

“Obamamania”: Barack Obama: A Neocon in sheep’s clothing

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I admit it; I was one of the estimated 5.9 billion people worldwide who was initially captivated, enraptured, shellacked, call it what you will, by America’s “first black president” Barack Hussein Obama.

But who on earth wasn’t?

Following eight brutal years of being dragged around the planet in search of monsters by a self-declared “war president,” it was all too easy to be seduced by Obama’s honey-dripping message of Hope and Change.

The Bush years, we believed, were an unfortunate and very un-American anomaly and Obama would put the American house back in order. Yes, we’d sit down and chat with tyrants; we’d get tough with transnational corporations; we’d put the long-forgotten rugged individuals back where they belong in the grand order of things. With the triumphant election of Barack Obama, it felt like morning again in America, which had just passed through the longest, darkest night of its history.

Indeed, the need to believe the hype and hysteria was so powerful that it even compelled the otherwise intelligent people at the Nobel Institute to pin the peace laurels on Obama’s chest at the very same time US troops were hunkered down on two fronts.

The international community is no longer enamored by Obama, however, at least not the way they were just three years ago. The American president can still charm the pants off a news conference, and deliver a mesmerizing speech via the teleprompter, but the magic of those early days, when Change was so close you could almost reach out and touch it, has vanished into thin air.

“Obamania” has been downgraded to “Obamanic depression.”

The British betrayed their inner feelings about America’s Commander in Speech when they chose a tongue-in-cheek codename for Obama’s recent UK visit.

According to the Daily Mail: “More than one person has wanted to call Barack Obama a ‘smart alec’, and now British police will get the chance to do so without getting reprimanded. That’s because Scotland Yard has tapped the codename ‘Chalaque’ to refer to the U.S. president for security reasons during his upcoming state visit to the United Kingdom May 24-26.”

And what exactly does “Chalaque” mean? The Mail, quoting a Punjabi speaker, said the

word is used “when we want to denigrate someone who we think is too clever for their own good.”

Although Scotland Yard says the name was selected randomly from some cheeky supercomputer, the characterization appears too accurate to be the product of mere chance. Besides, even if the program really did spit out the very applicable designation, the British authorities could have easily commanded the computer to ‘try again.’

Anyways, there is no need for name calling when simply reporting the facts is so much more effective.

GUANTANAMO BAY

Of Barack Obama’s numerous unfulfilled promises, the failure to shut down the Guantanamo Bay detention facility is the most glaring and unpardonable. Not only does this prison, situated in a remote corner of communist Cuba, fly in the face of democratic principles, it has actually served to harden the resolve of America’s enemies due to the inhumane treatment of the detainees, some of whom are innocent.

According to a report by Human Rights Watch, “Washington has ignored human rights standards in its own treatment of terrorism suspects. It has refused to apply the Geneva Conventions to prisoners of war from Afghanistan, and has misused the designation of ‘illegal combatant’ to apply to criminal suspects on U.S. soil.”

On May 25, 2005, Amnesty International released its annual report calling the detention facility the “gulag of our times.”

Meanwhile, Lord Steyn, a prominent judge in the United Kingdom, called it “a monstrous failure of justice,” because “... The military will act as interrogators, prosecutors and defense counsel, judges, and when death sentences are imposed, as executioners. The trials will be held in secret. None of the guarantees of a fair trial need be observed.”

Remember, Obama was going to reverse all of this insanity. And there is no question about: it is insane.

Guantanamo Bay ranks as one of the most sinister war-time camps ever devised. Who will ever forget (certainly, America’s enemies never will) the images of cuffed detainees kneeling on the ground, inside of barbed-wire enclosures, while sporting sensory-deprivation devices – i.e. no light, no sound, no tactile stimuli whatsoever. All the while, US soldiers, armed to the teeth, were inside of the enclosures as well. Even if there was a chance that one of the bad guys would pull a Houdini and escape, Guantanamo Bay is in the middle of shark-infested waters miles away from nothing. Why so many over-the-top security measures, which only make the American captors look cruel and ridiculous?

On January 22, 2009, much of the free world let out a sigh of relief when Barack Obama announced the facility would be shuttered within one year. At this point, the Democratic president got his first indication as to what a joy it would be trying to work with the Republican Party. With former vice president Dick Cheney suddenly on every news channel, the Neocons came out of the woodwork, arguing that the country with the world’s premier prison system could not handle a couple hundred broken “terrorists” on American soil for their trials. What?!

Obama finally caved in to the incredible pressure, and to this day Guantanamo Bay, the darkest chapter in America's history since at least the days of slavery, remains open for business. Not only is it open for business, but the detainees, who have been blamed for some of the worst crimes against the United States, will not have an opportunity to tell their story before a civilian court. More importantly, however, nor will the American people get to hear their story. The voice of the detainees of Guantanamo Bay will disappear into the void of military tribunals, where closed courts will keep Americans in the dark.

Not democracy's best day.

WAR

Barack Obama has failed to end the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, as he promised to do on the campaign trail. In the case of Afghanistan, US troop strength has tripled there, while the death of American soldiers is on the rapid uptick. According to justforeignpolicy.org, since Obama took over the Oval Office, 910 US troops have been killed in Afghanistan, compared to 575 in the seven years that Bush served as president.

In Iraq, where the official close of military operations has been announced, Obama has left behind a 50,000-strong "transitional force" tasked with training the Iraqi Security Forces and conducting counterterrorism operations. Obama says the troops there "may" remain until the end of 2011, but only a fool would take Obama's golden words at face value.

Did Obama stop the illegitimate and indiscriminate use of drone technology? Here is Cindy Sheehan, anti-war activist who lost her son in Iraq: "On day three (of Obama's presidency), he ordered his first drone bombing strike in the tribal regions of North Pakistan thus murdering a reported 36 civilians. Since that day, the US has used this tactic of abject terror 192 more times resulting in hundreds of civilian deaths. In the four years the Bush stain used this tactic of terror it was used 43 times. In this area, Obama is definitely an overachiever."

Not only has our Nobel Laureate failed to bring home the boys from Afghanistan and Iraq, he threw his support behind military intervention in Libya, where antigovernment rebels are attempting to overthrow Libyan strongman Muammar Qaddafi. NATO forces are now conducting massive aerial bombardments over Tripoli, inflicting untold casualties on the civilian population. According to Bloomberg News, "thousands" have been killed since the bombing campaign started two months ago, and hundreds of thousands have fled the country.

The alleged killing of Osama bin Laden (no proof of this exploit exists, not even a video, which the US Army has proven very adept at providing in the past) can not wash away all of these failed promises, especially when it remains possible that OBL was not even remotely responsible for pulling off 9/11. Indeed, how a man on the run in the mountains could pull off a sophisticated attack against the strongest country in the world will be a question for the historians to ultimately decide.

OBAMA BATTING FOR BUSH

Ok, so you are still unconvinced that Barack Obama has not only continued Bush-era policy, but actually intensified it? In addition to recently continuing with Bush tax cuts for the rich, at a time when the US is facing the deepest deficit in its history, Obama also snuck through

an extension of the Patriot Act minutes before it was set to expire.

The Patriot Act, rammed through by the Bush administration when America was in a code-red panic following the events of 9/11, empowers US security agencies to implement wiretaps, as well as conduct extensive searches against private citizens. But that is only the tip of the iceberg concerning its powers, since there has never been a real democratic debate on this autocratic piece of legislation.

Democratic Sen. Jeff Merkley of Oregon complained that “the government won’t even tell the American people how it interprets these provisions, or whether it sees any limits on its authority at all.”

Meanwhile, Sen. Tom Udall of New Mexico said almost 10 years after the Patriot Act’s passage, “we still haven’t had the debate that we need to have on this piece of legislation.”

Did Obama the Great Changer give America the debate it wants and needs on the subject of this invasion of privacy? Did he listen to his own constituents, many of whom expected the Democratic wunderkind to end this draconian trend toward tyranny? Of course not. In fact, at the eleventh hour, just minutes before the highly controversial Patriot Act was set to succumb to a much-deserved demise, Obama, who once challenged us to have the audacity to hope, signed the legislation for another four years with his autopen while away in France.

And I would imagine the Statue of Liberty, if caught at that moment, blushed; blushed in frustration, anger and hopelessness for what has become of her once proud nation.

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