

Are The Democrats Really “The Peace Party”. A Bi-Partisan Foreign Policy. The War at Home

By [Dr. Gary G. Kohls](#)

Global Research, November 15, 2013

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Police State & Civil Rights, US](#)
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“Our power alone cannot protect us, nor does it entitle us to do what we please....Our power grows through its prudent use; our security emanates from the justness of our cause, the force of our example, the tempering qualities of humility and restraint.” –President Barack Obama

These words come from the president of the United States. As is so often the case, we see lofty ideals and glittering generalities used to describe our nation’s foreign policy. These words make for good press and they could perhaps inspire another generation of young idealists. However, these words are, alas, only words. They exist independently of the actual policies that the United States government pursues in countries around the globe. More importantly, these words stand in stark contrast to the human and material costs of U.S. foreign policy around the world.

Syria

The fact of the matter is that under President Obama and the Democratic Party as well as under President George W. Bush and the Republican Party, we see a startling contrast between professed ideals and actual policy. For example, concerning the strife-torn nation of Syria, President Obama forcefully asserted that he did not need either a resolution from the United Nations Security Council or a formal declaration of war from the United States Congress in order to begin punitive air strikes against Syria. There is no doubt that President Obama would have carried out these attacks but for the fact that the people of the United States, weary of the U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, simply said “no” in opinion poll after opinion poll and in letters to their senators and representatives. The margin of opposition was overwhelming. Otherwise, President Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry, veterans of the fine art of ignoring public opinion, would have commenced the bombing of Syria.

It should be noted here that “liberal” senators Barbara Boxer (D-CA) and Barbara Mikulski (D-MD), as well as Hillary Clinton and Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) announced their support for a bombing strike. As for Stenny Hoyer (D-MD), second in command among Democrats to Nancy Pelosi in the U.S. House of Representatives, he advocated bombing Syria without Congressional approval if negotiations failed.

Yes, the use of chemical weapons against civilians in Syria was horrific. However, the bombing of Syria proposed by President Obama and Secretary of State Kerry would only have added to the body count and the increased human suffering in that war-torn country. It should also be noted that this Democratic president has continued the war in Afghanistan.

Interventionism

While many people thrill to the liberal rhetoric about peace and equality around the globe, the fact of the matter is that liberal Democratic administrations in Washington D.C. have been little different from their Republican counterparts in their willingness to intervene in the affairs of other nations. Often when liberal Democratic presidents do order U.S. troops to intervene, it is at the request of local dictators, local privileged elites, or U.S. owned companies in those nations. In 1961, President John F. Kennedy authorized the Bay of Pigs invasion of the small island nation of Cuba. Cuba, which had recently undergone a popular revolution, displayed a streak of independence which displeased policymakers in Washington. Four years later, in 1965, then President Lyndon B. Johnson ordered U.S. forces into another tiny island nation—the Dominican Republic. Johnson and his Secretary of State Dean Rusk complained that there was a “Communist presence” in the government of left-leaning populist, Juan Bosch. This government was overthrown and then, in the aftermath, a new election was commissioned which resulted in the “election” of a safe right-wing candidate to the presidency.

A Bi-Partisan Foreign Policy

Since 1965 both Democratic and Republican administrations have pursued essentially the same foreign policy with regard to interventions, wars, and counter-insurgencies. In both Democratic and Republican administrations, there is the same commitment to sending troops to areas of the world where regimes in power act independently of Washington or where popular forces wish to determine their own future rather than to serve the interests of any outside nation.

There was the Korean war waged under Truman (D) and Eisenhower (R); the Congo intervention under Eisenhower (R); the Vietnam war waged under Eisenhower, Kennedy (D), Johnson (D), Nixon (R), and Ford (R); the Chile intervention under Nixon; the Grenada invasion under Reagan (R); the Panama invasion under George H.W. Bush (R), the bombing of Kosovo under Clinton (D), the Iraq war under George Bush (R); and the Afghanistan war under Bush and Obama(D). And that is only a partial list.

In other ways, U.S. policy remains the same regardless of whether the majority party in the U.S. Congress is the Democratic Party or the Republican Party. In nations such as Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvadore or Colombia, the United States strategy of counterinsurgency warfare is continued seamlessly. Under this strategy, to “militarize” and “modernize” the country in ways approved of by the local economic elite. Often this means the deployment of local military forces with U.S. advisers through the country so that dissident elements can be “pacified.” This was Plan Colombia begun in Colombia during the last days of the administration of President Bill Clinton. This policy has provided billions of dollars of aid to brutal and corrupt regimes whose policies have resulted in the deaths of 500,000 civilians and the murder of 500 trade unionists. This program of aide continued through and Bush Presidency and is still policy under the Obama administration.

The War at Home

In addition to pursuing a foreign policy that is not different from that practiced by the Republicans, the Democrats have also conducted the “war on terror” in a manner that does not differ from the policies of the GOP. For example, one of the legacies of the Bush

Administration—the Guantanamo Bay concentration camp—continues under the Obama Administration. In addition, the Obama Administration has even expanded the breadth and depth of government spying on U.S. citizens. Witness the massive gathering by the National Security Administration (NSA) of the electronic communications of millions of ordinary citizens. Another example would be the unprecedented use by the Obama Administration to use sections of the antiquated and unjust Sedition Act (passed in 1917 to suppress anti-war dissent) to persecute and prosecute whistleblowers who call attention to many of these policies. Finally, we must mention the Obama Administration’s unprecedented use of drones to target insurgents overseas in countries like Yemen and Pakistan. Some of these targets are U.S. citizens.

Where Do We Go From Here?

Recently, a pundit on television stated that Democratic foreign policy is not different from Republican foreign policy because the more dovish Democratic Party does not want to seem weak. While that may be true of some individuals, a more fundamental reason is that both parties receive most of their financial support from the corporate, banking, and financial elite in the United States. On some social issues like abortion and marriage equality, the Democratic Party seems more enlightened than the GOP. However the Democrats pursue the same foreign policy as the Republicans because both parties are committed to extending the prerogatives of American and international business throughout the world. If furthering these private interests requires military intervention, so be it. If low intensity counter-insurgency programs are needed to terrorize local populations, so be it. If illegal and secretive measures are needed to cover up some of the unsavory details of these policies, then these will be undertaken. These two parties raise billions of dollars from corporate and business sources. Aren’t we somewhat naïve if we then believe that they will pursue policies that are harmful to their sources of support?

Independent Politics

If Americans wish to see a different foreign policy, we will have to begin to build a political party that is not accountable to the same interests that fund both the Democrats and Republicans. Won’t this be hard to do? Yes. Is it essential? Yes as well. This would be a party that would be based on the American labor movement and it would be a party that would speak for all workers, organized and unorganized. This is the only way to end the bipartisan foreign policy of wars, interventions and counter-insurgencies.

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