

Obama uses Ebola doctors as campaign prop

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President Obama appeared Wednesday with a group of doctors and other healthcare volunteers just returned from working in the Ebola zone of West Africa, in a cynical effort to put a caring face on the aggressive militarism of his administration.

The White House event was blatantly stage-managed, only five days before the US congressional elections, to allow Obama to posture as an advocate of humanitarian intervention overseas, while taunting his political rivals in the Republican Party, who he suggested were “hiding under the covers” in the Ebola crisis.

There was a striking contrast between Obama’s strident American nationalism and the humane and modest posture of the man who introduced him at the event, Dr. Kent Brantly, the medical missionary who contracted Ebola in Liberia but survived because he was transported back to the US and treated at Emory University hospital.

Dr. Brantly made reference to the desperate need for more medical personnel in West Africa, then declared, “At this time, perhaps more than any other, we feel the impact of our position as citizens of not only the United States of America, but as citizens of the world. We must strive together for the good of all mankind to put an end to this disease.”

Obama, however, spoke not as a “citizen of the world” but as the commander-in-chief of American imperialism, waving the flag and declaring his belief in “American exceptionalism” and “American leadership.”

“The medical professionals and public health workers serving in Africa are a shining example of what America means to the world, of what is possible when America leads,” he said.

Actually, in terms of deploying medical personnel, Cuba and not America is the leader, both in the world and in West Africa. One third of all foreign medical professionals in the Ebola zone come from that small

island, with 11 million people, one-thirtieth the population of the United States.

While 165 Cuban health care workers are currently in the Ebola zone -- the first batch of a planned deployment of 461— Washington has deployed a total of 65 health officials to Liberia.

Obama referred to the visit of his UN ambassador, Samantha Power, to the Ebola zone, where she toured Ebola treatment facilities being built by US soldiers sent to Liberia last month at his orders. This deployment has far more to do with imperialist geopolitics than humanitarianism,

The immediate goal of the Liberia deployment is the Pentagon’s quest for a permanent location for the headquarters of its Africa Command (AFRICOM), which has been stranded in Germany since its formation because no African country would host it. Now that US troops have been introduced into Liberia in a “humanitarian” guise, Washington calculates that its political puppet, Liberia President Ellen Sirleaf, will extend an invitation for an indefinite stay.

West Africa and the offshore Gulf of Guinea is increasingly important to the United States, Britain and France as a source of oil, and the disease-fighting actions of the imperialist powers and former colonial masters are thus happily conjoined with more profitable concerns.

Besides promoting the national interests of American corporations and banks, Obama seized on the occasion to gain leverage on his political rivals. Republican candidates for the US Senate and Republican governors have added criticism of the administration’s handling of the Ebola crisis to their political campaigning for the November 4 election.

Over the last several days, New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, a likely candidate for the Republican presidential nomination in 2016, has deliberately postured as “tougher” on Ebola than the Obama

administration, criticizing the guidelines set by the Centers for Disease Control on monitoring health care workers returning from the Ebola zone in West Africa.

Last Friday, Christie and his Democratic counterpart in New York, Governor Andrew Cuomo, announced a full-scale 21-day quarantine on all returning health workers, despite the unanimous consensus among public health experts that such a measure is unnecessary and even counter-productive, since it will discourage health care volunteers to go to West Africa, thus increasing the danger of a global Ebola outbreak.

For several days, representatives of the medical community have fought back publicly against Christie's bullying, with a joint statement condemning the quarantine issued by the American Hospital Association, the American Medical Association and the American Nurses Association, and an editorial in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. The Journal said the quarantine "is not scientifically based, is unfair and unwise, and will impede essential efforts to stop these awful outbreaks of Ebola disease at their source, which is the only satisfactory goal."

The media has put a sympathetic spotlight on Kaci Hickox, the Ebola nurse who was the first victim of the New Jersey quarantine, and who was allowed to travel to her home in Maine on Monday. In that state, another reactionary blowhard Republican governor, Paul LePage, ordered Hickox confined to a home quarantine and stationed state troopers outside the house in Ft. Kent, Maine to enforce it.

On Wednesday Hickox spoke out on the NBC "Today" program, denouncing the quarantine as "not scientifically nor constitutionally just." She said she would adhere to the guidelines set by the CDC, for twice-daily temperature readings and daily in-person monitoring by a CDC representative, but she would not accept home confinement through November 10, as ordered by the governor.

"If these restrictions are not removed for me by tomorrow morning, Thursday morning, I will go to court to fight for my freedom," she said. "I am not going to sit around and be bullied by politicians and forced to stay in my home when I am not a risk to the American public."

Obama sought to associate himself with the medical consensus and the courageous stance taken by Hickox, without, as usual, actually taking a stand. He made no

mention of either Hickox or Christie, only declaring that neither a travel ban nor a quarantine could stop Ebola in a world of easy global travel.

He then tacitly accused Christie and those like him of insufficient aggressiveness in maintaining the world position of American imperialism. "When I hear people talking about American leadership, and then promoting policies that would avoid leadership and have us running in the opposite direction, hiding under the covers, it makes me a little frustrated," he said.

"It is how we help others around the world that is important. It is not just massive numbers of troops and equipment -- deployments of troops and equipment, as proud as we are of that."

There is not a shred of genuine concern for the health of the American people or that of the people of West Africa in the political posturing by Obama and the Republicans. Both big business parties have facilitated the Ebola crisis through cuts in public health funding in the United States, through support for the giant drug companies that have refused for decades to develop an Ebola vaccine because it wasn't profitable, and through support for the continued imperialist oppression of the impoverished masses of West Africa.



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