

West Point: Obama Defends US Aggression on the Grounds of “American Exceptionalism”

Saber Rattling at West Point

By [Mike Whitney](#)

Global Research, June 03, 2014

[CounterPunch](#)

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Terrorism](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

On May 28, President Barack Obama delivered his most belligerent and menacing speech to date at the US Military Academy at West Point. Aside from the lofty rhetoric we’ve come to expect in every Obama presentation, the president’s commencement address was a defiant restating of the Bush Doctrine of unilateral intervention, executive authority and endless warfare. The speech contained no new initiatives or surprises, but emphasized Obama’s unwavering support for the policies which have plunged large parts of the Middle East, Africa, and Eurasia into civil conflict, economic collapse and war. Obama defended US aggression on the grounds of “American exceptionalism”, the dubious idea that Americans are special and cannot be held to the same standards as others. The theory implies that Washington’s relentless war-mongering and killing of civilians cannot be prosecuted under international law because the US is a law unto itself.

“I believe in American exceptionalism with every fiber of my being,” said Obama. “But what makes us exceptional is not our ability to flout international norms and the rule of law; it is our willingness to affirm them through our actions.”

Obama’s statement is deliberately misleading. As the president knows, the Bush administration notified U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan that the US would withdraw from the International Criminal Court Treaty in May 2002 just prior to the invasion of Iraq claiming that the ICC treaty put U.S. service members and officials at risk of prosecution by a court that is “unaccountable to the American people.” In retrospect, we can see that Bush and his lieutenants wanted to remove themselves from any accountability for the atrocities and crimes against humanity they planned to perpetrate in the invasion and occupation of Iraq. Thus, exceptionalism does not affirm Washington’s willingness to comply with “international norms and the rule of law” as Obama says, but to absolve US leaders from any responsibility for their habitual war-making. As policy analyst Noam Chomsky has said many times, “If the Nuremberg laws were applied, then every post-war American president would have been hanged.”

Here’s Obama again: “Let me repeat a principle I put forward at the outset of my presidency: The United States will use military force, unilaterally if necessary, when our core interests demand it... International opinion matters, but America should never ask permission to protect our people, our homeland or our way of life.”

In other words, the United States will do whatever the hell it wants to and if you don’t like it: “Too bad”. This is the Bush Doctrine verbatim. The West Point oration proves that the new

administration has simply modified the Bush credo to suit Obama's pretentious speaking style. Strip out the visionary formulations, the grandiose bloviating, and the sweeping hand gestures and the ideas are virtually identical; unilateralism, preemption, and exceptionalism, the toxic combo that has spurred 13 years of war, occupation, regime change, black sites, extra-judicial assassinations, drone attacks, and hyperbolic state terror most of which has been directed at civilian populations whose only fault is that they occupy regions where vast petroleum reserves have been discovered or which have some fleeting strategic importance to Washington's war planners. Here's an excerpt from an article in the World Socialist Web Site titled "Obama's West Point speech: A prescription for unending war" by Bill Van Auken:

"Obama is not elaborating here a policy of defensive war to be waged only in response to an attack or the threat of an imminent attack. He is spelling out that the US reserves the right to intervene militarily wherever it believes its "core interests"—i.e., the access of its corporations and banks to markets, raw materials, cheap labor and profits—are involved.

When he speaks of "our livelihoods" and "our way of life," he is referring not to the ever-declining living standards of the American worker, but to the eight-figure compensation packages of American CEOs, whose fortunes are founded on the exploitation of the working populations and resources of the entire planet...

Everything put forward by Obama is a repudiation of international law and an endorsement of the policy of aggressive war practiced by the Nazis three-quarters of a century ago." ([Obama's West Point speech: A prescription for unending war](#), Bill Van Auken, World Socialist Web Site)

Here's Obama again defending his malignant foreign policy in terms of "leadership":

"America must always lead on the world stage. If we don't, no one else will. The military that you have joined is, and always will be, the backbone of that leadership."

Obama finds it easy to praise the people who fight his wars, even while he stealthily carries out a plan to privatize the Veterans Administration. Check out this blurb from an article titled "VA secretary resigns amid push to privatize US veterans' health care":

"Obama and members of Congress have responded to the VHA scandal with a breathtaking level of cynicism and hypocrisy, even by Washington standards ... according to many lawmakers, the answer to this crisis is not the appropriation of funds to hire new doctors and other medical professionals, but the dismantling of the government program in order to provide a profit windfall to private insurers and health industry firms. The result of this policy will be less care at greater cost to veterans...

Under the "Veterans Choice Plan" being promoted by Rep. Andy Harris (Republican of Maryland), veterans could either choose to continue receiving care through the VHA or go to a private provider of their choosing. In what amounts to a voucher system, the federal government would cover the cost of insurance premiums and some out-of-pocket costs, depending on a veteran's priority ranking...

The moves to privatize veterans' health care underscore the hypocrisy of the bipartisan glorification of soldiers and veterans. It also sets a precedent for privatizing Medicare and Medicaid, the federal-state health care program for the poor." ([VA secretary resigns amid push to privatize US veterans' health care](#), World Socialist Web Site)

Is there any doubt that Obama forced General Eric Shinseki to step down so he could start to dismantle the VA? And if Obama cares so much about veterans, then why hasn't he spoken out before about other veteran-related issues like the epidemic of suicides, rapes, traumatic brain injury or PTSD? Obama's phony outrage is just a headline-grabbing gimmick to conceal what's really going on, which is the VA is being handed over to America's insatiable health care tycoons on a silver platter.

Obama again: "For the foreseeable future, the most direct threat to America, at home and abroad, remains terrorism, but a strategy that involves invading every country that harbors terrorist networks is naïve and unsustainable. I believe we must shift our counterterrorism strategy, drawing on the successes and shortcomings of our experience in Iraq and Afghanistan, to more effectively partner with countries where terrorist networks seek a foothold."

Obama's comment absurdly implies that the US has learned from its past mistakes and has fine-tuned the art of counterterrorism so it doesn't involve the squandering of valuable resources. What a joke. It's like listening to a Mafia hit-man boast that he 's learned how to save money on ammo by strangling his victims with his bare hands. This is also a good example of how the Dems think they're more effective (and discreet) in executing the elitist/corporate agenda than their rivals in the GOP. As if that was the purpose of the party!

Obama also made a few perfunctory remarks about closing Guantanamo, ending indefinite detention and taking steps to address climate change. But clearly these had nothing to do with the main thrust of the speech which was to announce his intention to expand the wars abroad. Citing hotspots in Syria, Ukraine and the South China Sea, Obama promised to "lead" with the military, asserting, by implication, dominion over these regions where the US claims to have "national interests". Obama is as committed as his predecessor, Bush, to rule by force of arms even though his current adversaries (Russia and China) are not ragtag militias in sandals, but nuclear-armed nation-states who could level the better part of the planet with a flip of the switch. Even so, Obama is determined to pursue the same provocative strategy whatever the risks increasing the probability of a miscalculation that ends in a mushroom cloud.

It's madness.

Mike Whitney lives in Washington state. He is a contributor to [Hopeless: Barack Obama and the Politics of Illusion](#) (AK Press). Hopeless is also available in a [Kindle edition](#). He can be reached at fergiwhitney@msn.com.

The original source of this article is [CounterPunch](#)
Copyright © [Mike Whitney](#), [CounterPunch](#), 2014

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

Become a Member of Global Research

Articles by: [Mike Whitney](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca