

What Obama Said — and What He Meant — About Climate Change, War and Civil Liberties

By [Norman Solomon](#)

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Region: [USA](#)

The words in President Obama's "State of the Union" speech were often lofty, spinning through the air with the greatest of ease and emitting dog whistles as they flew.

Let's decode the president's smooth oratory in the realms of climate change, war and civil liberties.

"For the sake of our children and our future, we must do more to combat climate change."

We've done so little to combat climate change — we must do more.

"I urge this Congress to get together, pursue a bipartisan, market-based solution to climate change..."

Climate change is an issue that can be very good for Wall Street. Folks who got the hang of "derivatives" and "credit default swaps" can learn how to handle "cap and trade." The corporate environmental groups are on board, and maybe we can offer enough goodies to big corporations to make it worth their while to bring enough of Congress along.

"The natural gas boom has led to cleaner power and greater energy independence. We need to encourage that."

Dual memo. To T. Boone Pickens: "Love ya." To environmentalists who won't suck up to me: "Frack you." (And save your breath about methane.)

"That's why my administration will keep cutting red tape and speeding up new oil and gas permits."

Blow off steam with your demonstrations, you [350.org](#) types. I'll provide the platitudes. XL Keystone, here we come.

"After a decade of grinding war, our brave men and women in uniform are coming home."

How's that for an applause line? Don't pay too much attention to the fine print. I'm planning to have 32,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan a year from now, and they won't get out of there before the end of 2014. And did you notice the phrase "in uniform"? We've got plenty of out-of-uniform military contractors in Afghanistan now, and you can expect that to continue for a long time.

"And by the end of next year, our war in Afghanistan will be over."

If you believe that, you're the kind of sucker I appreciate — unless you think "our war in Afghanistan" doesn't include killing people with drones and cruise missiles.

"Beyond 2014, America's commitment to a unified and sovereign Afghanistan will endure, but the nature of our commitment will change. We're negotiating an agreement with the Afghan government that focuses on two missions: training and equipping Afghan forces so that the country does not again slip into chaos, and counterterrorism efforts that allow us to pursue the remnants of al Qaeda and their affiliates."

We're so pleased to help Afghan people kill other Afghan people! Our government's expertise in such matters includes superb reconnaissance and some thrilling weaponry, which we'll keep providing to the Kabul regime. And don't you love the word "counterterrorism"? It sounds so much better than: "using the latest high-tech weapons to go after people on our 'kill lists' and unfortunately take the lives of a lot of other people who happen to be around, including children, thus violating international law, traumatizing large portions of the population and inflicting horrors on people in ways we would never tolerate ourselves."

"We don't need to send tens of thousands of our sons and daughters abroad, or occupy other nations. Instead, we'll need to help countries like Yemen, Libya and Somalia provide for their own security, and help allies who take the fight to terrorists, as we have in Mali. And, where necessary, through a range of capabilities, we will continue to take direct action against those terrorists who pose the gravest threat to Americans."

We don't need flag-draped coffins coming home. We're so civilized that we're the planetary leaders at killing people with remote control from halfway around the world.

"We must enlist our values in the fight. That's why my administration has worked tirelessly to forge a durable legal and policy framework to guide our counterterrorism efforts. Throughout, we have kept Congress fully informed of our efforts. And I recognize that, in our democracy, no one should just take my word for it that we're doing things the right way. So, in the months ahead, I will continue to engage Congress to ensure not only that our targeting, detention and prosecution of terrorists remains consistent with our laws and system of checks and balances, but that our efforts are even more transparent to the American people and to the world."

I'm sick of taking flak just because I pick and choose which civil liberties I want to respect. If I need to give a bit more information to a few other pliant members of Congress, I will. The ones who get huffy about the Bill of Rights aren't going to get the time of day from this White House. I recognize that some of my base is getting a bit upset about this civil-liberties thing, so I'll ramp up the soothing words and make use of some prominent Democratic members of Congress who are of course afraid to polarize with me. Don't underestimate this president; I know how to talk reverentially about our great nation's "checks and balances" as I undermine them.

"The leaders of Iran must recognize that now is the time for a diplomatic solution, because a coalition stands united in demanding that they meet their obligations. And we will do what is necessary to prevent them from getting a nuclear weapon."

Maybe it's just about time for another encore of "preemptive war."

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