

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نپاشد تن من مباد بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2017/01/27/the-empire-has-no-clothes/print/>

The Empire Has No Clothes

By Paul Street
January 27, 2017



Harsh realities have long mocked United States “elites” ritual description of their nation state as a benevolent beacon and agent of freedom, democracy, and justice at home and abroad. The mythology doesn’t square with stark disparities and oppressions inflicted by the nation’s unelected and interrelated dictatorships of money, class, race, and empire. The many dark truths about America behind the nationally narcissistic fantasy include:

Globally unmatched and hyper-racialized incarceration rates.

The imposition of poverty or near-poverty on half the U.S. population while the top tenth of the upper U.S. One Percent possesses as much wealth as the nation's bottom ninety percent.

The U.S. ranks ahead of only Turkey, Chile, and Mexico among thirty-one "advanced industrial nations" belonging to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in measures of economic equality, social mobility, and poverty prevention.

Shocking levels of racial, ethnic, and gender inequality.

- + The hyper-segregation and mass criminalization of the nation's disproportionately poor Black population.

- + Rampant domestic police-statism and ubiquitous related public and private surveillance.

- + Transparently plutocratic electoral and policymaking systems and outcomes that mark the country as "an oligarchy" and "not a democracy" (mainstream liberal political scientists Martine Gilens of Princeton and Benjamin Page of Northwestern) regardless of which party or party configuration holds sway in elected offices.

- + The cultural and informational dominance of a corporate- and military-propagandist commercial media owned by a small handful of communications conglomerates.

- + The maintenance of more than 1000 U.S. military installations across more than 100 "sovereign" nations.

- + An empire ("defense") budget that accounts for nearly half of world military spending and for 54 percent of U.S. federal discretionary spending.

- + The absence of affordable quality health care for tens of millions living in "the world's richest country."

- + More than a third of Black and Native American children live below the federal government's notoriously inadequate poverty level while parasitic financiers and other capitalist overlords enjoy unimaginable hyper-opulence.

- + The loss of 93 American lives to gun violence each day.

- + A recently discovered and unprecedented decline in the life expectancy for American working class whites.

- + A labor market in which 94 percent of jobs created over the last eight years have been temporary, part-time, and contingent, non-life time contract and "gig" jobs.

- + The reliance of 1 in 7 citizens on food banks in "the world's richest country."

+ The rampant pollution and poisoning of air, land, water, and food, contributing to sky-high cancer rates.

(This is the short list, taken from the Age of Obama.)

Still, symbols and marketing matter in selling the American System and U.S. power at home and abroad. And the perceived character of the U.S. president is a big part of that marketing and public relations.

Nothing was better for portraying the United States as something it is not – a wise and benevolent, forward-looking agent and embodiment of freedom and democracy – than the replacement of George W. Bush by the neoliberal Wall Street darling Barack Obama in the White House in 2008-09.

It's not that U.S. policy changed to any significant degree with the shift from George W. Bush to Obama. It did not. As the former longtime top Republican congressional staffer Mike Lofgren notes in the fourth chapter – tellingly titled “Do Elections Matter?” – of his important book *The Deep State: The Fall of the Constitution and the Rise of a Shadow Government* (2016):

“In 2008, Barack Obama the change agent ran against the legacy of George W. Bush. But when he assumed office, his policies in the areas of national security and financial regulation were strikingly similar. Even the Affordable Care Act, which Republicans vilify with uncontrollable rage, is hardly different in outline from Bush's Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement, and Modernization Act (both expand medical coverage by subsidizing corporate interests)...[Obama was] merely an ambitious politician who tested well with focus groups, and who arrived at the right moment, promising hope and change as a pretext to administer an entrenched system...”

Lofgren might have added that the “right moment” included the Deep State establishment's sense that the American System needed a significant re-branding in the wake of the all-too openly plutocratic, stupid, unhinged, and imperialist Bush's criminal and bungled occupation of Iraq and the collapse of the economy by the powerful financial institutions that controlled Washington and the White House under Bush⁴³ as under Bill Clinton⁴². And that that's one part of why American presidential elections do in fact matter to the nation's wealth and power elite.

True to the hopes of the ruling class interests who funded (at record-setting levels) and otherwise backed his ascendancy, the “vacuous to repressive neoliberal” Obama⁴⁴ was much better than Bush⁴³ when it came to selling U.S. and global citizens on the notion that sensible, decent, balanced, and caring people stood atop the American Empire. Bush, Lofgren notes, “was a man out of his depth... a reprise of the hapless James Buchanan on the eve of the American Civil War...[he] was clueless and never one to read briefing memos of any length.” (Like the figure-head Reagan before him, Dubya was “deliberately kept ‘out of the loop’” of many key elite policy discussions.) Obama, by contrast, was “a far more disciplined student – a constitutional scholar [from Harvard Law – P.S.], no less, and a man capable of penning his own rhetorical flourishes.”

That that was only the beginning of Obama's marketing value. Additional assets included his telegenic youthfulness and perceived novelty, his status as the nation's first technically nonwhite and multicultural president, and his thoroughly fake progressive campaign imagery. Obama was *The Empire's New Clothes*, the title of my 2010 book on his first year in office. It was a great public relations coup for the American "Democracy, Incorporated" (to use the late Princeton political scientist Sheldon Wolin's phrase for what he called the United States' "inverted totalitarian" mode of "corporate-managed democracy"). Who better to complete the no strings attached-bailout of the great financial institutions that pushed the economy over the cliff, to re-fashion the imperial project, and to pass a watered-down corporate and finance-friendly version of health insurance reform than a brash, handsome, and seemingly (superficially) left-leaning first Black president endowed even with a "Muslim name," no small symbolic asset in the wake of Bush's mass-murderous provocation of the Muslim world?

The great hopey-changeey bamboozlement was impressive, aided and abetted by some very silly Scandinavians at the Nobel Peace Prize committee. The antiwar movement, still semi-active in Dubya's second term, collapsed almost completely under Obama. It stayed mostly somnolent while the nation's first Black president launched a drone war program that became "the most extreme terrorist campaign of modern times" (Noam Chomsky) and a catastrophic regime-change in Libya – all this this while dispatching murderous U.S. Special Forces across Africa and to more nations than any U.S. commander in chief before him. Drove of liberals and even some self-declared leftists (who can ever forget the relentless and nauseating absurdities of Carl Davidson?) had Obama's back as he dutifully served the aforementioned unelected and deep state dictatorships, helping create the vacuum and set the stage both for the rise of the Tea Party and the ascendancy of Donald Trump.

And now the American System is saddled with the public relations and marketing dilemma that is the openly white-nationalist, nativist, racist, misogynist, eco-cidal, authoritarian, stupid, reckless, thin-skinned, narcissist, and Twitter-addicted Donald. That the Deplorable One is, like Dubya, a "man out of his depth" was suggested by his first full day in the White House. Confronted with massive, historic demonstrations protesting his Inauguration and across the nation, Trump went to the headquarters of the CIA and stood before the hallowed CIA Memorial Wall (engraved with the names of OSS and CIA agents who lost their lives in service to U.S. foreign policy/imperialism) to deliver a childish petulant and impromptu rant on the "liberal" media's supposed under-estimation of the number of people who attended his Inauguration speech. Even more strange, Trump told the CIA that the Islamic State arose because the U.S. failed to "keep the oil" when it invaded Iraq and said that "maybe we'll have another chance" to take Iraq's oil. CNN anchor and former CIA intern Anderson Cooper reported that "senior CIA officials sat stone-faced" during this bizarre performance.

The Iraqi oil comments must have gone over well in the Middle East and the Muslim world (I was asked to reflect on them by a Middle Eastern television network within five minutes of their utterance).

The elite cringing isn't about any serious concern for Iraqi sovereignty, of course. For the U.S. establishment, Trump poses a threat to Brand America. It is longstanding bipartisan U.S. ruling class doctrine that the United States is the world's great beacon and agent of democracy, human

rights, justice, and freedom. American Reality has never matched the doctrine, and it didn't under Obama, of course, but it is especially difficult to credibly align those claims with a candidate and now a president like Trump, who has openly exhibited racist, nativist, sexist, arch-authoritarian, police-statist, Islamophobic, pro-torture, and even neo-fascist sentiments and values. "If our system of government [under Obama as under George W. Bush and under Bill Clinton and their predecessors – P.S.] is an oligarchy with a façade of democratic and constitutional process," Lofgren wrote in the preface to his book's paperback edition last summer, "Trump would not only rip that façade away for the entire world to behold; he would take our system's ugliest features and intensify them."

Along with real policy differences they have with Trump's right- "populist," "isolationist," and "anti- 'free trade;'" rhetoric, that is why the nation's overlapping economic and foreign policy "elites" preferred Jeb Bush and Marco Rubio over Trump in the Republican primaries – and Hillary Clinton over Trump in the general election.

And now Donald the Ripper sits with other vicious and all-too transparently sociopathic swamp creatures like the quasi-fascist Steve Bannon atop the visible U.S. state, where marketing and branding matter to those wielding real and continuous behind the "marionette theater" of electoral and parliamentary politics. The Empire, once again, has no clothes.