

President Barack H. Obama, One Year Later: 'C' for Effort

By [Prof Rodrigue Tremblay](#)

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"I don't want to just end the [Iraq] war, but I want to end the mind-set that got us into war in the first place." Presidential candidate Barack Obama, January 31, 2008

"Behind the ostensible government sits enthroned an invisible government owing no allegiance and acknowledging no responsibility to the people." Theodore Roosevelt (1882-1945), 26th US president

"If we are strong, our character will speak for itself. If we are weak, words will be of no help." John F. Kennedy (1917-1963), 35th US President

"If the Nuremberg laws were applied, then every post-war American president would have been hanged." Noam Chomsky, linguist and political analyst

Barack H. Obama was a good presidential candidate but, so far, in crucial areas, he has been a somewhat disappointing president.

In November 2008, Democratic presidential candidate [Barack H. Obama](#), and the first black American to have that chance, got to the U.S. presidency on the coattails of a despised Bush-Cheney administration. Indeed, it was a relief for a majority of Americans to have Senator Obama replace "facts-do-not-matter" George W. Bush as president of the was little more than a Bush-retread. It was therefore unavoidable that such an election would generate big expectations that things would change for the better. As a matter of fact, candidate Obama's electoral slogans were ["Yes we can"](#) and ["change we can believe in"](#).

Because President Obama is America's first black President, he is symbolically the culmination of Martin Luther King's [Civil Rights movement](#). Because of that, many have hesitated to criticize him or his administration. But his record, so far, speaks for itself. In two central areas, defense and the economy, his performance has been, at best, lackluster. In fact, Obama's performance in these areas has betrayed a lot of highly held expectations.

He seems to have been ill prepared for such a big time job. It is true that the function of president of the United States, as the country becomes more and more a militaristic empire and less and less a democratic [republic](#), is most demanding. Possibly, nobody can be qualified and prepared enough for such a challenge.

In Obama's case, he was promoted from being a junior senator with a limited staff (one secretary and a few assistants), and no real administrative experience, to running the huge U.S. government with its three trillion dollar budget. And, moreover, he had not had the time

or the wisdom to build around him a strong enough “brain-trust” to intellectually control the agenda. Rather the agenda seems to have been imposed upon him. It can be said that he asked for it when, after moving into office, his first move was to keep at their job key Bush appointees to implement the all-too-important defense and economic policies. As it is said in French “Plus ça change, plus c’est pareil” (The more things change, the more they remain the same!)

In Obama’s case, the disappointment is not only a question of poor performance due to a lack of depth, formation or experience. It is a question of promises not kept and of vision betrayed. The disappointment is palpable in [polls](#). His job approval rating hovers around 50 percent (only 45 percent of adults), while only 43 percent of Americans say they would vote to reelect him, and 48 percent say they would vote for someone else. Obama’s performance has reinforced the cynicism and disillusion felt by many voters and their uneasy feeling that most politicians are either corrupt, incompetent, deceitful or hypocrites, or all of the above. In such an environment, it appears to many that voting has become a waste of time. [Voter turnout](#) in the U.S., already one of the lowest in the world, may take a turn for the worse if confidence is not restored soon. On that score, the 2010 turnout should be watched closely, especially among young disillusioned voters.

As far as foreign wars are concerned, Obama’s record is less than positive. Although there has been a timid beginning of troop withdrawals in Iraq—notwithstanding the promises—in Afghanistan, things have taken a turn for the worse. Indeed, President Obama has only made things [worse](#) in that remote part of the world, by accelerating the killing and by illegally upgrading the killing in Pakistan with the Pentagon’s drones. This is dangerous politics because this open-ended military adventure is all too reminiscent of the [Vietnam](#) quagmire that destroyed President Johnson, mired the last days of President Nixon’s term, and tarnished America’s reputation in the world.

Similarly in financial matters. Under Obama, the causes of the 2007-2009 financial crisis have not been clearly identified, let alone corrected or eradicated. Instead, they have been swept under the rug and covered with tax money bailouts and an orgy of newly created money. In fact, just as for defense, President Obama has delegated his economic and financial policies to the troika of Bernanke-Geithner-Summers, just as President Clinton had delegated the same responsibility to the troika of Greenspan-Rubin-Summers, and just as President G. W. Bush had done with the troika of Bernanke-Paulson-Geithner. We cannot help but detecting a pattern here.

It must be recorded that the Bernanke-Geithner-Summers team was deeply involved in the financial deregulation that led to the [securization banking crisis](#) and to the [subprime mortgage crisis](#). When one considers the trillions of dollars in public money that have been used to camouflage the large N. Y. banks’ bad debts, it is obvious that the Obama administration has adopted the old political technique of pandering to the rich with the blind support of the poor. (N.B.: The top 23 Wall Street banks and financial firms are expected to hand out a record [\\$140 billion in bonus compensation](#) during this year of 2009—\$10 billion more than the previous record year of 2007. It has since been announced that the seven largest bailed out banks may see their bonus plans scaled down, and the Obama administration should get the benefit of the doubt for this small and possibly symbolic step toward public morality.)

Such practically unconditional bailouts of “too-big-to-fail” banks can be seen as some

plush [state socialism for the rich](#), coupled with harsh and unregulated market capitalism for the poor, saddled as they are with unlimited home foreclosures and personal bankruptcies.

The epicenter of the unprecedented banking salvage operation has been the Federal Reserve System, sort of a parallel government with the power to impose hidden taxes. Even more than the Treasury's generous [Troubled Asset Relief Program](#) (TARP) of purchasing preferred equity in troubled banks, and other similar [Treasury plans](#), the bulk of the banking bailouts came from the Federal Reserve system. The list of the [Fed's bailout programs](#) is very long and very complicated and remains mostly off screen, because it is mostly camouflaged within a [super-easy monetary policy](#).

The U.S. Fed is a sort of semi-private central bank that often caters to private banking interests at the expense of the public good. Many Americans realize that [the Fed](#) is as much a creator of financial crises as it is an instrument to fight them. In fact, the Fed is presently busy preparing the next big financial crisis, i.e. the collapse of the bond market two or three years from now. —That could explain why the remote and mysterious semi-private Fed is the [least popular](#) of all American federal institutions, and why grass roots efforts to submit it to a public audit are gaining momentum.

In fact, the U.S. Fed is an institution that has gone much further than the U.S. Treasury in socializing the large N.Y. banks' losses and in privatizing their huge profits in the hands of profiteers, at a time, especially after the [Sept. 15 \(2008\)](#) demise of Lehman Brothers, when many of them were technically insolvent.

Thus, by buying large amounts of toxic and unmarketable assets from the large N.Y. banks and from large insurers, such as the huge American International Group (AIG), at close to zero cost to them, and by creating new deposits in exchange, and by paying interest on such bank deposits, the Fed has in effect transferred all or most of the [seigniorage of money creation](#) from the public to the private sector. Everybody holding U.S. dollars has paid a huge hidden tax imposed by the Fed to salvage the large "too-big-to-fail" N.Y. banks. Sooner or later, somebody will have to calculate that hidden tax and make it public. Most likely, this could only be done if the Fed were to be thoroughly audited, which it has so far staunchly refused.

All and all, and where it counts the most, in matters of wars and peace and in economic matters, things have hardly changed under the new Obama administration. It is likely that an even more pugnacious McCain administration would have been worse, considering Sen. McCain's public declarations and pronouncements. Nevertheless, this is poor consolation to those who had high expectations and who were led to believe that President Obama's election would really bring fundamental change.

Rodrigue Tremblay is professor emeritus of economics at the University of Montreal and can be reached at rodrique.tremblay@yahoo.com. He is the author of the book ['The New American Empire'](#).

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