

Accepting peace prize, Obama makes case for unending war

David Walsh
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In the most bellicose Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech within living memory, President Barack Obama made an argument Thursday in Oslo for ever-widening war and neo-colonial occupation, putting the world on notice that the American ruling elite intends to push ahead with its drive for global domination.

Obama defended his dispatch of tens of thousands more US troops to Afghanistan, and ominously referred to Iran, North Korea, Somalia, Darfur in Sudan, Congo, Zimbabwe and Burma, any or all of which may become targets for future American military intervention.

There was a darkly farcical element to the award ceremony, as Obama acknowledged that he is the “Commander-in-Chief of the military of a nation in the midst of two wars.” He presented war as a legitimate means of pursuing national interests.

In Orwellian fashion, he declared that “the instruments of war do have a role to play in preserving the peace,” that “all responsible nations must embrace the role that militaries with a clear mandate can play to keep the peace,” and that imperialist troops should be honored “not as makers of war, but as wagers of peace.”

Awarded a prize supposedly intended to promote world peace, Obama made the case for past, present and future military action. The US president communicated the “hard truth” to his audience that “we will not eradicate violent conflict in our lifetimes.” He promised that nations would continue to “find the use of force not only necessary but morally justified,” and emphasized that squeamish populations would have to get over their “deep ambivalence about military action” and “reflexive suspicion of America, the world’s sole military superpower.”

He admitted that masses of people around the globe are hostile to imperialist war, noting regretfully that “in

many countries, there is a disconnect between the efforts of those who serve and the ambivalence of the broader public.” But the popular will and democracy be damned: “The belief that peace is desirable is rarely enough to achieve it. Peace requires responsibility. Peace entails sacrifice.”

Obama arrogantly spelled out Washington’s belief that it can intervene in defense of US interests when and where it likes, no matter what the human cost.

This was wrapped, rather miserably, in the language of moral uplift, the “law of love” and, inevitably, the “spark of the divine.” He indicated, although the speech and his mode of presentation offered no sign of it, that he felt an “acute sense of the cost of armed conflict.” On the contrary, Obama delivered his remarks about war and peace with all the depth of feeling of a university administrator issuing a set of campus parking regulations.

Obama was even blunter when answering questions from Norwegian journalists prior to the ceremony. Speaking of his administration’s first 11 months, he explained, “The goal is not to win a popularity contest or to get an award, even one as prestigious as the Nobel peace prize. The goal has been to advance America’s interests.”

Obama offered his audience—which included Norwegian royalty and politicians, along with Hollywood celebrities—a potted, misanthropic history of human civilization (“War ... appeared with the first man ... Evil does exist in the world”), before launching into a spirited and lying defense of America’s global role.

The president presented the post-war period as one of peace and prosperity bestowed by a benevolent US. “America led the world in constructing an architecture to keep the peace ... The United States of America has helped underwrite global security for more than six

decades with the blood of our citizens and the strength of our arms. ... We have borne this burden not because we seek to impose our will.” The levels of hypocrisy and falsification are staggering.

Obama later made the extraordinary claim that “America has never fought a war against a democracy, and our closest friends are governments that protect the rights of their citizens.” Aside from the historical fact that the US has fought wars with Britain, Germany and Austria-Hungary, when all of them had parliamentary systems, Obama deliberately sidestepped the long, sordid history of US interventions against peoples of the oppressed countries, from Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean region in the first part of the 20th century, to Vietnam, Iran, Guatemala, Congo, Indonesia, Chile, and Nicaragua in the post-war period.

As for Washington’s “closest friends,” that list presently includes brutal and corrupt regimes in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Uzbekistan (along with the puppet governments in Iraq and Afghanistan), among others, all of which practice torture and widespread repression.

After referring to the concept of “just war,” associated with a nation acting to defend itself, and claiming, falsely, that the US invasion of Afghanistan after 9/11 was based on that principle, Obama made it clear that Washington needs no such legitimation.

He spoke in favor of military action whose purpose “extends beyond self-defense or the defense of one nation against an aggressor.” “Humanitarian grounds,” determined of course by Washington, were sufficient to justify “force,” which could be employed against much of Africa, Asia, Latin America and eastern Europe. This is nothing more than colonialism cloaked in the mantle of “just war.”

Obama defended a version of the Bush doctrine of preemptive war, with a more multilateral coloration as part of the effort to reinforce the European powers’ support for the US-led wars in the Middle East and Central Asia. “America cannot act alone,” said the US president.

The European ruling elites, whose interests find expression in the decisions of the Nobel committee, were glad to oblige Obama with a stage from which he could defend these wars and paint imperialist aggression as an act of humanitarianism. They hope that Obama, unlike Bush and Cheney, will offer Europe

a role in enforcing “global security” (and sharing in the spoils) in “unstable regions for years to come.”

Obama made reference to the Nobel prize speech delivered 45 years ago by Martin Luther King Jr., in order to repudiate its oppositional content. King, unlike Obama, delivered a short address, calling attention to the ongoing repression of blacks and opponents of racism in the South. King insisted, “Civilization and violence are antithetical concepts.”

Before his assassination, King became an outspoken opponent of the Vietnam War. It is his identification of militarism with oppression and barbarism that Obama and the entire American political establishment instinctively find threatening and seek to discredit.

The Nobel speech is a further stage in the political unmasking of Obama. The candidate of “change” is revealing himself not only as the continuator, in every important aspect, of the Bush-Cheney policies, but as a deeply reactionary, foul figure in his own right. He is not feigning his obvious relish for the military and war; this is who and what he has become over the course of his political career.

Jabir Aftab, a 27-year-old engineer in Peshawar, Pakistan, told the Agence France-Presse Thursday, “The Nobel prize is for those who have made achievements, but Obama is a killer.” That understanding will come to permeate the thinking of vast numbers of people in the coming period.

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