

What Happened to John Kerry? From Anti-War Vietnam to Bellicose Rhetoric on Syria

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As he has demonstrated by his bellicose rhetoric on Syria, John Kerry has made complete his 180-degree transition from an anti-war Vietnam veteran who in 1971 threw his navy medals back onto the White House lawn and who testified to Congress on the immorality of war, to a belligerent warrior without a cause.

Tracing the causes of this shift is perhaps pointless, but a comparison between the 1971-Kerry and the 2013-Kerry will reveal the corrupting influence of the combination of money and power with its necessary consequence of surrendering what Kerry himself calls one's "moral compass." This article does not intend to attack John Kerry as a person. I respect and even like John Kerry. But Kerry is a significant and interesting example of how one operates when they surrender their moral compass and take instead the path to power over principle. Let us look at three facts that correlate with this shift.

First, his change of mind regarding the morality of war correlates with his investment in war machinery. Here is Kerry in 1971 congressional testimony: "We fought using weapons against "oriental human beings." We fought using weapons against those people which I do not believe this country would dream of using were we fighting in the European theater." Here he is in 2013: Among lawmakers on Capitol Hill, John Kerry has the most money invested in defense contractors, up to \$38,209,020. This includes the significant investments in Raytheon and in General Electric, both of whom are major players in the U.S. war machine. Kerry decided in January to set aside his stock in these companies as a prerequisite to becoming secretary of state. Additionally, Kerry's support for chemical companies such as Dow Chemicals and Monsanto (who manufactured the Agent Orange Kerry said he knew was being used while he was in Vietnam) is now well known (see Humanrightsinvestigations.org for more).

Second, the process of his functioning as a small cog in the war machine in Vietnam to functioning as a big cog in the Empire correlates with Kerry changing the direction of his moral compass from moral principles and the value of individual civilian lives and interests, to the interests of empire's power. In 1971, what Kerry said is worth quoting at length:

We feel [that] what threatens this country, [is] not the reds, but the crimes which we are committing that threaten it, that we have to speak out....We saw Vietnam ravaged equally by American bombs and search and destroy missions, as well as by Viet Cong terrorism - and yet we listened while this country tried to blame all of the havoc on the Viet Cong.

We rationalized destroying villages in order to save them. We saw America lose her

sense of morality as she accepted very coolly a My Lai and refused to give up the image of American soldiers who hand out chocolate bars and chewing gum. We watched pride allow the most unimportant battles to be blown into extravaganzas, because we couldn't lose, and we couldn't retreat...

We are here in Washington to say that the problem of this war is not just a question of war and diplomacy. It is part and parcel of everything that we are trying as human beings to communicate to people in this country – the question of racism which is rampant in the military, and so many other questions such as the use of weapons; the hypocrisy in our taking umbrage at the Geneva Conventions and using that as justification for a continuation of this war when we are more guilty than any other body of violations of those Geneva Conventions; in the use of free fire zones, harassment interdiction fire, search and destroy missions, the bombings, the torture of prisoners, all accepted policy by many units in South Vietnam.

Now, here is Kerry on the morality of war in 2013:

There is a reason why President Obama has made clear to the Assad regime that this international norm cannot be violated without consequences.

Never mind that the discrepancy between Kerry's words, Obama's words, and the ongoing use of chemical weapons by the U.S. in Iraq and in other countries, along with the supreme crime of aggression in violation of international law, has been well-documented by now. The only consequences that matter to the "Kerry of the Empire" are those to be suffered by nations who are in the sites of the empire's war machine:

I spoke on Thursday with Syrian Foreign Minister Muallem, and I made it very clear to him that if the regime, as he argued, had nothing to hide, then their response should be immediate, immediate transparency, immediate access, not shelling. Their response needed to be unrestricted and immediate access.

The Empire makes demands. It does not justify its demands. As if to underscore this observation, in a speech on May 23, Kerry stated:

In the event that we can't find that way forward, in the event that the Assad regime is unwilling to negotiate Geneva I in good faith, we will also talk about our continued support and growing support for the opposition in order to permit them to continue to be able to fight for the freedom of their country.

Yet, the same Geneva Convention requires countries to engage in responsible behavior, including not arming those who engage in "willful killing, torture or inhuman treatment, including biological experiments, willfully causing great suffering or serious injury to body or health, and extensive destruction and appropriation of property, not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly."

Further, Kerry stated in a recent speech:

Anyone who could claim that an attack of this staggering scale could be contrived or fabricated needs to check their conscience and their own moral compass. What is before us today is real, and it is compelling.

If only Kerry hadn't thrown his moral compass onto the White House lawn along with his metals, he might have been a moral brake on Obama's aggressiveness toward Syria. If the U.N. can conclude that the chemical attacks that occurred in Syria back in April were done by the rebels, thus demonstrating the lies engaged in by the U.S. (including Kerry) to be try to pin it on the Assad government, then there is no reason that the current evidence is more "compelling" and "moral" now than it was then. Yet Kerry said nothing back in May when

U.S. accusations turned out to be a lie. Further, false flags for war are obviously not unheard of in U.S. history, whether it is the Gulf of Tonkin or the use 9/11 to rev up the U.S. Empire's war machine.

Third, Kerry's shift from morality to Empire correlates with a shift from factually-founded moral arguments to purely emotional appeal. Here is Kerry in 1971:

In our opinion and from our experience, there is nothing in South Vietnam which could happen that realistically threatens the United States of America. And to attempt to justify the loss of one American life in Vietnam, Cambodia or Laos by linking such loss to the preservation of freedom, which those misfits supposedly abuse, is to us the height of criminal hypocrisy, and it is that kind of hypocrisy which we feel has torn this country apart.

We found that not only was it a civil war, an effort by a people who had for years been seeking their liberation from any colonial influence whatsoever, but also we found that the Vietnamese whom we had enthusiastically molded after our own image were hard put to take up the fight against the threat we were supposedly saving them from.

And here is Kerry from 2013:

Let me be clear: The indiscriminate slaughter of civilians, the killing of women and children and innocent bystanders by chemical weapons is a moral obscenity. By any standard, it is inexcusable.

Last night...I went back and I watched the videos, the videos that anybody can watch in the social media, and I watched them one more gut-wrenching time. It is really hard to express in words the human suffering that they lay out before us.

As a father, I can't get the image out of my head of a man who held up his dead child, wailing, while chaos swirled around him, the images of entire families dead in their beds without a drop of blood or even a visible wound, bodies contorting in spasms, human suffering that we can never ignore or forget.

This is the way power is consolidated and used: not by rational and morally-principled arguments that allow the people to discuss such issues, but by propaganda tricks and appeals to emotion.

Let me reiterate that none of this makes John Kerry a bad man. But it does show us something about the trading of individual conscience for functioning in a high position of great power and in the service of a small number of elites. But if only Kerry would listen to his own words from 1971, the moral voices of the nation might well have the upper hand in the future to stop any further drive to war on the part of the Obama administration:

But all that they have done and all that they can do by this denial [of the "mistake" it was to invade Vietnam] is to make more clear than ever our own determination to undertake one last mission – to search out and destroy the last vestige of this barbaric war, to pacify our own hearts, to conquer the hate and fear that have driven this country these last ten years and more.

Short of doing just that, Mr. Kerry will go down in history as so many in our government leaders are doing: as a functionary of the Empire. If Secretary of State Kerry truly wants to be a world leader, he can unite people to further this goal of "conquering hate and fear" and helping us to live peaceably with other peoples.

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