

Obama - My Combat. Rhetoric Versus Reality

State of the Union address 2016

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The last State of the Union address by President Obama was the occasion of a vigorous panegyric in favour of his country, in all points the best « on Earth » (sic). Unfortunately, his magnificent rhetoric was not based on a single convincing argument. His splendid oratory was thus unable to mask the reality of the decline of the United States, the result being that his Republican adversaries have made it the theme of their campaign.

The last address on the State of the Union, given by President Obama, was designed primarily to write the pages of his own history in the imagination of his compatriots [1]. Apart from a few allusions to the danger represented by the excesses of Republican candidate Donald Trump, the address was a long panegyric to the supremacy of his country, and ended with a proposition for the reform of political life as necessary as it is inapplicable.

« The strongest economy in the world »

Barack Obama began by declaring that :

« The United States of America, right now, has the strongest, most durable economy in the world ».

What he did not say was that, if we are to believe the IMF, while the United States does indeed have the largest nominal GDP, they come only in second position if we consider the GDP in terms of purchasing power parity, in other words, if we stop counting in dollars and begin comparing what is comparable. De facto, the primary world economic power is no longer the United States, but China.

Though he denied this reality, the President admitted that there remained much progress to be made towards sharing the riches. In its tri-annual report, made public last September, the Federal Reserve noted that the average income has declined by 5 %. In other words, while the super-rich are getting richer and richer, the United States in general are not. The inequalities have become such that 3 % of the population possess more than half of the nation's patrimony, 7 % possess the next quarter, and 90 % the last quarter. Following the financial crisis of 2008-09, these 90 % have been reduced to what they possessed in 1986, while during the same period, the Chinese multiplied their own patrimony several times.

In order to demonstrate the excellent health of his industry, the President pointed out that this has been the best year for automobile manufacturers. Apart from the fact that we do not yet have the exact figures, if we refer to the available data, the world's principal automobile producer is not the United States, but Japan. Whether we calculate in terms of

the number of cars sold, or especially in terms of GDP and profit, Toyota is the clear winner. In reality, most of the revenue of the United States does not come from what they produce, but from royalties on the patents they have bought. Therefore, although this is revenue that everyone may consider legitimate under the aegis of the World Trade Organisation, it did not exist before, and indeed may not exist tomorrow.

After having claimed for himself certain of the arguments of the Occupy Wall Street movement, the President did not go on to announce the slightest measure to correct these inequalities, but simply proffered a few benefits intended to patch up a few wounds. Then he suddenly changed the subject and reminded his audience about his cancer research plan and his support for the United Nations Conference on « *the climate* ».

Having thus « *refuted* » the theorists of economic decline, President Obama then arrived at the heart of his subject – namely US military supremacy over the rest of the world. Unless I'm mistaken, this is the first time since Adolf Hitler and Hideki Tōjō that such an argument has been deployed in an address by a head of state or government.

The « most powerful army on Earth »

« I told you earlier all the talk of America's economic decline is political hot air. Well, so is all the rhetoric you hear about our enemies getting stronger and America [meaning only the United States] getting weaker. Let me tell you something. The United States of America is the most powerful nation on Earth. Period. (Applause). It's not even close. It's not even close. (Applause.) It's not even close. We spend more on our military than the next eight nations combined. Our troops are the finest fighting force in the history of the world. No nation dares to attack us or our allies because they know that's the path to ruin. Surveys show our standing around the world is higher than when I was elected to this office, and when it comes to every important international issue, people of the world do not look to Beijing or Moscow to lead—they call us. (Applause). »

Firstly – the Nobel Peace Prize laureate makes no attempt to celebrate the fact that his army is capable of defending his country, but rather that it is so superior to others that the whole world turns to Washington. In other words, he admits that the authority of his country does not derive from its capacities, but only from the fear it inspires.

Secondly – he measures his « *leadership* » by the allegation that, according to surveys whose authors he does not mention, the position of his country in the world is higher than when he was elected. Precisely, this argument does not enable us to evaluate the natural authority of his country, but it's domination of others. This is a characteristic of US political thought. Washington's challenge is not Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness, as stated by the words of the *Declaration of Independence*, but superiority over others. In his famous 1991 report about the strategic objectives of the United States in a world without the Soviet Union, Paul Wolfowitz thus envisaged conserving the superiority of the moment by weakening the allies, in particular the European Union, even if this meant weakening themselves. Consequently, today, the role of US armies is not to defend the interests of US citizens, but to prevent other powers from developing faster than themselves. This is an evidence in the Near East, but it is also the case in the rest of the world.

Thirdly – like most of his compatriots, Barack Obama thinks that money allows you to buy anything. He declared a little earlier in his speech that public financial investment in cancer

research would enable the victory over the disease. As if the spark of genius in researchers could be triggered with dollars. Concerning his armies, he affirmed that their un-paralleled budget has made them the most powerful. By saying so, he is the first Commander-in-Chief to pretend that the valour and courage of his soldiers is a question of dollars. From the Greco-Persian wars that saw the victory of a handful of Greeks against with the armies of emperors Darius and Xerxes, ten to twenty times superior in numbers and equipment – up until the defeat of Tsahal, the most sophisticated army in the world, backed by US logistics, the most powerful in the world, against a few Hezbollah Resistants supported by Syria and Iran, we know that the will and courage of men will triumph over the most extravagant budgets.

Fourthly – the allusion to Russia and China is a poor disguise for US resentment at the military industries of these two states. Everyone can now see, in Kaliningrad, in the Black Sea and in Syria, that NATO forces are marginalised by Russian technology. In the event of a conventional war against NATO, there is no doubt whatsoever that Russia would quickly prevail. The wearying of US industry is particularly visible in the aeronautics sector. For close to twenty years, the Pentagon has been promising the imminent construction of the F-35, a multi-function airplane capable of replacing almost all current military aircraft. Not only do they still have a long way to go, but while US engineers were re-designing their plans for the umpteenth time, Russia produced the Soukhoï Su-35, a plane of astounding agility, and China produced the Chengdu J-10B, with stealth capacities greater than any other. It is true that the United States have a production capacity without equivalent, but their conventional equipment has been long overtaken and now only impresses the smaller states.

After all this bragging, President Obama denounced the danger of terrorism and affirmed that he was fighting both al-Qaïda and Daesh. As proof of his engagement in the face of those who remain astounded by the patent inefficiency of the anti-Daesh Coalition, he declared :

« If you doubt America's commitment (he means the United States) or mine, to see that justice is done, ask Osama bin Laden. (Applause.) [...] When you come after Americans, (he still means the United States) we go after you. It may take time, but we have long memories, and our reach has no limit. (Applause.) ».

An argument which will only convince those who were already convinced of the assassination of Osama bin Laden by the Seals, in Pakistan, in 2011. In other words, not so many.

Other states are worth nothing

Speaking now of the balance of world power, President Obama continued :

« The Middle East is going through a transformation that will play out for a generation, rooted in conflicts that date back millennia. Economic headwinds blow from a Chinese economy in transition. Even as their economy contracts, Russia is pouring resources to prop up Ukraine and Syria – client states they see slipping away from their orbit. And the international system we built after World War II is now struggling to keep pace with this new reality. »

No-one could truly say what these « *conflicts that date back millennia* » which are shaking the Middle East may be. In reality, since Jimmy Carter, Washington has been doing everything in its power to break up developing states by leaning on those who rejoice in their ignorance, like Saudi Arabia. But the phrase makes it possible to justify the present chaos and burden the next generation with the search for a solution.

The Chinese economy is certainly in transition, but in a similar way to that of the United States, which oscillates between growth and depression. The present fall of Chinese stock markets do not reflect economic reality. First of all because the principal Chinese companies are either public or listed in Western stock exchanges, and then because this fall is due to the war between the yuan and the yen. Shinzō Abe's planned devaluation of Japanese currency forces China to devalue its own money.

The contraction of the Russian economy is not due to intrinsic weakness, but is the consequence of the Western embargo – an embargo which forces Moscow to develop in the East, which it had been hoping to do for a long time without being able to do so. Apart from that, to pretend that Ukraine and Syria are client states is ridiculous – Viktor Ianoukovytch's government was not pro-Russian, even though it was not anti-Russian. As for Syria, it had ceased most of its relations with Moscow after the dislocation of the USSR, and had been unable to re-activate them in 2007. The recourse to lies like this is aimed only at masking defeat – it is of no importance whether or not Crimea and Syria become Russian or pro-Russian, because this is the way it has always been.

Finally, after having affirmed that other states are not worth much compared to his own, President Obama deplored that the United Nations are having trouble adapting, without specifying clearly to what they should be adapting. He was probably alluding to the fact that the UNO, under the direction of Ban Ki-moon and Jeffrey Feltman, not only are not acting in favour of peace, but are organising war, as can be seen since 2012 in Syria. Consequently, many states are now seeking to establish alternative institutions. Already, the BRICS have created an alternative banking system, distanced from the IMF and the World Bank. One after the other, all the institutions founded by Washington are soon to be in competition with, and excluded from, these new institutions.

To finish his address, Barack Obama called for a reform of Congress which would free it from lobby financing. This is a popular theme in a country in which only 3 % of the population considers itself democratically represented by the Parliament. But it is clear that the President will do nothing to ensure that this dream is realised. He spoke only to convince his compatriots to maintain confidence in his régime.

During his address, he was applauded by less than half of the audience.

Translation: Pete Kimberley

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