Written by **Jack Kenny** on November 16, 2014

CFR's Max Boot Sees Elections as Mandate for More War

Max Boot, the Jeane J. Kirkpatrick senior fellow for national security studies at the Council on Foreign Relations, is a regular contributor to the op-ed pages of the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Wall Street Journal*, as well as to neoconservative magazines such as the *Weekly Standard* and *Commentary*. The subjects of his wide-ranging expertise are, according to his CFR biography, "U.S. foreign policy; defense policy; military history; terrorism and guerrilla warfare." As a commentator on American elections, however, he belongs to the curious crew of pots calling kettles black, as he so ably demonstrated in a post-election essay for *Commentary.*

Boot has identified the White House as that "Temple of Denial," where Barack Obama refuses to admit he was repudiated by the voters in this month's elections. The outcome surely does point to a repudiation of the leadership, programs, and policies of the person and the party in the White House. But if Obama is in the "Temple of Denial," Boot and a number of his neocon colleagues are in a chapel of the same denomination. The rest of the country might see the election results as a repudiation of Obama's record on the economy or on the multitude of problems with ObamaCare. But for Boot, the election was a referendum on his favorite subject, "national security." And, of course, the "hawks" won.

National security, Boot is convinced, "was as important a factor in this election as it was in the 2006 midterm when, in the midst of Iraq War debacles, the Republicans lost control of the Senate." Left unmentioned is the fact that Boot and other desktop warriors in the CFR ranks were all along urging Bush into the "Iraq War debacles." "The president did himself incalculable damage," Boot continued, "when he set a 'red line' for Syria last year but failed to enforce it. That created an image of weakness and indecision which has only gotten worse with the rise of ISIS and [Russian President Vladimir] Putin's expansionism in Ukraine."

On second thought, the phrase "in denial" doesn't do justice to Boot and his ceaseless devotion to the warfare state. Does he really believe that the one-third of the electorate that bothered to vote on November 4 went to polls to repudiate Obama over his failure to take the nation into a war with Syria? Or because the president hasn't created enough of a confrontation with Russia over Ukraine? Did the two-thirds who didn't vote stay home out of disgust with the shortage of presidential warmaking? Was there a poll anywhere showing Syria and Ukraine anywhere near the top of the list of concerns of American voters? As for ISIS, Obama has bombs and missiles fired at them day and night, and poll after poll has shown solid majorities opposed to sending ground troops back to Iraq or into Syria. But maybe Boot knows something the pollsters don't.

Interpreting "the message the voters were trying to send," Boot has determined the president needs to "increase the tempo of airstrikes against ISIS" and send "at least 15,000 personnel" to Iraq and Syria, which is pretty close to the number of "military advisers" we had in Vietnam before Lyndon Johnson turned advising into full-scale war. "This isn't a call for U.S. ground combat troops." Boot assures readers, "but we do need a lot more trainers, Special Operators, and support personnel, and they need to be free to work with forces in the field rather than being limited to working with brigade and division staffs in large bases far from the front lines." Right. Voters went to the polls this November to demand more Americans killed in a Middle East war while defending the territorial lack of integrity and the political instability of a pseudo-sovereign nation such as Iraq, or intervening militarily in the slaughterhouse that is Syria.

"Repeal the 2016 deadline for pulling troops out of Afghanistan and announce that any drawdown will be conditions based," Boot recommends. Supposedly 15 years is hardly a long enough time to be fighting over the rocks and rubble and poppy fields of Afghanistan, a land al-Qaeda has long since vacated. Any deal with Iran must include "the dismantlement of its nuclear facilities," Boot insists, while also recommending that bombing in Syria include airstrikes on "Iran's proxy," Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

"Save the defense budget from the mindless cuts of sequestration, which are already hurting readiness and, if left unabated, risk another 'hollow' military," Boot warns. The Pentagon must employ a great many geniuses in profligate spending if they all they can purchase is hollowness with the hundreds of billions that would still be in the defense budget even after sequestration. Our nation spends on its "defense" nearly as much as the combined military expenditures of the rest of the world. And it is still not clear just whom we are defending, and against what, in Germany, Japan and other nations playing host to the network of bases we have circling the globe at the expense of American taxpayers.

Boot wants, of course, "tougher sanctions on Russia, freezing Russian companies entirely out of dollar-denominated transactions, while sending arms and trainers to Kiev and putting at least a Brigade Combat Team into each of the Baltic republics and Poland to signal that no more aggression from Putin will be tolerated." The insurgency Russia is supporting in Ukraine followed the U.S.-backed coup that overthrew the democratically elected government of Viktor Yanukovych and installed the current regime. We might well wonder what Mr. Boot and other barons of the media boardrooms might be saying about "aggression from Putin" if the Kremlin had abetted a coup on our border and were now sending "arms and trainers" to Mexico.

In outlining an agenda for the president to follow, from sending troops into battles with ISIS to bombing the president of Syria, Boot mentions Congress only once, and that in connection with getting "fast-track" authority for the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal currently under negotiation with 11 Pacific Rim nations. The Constitution delegates "all legislative Powers" to Congress. That includes amending legislation, a power Congress surrenders when it agrees to fast-track votes on trade deals. But Boot appears no more concerned with Congress's legislative powers than with its authority to declare war. The Constitution gives no leave to the president to take the country to war on his own say-so, as Obama did in the air war he waged over Libya. His Nobel Peace Prize notwithstanding, Obama has conducted bombing campaigns in more countries than George W. Bush did, despite the prevailing Republican myth that Obama is reluctant to use force and would like to respond to every danger in the world by inviting us to join hands and sing "Kumbaya."

After eight-and-a-half years of combat in Iraq and 13 years of it in Afghanistan, it just might be that the

American people are weary of war, regardless of who is in the White House. But for Boot and other pundits beating war drums with their word processors, there is no weariness with war. They always manage to find a shortage of it.