



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on September 11, 2013

“Protecting” the Children With War

It’s all about the children, of course. It always is, it seems.

That was the theme, apparently, of the speech to the nation by President Obama Tuesday night, which lacked the drama that would have accompanied it before Vladimir Putin’s and Bashar al-Assad’s diplomatic move had taken the wind out of Obama’s war sails. But let us leave the children for a moment and consider how marvelously these “mainstream” politicians “grow” in office.



Starting with Obama. Many voted for him in 2008 believing he was an anti-war, or peace candidate, opposing that old war horse John McCain, who seemed to want American “boots on the ground” everywhere. Indeed, to this day, some believe Obama’s single contribution to the nation’s and the world’s welfare may be his winning the presidency in 2008, thereby closing the White House door to McCain, who might by now have opened half a dozen or more new hot war fronts in the Global War on Terror.

Obama appears to be trying to wind down that war, having reluctantly yielded to the expiration of the Status of Forces Agreement in Iraq at the end of 2011 and withdrawing U.S. combat forces from that country. He has set a 2014 deadline for the withdrawal of U.S. and NATO troops from Afghanistan, where America and our allies have been fighting for nearly 12 years. Though he waged an unauthorized air war over Libya in 2011, he has said that the war on terror must end and that no nation can remain indefinitely on a wartime footing while still preserving its democratic or republican freedoms.

That may be a disappointment to some of the neocon hawks, who seem to believe, as Theodore Roosevelt said long ago, that “all the great masterful races have been fighting races,” and that no achievement of peace can match the glorious virtues that bring victory in war. For the editors of and contributors to *Commentary* or the *Weekly Standard* magazines, it is always the eve of World War II and the latest villain is always another Hitler threatening the peace and security of the entire world.

This time it is Bashar al-Assad of Syria, who in the 2-1/2-year war with insurgents trying to overthrow the Damascus regime has allegedly resorted to the use of chemical weapons. That has prompted rumblings from the West, most notably from the U.S. president, who had warned a year ago that using, or even “moving around,” chemical weapons would be the crossing of a “red line” for the West and would presumably result in retaliation against the Assad regime.

But now Assad, led by Putin, has offered to negotiate a surrender of the nation’s chemical weapons, which would reduce the anxieties of the “international community,” fearful not only of Assad’s use of such weapons, but equally or even more anxious about their possible capture by the rebel forces, heavily infiltrated (and even dominated in key areas) by al-Qaeda and its allies.

So Obama has taken a step back, but interestingly he has in recent weeks been rivaled, if not exceeded, by McCain and McCain’s South Carolina sidekick, Lindsey Graham, in calling for retaliatory action. So what does that make of the supposed choice of the American voters in 2008 that pitted warrior McCain



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against Obama, who Republicans would have us believe would respond to an international crisis by suggesting we all join hands and sing a chorus of “Kumbaya”? It was, in fact, the same type of choice we had faced in 2012 between Republican Mitt Romney and Obama. What was the difference between them on foreign policy? About as much as existed between Bush and John Kerry in 2004, when Kerry said that even if he had known the weapons inspectors would find no “weapons of mass destruction” in Iraq, he would still have voted to authorize the president to use military force to supposedly disarm the Iraqi dictator, Saddam Hussein.

But wait! Could this be the same John Kerry who turned against the Vietnam War, conspicuously throwing his medals away in disgust over the sacrifice of American lives and limbs in a war that began in earnest with a highly questionable incident in the Gulf of Tonkin, which inspired a resolution by Congress that was later called the “functional declaration of war”?

Both Obama and Kerry, you see, have “grown in office,” which means they have abandoned the principles on which they began running for office. It’s nothing new, of course. Woodrow Wilson campaigned successfully for reelection in 1916 on the slogan, “He kept us out of war.” In April of 1917, Wilson asked for and Congress supplied a declaration of war. Running for an unprecedented third term in 1940, Franklin Roosevelt promised “again and again and again” that American boys would not be sent into any foreign war. Of course, the attack on Pearl Harbor, [welcomed by Roosevelt and his foreign policy “brain trust,”](#) brought the “foreign war” home.

In 1964, Lyndon Johnson was the “peace candidate” running against the bellicose Barry Goldwater. Johnson promised he would not send American boys to fight a war Asian boys should be fighting. In the next few years the “American boys” fighting in South Vietnam at one time reached more than half a million. And in 1968, it would have taken Merlin the Magician to find the difference between Nixon and Humphrey on American involvement in the Vietnam War.

Maybe that’s why the politicians are always pitching their plans in terms of protecting the children. The children can’t vote, of course, but at least they are too young to remember all the broken promises left in the wake of the politician’s rise to power. And most of their parents are too forgetful or distracted to notice the contradictions — like that the chemical weapons Saddam Hussein possessed at one time had been supplied by the United States, whose officials looked the other way when Iraq used them in its war against Iran. That the same president who objects on moral grounds to the gassing of people with lethal chemicals is the commander-in-chief who has targeted citizens of his own country for death by drone attack.

Ours is the nation that used napalm in Vietnam and firebombed the civilian population of Tokyo and other Japanese cities before unleashing the most lethal weapons of mass destruction that had yet been devised, the atom bombs dropped on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Obama’s concern for the children is touching, but this is the same man who has consistently opposed any restriction on the killing of infants in the womb by a wide variety of chemical “weapons.” Mitt Romney claimed to be a convert to the pro-life, anti-abortion cause. John McCain has consistently voted against abortion, but his extremely rare but revealing statements on the subject suggest his next thought about it will be his first.

Meanwhile, the United States stands ready to send planes and missiles over Syria, firing weapons our military officials are pleased to call “hellfire.” War is hell, General Sherman famously said, but apparently the desktop warriors in Washington are always ready and often eager to go there.



Photo of war dead in Syria



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