

The Profound Hypocrisy of President Obama's Speech on the Middle East

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President Obama took to the airwaves today to discuss the revolts and conflicts spreading throughout the Middle East. The U.S. dominance over this strategic and oil-rich region has been the pivot of U.S. foreign policy for decades. Utilizing a system of proxy and client regimes, in addition to its own vast military forces in the region, the United States has supported a network of brutal dictatorships and the Israeli regime for decades.

Now that system of imperial control has been shaken by the popular risings that started in Tunisia and spread to Egypt and elsewhere, the Obama administration spoke today at the U.S. State Department as part of an effort to reassert U.S. leadership over the swiftly changing region.

Using the rhetoric of democracy and freedom to mask the responsibility of U.S. imperialism in the enduring oppression and suffering of the peoples of the Middle East, President Obama's speech was a demonstration of profound hypocrisy.

Hypocrisy: President Obama said that the "greatest untapped resource in the Middle East and North Africa is the talent of its people."

Reality: The U.S. strategy is based on control of the Middle East's most coveted resource: two-thirds of the world's known oil supply. The U.S. government has given billions of dollars and armed the most brutal dictatorships in the Middle East for decades, a practice fully continued by the Obama administration. The U.S. government never cut funds to the Mubarak dictatorship even while the regime murdered more than 850 peaceful protestors. More than 5,000 civilians in Egypt have been convicted and jailed since Jan. 25 following trials conducted by the Egyptian military. The United States continues to provide massive funding to Egypt's military in spite of the ongoing repression against the people.

Hypocrisy: President Obama stated, "it will be the policy of the United States to promote reform across the region, and to support transitions to democracy."

Reality: The only governments in the Middle East that have been targeted for invasion, economic sanctions and overthrow by the U.S. government are those that pursue policies that are independent of U.S. economic, political and military control. The U.S. never imposed economic sanctions on the Mubarak dictatorship and only came out publicly against Mubarak when the tide of revolution had become irresistible. Likewise, the U.S. supports the brutal Saudi monarchy.

Hypocrisy: President Obama championed for the people of the Middle East the "basic rights to speak your mind and access information," stating, "the truth cannot be hidden; and the

legitimacy of governments will ultimately depend on active and informed citizens.”

Reality: The Obama administration has gone out of its way to punish those who would inform the public by shedding light on the activities of the U.S. government. Bradley Manning remains jailed with the threat of life in prison, having been held in brutal conditions that caused the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Torture to seek an investigation. The Justice Department is working at full speed to find a way to prosecute Julian Assange of Wikileaks for disclosing government documents to the public, many of which expose the U.S. role in the Middle East. The Obama administration has undertaken a major campaign more aggressive than any prior administration to criminally prosecute whistleblowers who expose the truth of illegal government actions.

Hypocrisy: President Obama stated: “The United States opposes the use of violence and repression against the people of the region.”

Reality: The United States under Obama is involved in the invasion, occupation, and bombings of four predominantly Muslim countries simultaneously: Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and Pakistan. Moreover, the head of state who has been the single biggest violator of the basic human rights of Arab people and the perpetuator of violence in the region is George W. Bush, whose illegal invasion of Iraq cost the lives of more than one million people. The March 19, 2003, invasion was a war of aggression against a country that did not pose any threat to the United States or the people of the United States. The invasion and occupation of Iraq led to the deaths of more Arab people than have been killed by all the dictatorships in the region combined. President Obama today called Osama Bin Laden a mass murderer. September 11, 2001, was indeed a great crime that took the lives of thousands of innocent working people, but measured in order of the magnitude of victims killed, Bush’s crime of mass murder in Iraq is unmatched. George W. Bush has not been arrested for the mass killings of Iraqi people but is treated honorifically by the Obama administration.

Hypocrisy: In an effort to appease Arab public opinion, President Obama’s speech made it appear as if the United States was insisting that Israel return to its pre-1967 borders. Obama stated, “precisely because of our friendship, it is important that we tell the truth: the status quo is unsustainable, and Israel too must act boldly to advance a lasting peace.”

Reality: Israel’s war against the Palestinian people would be impossible without U.S. support, which continues unabated. The single biggest recipient of U.S. foreign aid is the state of Israel, which uses the \$3 billion it receives annually to lay siege to the people of Gaza, continue the illegal occupation of the West Bank and prevent the return of the families of the 750,000 Palestinians who were evicted from their homes and villages in historic Palestine in 1948. The United Nations in various resolutions has condemned the 1967 Israeli invasion and occupation of Gaza, the West Bank, and Syria’s Golan Heights. Far from imposing economic sanctions, President Obama has promised Israel a minimum of \$30 billion in military aid over the next 10 years, thus functioning as a partner in the occupation. Obama’s speech also made it clear that the United States would support Israel retaining vast swaths of the West Bank. This is what he meant by referring to “land swaps.” In the coming days, Obama will have private meetings with Benjamin Netanyahu and will be a featured speaker at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) conference. He will undoubtedly reinforce the strong U.S.-Israeli military ties and U.S. financial support.

Hypocrisy: President Obama stated: “We support a set of universal rights. Those rights

include free speech; the freedom of peaceful assembly; freedom of religion; equality for men and women under the rule of law; and the right to choose your own leaders – whether you live in Baghdad or Damascus; Sanaa or Tehran.... [W]e will continue to insist that universal rights apply to women as well as men.”

Reality: While the U.S. government – along with Britain and France (the former colonizers of the Middle East and Africa) – are bombing Libya with the latest high-tech bombs and missiles in the name of “protecting civilians” and “promoting democracy,” the Obama administration offered the most tepid pro-forma criticism of the Bahrain monarchy as it and the Saudi monarchy kill and imprison peaceful protestors in Bahrain. No sanctions have even been hinted at for Bahrain or Saudi Arabia. The Saudi monarchy is the ultimate negation of democracy, depriving women of all rights, depriving workers of the right to form unions and depriving all sectors of the population of any right to free speech, assembly or press. There has never been an election in Saudi Arabia. But the Saudi monarchy functions as a client of the U.S. government and, as such, is not targeted for economic sanctions or “regime change” as are the governments of Syria and Libya. The Bahrain monarchy likewise functions as a U.S. client and allows the U.S. Fifth Fleet to use Bahrain as its home port, which is why he referred to the monarchy as “a long-standing partner.”

Hypocrisy: President Obama denounced the Iranian government, stating that “we will continue to insist that the Iranian people deserve their universal rights,” and condemned what he called Iran’s “illicit nuclear program.”

Reality: He failed to mention that it was the CIA along with its British counterpart that staged the overthrow of Iran’s democratic government in 1953 and reinstated the Shah’s monarchy. They overthrew Iran’s democracy when Iran nationalized its own oil from AIOC/British Petroleum. The U.S. only broke relations with the Iranian government when the Shah’s dictatorship was overthrown by a populist national revolution. Regarding nuclear weapons, the Israeli government has refused to sign the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and has accumulated 200 “illicit” nuclear weapons. Of course, the United States has thousands of nuclear weapons and remains the only country to have used nuclear weapons, destroying Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945.

Hypocrisy: President Obama told the world that the United States shares the goals of the Arab revolution, that “repression will fail, that tyrants will fall, and that every man and woman is endowed with certain inalienable rights.”

Reality: The U.S. government, whether it is led by Democrats or Republicans, views the oil-rich Middle East through the lens of empire. Operating through a network of proxy regimes including Israel, Saudi Arabia, the Mubarak dictatorship in Egypt, the Shah of Iran until his overthrow in 1979, and other regimes in the region – and supplemented by tens of thousands of U.S. troops positioned in U.S. bases throughout the region and on aircraft carriers – the United States aims to dominate and control a region that possesses two-thirds of the world’s known oil supply. It has and continues to finance a network of brutal client dictatorships, and it has funded the Israeli war machine and staged repeated invasions, bombing campaigns, and occupations against the people of the region.

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