

**How  
America  
Does  
It**

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*(President Obama, Secretary of State Kerry and several aides are brainstorming Kerry's address justifying a military attack on Syria to make it more effective.)*

OBAMA: All right, John, let's try it again. This time with much more feeling. The lingering effects of our last few wars makes this one a harder sell.

AIDE: Perhaps we should emphasize that we only want an air attack...no boots on the ground.

OBAMA: We must not rely on words – words lead to thinking, and thinking means they won't believe us. So, John, we need maximum emotion in your presentation and the minimum of anything that may stimulate the thought process.

KERRY: *(To himself)* Emotion..no thinking...Emotion...no thinking...*(Faces Obama and aides. Stiff presentation.)* “What we saw in Syria shocks the conscience of the world...defies any code of morality...The indiscriminate slaughter of civilians by chemical weapons is a moral obscenity...It is...”

OBAMA: No..no..NO! *(Aside to aide)* The guy really is as stiff as a post.

KERRY: Hey, I heard that!...Remember when we supplied Iraq with chemicals for its poison gas attacks on Iran and then denied its use until Iran sent victims abroad for treatment? Guess who revealed the facts to the world? *(Brief pause)* Me!....Now I'm supposed to act as if I'm shocked by all of this.

OBAMA: Act!...that's just what you must do, but with emotion. That way the audience does not see the Secretary of State of the United States of America, with all the baggage that goes along with that position, but an ordinary human being who, like them, is expressing his genuine feelings about this atrocity....Okay, let's try it again. *(Kerry paces back and forth with his head down)* Now what?

KERRY: I'm trying to visualize something that will work up that passion.

OBAMA: You need motivation? – How about if we charge you with crimes against the state for revealing our poison gas assistance to Iraq? That will put you in league with all those English traitors. *(Brief pause)*

AIDE: Mr. President...Manning isn't English, he's Welsh.

OBAMA: I was thinking of that other guy...

AIDE: Who?...Snowden? He's not English.

OBAMA: Are you sure?

AIDE: You're thinking of the fellow that married into the royal family. That was years ago.

OBAMA: Oh...Well, then there's Assange.

AIDE: He's Australian.

OBAMA: Yeah, but isn't Australia part of the United Kingdom?

KERRY: Only the Commonwealth.

OBAMA: Then why are they protecting him?

KERRY: They're not. It's Ecuador. Diplomatic privilege.

OBAMA: *(To aides)* You can see why I knew John was well qualified for heading State.

KERRY: Then take my advice and withhold criticism of England. Without them we'd have only Israel as a consistent supporter of our policies. *(Brief pause)*

OBAMA: Okay, John...Let's see you work up that new-found motivation.

KERRY: From the top?

OBAMA: No...from where you left off....Ready...Action!

KERRY: *(Works up a determined expression)* "I talked to the Syrian Foreign Minister and made it clear that if they have nothing to hide, we want immediate transparency, immediate access..."

OBAMA:...Much better!...

AIDE:...Yes...but sir, the second battle of Fallujah wasn't that long ago.

OBAMA: *(To Kerry)* Fallujah?

KERRY: It's in Iraq...We had to go all-out in subduing the rebellion because the Shi'a and Sunnis were uniting in opposition to the invasion.

AIDE: Yes, and we threw everything we had against them....white phosphorus, poison gases, MK77 (AKA Napalm), depleted uranium, bunker busters...willy pete forms a cloud leaving its victims scorched and dead..more horrible than sarin...

OBAMA:...Okay!...spare us the details...just where do you see a concern?

AIDE: Well...sir...isn't it obvious? We demand transparency, and then our enemies point to the secretiveness surrounding a similar atrocity. Furthermore, Syria hasn't signed the chemical warfare treaty; we had. What if opponents point to the hypocritical...

OBAMA:...There is no hypocrisy where there is sufficient power...If they say anything, we just look them in the eye as if to say, 'Hey, you see me', *(Pointing to all around him)* 'do you see us?...We..don't..fucking..care!' Power places us beyond anything that may shame or embarrass us. *(Looking disapprovingly at his aides)* I would expect that you, of all people, would know what being presidential means...at least in the American sense.

KERRY: Like the way you handled the Mandela memorial flap.

OBAMA: Yes...I was deeply offended by the implied racism of those sleazy comments regarding the Danish PM -- as if I never had a blonde before -- but was very careful not to show any sign of it...that's presidential...

KERRY:...I was referring to your jocular attitude at a memorial service...

OBAMA: Is it my fault that Mandela took longer to die than Franco? I kept practicing the appropriate somberness...and then he would recover...the guy was like the world economy, collapsing and then showing signs of life...I mean, sometimes even the finest actors tire of their role.

KERRY: You did the presidential bit perfectly with the Castro hand shake...

OBAMA:...and made the Republicans look like bunch of assholes after their Tea Party yahoos squawked about it....I'm the President of the United States...another president sticks his hand out...I shake it...That's being presidential...No one has to know that I thought he was the guy emptying waste baskets.

KERRY: That is one of your weaknesses...you sometimes let the 'man of the people' business go too far.

OBAMA: But that's what maintains the necessary balance that keeps America strong. We live in a capitalist world, but capitalists constitute only a minuscule portion of the total population. How do we bring everyone else on board...make them feel part of the system? – We insure that they all have a piece of the pie, even if it's the tiniest sliver...Push them into personal investment through pension plans, etc.; puff up the financial markets with all of these QE's and before you know it, everyone is out there spending money they never earned -- and then, as added proof there is no longer a distinction between classes, we shake their hands.

AIDE: That *is* brilliant, sir, when everyone is a parasite, there are no longer any parasites.

OBAMA: (*Gives aide an annoyed look*) True. But we must come up with a better term.

AIDE (*a woman*): Equality?

OBAMA: Certainly not! We present an opportunity, not an outcome.

KERRY: The terms can work when paired. Equality of opportunity. (*Shakes Obama's hand*) 'Welcome to Monocap Corp as our new CEO' – (*Shakes his hand again*) 'Welcome to Monocap Corp as our new waste basket emptier'.

OBAMA: Exactly. But why did you make me both both CEO and waste basket emptier? (*Pause. Kerry seems slightly flustered.*) Is this tied to 2004?...Okay, you're not a CEO, but you are far from being a waste basket emptier. I've already told you – yes, I was on the platform committee, no, I had nothing to do with that part of it.

KERRY: I believe you...It's just that I was saddled with the stupidest position possible....Here I was running against a guy who got us involved in two losing wars – People wanted to vote for someone that opposed those actions, and what was I saying?...

OBAMA:...John, you must expunge those thoughts from your mind, especially now that we're trying to create a gushing sentimentality for the Syrian issue....

KERRY (*continuing*)...and what was I saying as I criss-crossed the nation?... 'People...I'm with you 100% in criticism of these wars...that's why, if elected, the first thing I'll do is *send 40,000 more troops to Afghanistan*'.

OBAMA: I know. There we were expecting Bush to stick his foot in his mouth numerous times, and there you were hopping around the country as if you swallowed one of yours. It shows how important a slight alteration can be...like you probably would have gotten away with 'more troops', but that '40,000' was a killer.

KERRY: Then McCain gave you the perfect gift in 2008.

OBAMA: Yeah, saying the fundamentals were sound just when the economy was falling on its fundament. McCain was hoisted by business talk jargon. It's easy to get confused, especially when language is class or gender specific....like recently I couldn't find my shampoo so I looked among Michelle's things. There were two: a clarifying shampoo and a balancing shampoo. What the devil do they mean? I had to ask Michelle. (*Brief pause*)

KERRY:...Well?...Now that you have piqued our interest...

OBAMA: I have no idea...It's in female language. I just found the clarifying shampoo strangely repellent, so I opted for the balancing. (*Brief pause*)

KERRY: C'mon, Jocelyn, give an old Harvard grad a stab at it.

JOCELYN: (*The same actress who said "equality". She should contrive an involved 'real' explanation – that will be gobbledegook enough for most in audience. Kerry looks confused. Obama vindicated.*)

OBAMA: You see?...like a dog whistle...When you say things right, you can do...(trying to find the right word)...things...

KERRY: Searching for the right word for wrong?...

OBAMA: I say 'undocumented' and never 'illegal'. I get the Latino vote while kicking more out of the country than Bush. As a professor of constitutional law I declare Bush's actions unconstitutional. As president I take Bush's side in pending court cases against him, and undermine personal rights more than any president since Wilson's espionage act. As a candidate I promised national healthcare with a public option. As president the public option is out and instead I compel the insured to be gouged by private health insurers or risk being fined...

KERRY:...and then look who they put you up the second time...

OBAMA:...a guy with all the charm of a Basil Fawlty...(Glances at Kerry)...No insult intended. (*Brief pause*)

AIDE: Excuse me, sir, we just received this new report that may have immediate interest.

OBAMA: Is it on support for a Syrian action?...We've got to get going. The Saudi's have been sending poison gas ingredients to our side...and also that place that sounds like a hacking cough...

AIDE:...Qatar [catarrh]...No. It's that survey we did on popular opinion in countries that constitute our closest allies. We asked them which country they most feared and 70% said it was us.

OBAMA: *(Obama and Kerry high-five and whoop it up)* 70%!....And to think it was only 62% when my term began...You would need a raving lunatic running the country to get a higher figure.

KERRY: Support us or run for your lives! I can hear more knee joints bending as we speak.

OBAMA: But we're fair...we let them know where we want the kiss planted. Such indignation when those English guys revealed our spying on everybody. They all resent not being able to do it as well as us. Fuck them! The world is now capitalist. Capitalism means competition, and competition means war. And we are prepared.

KERRY: Isn't it a real kick in the pants that we're more likely to be in serious wars without the 'communist' menace than with it?

OBAMA: Yes...and that reminds me...*(To Aides)* I hope you are working on a good explanation for the Chinese makeover. We got away with an amazing crock of shit regarding the USSR. *(Laughing to Kerry. Ironically.)* Didn't you see that massive invisible upheaval against the Russian ruling elite? As if people are unaware that no system can be overthrown without a popular force that exceeds that of police and military remaining loyal to the rulers.

KERRY: The truth value of a repetitive lie is stronger than a gun to ones head.

OBAMA: Precisely...that gun says 'lie'...But China is a problem. The 'communist' elite has formed a class by moving state enterprises into the private hands of their relatives. The only uprisings are of the masses trying to stop the theft of what was nominally theirs. Somehow we have to keep people convinced that those people really were communists.

*(Brief pause)*

AIDE: Sir, shall we continue?...*(Handing Obama a picture)* I did a search on the Net and came up with the image you wanted to use.

OBAMA: *(Looking at picture)* Ah, yes, this will be like a punch in the emotional gut. *(Handing it to Kerry)* Hold it as you speak so the cameras can pick it up but still within your vision. That should help you recite your lines at the right emotional pitch. Give it a try...Ready....Action!

KERRY: *(Opens with Kerry viewing image – somber expression. Then he shows image to audience. It's the widely broadcast image of a father holding his cute little child recently killed in a gas attack)* It was a horrible, gut-wrenching experience viewing videos of the massacre..."As a father, I can't get the image out of my head of a man holding up his dead child...."

AIDE: *(To Obama)* Sir, It might not be advisable to show the image to the audience.

OBAMA: Why on earth not? It's a tremendously moving experience to see dead children!

AIDE: But the audience is liable to have seen many images of horribly deformed children on the Internet.

OBAMA: Deformed?...Poison gas can do that?

AIDE: No, I found these while searching for the one you have. (*handing images to Obama*) I meant Iraqi children with birth defects caused by our use of depleted uranium...Extra arms and legs, and god knows what, sticking out from everywhere...

OBAMA...(*Handing back images to aide. Expression of disgust*) Right now I think my top aide is suffering from depleted intelligence. Look, it's far more moving to see a father holding up his cute little dead child than seeing a living child with disgusting birth defects. We're on the right track here and... (*Notices Kerry seems distressed while looking at the image. To Kerry*)...What is it, John?

KERRY: When I look at this one, I can't help seeing the others as well...

OBAMA: (*Angrily to aide*) You see what you've done?...You've poisoned our efforts to have him act human by almost making him a real one. (*To Kerry*) John, snap out of it! You must make yourself feel that our enemies are responsible for *all* ugly images.

KERRY:...Why don't we just go into standard attack mode?...air some sort of lame justification as the bombs drop..."Assad is serving as a conduit for Iran's nuclear program"...while we're making Damascus look like a slum of Fallujah. Drop pictures of the dead Gaddafi with the inscription: *Assad: You are next!*

AIDE: We've already done that.

OBAMA: (*To Kerry*) We're not giving in! You don't make it to the presidency of the U.S. by giving up. There are other ways of generating the appropriate feeling....like...like with music. I knew someone who would get choked up every time he heard My Old Kentucky Home even though he could give a damn about Kentucky, or the South (*Obama hums the tune and starts song. To aides.*) *The sun shines...* I can't remember the lyrics.

AIDES: (*After looking at each other nervously. They sing.*) The sun shines bright in the old Kentucky home/'tis summer/the....mmm mmm...('darkies') are gay...

KERRY:...Yes...I think it's working...I'm sitting in a comfy old chair before a crackling fire remembering mother bringing me hot cocoa on those wintry nights...Oh, and you're there, too...wearing a kind of formal dress with white gloves...now, if you will just bring me my pipe and slippers....no, do a tap dance first...

OBAMA: Nope. Not even in a presidentially induced reverie will I do those things.

KERRY: Why not?...You thought nothing of sending a wreath to Confederate memorial day services even though they probably used it for kindling at their next cross burning.

OBAMA: That's different...With the wreath I was serving the interests of America...And they very politely accepted it because, bigots though they be, they knew the importance of re-branding the image

of America for the world that is to come. This (*pointing to his skin*) is the new brand, whiteness is out, and we are way ahead of the other major powers. Look at Germany, still bound to the purity of German blood as if the Nazis never left. And the Japanese – they hate other Asian peoples as much as whites look down on them.

KERRY: Hold on...I love the Japanese and all Asian people...In fact, I wish I were Asian...I'm sick of being white. Had Michelle stayed home while you were making out with the Danish PM, I would have...

OBAMA:...Now, John, don't get carried away...you have the lovely Ms Heinz at home, and I'm sure she hasn't gone through *all* the 57 varieties....

KERRY: Only because she keeps them locked in the cupboard. (*Brief pause*)

AIDE:...uh, sirs, we have notified the networks to open a prime time slot for tonight.

OBAMA: Right. Let's make another quick stab at it. (*Thinking*) Wait a second! Why didn't we think of this before? Vietnam! John, what did you tell me about being in the riverine forces – you know, when the VC would fire on one of your boats you would blast away at a village to teach them a lesson?

KERRY: Well, after it was over we went in for a body count.

OBAMA: And what did you see?

KERRY: A mass of dead women, children and old men. The Mekong Delta was the mostly densely populated area in Vietnam – you couldn't fire a round into a village without hitting someone.

OBAMA: And the VC?

KERRY: Long gone. We were ordered to slaughter civilians so they wouldn't dare give them aid.

OBAMA: And what did you feel about those who issued those orders?

KERRY: **Absolute hatred!** For them and for myself because I was too cowardly to resist. Those images are frozen in my memory – village after village of mangled bodies – innocent victims. I can't get them. . .

OBAMA: John, *Hold those feelings!* (*To aide*) Here we were searching all over for the right emotion generator when all we had to do was to get him to hate himself. Go to it, John, those Syrians made you do it!

KERRY: (*With great emotion*) “As a father...I...” (*Interrupted as an aide enters*)

AIDE: Sorry...but this is very important news....It just came in over the wires. The French have approved our attack on Syria, but the British say no.

OBAMA: (*As he turns away from his aides and back toward Kerry*) Who cares about the fucking French?...Now, John...



AIDE: No, sir, it's the other way around – It's the British who are opposed to our bombing Syria.

OBAMA: That's impossible!

KERRY: The poodle has escaped the pound?

OBAMA: It's that Clegg!...He spends a summer emptying waste baskets for The Nation magazine, and then he goes and poisons the mind of that other jerk!

AIDE: That's not it at all, sir, they both supported our bombing of Syria.

OBAMA: The government supported us?!...Then what else is there?

AIDE: The British people...They said they've had enough of this war-making shit and....*(Obama interrupts)*

OBAMA: I'll not have my staff swearing in the presence of the president. *(Turns, angrily)* Those spineless bastards!..But what's with the usually chicken shit French?...What induced their support?

AIDE: Shame. *(Obama turns toward Kerry questioningly. Kerry shrugs.)* It's Sykes-Picot...It gave what became Syria to France...France was responsible for the creation of a minority ruled state.

KERRY: *(Thinking)* Now, wasn't it Sykes-Picot that caused Siegfried Sassoon to desert the First World War?

AIDE: No, he deserted before the Bolsheviks revealed the treaty. He already knew that the war was for national gain, not honor. *(To other aides)* Did you see Regeneration?

AIDE: As good as Paths Of Glory when it comes to anti WWI films.

AIDE: And poor Wilfred Owen....

OBAMA: *(Loudly clearing throat)* Excuse us!...Please save your anti-war blather for when the British Filmography Club meets on its own time...We've got a slight problem to sort out. We need to find a way to make the Brits feel shame for the bad stuff they've done.

AIDE: It won't work. They feel it but keep it to themselves. If it's not expressed, there is no public reaction that needs to be addressed.

OBAMA: That's not the American way. When we do something shameful, we feel it...We do not *pretend* to feel it like the Germans and Japanese...We do not write volumes of guilt-ridden mush like the French. No. When we do something that makes us feel guilty and ashamed we don't mope around, no, we just keep doing it over and over again until our feelings learn to accept it as a new norm. For example, look at our solution to the economic collapse. I swear, I couldn't look myself in the eye for at least a few minutes after announcing the first Quantitative Easing. Here I was rewarding the very people that caused the loss of millions of jobs, homes, and generally made life miserable for most Americans. But did I let that stop me? No. I did it again and again and again until I was totally comfortable with it. Now it's become the norm to be followed by the rest of the world and...*(To aide)* What was that you told me yesterday?..

AIDE: The UK, the EU Central bank and Japan all have debt to GDP ratio that is greater than ours.

OBAMA: There...you see?...We started it...they followed us...and when it blows up...they will suffer the consequences while we've moved on...I tell you, John, sometimes I'm overwhelmed by what it means to be an American...it makes me feel...

KERRY: (*Showing extreme emotion*)...Give me the picture...that pride in being an American is about to produce a gusher even beyond Vietnam...'As a father I'...

OBAMA: John...it's too fucking late...we're into another problem. But (*To aide*) if we have to do this again we now know that something like Yankee Doodle Dandy should work.

AIDE: How is an anti-American British song going to produce a positive effect?

OBAMA: (*To Kerry*) You see, John, this is why we're up and they're down. (*To aides*) It doesn't matter what *they* intended it to be, it's what *we* made it into that counts....Now we've got another transformation that needs doing. (*Brief pause*)

KERRY: Clearly, the bombing is dead. If the Brits reject it, then we risk losing our own people. (*Brief pause*)

AIDE: If I may suggest, the threat of bombing can be presented as merely a pressure tactic, like we did with Iran.

OBAMA: I guess that will have to do. But we also must give the French a little something for their support.

KERRY: Let's issue a prominent endorsement of their recent African invasions.

OBAMA: Yes...very good..what countries were they?...Chad and the Central African Republic?

KERRY: No, I think they were Mali and Mauritania.

OBAMA: Maybe Gabon...

KERRY: Or Cote d'Ivoire...

AIDE: Actually, it was all of them and more.

OBAMA: My...the French are getting peppy...God bless them...Now, the Brits. It has to be a minor punishment because the government, losers though they be, did support us. Any ideas? (*brief pause*)

KERRY: Well...there is Rockall...that would be minor, but still something.

OBAMA: Rockall?...What the devil is Rockall? (*To aide*) Check it out.

KERRY: It's a British possession in the North Atlantic. We had our eye on it, and the Brits swooped down and snapped it up before we could move.

OBAMA: Okay, so that has gotten our dander up enough to make a demand...Is there something valuable about it? (*Aide shows a picture of Rockall from her iPad*) Why, it's nothing but a big damn rock! That's all there is to Rockall?

KERRY: We would have called it Allrock...Here's the thing – Nobody lives there...The Brits officially declared it to be their possession, but it's uninhabited.

OBAMA: Who the hell would want to live on a rock out in nowhere?

KERRY: Barak, you sound more like one of our naïve aides than the president I know. The Dutch declared Connecticut their own but never settled it. The British swooped in with settlers, and soon it belonged to them...

OBAMA:...I get it...I get it...If a family can live in a lighthouse, they should do quite well on this big beautiful rock. We say a little something to the Brits, and before they know what happened we've blown off its top and made a nice patio for the modular unit we'll drop on to it along with a happy American family, and dog. (*To aide*) Tomorrow you send a short polite note to whoever sits at the Rockall desk in the Colonial Office requesting permission for a brief visit by our North Atlantic Global Warming Scientific Consortium for the purpose of analysing the flora and fauna of Rockall. Won't they be surprised?!

AIDE: (*Writing note*) Yes, sir.

OBAMA: Then later we can maybe claim something nearby...like a bit of Greenland.

KERRY: No...It would better to pick on something that can be passed off as British...like we can say that the Faroe Islands are really nothing more than the Extremely Outer Hebrides.

OBAMA: (*Slapping his hands together*) That's my John! Okay, let's call it a day. Later we'll say something to Cameron. (*They all begin to leave*) Is he Scotch...or wait a second, do you say Scotch or a Scot?

AIDE: I believe you say, so-and-so is a Scot.

KERRY: But in a bar you say give me a double scotch.

OBAMA: What would happen if I ordered a double Scot?

AIDE: Very likely something obscene.

KERRY: And while you're at it, never gamble with the Prince of Welsh.

[End – Second edition]

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