

Obama at the UN: The arrogant voice of imperialism

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President Barack Obama used his speech at the United Nations General Assembly Thursday to defend US wars and state terror abroad and to proclaim that the economic crisis has been resolved thanks to his Wall Street bailout.

The US president received a noticeably tepid response from the assembled UN delegates. While in his first address to the body last year, he was able to pose as a fresh alternative to the crimes carried out by the Bush administration, by now it has become clear to most on the international stage that his administration's policies are largely in continuity with those of its predecessor.

In its tone and its content, the Obama speech was the authentic and arrogant voice of US imperialism.

Parroting remarks delivered by George W. Bush from the same podium, Obama began by invoking September 11, 2001, once again exploiting the terrorist attacks of that day to justify the acts of military aggression committed by both US administrations in the intervening nine years.

In the same breath, he referred to Wall Street's financial meltdown of September 2008, as an event that "devastated American families on Main Street," while "crippling markets and deferring the dreams of millions on every continent."

These two events were presented as the source of the core challenges confronting the US administration. Supposedly in response to the first, the Obama administration has continued and escalated wars in Iraq and Afghanistan-Pakistan, while reaffirming Washington's "right" to carry out unilateral military aggression anywhere on the planet.

In response to the second, the administration continued the massive bailout begun under Bush, committing more than \$12 trillion to propping up the US banks and financial institutions, while holding none of those involved responsible for the criminal forms of speculation practiced on Wall Street.

Obama claimed that the so-called Wall Street reform legislation passed by his administration would ensure "that a crisis like this never happens again." It does nothing of the kind, placing no serious limits on the speculative activities and profitability of the big banks and leaving Wall Street to continue with "business as usual."

"The global economy has been pulled back from the brink of a depression," Obama told his UN audience. This statement flies in the face of the grim conditions confronting working people on every continent. This includes the US itself, where the official unemployment rate remains near 10 percent, the unemployed and

underemployed account for 17 percent of the workforce, some 30 million people, and one out of every seven Americans is living below the poverty line.

While profits have returned to pre-crisis levels, the reality is that none of the underlying contradictions that have given rise to the deepest world economic crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s has been resolved. They have only grown in intensity. The response of the ruling classes throughout the world has been to redouble their attacks on the working class in an attempt to force it to pay for this crisis.

Obama followed his assertion about the economy being pulled back from "the brink" with an even more absurd claim that he would not "rest until these seeds of progress grow into a broader prosperity, not only for all Americans, but for peoples around the globe."

In the US, throughout Europe and in much of the rest of the world, governments are pursuing unprecedented austerity policies that are ripping up basic social rights and dramatically lowering the living standards of working people. Meanwhile, Obama himself spoke before a global poverty summit the day before his speech, warning the world's poorest that Washington was determined to break their cycle of "dependency."

The US president's lies about the economy were followed by the fraudulent claim that the military operations his administration is pursuing abroad are aimed at upholding "our common security."

Obama said that he is "winding down the war in Iraq" and will pull out all of its occupation troops by the end of next year. At the same time, he declared Washington's intention to forge "a lasting partnership with the Iraqi people," by which he means maintaining a US protectorate over the oil-rich country in order to advance the geo-strategic interests of American capitalism.

He said that the drawing down of US troops in Iraq had allowed the US military to be "refocused on defeating al Qaeda and denying its affiliates a safe haven" in Afghanistan. This is another lie. US military and intelligence officials acknowledge that there are no more than 100 al Qaeda members in all of Afghanistan. The nearly 100,000 US troops deployed in that country are not combating "terrorism," but asserting US neo-colonial control in a bid to advance Washington's quest for hegemony in Central Asia.

In one of the speech's more chilling passages, Obama bragged that "from South Asia to the Horn of Africa, we are moving toward a more targeted approach" in the war on terror, that did not require "deploying large American armies." In other words, while

constrained in its ability to carry out another major military occupation, US imperialism is pursuing its policies by means of assassinations, drone missile attacks and the deployment of elite killing squads, and has arrogated to itself the right to target and kill its perceived opponents anywhere on the planet.

Obama used the speech to once again threaten Iran. Only days before his appearance at the UN, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton delivered a speech urging elements within the Iranian ruling elite to carry out regime change in the country. He reiterated the vow made in his speech last year that Iran “must be held accountable” for its alleged violations of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

At least a quarter of Obama’s address was dedicated to the US-brokered Israeli-Palestinian “peace talks” that appear to be on the brink of yet another breakdown in the face of Israeli intransigence and provocation.

For all the hackneyed rhetoric about the “Holy Land” and “our common humanity,” the Obama administration is pursuing these negotiations as a means of solidifying support among the Arab regimes for its escalating threats of aggression against Iran and to further its domination of the Middle East.

The content of the speech made clear the US administration’s unwavering complicity in Israel’s crimes against the Palestinian people. Obama urged that a limited moratorium declared by the Israeli government be extended beyond September 26, when it is set to expire. He said Israel should do this because it “improved the atmosphere for talks,” not because the entire settlement activity in the Israeli-occupied West Bank is a violation of international law and multiple UN resolutions. In the same breath, the US president asserted that “talks should press on until completed,” presumably regardless of what Israel does.

Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu has insisted that his government will not extend the moratorium, while Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas had initially insisted that his delegation would be forced to walk out if it does not. An ever-pliant servant of Washington, Abbas has since indicated that he might back down on this threat.

The rest of Obama’s remarks on the Israeli-Palestinian question had an Orwellian flavor, in which Israel was presented as the victim. “The slaughter of innocent Israelis is not resistance—it’s injustice,” Obama declared. He made no mention of the slaughter of 1,400 Palestinians in the US-backed siege of Gaza in 2008-2009 or the criminal attack on the Gaza aid flotilla that killed nine Turkish civilians last May. The day the US president spoke, the UN issued a report charging that Israel’s actions were illegal and employed an “unacceptable level of brutality,” meriting war crimes prosecution.

The US president concluded his speech with an exaltation of “democracy” and “human rights,” which again echoed similar language employed by his predecessor, George W. Bush.

In Bush’s case, this phony democratic rhetoric was employed to justify US imperialism’s drive for dominance in the Middle East, where Washington demonstrated its commitment to “human rights” by carrying out mass killings, the detention of tens of thousands without charges or trial, and the infamous acts of torture at Abu Ghraib, Bagram and Guantánamo.

In Obama’s case, the posturing as the global champion of

democratic rights is no less contemptible. The target, however, appears to have shifted.

The Council on Foreign Relations, the establishment thinktank that enjoys close ties to the administration and the State Department, spelled this out. Noting Obama’s “full-throated endorsement of democracy as the best form of government,” it commented: “Yet the appeal of such an idea faces challenges at bodies like the UN. This is not, for example, the future world that Chinese leaders envision.”

Indeed, Obama followed his celebration of democracy by calling attention to his upcoming trip to Asia, ticking off the countries he will visit—India, Indonesia, Korea, Japan—and praising each for having promoted “democratic principles in their own way.” The itinerary includes the four largest countries that US strategists envision as bulwarks against the expansion of Chinese influence.

On the same day that Obama delivered his speech, the *New York Times* published a front-page article on the increasingly tense US-China relationship that was clearly based on the perspective of the US administration. The *Times* reported that “rising frictions between China and its neighbors in recent weeks over security issues have handed the United States an opportunity to reassert itself—one the Obama administration has been keen to take advantage of.”

It noted that Washington has inserted itself into territorial disputes between China and Southeast Asian countries, organized provocative joint military exercises with South Korea near Chinese waters and has solidified its alliance with Japan, largely in opposition to China’s influence.

Under conditions of rising conflicts between Washington and Beijing over currency and trade relations, Obama’s praise for “democracy” at the UN represents a thinly veiled threat of new and far more catastrophic eruptions of American militarism.



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