

# Obama defends Trump at White House press conference

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In a press conference Monday, his first since the 2016 elections, President Barack Obama defended his incoming Republican successor, Donald Trump, and dismissed concerns that a Trump administration marks a radical threat to the democratic rights of the American people.

Trump would not be able to carry out any rapid changes, let alone fulfill the most extreme desires of his supporters, Obama argued, because the American government “is not a speedboat, it’s an ocean liner.” Moreover, he claimed, “I don’t think he is ideological. I think ultimately he’s pragmatic in that way.”

Obama’s solicitude for Trump resurfaced on several occasions, as he declared, “I think it’s important to give him the room and the space” to make proper decisions on a new administration, adding that Trump might well listen to his critics. “I think it’s important for us to let him make his decisions,” he said.

Throughout the session with the press, which lasted nearly 90 minutes, Obama exuded a combination of complacency about the outcome of the elections and indifference to the consequences for working people, and even for his own political supporters.

This was so remarkable and pronounced that at one point ABC correspondent Martha Raddatz asked, with a note of surprise in her voice, “Is there anything that concerns you about a Trump administration?”

This followed Obama’s response to the question from CNN journalist Athena Jones, who cited his denunciations of Trump as unqualified to be president, then followed up with a question about the hostility in the Trump camp to racial minorities. She asked Obama to comment specifically on the selection of Stephen Bannon, former CEO of the ultra-right news outlet Breitbart.com, as chief strategist and White House counselor, effectively coequal with Trump’s new chief of staff, Republican National Committee Chairman Reince Priebus.

Obama simply refused to comment on the Bannon appointment, saying, “[I]t would not be appropriate for me to comment on every appointment that the President-elect starts making if I want to be consistent with the notion that we’re going to try to facilitate a smooth transition.”

The first African-American president has nothing to say about his successor filling one of the two leading positions on his

staff with a white supremacist! This was in keeping with Obama’s posture throughout the press conference, as he dismissed concerns that the incoming Trump administration represented a threat to the democratic rights of the American people.

Obama continued: “Look, the people have spoken. Donald Trump will be the next President, the 45th President of the United States. And it will be up to him to set up a team that he thinks will serve him well and reflect his policies. And those who didn’t vote for him have to recognize that that’s how democracy works. That’s how this system operates.”

This declaration evades the issue entirely. Trump won a majority in the Electoral College, thanks to a series of narrow victories in states like Michigan, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, North Carolina and Florida. But he trails in the popular vote to Hillary Clinton by nearly one million votes, a deficit that is likely to increase as final vote counting is completed in California.

Obama could have suggested that, given Trump’s losing the popular vote, he lacked a genuine mandate from the voters and should proceed cautiously in implementing his policies, and only after taking into consideration the views of those who voted against him. He did nothing of the kind.

Instead, he focused most of his remarks on praising his own record and the performance of his administration on a wide array of issues. Trump would have the benefit, he suggested, of taking office in a country enormously improved from the crisis-stricken America of January 2009.

Although he acknowledged, “obviously there are people out there who are feeling deeply disaffected; otherwise, we wouldn’t have had the results that we had in the election,” Obama painted a picture of America in which such discontent should affect only a small minority.

“[I]f you look at the basic indicators of where the country is right now, the unemployment rate is as low as it’s been in eight, nine years,” he said. “Incomes and wages have both gone up over the last year faster than they have in a decade or two. We’ve got historically low uninsured rates. The financial systems are stable. The stock market is hovering around its all-time high, and 401(k)s have been restored. The housing market has recovered.”

The assembled journalists apparently shared Obama's indifference and complacency. None asked him to square his claims of across-the-board success for his administration's policies with the collapse of the electoral fortunes of the Democratic Party under his leadership. Since Obama became president in January 2009, the Democrats have lost control of the Senate, lost a net 63 seats in the House of Representatives, lost a net 900 seats in state legislatures, while seeing the number of Democratic governors fall from 29 to 16 out of 50 states, and the number of state legislatures under full Democratic control fall from 27 to only 5.

Trump suggested Sunday night, during his nationally televised interview on the CBS program "60 Minutes," that he might carry out his threat to prosecute Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton for alleged crimes involving the mishandling of classified data while she was Secretary of State under Obama. But no journalist asked Obama for his reaction, or whether he was prepared to pardon Clinton preemptively in order to block a politically motivated prosecution by Trump.

Obama never even mentioned Clinton's name in the course of the press conference, although he did make one disparaging comment about her campaign, claiming that he had won elections in the state of Iowa by diligent campaigning in small towns and rural areas. The clear implication was that Clinton had failed because she did not follow this example.

While conceding certain organizational mistakes by the Democratic Party, Obama placed the main responsibility for the victory of Trump on the American people, namely, those voters who did not go to the polls. "Hopefully it's a reminder that elections matter and voting counts," he said. "And so I don't know how many times we have to relearn this lesson, because we ended up having 43 percent of the country not voting who were eligible to vote. But it makes a difference."

That 100 million Americans did not vote because they are disgusted with both corporate-controlled parties, and disappointed by the wretched record of the president who promised "hope and change," is a closed book to Obama and the Democrats.

Nor is Clinton the only individual Obama is prepared to consign to the tender mercies of Donald Trump. Asked directly if he was prepared to take any action to protect the three-quarters of a million undocumented immigrants who have registered with the government under Obama's DACA program, who are now vulnerable to mass roundup under the Trump administration, Obama said only that he would "urge the President-elect and the incoming administration to think long and hard before they are endangering that status of what for all practical purposes are American kids."

Obama suggested that the incoming Trump administration would be compelled by the sheer complexity of the challenges to moderate its policies. He claimed, "this office has a way of waking you up. And those aspects of his positions or predispositions that don't match up with reality he will find

shaken up pretty quick, because reality has a way of asserting itself. And some of his gifts that obviously allowed him to execute one of the biggest political upsets in history, those are ones that hopefully he will put to good use on behalf of all the American people."

This imbecile theory would make the political "gifts" of a fascistic billionaire the instrument for improving the conditions of life for working people in America. The word "prostration" doesn't do justice to the collapse of any opposition by the Democratic Party to the ultra-right takeover of the US government, which next January will include not only the White House and both houses of Congress, but the Supreme Court as well, once Trump nominates and the Republican Senate confirms an ultra-right successor to the late and unlamented Antonin Scalia.

Obama spoke in this way at what may well be his final press conference in order to perform one last service to the American ruling elite. Recognizing that the victory of Trump means a fundamental reorientation by the ruling class, towards the prosecution of an all-out assault on working people using the most ruthless methods possible, Obama is doing his part in chloroforming popular consciousness.

While the Trump administration is assembling an ultra-right cadre to carry out the dismantling of economic and environmental regulations, halt enforcement of civil rights, voting rights and restraints on police brutality, slash taxes for the wealthy, and pour trillions into building up the military-intelligence apparatus, Obama preaches complacency.

And Obama's services are appreciated. Trump's campaign manager Kellyanne Conway hailed the comments of leading Democrats and contrasted them to the anti-Trump protests around the country. "Folks should do what President Obama, Secretary Clinton and others are doing, frankly," she said. "I heard Senator [Bernie] Sanders this morning, which is to support this new president-elect and his mission to unify the country and to implement his 100-day plan."



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