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OBAMA 100: Trop Beau. Ce Président!

"Too handsome that president" was the conclusion of a French women's magazine

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"Too handsome that president" was the conclusion of the French women's magazine *Voici* (27/12/08) "le président plus sexy jamais élu", the most sexy president ever elected, "attendu comme le Messie", awaited like the Messiah". In the swimming trunks, also appearing in an IHT column 16/05/09 calling Michelle's remark about being "proud about her country for the first time" a *blunder*. Oh no. Honesty.

Where are we after 100 days? Close to hyphenation, Obama-Bush. But Obama is to the right of Bush in West Asia. He was silent on the Gaza massacre and no words to irritate the Israeli leadership as Rice did questioning settlements; on Iraq in the increasing numbers of soldiers that will "stay behind" instead of negotiating with the resistance; on Iran, watch the Dennis Ross preparations in State Department; on Pakistan in forcing their army to shoot on their own, the few available that is, the so-called talibans are of course in the refugee camps unavailable for murder by tanks designed for conventional war with India; in Afghanistan more than doubling by deploying 36,000 more troops, with the Gates switch to Delta Force counter-insurgency, over even Karzai strong protests. With the Pentagon budget up from US$534 to 740 billion. Change yes, wanted?

The operation in Gaza was not military but designed to punish the people for having produced Hamas, and of course to prove to them that Hamas is not in a position to protect them. Exactly the same as the strategy in Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan. And in Sri Lanka:

A CIA regional analyst in July 2001: "Containing the LTTE while stepping up pressure on the civilian population under its control by stepping up 'terror' bombing might create conditions for unseating Prabhakaran" (*US Strategic Interests in Sri Lanka, Taraki*, 30/09/05)

It did not. But thus speaks an empire, deeper, stronger than an Obama cover up front, speaking very seductively for the millions naive about the empire. Obama has become the good cop who strikes people with their feathers when the bad cop is through with the job.

He has taken on an enormous agenda after the 43rd president, George Walter Bush, by many seen as the worst ever. Depends on the criteria. Economically he may compete with No. 31, Hoover. But in spite of wars for oil, its pipelines, its bases and its discontents in Iraq and Afghanistan, there have been much worse imperialists. He pails relative to No. 11, Polk (conquering more than half of Mexico, well prepared by No. 3, Jefferson and No. 5, Monroe), the very imperialist numbers 25-26-27, McKinley-Roosevelt-Taft. And there have been some strange highly forgettable ones, even unmentionable.

But undoing the crimes and stupidities of Bush does not a good policy make–as little as stopping beating your wife does a good marriage make–it only looks very seductive for a short while. He is the top administrator of the US Empire and there is no change in its economic and military policies in spite of a positive rhetoric on negotiation and dialogue rather than hegemony and truth monopoly.

There is a stimulus approach to the economy but the bailout approach is far stronger, with the TARP from Bush costing US$1450 billion. Michel Chossudovsky, the brilliant Canadian economist, adds Defense, Bailout and Net Interest (on the US debt) and gets US@ 2353 billion, very close to the total US federal revenue of US$2381 billion. Of course the cuts will be on health, education, welfare and–also an Obama policy–taxes. His use of Summer-Geithner was a major mistake–Summers even earned millions from the banks and hedge funds he is now protecting from regulation. Or – are the forces protecting Israel from Obama's "change" also protecting Wall Street?

Softening close to 50 years of illegal sanctions on Cuba is not enough, nor is rhetoric at the OAS meeting in Trinidad. There is a peaceful revolution in Latin America, giving common people more space and livelihood. Obama should welcome it, learn, practice it. And turn Guantánamo, wrongly acquired in 1934, back to the owner: Cuba.

Will Guantánamo be closed? Maybe, maybe not. The military tribunals will stay. At the Bagram base prisoners still have no rights whatsoever. And Obama stops release of the next batch of torture photos lest publication endangers US soldiers' lives. But his censorship endangers them more than honesty and transparency, and the photos will be leaked sooner or later. Rumors say they reveal more use of sexuality as torture technique. Besides, there is a good way of protecting US soldiers' lives: withdrawing them, even if suicide (up 13%) and traumas of all kinds will be a lasting legacy.

And those who paved the way legally and politically for torture get off with impunity. John Yoo is a tenured professor at Berkeley, Donald Rumsfeld is at the Hoover Institution at Stanford, George Tenet makes money directing companies with military or intelligence contracts, Douglas Feith teaches at Harvard, so does Bill Kristol, and Paul Wolfowitz runs the US-Taiwan Business Council. They should be in court all of them, but Obama is looking forward, not backward. Not even demanding an investigation of the Smithfield corporation running giant hog farms around the world, also near Vera Cruz in Mexico by many held responsible for the swine flu (*IHT*, 06/05/09).

In a democracy candidates launch products, their policies, in the political market. People buy products they like by voting for them. In this there is a contract like in the economic market; this is the quality we offer, this is the price. False advertising can qualify as a crime. How about false political advertising? The voter has paid the price, voting, is the elected president then free to run away from so many of his promises? Is that not better known as fraud, and a colossal loophole in democratic theory and practice?

There is much search and research behind a price for commercial products; are politicians exempt from that? The word is populism, and Obama is one of them. And a very seductive one, as long as it lasts.

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