

The Obama Doctrine: Making a Virtue of Necessity

By [Prof. James Petras](#)

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After nearly 3 years in deep pursuit of the colonial wars initiated by ex-President Bush, the Obama regime has finally recognized the catastrophic domestic and foreign consequences. As a result the “reality principle” has taken hold; the maintenance of the US Empire requires modification of tactics and strategies, to cut political, military and diplomatic losses[1].

In response to major military and political losses as well as new opportunity, the White House is fashioning a new doctrine of imperial conquest based on intensified aerial warfare, greater extra-territorial intervention, and, when circumstances allow, alliances with collaborators. This includes the arming and financial backing of retrograde despotic regimes in the Gulf city-states, fundamentalists, opportunist defectors, mercenaries , academic exiles gangsters and other rabble willing to serve the empire for a price.

Whether these ‘changes’ add up to a new post-colonial “Obama doctrine” or simply reflects a series of improvisations resulting from past losses (“making a virtue of necessity” remains to be seen.

We will proceed by outlining the strategic failures which set the context for the “rethinking” of the Bush-Obama policies in mid- 2011. We will then point out the ‘reality principle’ – the deep crises and rising pressures – which forced the Obama regime to modify its methods of imperial warfare . Obama’s changes are designed to retain levers of power under conditions of limited resources and with dubious allies. The third section will describe these changes as they have occurred; emphasizing their reactive nature – improvised- as unfavorable circumstances evolve and favorable opportunities arose.

The final section will critically evaluate Obama’s new imperial policies, their impact on targeted countries and peoples as well as the consequences for the US .

The Bush-Obama Continuum 2009-2011

Obama took his lead from the Bush administration and ran with it. He expanded war budgets to over \$750 billion; increased ground troops by 30,000 in Afghanistan ; expanded expenditures on base building and mercenary troop recruitment in Iraq ; multiplied US air and ground incursions in Yemen , Pakistan , Somalia , Libya . As a result the budget deficit reached \$1.6 trillion; the trade deficit reached unsustainable levels and the recession deepened. Public support for Obama and the Democrats plummeted.Parallel to Obama’s skyrocketing external imperial expenditures, he spent hundreds of billions of dollars in dozens of internal security agencies further depleting the treasury. Greater debts abroad and deficits at home were accompanied by the trillion dollar bailout of Wall Street while 10 million homes were foreclosed and unemployment reached double digits.

Obama retained and expanded the Bush era wars, bailouts, millionaire tax exemptions and proposed draconian cuts in social security, federal funded medical programs and education. Despite massive military commitments, Obama could not secure a single major military victory. By the beginning of the third year of his regime, it was abundantly clear that amidst the wreckage of the domestic economy and the demise of key overseas collaborator regimes, the US Empire was under siege.

The Reality Principle

The reality of massive expenditures in losing wars and faltering support at home and abroad, finally penetrated even the most dogmatic and intransigent militarist ideologues in the Obama regime. Nationalist Islamists were a “shadow” government throughout Afghanistan , inflicting increasing casualties on US-NATO forces even in the capital, Kabul . In Iraq even the puppet regime rejected a minimum US military presence, as warring factions sharpened their knives, preparing for a post-colonial showdown between willing colonial collaborators, resistance fighters, sects, tribes, death squads, ethnic separatists and mercenaries. Despite US military threats and Zionist designed economic sanctions, Iran gained influence throughout the region, eroding US influence in Iraq , Syria , western Afghanistan , the Gulf, Lebanon and Palestine (especially Gaza).

The fall of major US client regimes in Egypt and Tunisia (Mubarak and Ali), and mass uprisings threatening other puppets in Yemen, Somalia, Bahrain finally forced the Obama regime to acknowledge that the Israeli ‘model’ of war, occupation and colonial rule via puppet regimes was not viable. The reality principle finally penetrated even the densest fog surrounding imperial advisers and strategists: the US empire was in retreat, Obama-Clinton were not custodians of an expanding empire, but the masters of imperial defeats. The empire- building project of the post-Cold War period, premised on unilateral action and military supremacy launched by Bush senior, continued by Clinton, expanded by Bush junior and multiplied by Obama was a total and unmitigated failure by any imperial standards: prolonged losing wars, were accompanied by a vast wave of pro-democracy uprisings dumping prized imperial clients. As colonial wars depleted the imperial treasury, impoverished citizens and undermined the “will to sacrifice” for the chimera of Global Greatness. The national mood was deeply disturbed by the cost of empire but also by the loss of global markets to new Asian competitors in China , India and elsewhere. Nowhere was the decline of the US more evident than in Latin America where new nationalist reform and developmental regimes, secured divergent policies on key foreign policy issues, generated high growth, collaborated with new trading partners , decisively rejected several US backed coups and repudiated Geithner’s recycled free market dogma. There was nowhere in the world where the Obama regime could claim military victory, economic success or greater political influence.

As the reality of the deficits, losses and discontent entered the consciousness of key policymakers, a new imperial policy agenda took shape, not fully elaborated but improvised as circumstances dictated.

The Making of the “Obama Doctrine”

The first and foremost “recognition of reality” among the Obamites was that in a world of sovereign states, colonial land wars based on territorial armies of occupation were not viable. They led to prolonged resistance, extended budget over runs, continuing casualties and were definitely not “self-financing” as the Zionist geniuses in the Pentagon once

claimed. New forms of imperial warfare were needed to sustain the empire and destroy adversaries.

The hard choice facing the Obama regime with regard to Iraq was whether to admit defeat and retreat (in the sense that the US can not retain a colonial presence and will leave behind an unreliable military and political configuration expanding ties with Iran and hostile to Israel), or to claim “victory” in the sense of overthrowing Saddam Hussein and weakening Iraq’s role in the Middle East. The retreat and defeat reality is now rationalized as a “repositioning” of 20,000 troops in the tiny city states run by despotic Gulf monarchies and the posting of war vessels in the Persian Gulf . Obama-Clinton claim the troops, war ships and aircraft carriers would re-enter Iraq if the current regime falls and a new nationalist movement comes to power. This is a doubtful proposition – as any “re-entry” would return the US to a prolonged, costly war. The main purpose of the repositioning is to protect the Gulf client dictatorships from their internal pro-democracy movements and to launch a joint US-Israeli air and sea attack on Iran . In other words troop retrenchment (as an occupying colonial power) is replaced by a build-up and concentration of air and sea power for attack and destruction of military and economic bases of the Iranian state.

The US retreat is a product of defeat; a departure under duress. The relocation of troops to petrol-despot mini-states is a downsizing of the US presence and a move to prop-up highly vulnerable corrupt clan based despots. The shift from Iraq to the Gulf states is a move to small, safe, sanctuaries from a highly volatile conflictual major state, with a history of resistance and independence. Since the US can no longer afford an unending large troop presence and cannot secure a ‘residual force’ its retreat to the Gulf states is making a virtue of necessity, a fall-back position to retain a launch pad for the next aerial war.

The Libyan war marks the key imperial formula for retaining Obama’s imperial pretensions. The pretext for the war was just as phony as the cause bellicose in Iraq : in place of weapons of mass destruction, in Libya charges of genocide and rape were fabricated. A UN resolution claiming the right to militarily intervene to “protect civilians” was cooked up, and NATO launched an 8 month war based on nearly 30,000 air attacks, to overthrow the established government and destroy the economy. Obama’s Libyan policy was based on air and naval bombardment and Special Forces advisers; the use of a mercenary army and client ex-pats as the ‘new leaders’; a multi-lateral coalition of European empire builders (NATO) and Gulf state petrol-oligarchs. In contrast to Iraq and Afghanistan sustained massive air attacks took the place of a large invasion army. Already Obama’s military strategists have embraced and promulgated the Libyan experience as a new “Obama doctrine” for successfully rolling back independent Arab regimes and movements. Despite massive propaganda efforts to puff up the role of the mercenary ‘rebels’, the fact is that Gadhafi loyalists were only defeated by the combined air power of the NATO military command. Obama-Clinton’s celebration of the Libyan victory is premature: the means to victory involved the thorough destruction of the economy ,from ports to irrigation systems to roads and hospitals; the disarticulation of the labor force, with the forced flight of hundreds of thousands of sub-Sahara African workers and North African professionals. In other words it was a “pyrrhic victory”: Washington defeated an adversary it has not won a viable state.

Even more serious, Washington ’s client mercenary ground forces include an amalgam of fundamentalist, tribal, gangster, opportunist clan and neo-liberal operators who have few interests in common .And all are armed and ready to carve up competing fiefdoms. The

parallel is with Afghanistan where the US armed and financed drug traffickers, clan chiefs, war lords and fundamentalists to fight the secular pro-Soviet regime. Subsequent to destroying the regime, the same forces turned against the US and proceeded to spread a kind of pan-Islamic mobilization against pro-US client states and the US military presence throughout South-Central Asia, the Gulf states , the Middle East and North Africa .

Obama's Libyan formula of using disparate mercenaries to achieve short term military success has boomeranged. Islamic fundamentalist militias and contrabandists are sending tons of ground to air missiles, machine guns and automatic rifles seized from Gadhafi's arms depots to Egypt, Syria, Somalia, Sudan and all points east, west, south and north.

In a word, the volatile social and military conflicts among the collaborator "rulers" in Libya has all the markings of a failed regime. Neither NATO bases nor oil companies can pretend to establish firm bases of operation and exploitation.

The resort to missile warfare, especially the drone attacks on insurgents challenging US client regimes which figure so prominently in the "Obama doctrine" have succeeded in killing a few local commanders, but at a cost of alienating entire clans, villagers, townspeople and the general public in targeted countries. Drones' missiles are killing hundreds of civilians, causing relatives and ethnic kinspeople to join resistance groups. Up to the present, after 3 years of intensified "missile air warfare" the Obama regime has not secured a single major triumph over any of the targeted insurgencies. The data available demonstrates the opposite. In Pakistan not only has the entire northwest tribal areas embraced the Islamic resistance but the vast majority of Pakistanis (80%) resent US drone violations of national sovereignty, forcing even otherwise docile officials to call into question their military ties with Washington . In Somalia and Yemen , drone and Special Forces' operations have had no impact in weakening the mass opposition to incumbent client regimes. Obama's long distance, high tech warfare has been an ineffective substitute for failed large scale land wars.

The third dimension of the Obama doctrine, the heavy reliance on "third party" military intervention and/or multi-lateral armed interventions, was not successful in Afghanistan and Iraq and was of limited effectiveness in Libya . The European multi-lateral forces retired early on in Iraq , unwilling to continue to spend on a war with no end and with virtual no support on the home front. The same process of short-term low level military multi-lateralism took place in Afghanistan : most NATO soldiers will be out before the US withdraws. The Libyan experience with "multi-lateral" air force collaboration in defeating Libya 's armed forces destroyed the country, undermining any post-war reconstruction for decades. Moreover, "aerial multi-lateralism" followed the formula of "easy entry and fast exit" - leaving the mercenary predators, in control on the ground, with a documented record of excelling in rape, pillage, torture and summary executions. Only a brainless and morally depraved Hilary Clinton could sing the praises and dance a jig celebrating the victory of a knife wielding sodomist, torturing a captured President as "a victory for democracy".

The fourth dimension of the "Obama doctrine" the use of foreign mercenary armies has been tried and failed in a number of cases where incumbent client rulers are under siege from resistance forces. The US financed the Ethiopian dictatorship's armed invasion of Somalia to prop up a corrupt, isolated regime holed up in the capital. After a prolonged futile effort to reverse the tide, the Ethiopian mercenary forces performed no better. They were followed by the entry of the US backed Kenyan armed forces which has only led to massacres and starvation of hundreds of thousands of Somalian refugees in Northern Kenya

and Southern Somalia and deadly ambushes by the Islamic national resistance. These third party mercenary invasions have totally failed to secure the puppet regime; in fact they have aroused greater nationalist opposition.

US backed “Third Party” mercenary armed interventions in Bahrain, where Saudi Arabian military forces put down a majoritarian uprising, has temporarily propped up the despotic monarchy but without dealing with the underlying demands of the pro-democracy mass movements.

The fifth dimension of the Obama doctrine is to use highly trained heavily armed “Special Forces” (SF) contingents of 500 more to assassinate insurgent leaders, to terrorize their rural supporters and to “give backbone” to the local military officials. Obama’s dispatch of a brigade of SF to Uganda is a case in point. Up to now there is no reports of any decisive victories, even in this tiny country. The prospects for future use of this imperial tactic is probably limited to locales of limited geo-political and economic significance with weak resistance movements. And only as a “complement” to local standing armies.

The final and probably most important element in the Obama doctrine is the promotion of civil-military mass uprisings and the reshuffle of elite figures to ‘co-opt’ popular pro-democracy movements in order to derail them from ending their countrys’ client relationship to Washington .

Washington and the EU have incited and armed sectarian regional mass and armed movements aimed at overthrowing the authoritarian nationalist Assad regime in Syria . Playing off of legitimate democratic demands and harnessing fundamentalist/hostility to a secular state, the US and EU, with the collaboration of Turkey and the Gulf states, have engaged in a triple policy of external sanctions, mass uprisings and armed resistance against the secular civilian majority and nationalist armed forces backing Basher Assad. Obama policy relies heavily on mass media propaganda and the exploitation of regional grievances to gain leverage for an eventual “regime change”.

Parallel to the “outsider” political strategy in Syria , the Obama doctrine has adopted an insider strategy in Egypt and Tunisia . Faced with a nationalist-pro-democracy-pro-workers social upheavals in Egypt , Washington financed and backed a military takeover and rule by an autocratic military junta which follows the basic foreign and domestic policies sustaining the economic structures under the Mubarak dictatorship. While cynically evoking the “spirit” of the Arab spring, Obama and Clinton, have backed the military tribunals which prosecute, torture and jail-thousands of pro-democracy activists. A similar process of “internal subversion” financed by the EU has put in place a coalition of “Islamic free marketers” and pro-NATO politicians who have more in common with the White House than they have with the original pro-democracy mass movements.

In the immediate period the Obama doctrines’ use of ‘external’ and ‘internal’ civilian-military subversion has succeeded in derailing the promising anti-imperial movements that erupted in the early months of 2011. However, the great gulf that has opened between the recycled new client rulers and the pro-democracy movements has already led to calls for a ‘second round’ of uprisings to oust the opportunists “who have stolen the revolt” and betrayed the democratic principles of those who sacrificed to oust the client dictators. All the conditions which underlay the “Arab spring” are in place or have been exacerbated: unemployment, police repression, crony capitalism, inequalities and corruption. The experience of successful rebellion is still fresh and alive among the increasingly

disenchanted youth. Like all of the new Obama imperial policies, the propping up of co-opted officials does not promise a reconsolidation of empire.

Conclusion: The “Obama Doctrine”

Reactive, improvised policies, with no overarching strategic framework, the so-called “Obama doctrine” shows few signs of reversing the decline of the US Empire. The deterioration of US “forward positions” in the Arab heartland is not linear nor without tactical advances, especially in light of the Obama regimes’ co-optation of several Islamic leaders in Libya, Syria and Tunisia and the recycling of Mubarak era generals in Egypt.

Under cover of political euphemisms the Obama regime understates the scale and significance of its political and diplomatic losses: the forced withdrawal from Iraq is presented as a “successful mission in regime change”, notwithstanding the burgeoning civil and regime violence between rival sectarian and secular factions. The US “withdrawal” from Afghanistan, is in reality a military retreat as the Taliban and related forces, form a shadow government throughout the country and the huge mercenary army funded by billions of Pentagon dollar is infiltrated by Islamic-Nationalist militants.

The “drone attacks” presented as a successful new counter-terror weapon crossing frontiers, is hyped as an effective cost-effective alternative to large scale ground invasions subject to prolonged armed resistance. In fact the “drones” and killings mainly provide sensational propaganda and public relations successes – having little impact revising the larger defeatist political reality.

On the diplomatic front US imperial decline is even more dramatic. The UN General Assembly votes against the US on Cuba, and the UNESCO vote on the admission of Palestine are overwhelmingly hostile to the Obama regime. Totally isolated, Washington’s “retaliatory” posture of cutting off financial resources further reduces US institutional leverage.

As Obama submits to greater subservience to Israel’s political arm in the US, the 52 “Presidents of the Major American Jewish Organizations”, and prepares a joint military attack on Iran, even NATO, refuses to follow suite.

The great danger of the “Obama doctrine” is that it looks at short term ‘local’ consequences. Air and sea power can successfully bomb Iranian nuclear and military facilities, please the head of the Israeli ruling junta and guarantee American Zionist financial backing for Obama’s re-election campaign. What is overlooked is the military capacity of Iran to close the world’s most important waterway (the Strait of Hormuz) shipping oil to Europe, Asia and the US.

Obama’s air war successes in Iran would be overwhelmed by Iranian ground and missile attacks of US forces throughout the Gulf. All US petrol allies in the region would be vulnerable to attack. Long range Iranian missiles would send millions of Israeli’s scurrying for bomb shelters, even before Obama’s Zionist advisers uncork their champagne to celebrate their “air victory” over Teheran.

The ‘Obama doctrine’ of extra territorial air wars with impunity turned against Iran would provoke a catastrophic conflagration, which would far surpass the disastrous outcome of the land wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The “Obama doctrine” is in reality a set of improvised policies designed to deal with specific sets of circumstances based on a common overall

problem: how to retain imperial domination in the face of failed colonial-occupation policies. The tactical success in the air war against Libya and the opportunities opened by Muslim led uprising in Syria has given rise to the need to formulate a new overall strategy. Local collaborators are central, especially those with an institutional power base (Egyptian military) or with levers of regional influence in civil society (Islamic movements in Syria).

The attempt to generalize these 'tactical' gains into a general offensive strategy, however, founder on the fallacy of "misplaced concreteness". Iran is not Libya : it has the military power, geographic proximity and economic resources to demolish the weak and vulnerable 'peripheral' US client states. Israel can start a US war against the Islamic world – but it cannot win it. Netanyahu's losses in the UN cannot be explained away as 193 "anti-semitic" countries. The Zionist-US-Israeli troika are mutually masturbating in a closet. They can rant and rave and even precipitate an apocalyptic war, but Obama and Netanyahu are increasingly on the margin of world changes. Their policies are impotent reactions to popular movements

envisioning historical transformations, which have even, began to enter into the center of empires: Wall Street and Tel Aviv. Ultimately the "Obama doctrine" is doomed to failure as it is incapable of recognizing that the problem of decline is not simply a problem of 'tactics' but a basic systemic breakdown of empire building: the cracks and fissures abroad have ignited revolts at home.

Note

[1] Thomas Shanker and Steven Lee Myers " US Planning Troop Buildup in Gulf After Exit from Iraq ", New York Times, Oct. 29, 2011.

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