

# From Bush to Obama: On the eve of a “seamless transition”

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Three days before the inauguration of the 44<sup>th</sup> president of the United States, the distinctions have largely been effaced between the outgoing and incoming administrations.

George W. Bush is, as even the corporate-controlled media admits, the most hated and despised president in American history. Barack Obama is, at least according to the opinion polls that measure popular moods, the beneficiary of a temporary honeymoon period in which hope outweighs experience and many are inclined to "give him a chance."

Far more decisive than these illusions are the policies of the Obama administration. There is ample reason to believe that popular opposition to Obama will grow rapidly, and that anger and outrage over the gross deception involved in the electoral process will add fuel to the fire. While millions voted for the Democratic candidate in a repudiation of the Bush administration's program of war, repression and favors to the wealthy, the actions of Obama demonstrate the fundamental unity of the two big business parties, which are both instruments of the same corporate ruling elite.

Obama's first major political intervention, even before entering the White House, was to lobby for congressional authorization to release the second half of the \$700 billion set aside last fall at the urging of the Bush administration to prop up the US financial system. The Senate (with Democrats providing 46 of the 52 votes) backed the latest bailout of the banks on Thursday.

The president-elect announced the same day that he would tackle another Bush administration economic priority—slashing the cost of entitlement programs like Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security. He told the *Washington Post* editorial board that he would convene

a "fiscal responsibility summit" before delivering his first budget to Congress. He declared, in relation to entitlement spending, "We have to signal seriousness in this by making sure some of the hard decisions are made under my watch, not someone else's."

The economic policy team selected by Obama includes Timothy Geithner as secretary of the treasury. Geithner is one of the three key officials in the Bush administration's management of the financial crisis, in his capacity as president of the New York Federal Reserve Bank. The stimulus package proposed by the incoming administration will include at least a quarter-trillion-dollars worth of tax cuts, many of them targeted to corporate interests.

There is continuity of both personnel and policy in foreign and military affairs as well, most notably the retention of Robert Gates as secretary of defense, the first time that a Pentagon chief has remained in office despite a change in parties in the White House. Gates is an enthusiastic proponent of the new administration's first major overseas initiative—the escalation of the US war in Afghanistan, with the dispatch of another 30,000 troops this year as well as an increase in cross-border strikes into neighboring Pakistan.

As for Iraq, Obama is retaining all three generals responsible for that war: Raymond Odierno, the Iraq commander; General David Petraeus, now commander of Centcom, covering Iraq and Afghanistan; and General Douglas Lute, the assistant national security adviser who coordinates White House oversight of the wars.

Virtually all of Obama's foreign policy nominees and advisers—Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, National Security Adviser James Jones, Vice President Joseph Biden and a slew of National Security Council, State Department and Defense Department

deputies—supported the war in Iraq until it became a military and political debacle for American imperialism.

Jones, the former commander of NATO forces, is one of an unprecedented four recently retired generals and admirals (one each from the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines) to be named to top positions in the Obama administration. General Jones is joined by Admiral Dennis Blair, nominated as director of national intelligence, General Eric Shinseki, nominated as secretary of veterans affairs, and General Jonathan Scott Gration, the likely choice for NASA administrator.

Throughout the transition, Obama has refrained from comment on most foreign policy issues, repeating the mantra of "only one president at a time." He has departed from this deference to Bush only on one occasion: publicly defending the right of Israel to carry out its bloody onslaught against the Palestinian population in Gaza. There is not the slightest "change" in the transition from Republican to Democrat in the White House when it comes to rubber-stamping the crimes of the Zionist regime.

Friday brought another brazen demonstration that Obama upholds the same imperialist interests as Bush. According to a report in the *Washington Post*, "President-elect Barack Obama has privately signaled to top US intelligence officials that he has no plans to launch a legal inquiry into the CIA's past use of waterboarding and other harsh interrogation techniques, agency director Michael V. Hayden said yesterday. Obama learned key details of the CIA's interrogation practices in a closed-door meeting last month, and afterward made clear that he was more interested in protecting the country from terrorist attacks than investigating the past, the outgoing CIA director said."

The *Post* report came only a few days after the extraordinary declaration by the Pentagon jurist responsible for the military tribunals at Guantanamo Bay that prisoners held there had been systematically tortured on orders from Washington. It was a clear signal from Obama to the US military-intelligence apparatus that no one will be held accountable for the crimes committed during Bush's eight years in the White House.

The Obama administration has embraced the "war on terror" declared by George W. Bush, both rhetorically

and in practice. The inauguration itself will be held under a security clampdown unprecedented in US history, with the Potomac River bridges closed, hundreds of undercover cops in the subways, and thousands of armed and uniformed personnel in the streets. Last week, Obama White House appointees joined their Bush counterparts in a dress rehearsal for a terrorist attack.

Obama and his top aides have repeatedly declared their intention of engineering a "seamless transition" and praised the outgoing Bush administration for its cooperation. These are not merely polite rituals, but rather demonstrate that what is taking place this month in Washington is a change in party and (to some extent) personnel, but not of fundamental policy. The Obama administration, like that of Bush, will defend the interests of the corporate elite against the working people, and of American imperialism against the world.



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