

Letter to the Editor: What Obama Actually (un)Said in Cairo

“I’ve come here to Cairo to seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world, one based on mutual interest and mutual respect.” Thus spoke Barack Obama and the citizens of the world were jubilant. Within the bosom of an American puppet state, a recipient of massive US foreign aid whose rulers are partners in Israel’s blockade of Gaza, Obama invoked his Semitic middle name and seduced the Muslim ears. He extolled Islam’s contributions to civilization, announced his “responsibility as president of the United States to fight against negative stereotypes of Islam wherever they appear”. He recognized Iran’s “right to access peaceful nuclear power.” The world drowned in the flow of praises for the American president. The few Malay words spoken by him aroused our own reporter, who, in return, caressed his laptop and crafted phrases of admiration and hope, joining the global chorus to congratulate Obama on what seems a radical breach he is of the protocols of Bush & Co. But how wrong the world has been, for Obama’s speech is nothing less than a lip service to a neo-conservative program to extend the hegemony of America and its “coalition of forty-six countries.”

Obama defines Iraq as a war of choice and Afghanistan as a war of necessity. The latter, according to him, was driven by Al Qaeda, the Taliban and 9/11. But he forgot that the nearly 3,000 life that fell on 9/11 are merely a smear on the lips of the buckets of blood that America has collected from the Muslim world. Obama supports the use of drones in his AFPAK agenda despite its proven inaccuracy which has killed hundreds of innocent civilians. Obama has created 2 million Pakistani refugees in his first 100 days in office. He should be congratulated for outdoing Israel who took 60 years to displace 3.5 million Palestinians. Need we remind him that none of the one million slaughtered Iraqis in the ‘war of choice’ are Al Qaeda? In August 2008 he promised to “end this war [Iraq] now” while simultaneously affirming that combat operations will continue for the next five years, and possibly indefinitely. In short Iraq was, still is and will continue to be systematically raped, mutilated and plundered. Iraq has lost a fifth of its population. Yet, lies Obama, Iraqis are better off now.

Obama’s most fiery rhetoric concerned the Israeli-Palestinian problem. He affirmed his commitment to the two-state solutions and his intention “to personally pursue this outcome with all the patience that the task requires.” Such is the covenant offered by someone who has refused to directly criticize Israel for its recent slaughter of Gaza. Instead, as he had done before, Obama highlighted the aggression of Hamas, thus implying that Israel’s carnage is a legitimate response. In an eloquently harsh phrase, Obama rebuked the legitimate, elected government of Gaza for “shoot[ing] rockets at sleeping children, or ... blow up old women on a bus. That is not how moral authority is claimed; that is how it is surrendered. Now is the time for Palestinians to focus on what they can build.” Obama said nothing of what Israel can build. He is shamelessly silent on the atrocities of the Israel’s military. He said nothing about hundreds of thousands of sleepless Gazan children, embraced by the trembling bodies of their parents under the nightly bombings by Israel’s warplanes. Obama never condemns Israel’s use of excessive force and indiscriminate destruction. He said nothing about the IDF’s illegal use of white phosphorous, cluster bombs, bulldozing of the entire neighborhood and massacring the

animals in the Gaza zoo just for the fun of it. He never demands Israel to pay for the rebuilding of Gaza. He never excoriates Israel for breaching the ceasefire and -as we now know – of strategizing Operation “Cast Lead” six months prior to its launching, that is, when the ceasefire was still in effect. Simply put, Obama’s oration in Cairo is practically a love letter to Bibi Netanyahu.

The ways things are going now, it does not look like Obama is going to change the imperialistic vision of his predecessors anytime soon. There is a complete absence of solid anti-war voice among Obama’s foreign policy executives: Hillary Clinton, Robert Gates, Susan Rice and Joe Biden are all supporters for the Iraq war, militaristic interventionism and neoliberal economic policies. Rahm Emanuel, Obama’s chief-of-staff and his first major appointment after being elected, is an Israeli citizen and army veteran, who supports the War on Terror and expanding the US presence in Afghanistan.

The world has been lulled by the words and image of the symbolic Obama far too long. The world must end its slumber and raise itself above the icon of Obama, the bold new African-American president created by his brilliant campaign and our pitiful ignorance. Many of us have found comfort under this icon who had promised a New American Century but left it undelivered. It is time to end our admiration and part with the illusion of the beloved president. It is time for us to re-mobilize our critical consciousness and interrogate the hypocrisy of Barack Hussein Obama.

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