

The Useless Logic of Round Numbers: A Massacre is a Massacre, a War of choice is a Crime

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The media's habit of revisiting certain issues at set intervals can be strange and even illogical at times. For example, many news outlets commented on President Barack Obama's first 100 days in office, as well as on the anniversary of his election win, and then again one year after his inauguration day. With every new round number, more commentators joined in and discussions heated up between proponents and detractors of his government's performance.

I am not exactly sure why we like round numbers. Is it because they make valuations easy, even when the particular number is irrelevant? Some philosophers, Plato included, believed that order and symmetry are innate values in the human psyche. Perhaps. Or, perhaps, in the case of the media, numbers give us the sense, deceptively, that we have a grasp over certain truths. We determine the order in which legacies such as Obama's should be dissected. After a decided date, the subject can be ignored until the next round number arrives, bringing with it more useless chatter.

Of course, this is a delusion. Like much of the media's behaviour, it has no connection to reality. It's all a mind game. A lie, even. For victims of US policies in Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, and elsewhere, the attention given to round numbers is wholly illogical. The drones flying over Afghanistan and Pakistan, loaded with killing technology, care little for numbers, including the number of lives they destroy daily.

Did Gazans starve less when we 'examined' Obama's (pro-Israel) legacy after 100 days of his presidency? Were they better off one year from his election victory or one year from his inauguration?

How about 273 days from his ascendancy to the White House? Was that a particularly chaotic day in Baghdad's streets? Do soldiers take a break from killing on even days, and resume the slaughter on odd ones?

But why should this discussion matter at all? It matters because we often buy into this folly, allowing the media to determine what is important and when a discussion is pertinent. Those involved in this charade express their views, agreeing politely and disagreeing loudly. The next day, the media returns to a state of complacency, as if the detrimental policies of Obama's government ceased to exist; as if war was eradicated, and there was nothing left to talk about.

But truly, do Palestinians in Gaza care much for round numbers? I doubt it. Nor do Iraqis, Afghans, and, now, Yemenis. Misery is misery, any day, every day; war is an inferno. The

smell of death, the scenes of blood in Kabul and Baghdad and Gaza, will remain the same on a Friday, or a Tuesday, 100 day into Obama's presidency or 514 days later.

Every minute in a victim's or potential victim's life counts. Those who have lived in war zones can comprehend this truth. That's why Gaza wants to see the end of its misery now, instead of waiting for CNN's next roundtable discussion assessing the next round number in Obama's presidency. Iraqis and Afghanis similarly listen to words and judge deeds, caring little for numbers.

Remember when Obama spoke to the "Muslim world" from Cairo on June 4th? That's the date that Muslims – many still victimized, directly or otherwise, by the Obama administration's policies – remember and recount. On that day, Obama made promises, speaking with 'audacity', and much hubris. Muslims listened. Some clapped and even cheered; others hesitated or expressed cynicism, but still hoped for change. Alas, none of those hopes have been fulfilled, as instead of change, there is only a continuation of the policies of his predecessor.

"I have come here to seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world; one based upon mutual interest and mutual respect," said Obama in Cairo. His deeds since then have reaped the opposite results: mistrust and disrespect.

"Make no mistake: we do not want to keep our troops in Afghanistan," he said. Since then, he has ordered the surge of 30,000 additional soldiers to that already distraught country. The US, its allies and their drones have killed and maimed hundreds of innocent civilians since that statement was made.

"Today, America has a dual responsibility: to help Iraq forge a better future – and to leave Iraq to Iraqis," he said. One fails to see evidence of a better future based on his administration's conduct in Iraq in the last year or so. Little progress has been made in leaving Iraq to the Iraqis.

Even in Cairo, he had the audacity to lecture Palestinians, the very victims of Israel's brutal occupation, which is armed and funded by US money. "Palestinians must abandon violence. Resistance through violence and killing is wrong and does not succeed. Now is the time for Palestinians to focus on what they can build." We must note that the US government continues to make these demands of Palestinians, ignoring the fact that Israel's reign of terror has never ceased, including Israeli violence against Palestinian non-violent resistance in the West Bank.

Still, Obama did state that "The United States does not accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlements. Israel must also live up to its obligations to ensure that Palestinians can live, and work, and develop their society."

Alas, the Obama administration faltered on its demand of a complete Israeli freeze, and is now harassing the ineffective leadership of Mahmoud Abbas in the West Bank to return to the negotiation table without conditions.

In addition, the hope of ensuring that "Palestinians can live, and work and develop their society," is nothing but a pipedream, considering that Palestinians in Gaza teeter between chronic malnutrition and starvation. We cannot forget the fact that the siege on Gaza would not have been possible without US support.

So before we giddily gather to discuss Obama's legacy the next time another round number is celebrated on our television screens, let's remember that for an Iraqi father, frantically searching for his son's remains in a Baghdad street, numbers matter little, whether even, odd, round or in any combination. A massacre is a massacre, and a war of choice is a crime, any day, any time.

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