

Obama uses final press conference to smooth transition to Trump

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President Barack Obama used his final press conference, held Wednesday afternoon, to vouch for the political legitimacy of the incoming administration of Donald Trump and smooth its transition to power.

With a series of opinion polls showing the right-wing billionaire having the lowest level of popular support of any incoming president in at least four decades, Obama went out of his way to disassociate himself from Democratic congressmen who are planning to boycott Trump's inauguration on Friday. He portrayed the new government of billionaires, ex-generals and ultra-right ideologues as part of the normal "ebb-and-flow" of politics.

There is nothing genuinely democratic about the Democrats' avoidance of the inauguration, or, for that matter, longtime Georgia Congressman John Lewis' statement earlier this week that he does not consider Trump a legitimate president.

These actions are not directed against the militarist, chauvinist and anti-working class policies of the incoming administration, but rather at Trump's refusal to fully embrace the US intelligence agencies' claims that Russia hacked into Democratic email accounts in order to swing the 2016 election against Hillary Clinton, and the president-elect's talk of seeking improved relations with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Nevertheless, even as he reiterated the unsubstantiated charges of Russian hacking, Obama distanced himself from these maneuvers in the interests of maintaining capitalist stability and with the aim of disarming the working class as to the scale of the attacks it will face under Trump.

Early on in the press conference, Fox News correspondent Kevin Corke noted that "more than five dozen" Democrats planned to boycott Friday's

inauguration. "Do you support that?" he asked, "And what message would you send to Democrats to better demonstrate the peaceful transfer of power?"

Obama replied by describing his conversations with president-elect Trump as "cordial," "fairly lengthy" and "substantive." He continued: "As you know, my working assumption is that having won an election, opposed to a number of my initiatives and certain aspects of my vision for where the country needs to go, it is appropriate for him to go forward with his visions and his values..."

"With respect to the inauguration, I'm not going to comment on those issues. All I know is I'm going to be there. So is Michelle."

As his Press Secretary Josh Earnest put it earlier in an interview on the "CBS This Morning" program, the president had instructed his staff to ensure "that the next administration can get off to a running start."

In the press conference, Obama counseled "Democrats or progressives" to distinguish between "the normal back-and-forth, ebb-and-flow of policy" and what he called "core values." In the former category he included raising or lowering taxes, expanding or eliminating programs and "how concerned we are about air pollution or climate change."

There could be no clearer expression of Obama's complacent and indifferent attitude to the social impact of Trump's agenda of sharply cutting corporate taxes and personal taxes for the wealthy, massively expanding military spending, and taking an axe to public education, business and environmental regulations, housing assistance, Medicaid and Medicare, minimum wage laws and all restrictions on corporate profit-making. Even as Obama was speaking, Trump cabinet nominees who have devoted themselves

to these policies were holding forth at Senate confirmation hearings.

This is a very different tune than the one Obama and other Democrats were singing during the election campaign, when they portrayed a Trump victory as a national and international catastrophe, in an effort to convince voters to choose Hillary Clinton, the hated personification of the corrupt political establishment.

Within days of the election, Obama was declaring that the differences, however sharply posed, were by no means fundamental, since the Democrats and Republicans were both “on the same team.”

Obama began the press conference with a sickening and absurd paean to the White House press corps, describing the domesticated and cowardly correspondents as heroes of American democracy. “You’re supposed to cast a critical eye on folks who hold enormous power and make sure that we are accountable to the people who sent us here,” Obama declared, “and you have done that.”

He went on to say that self-government “doesn’t work if we don’t have a well-informed citizenry, and you are the conduit through which they receive the information about what’s taking place in the halls of power.”

The first question from the press corps demonstrated precisely how the corporate media, in reality a de facto propaganda arm of the state, “informs the citizenry.” Jeff Mason of Reuters challenged Obama’s commutation Tuesday of whistle-blower Chelsea Manning’s prison sentence of “in light of WikiLeaks’ connection to Russia’s actions in the election.” He went on to ask if WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange would be charged or arrested if he agreed to come to the United States, as Assange had suggested he would do if Obama commuted Manning’s sentence.

Obama defended his decision to set Manning free this coming May largely on the grounds that he had already overseen Manning’s seven years of brutal incarceration for giving WikiLeaks documents exposing US crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan and State Department intrigues. He drew a sharp distinction between Manning and Assange.

Exhibiting his trademark cynicism, Obama chastised whistleblowers such as Manning and Edward Snowden for not working “through the established channels” and availing themselves of “the whistleblower protections

that have been put in place.” This was said by a president who has presided over the prosecution of more whistleblowers and leakers under the Espionage Act than all previous presidents combined.

In response to a second question, on Trump’s statements that he might consider lifting the sanctions on Russia, Obama restated his administration’s aggressive and provocative line toward Russia and called for an indefinite continuation of sanctions.

He repeated the official, false narrative depicting Russia as the aggressor in Ukraine. He then declared that “it is important for the United States to stand up for the basic principle that big countries don’t go around and invade and bully smaller countries.”

Not a single reporter challenged Obama’s potted narrative of the origins of the Ukraine crisis, not to mention the stunning hypocrisy of denouncing Russia for “bullying smaller countries,” given the role of the United States in Vietnam, Grenada, Panama, Iraq, Haiti, Serbia, Afghanistan, Iraq again, Libya and Syria, just to mention some of the small nations bombed, invaded, occupied and devastated by the American military.



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