

Obama's Presidency: A One Term Show?

On December 10, 2009, President Barack Hussein Obama will be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo. The award was premature, and for Obama it will be a heavy burden. That is why it would have class to turn it down.

Obama delivered many elegant speeches that gave rise to high expectations. But all his nice talk led to nothing. The discrepancy between his words and his deeds caused frustrations around the globe. In terms of foreign policy, his presidency has thus far remained empty rhetoric. After his speeches in Ankara and Cairo, the Muslim world expected some concrete results and a change of policy in the Middle East and Central Asia. So far, the results are elusive. The U. S. is still fighting its illegal war in Iraq and the so-called "war on terror" in Afghanistan. In Afghanistan the situation is catastrophic, and in Iraq the conditions are horrible. In Afghanistan, the Taliban are in control of 80 percent of the country, and Iraq has been totally devastated by the "coalition of the willing". All the talk about the success of the surge in Iraq is just spin. There are attacks by the Iraqis every day, and the control of the Iraqi government does not reach beyond the so-called green zone. In fact, both countries are run by American puppets. Without Western occupying forces both governments would be overthrown within weeks, and the indigenous peoples would settle their differences their own way, like many opposition leaders in Iraq have said.

In addition to this mess, the U. S. does everything to destabilize Pakistan by attacking alleged terrorists and civilians within Pakistan by drones, remotely controlled from military installations in Nevada. Iran is under permanent military threat by Israel. The fear that Israel might pre-emptively attack Iran creates pressure on Obama to allow an attack on the Islamic Republic. But the American President is still reluctant; he tries to buy time. Neoconservatives and "Israel-firsters" are calling for "crippling sanctions" against Iran, but they prefer a military attack as soon as possible. What the U.S. and other Western countries apparently fail to understand, is their need to stop their colonial, arrogant and presumptuous attitude towards that country. The Islamic Republic wants to be treated respectfully as an equal member of the international community. In his book "black skin, white masks" Frantz Fanon described with great lucidity the need of people in the "Third World" to be treated as equals. The first thing a "black" man should say is "no". (Fanon uses the term "black" for all non-white people.) "No to degrading treatment. No to exploitation of man. No to the butchery of what is most human in man: freedom. No to those who attempt to define him." Obama should be able to understand what Fanon meant. Even if he wanted to change the course of events he can't do it. He is a "prisoner" of the American system.

George W. Bush's "vision" of a "Greater Middle East" through military force has led the U. S. into a quagmire which at the end can bring down the American Empire. The Bush Jr. presidency was the worst the United States had ever had. Bush's conclusions of 9/11 were bug-ridden because his administration was driven by a simplistic ideology: "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists." Bush erred when he declared that the Muslim people hated America for its values and their way of living. They do not hate the US, but they hate the occupation of their countries, may it be in Iraq, Afghanistan or Palestine. Maybe Obama should read Frantz Fanon's "The Wretched of the Earth" in which he describes the social psychology engendered by colonialism. For his predecessor such a book would be too difficult to digest. After almost nine years of war in Afghanistan there is no light at the end of the tunnel. Obama should get rid of this ominous legacy at once. This requires four steps:

Firstly, the Obama administration must work off the eight Bush years and put him, Dick Cheney, and most of their cronies in the dock, because they have led the U. S. into two disastrous neocolonial wars on the basis of bogus evidence. They are responsible for the death of over 6,000 American service men and women and of tens of thousands seriously injured, maimed and traumatized soldiers. Not to speak of the millions of Iraqis who lost their lives and whose existence were ruined.

Secondly, Obama should not allocate 30,000 or more troops to Afghanistan, but rather formulate an exit strategy for this country and Iraq. Sending more troops to Afghanistan, to a country whose so-called President just forged the last election, would be irresponsible. Why should Western soldiers die for such a government which lacks legitimacy and is corrupt to the bone? To claim that the West is defending its freedom on the Hindu Kush is unconvincing: There must be other reasons for its presence in that region. All the talk about building democracy, freedom of speech, fighting the drug warlords and securing women's rights is spurious. The real reasons are geopolitical. Western involvement in the region is inspired by old imperialistic goals, including the geopolitical control of Central Asia, goals that disregard the rights and wishes of the people of these countries.

Thirdly, the West views the resistance in Iraq and Afghanistan as terrorism. Mark Juergensmeyer in his book "Global Rebellion. Religious Challenges to the Secular State, from Christian Militias to al Qaeda" quotes religious people who attribute to religion the strong resistance of indigenous people to foreign occupation. "Islam is under attack", says a mullah in Bagdad. George W. Bush has claimed that the U.S. does not fight "Islam" but the people of Iraq and Afghanistan view it differently. Besides "that Islam is under attack", they also resist a secular regime for their countries. Such a justification of leading figures in both countries should cause the West and nongovernmental organizations (NGO) to reconsider their nation-building strategy.

Fourthly, the Obama administration should get tougher on Israel regarding the end of the occupation. The Jewish state has been systematically violating human rights and international law with the approval of the United States since it occupied Palestinian territory in the Six-Day War of June 1967. The mess the various Israeli governments have created in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) and the misery they inflicted on the real owners of the land did not elicit U.S. censure. Contrary to all so-called Western values, Israel goes every once in a while on a rampage in the OPT, as it did in 2001 when Ariel Sharon was elected Prime Minister in order to fight terrorism, as the Israeli politicians say. The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) not only destroyed the complete infrastructure of the Palestinian Authority but also demolished all the ministries, including their equipment. The latest attack – on the Gaza Strip - happened just before Obama took office. It lasted from December 27, 2008 to January 18, 2009. It pitted the fourth strongest army in the world against a helpless population and killed more than 1,400 people, most of them women and children; Israel lost 14 soldiers, four of them by friendly fire. The reports by human rights organizations, such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the U.N. Goldstone Report, document the horrific onslaught by the Israeli military. For the State of Israel, Yassir Arafat, Mahmoud Abbas and Hamas were and continue to be "obstacles to peace". The real obstacle to peace is, in fact, Israel's 42-year-old occupation. It has to be terminated, and the source of Palestinian resistance will vanish. As long as the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians remains unresolved, U.S. policy in the Near and Middle East will get nowhere.

Obama understood from the outset that the "settlements" in the OPT were the main obstacle to peace. Thus he started out, by calling forcefully for a total freeze of Israel's colonial and illegal settlement projects in the OPT. But the Israeli government was not impressed. Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu gave Obama the cold shoulder. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, on the other hand, praised at her last visit to the region Netanyahu's offer of a limited settlement growth before beginning negotiations as "unprecedented". In fact, Netanyahu's so-called "restraint package" was so minimalist that it kept his coalition partners happy. From Israel, Clinton flew to Marrakesh where she met with Arab foreign ministers who criticized her statement as "taking sides with Israel". Morocco was the final stop of a charm offensive which Clinton launched across the Muslim world, starting in Pakistan. When Netanyahu announced his cabinet's decision as a "far-reaching and painful step (...) to suspend new construction in Judea and Samaria" - the names used by the Right and the nationalists for the occupied West Bank - Secretary of State Clinton reacted immediately with a statement formulating the goal of the

negotiations: The establishment of an "independent and viable state based on the 1967 lines". This could have been called a revolutionary statement because never before had a US government used such a language, when Netanyahu's intention would not have been too timid. His "peace"-offer aimed not at the Palestinians but rather at the Obama administration.

Obama promised an American change. "Yes, we can", was his slogan on the base of which he was elected. So far, he has disappointed everybody. Instead of getting tough on his predecessor and his cronies, he has followed their disastrous path in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Middle East. He even went further than Bush by permitting regular attacks on Pakistan and entertaining threats of attacks on Iran. He is under enormous pressure from the Neocons, the "Israel-firsters", Christian fundamentalists and the Israeli government which threatens to attack Iran itself if the Americans won't do it.

So far, his foreign policy is a disappointment for the progressives around the world and hardly any different from his predecessor's. If Obama does not watch out and make a U-turn in his approach towards these countries, the American Empire may topple: Either its soldiers will be worn down morally, or the financial burden will be too heavy to bear any longer. To transport a gallon of gasoline to Afghanistan costs 400 U.S. Dollars. Not to speak of the billions of US-dollars which are wasted in Iraq and Afghanistan. Perhaps, at the end of his first term Obama will either share the fate of Jimmy Carter or he will end up disenchanted, like Lyndon B. Johnson.

Ludwig Watzal