

Barack Obama: Where's the Peace?

Open Letter to the President of the United States of America

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Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [History](#)

Dear President Barack Obama,

Sometime in late 2007, a nine-year-old girl in Moscow hung a poster on the wall of her bedroom that featured an artistic rendering of your image, accompanied by a single word: "Change."

Given that children are not generally attracted to the drab, adult world of politics, that poster rammed home the power of your message and the hope it inspired. After all, even children can sense when things are out of whack in the world and change is needed.

It was not just children, however, who were inspired by your smoothly articulated message.

Indeed, two years ago this week, the Norwegian Nobel Committee awarded you the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize. This event took much of the world by surprise since the nominations were made just 12 days after you had entered the White House! Even you seemed surprised by the award, saying the tribute was not for your accomplishments but more of a "call to action." Indeed, your only presidential accomplishment to date, with all due respect, was getting elected.

Nevertheless, the Norway-based organization said they were honoring you for your "extraordinary efforts to strengthen international diplomacy and co-operation between peoples." In other words, it was almost as if the Nobel Committee had made a hefty down payment – the prize in 2009 was worth \$1.4 million dollars – on something it had expected to receive in the future. Namely, an honest effort at creating and sustaining global peace. Whether or not the Nobel committee has been satisfied in its expectations, I am not in a position to say. But we can venture a wild guess.

Since the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were not launched on your watch, Mr. President, it may be considered unfair to mention them in this letter. However, since you are the commander-in-chief, all decisions regarding war – regardless of who started them – are ultimately yours, of course.

Thus, it is necessary to consider the Afghanistan War, which has just entered its 10th year, making it the longest military operation in US history, even longer than the eight-year slog in Vietnam.

Although you should be credited with announcing that 10,000 US troops would be called home from Afghanistan by the end of 2011, with an additional 23,000 troops expected to leave by mid-2012, this means that over 50,000 US soldiers will be left behind to fight an

increasingly futile war.

As you certainly know, 4,500 US troops have already paid the ultimate sacrifice in Iraq, with another 1,700 in Afghanistan. At the same time, fighting two wars has cost the US taxpayer \$1 trillion since the terrorist attacks of 9/11. It would be very difficult to say what the American people got for all that heavy expenditure besides mountains of death, destruction and debt.

Meanwhile, the 50,000 US troops stationed in Iraq look as if they will remain there “indefinitely,” which is just another way of saying “forever.” Yet just last year you promised to “turn the page” on this ugly chapter in American history.

In a typically eloquent speech, this one delivered on August 31, 2010, you told the American people: “The United States has paid a huge price to put the future of Iraq in the hands of its people. We have sent our young men and women to make enormous sacrifices in Iraq, and spent vast resources abroad at a time of tight budgets at home...Through this remarkable chapter in the history of the United States and Iraq, we have met our responsibility. Now, it is time to turn the page.”

Many people are still waiting for this one page to turn, but it seems the story is just beginning.

Although you may have had little hope of bringing home the troops, you did have the opportunity to close the Guantanamo Bay detention facility. After all, you pledged on the campaign trail to shutter this concrete corner of Cuba, which has been dubbed the “Gulag of our times” by Amnesty International. Yet once again, with all due respect, you crumbled under the unbearable weight of the Republicans, despite the fact that they were the Congressional minority during your first two years in office. So ex-Vice President Dick Cheney got what he wanted, and the “terrorists,” many of whom are known to be innocent of the charges against them, remain stuck in a lawless purgatory.

As a result, the fate of these individuals will not be decided by a civilian court (i.e. open and transparent), but behind the locked doors of military tribunals, where guilty verdicts are all but guaranteed. Are the American people not entitled to hear what these individuals have to say to the charges brought against them, especially when the US taxpayer is paying the \$1 trillion dollar bill for the “War on Terror”? It stands to reason that we should be witness to the court proceedings against the people we are sacrificing so much to fight. After all, even the loathsome Nazis were given a public trial in Nuremburg following World War II, which gave the public an opportunity to confront their enemy in the flesh. There is a good reason for this, and it has nothing to do with morbid curiosity or good TV ratings. Public war trials are not for the benefit of the condemned, but rather for the benefit of the public as a means of acquiring closure on deeply traumatizing events. Sadly, the American people were denied this concluding act of war, and the reasons given (too expensive, too risky, too bad) continue to defy logic. Now the ghosts of terrorist acts past will haunt us forever.

While the enemy combatants in the war on terror were deemed unworthy recipients of the humanitarian guidelines set forth in the Geneva Convention, the American people, ironically, did not fare much better. Following the devastating attacks of 9/11, when a code-red atmosphere of Fear and Panic ruled the road and bumper-sticker patriotism was rampant, the Bush administration rammed through a shell-shocked Congress its so-called Patriot Act,

which essentially turned every American into a potential terrorist.

Here is how the Los Angeles Times put the plight: “Many were questioning the extreme measures taken by the Bush administration, especially after the disclosure of abuses and illegalities. Candidate Obama capitalized on this swing and portrayed himself as the champion of civil liberties.”

So, Mr. President, how did you fare in the face of this daunting challenge? If I may be so candid, it seems that “poorly” would be an understatement.

“President Obama not only retained the controversial Bush policies, he expanded on them,” the Times summarized. “He continued warrantless surveillance and military tribunals that denied defendants basic rights. He asserted the right to kill US citizens he views as terrorists. His administration has fought to block dozens of public-interest lawsuits challenging privacy violations and presidential abuses.”

The article went on to lament the damage you personally did to the civil liberties movement, which “has quieted to a whisper, muted by the power of Obama’s personality and his symbolic importance as the first black president as well as the liberal who replaced Bush.”

At the same time, as the situation in Libya proved, over-simplistic military solutions to complex foreign problems continue to be a hallmark of American foreign policy. Meanwhile, in nuclear-armed Pakistan, which has been declared a hunting ground in the open season on bogeymen, the use of unmanned drone attacks have actually increased on your watch as compared to the Neocon nightmare of the Bush administration.

Started under the Bush administration, drone attacks in Pakistan have increased fivefold on your watch, Mr. President. Last year, 118 such missions were reported, which have resulted in the death of some genuine bad guys, as well as up to 300 innocent civilians. Is this the sort of peace the Nobel Committee had in mind when it honored you the top prize? Certainly not, but yet the sanitized strikes continue.

According to a report by National Public Radio (NPR): “For now, the US government has no plans to ease up on the drone strikes, talk about them, or give Pakistan more say in how they’re done. Far from it: A couple of months ago, a top security adviser to President Obama, Doug Lute, was asked about the drone strikes at a security conference.”

Lute said Osama Bin Laden’s death makes the drone strikes even more important.

“So this is a period of turbulence in an organization which is our archenemy. This is a period, therefore, that all military doctrine suggests you need to go for the knockout punch,” Lute told NPR.

Does anybody in Washington even consider the fact that Pakistan has nuclear weapons?

Finally, in one last “peaceful” gesture, it was recently reported that you secretly sent 55 so-called bunker-buster bombs to Israel, thus adding fuel to the verbal fire now raging between Israel and Iran. Needless to say, a war between these two states may well be the war to end all wars, not to mention life on Earth as we know it. That appears to be a risk that some people, especially those with a more apocalyptic frame of mind, are willing to take. But I digress.

In a special report by Newsweek, US and Israeli officials “revealed that the GBU-28 Hard Target Penetrators — potentially useful in any future military strike against Iranian nuclear sites — were delivered to Israel in 2009, just several months after Obama took office.”

If these revelations are really true, it flies in the face of your other forgotten campaign pledge to “sit down and talk” with America’s enemies. Plus, it could send mixed signals to Israel concerning Washington’s intentions.

The Daily Beast asked if the transfer of the powerful bombs “would be seen as a green light for Israel to attack Iran’s secret nuclear sites one day.” In any case, in the event of such a hypothetical scenario, there are better-than-average chances that the already overstretched US military will be called up once again for Middle East duty.

In closing, you commented this week that the American people are not better off economically than they were four years ago. While this is true, you failed to mention anything about the state of peace in the world compared to four years ago. This was a glaring oversight since you received the Nobel Peace Prize, not the Economic Performance Prize, and the former is certainly more critical. If we fail to restore peace, then any conversation on the health of the economy is senseless.

It must be said that the American people, as well as much of the inhabitants of the planet, are not safer than they were four years ago. At least part of the reason is your failure to live up to the heavy expectations of the Nobel Committee when they awarded you their ultimate honor. But it is still not too late to change that.

Mr. President, I have nothing more to say except that your poster that was hanging in a child’s room in the center of Moscow has been taken down, rolled up, and carefully stored away. Maybe she is waiting for better days to return the poster to its place. I really don’t know.

Meanwhile, I can only imagine what the people at the Nobel Committee are thinking. But there is still time to try to correct things.

Respectfully yours,

Robert Bridge

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