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How Trump and Obama are Exactly Alike

By Sam Hussein
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Not until faithfulness turns to betrayal
And betrayal into trust
Can any human being become part of the truth.

— Rumi

Trump won the 2016 nomination and election largely because he was able to pose as a populist and anti-interventionist “America First”.

Similarly, Obama won the 2008 election in good part because he promised “hope and change” and because he had given a speech years earlier against the then-impending invasion of Iraq.

Short of disclosure of diaries or other documents from these politicians, we can’t know for certain if they planned on reversing much of what they promised or if the political establishment compelled them to change, but they both eventually perpetrated a massive fraud.

What is perhaps most striking is actually how quickly each of them backtracked on their alleged purpose. Particular since they were both proclaimed as representing “movements”.

Even before he took office, Obama stacked his administration with pro-war people: He incredibly kept Bush’s head of the Pentagon, Robert Gates; nominated Hillary Clinton for Secretary of State, who he beat largely because she voted for giving Bush authorization to invade Iraq. Other prominent Iraq War backers atop the administration included VP Joe Biden, Susan Rice and Richard Holbrooke. Before he was sworn in, Obama backed the 2008 Israeli slaughter of Palestinians in Gaza. See from 2008: “Anti-War Candidate, Pro-War Cabinet?”

Predictably, the Obama years saw a dramatic escalation of the U.S. global assassination program using drones. Obama intentionally bombed more countries than any other president since World War II: Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Libya, Somalia, Yemen and Pakistan. Obama talked about a nuclear weapons free world, but geared up to spent \$1 trillion in upgrading the U.S. nuclear weapons arsenal. At the end of his administration, attempts at the UN to work toward banning nuclear weapons were sabotaged, efforts that the Trump administration continues. At his first news conference as president, Helen Thomas asked Obama if he know of any country in the Mideast that had nuclear weapons. Obama passed on the opportunity to start unraveling the mountain of deceptions that constitutes U.S. foreign policy by simply saying “Israel” and instead said that he didn’t want to “speculate” about the matter.

As many have noted recently, Trump seemingly reversed himself on Syria and launched a barrage of cruise missiles targeting the Assad regime. It’s part of a whole host of what’s called “flip-flops” — Ex-Im Bank, NATO, China, Russia, Federal Reserve — but which are in fact the unraveling of campaign deceptions.

Fundamentally, Obama and Trump ran against the establishment and then helped rebrand it — further entrenching it.

And of course it’s not just foreign policy. Obama brought in pro-Wall Street apparatchiks Tim Geithner and others around Robert Rubin, like Larry Summers. Some were connected to Goldman Sachs, including Rahm Emanuel, Gary Gensler and Elena Kagan and Obama would back the Wall Street bailout. Trump campaigned as a populist and brought in a litany of Goldman Sachs tools, most prominently Steven Mnuchin at Treasury Secretary and Gary Cohn as chief economic advisor.

The nature of their deception is different. Obama is lawyerly and, like jello, hard to pin to the wall. Many of his broken promises are actually violations of the spirit of what he said, not the letter. He can promise to withdraw “all combat troops” from Iraq — but doesn’t inform voters that “combat troops” in his parlance is not the same as “troops”. And most certainly many of his backers were utterly infatuated with him and seemed incapable of parsing out his deceitful misimpressions. Obama did however outright violate some promises, most obviously to close the gulag at Guantanamo Bay in his first 100 days.

Trump triangulates by being an electron. He can say X and not-X in the span of a minute. Like an electron, he can be in two places at the same time. Trump is just an extreme example of what should be evident: It’s largely meaningless if a politician declares a position, especially during a campaign. The question is: What have they done? How have they demonstrated their commitment to, say, ending perpetual wars or taking on Wall Street?

These people are largely salesmen.

Nor are these patterns totally new. George W. Bush campaigned against “nation building” (sic: nation destroying); Bill Clinton campaigned as the “man from Hope” for the little guy; George H. W. Bush claimed he was a compassionate conservative. All backed corporate power and finance. All waged aggressive war.

In both the cases of Obama and Trump, the “opposition” party put forward a ridiculous critique that pushed them to be more militaristic. Obama as a “secret Muslim” — which gave him more licence to bomb more Muslim countries while still having a ridiculous image of being some sort of pacifist. Much of the “liberal” and “progressive” critique of Trump has been focusing on Russia, in effect pushing Trump to be more militaristic against the other major nuclear state on the planet.

One thing that’s needed is citizens aided by media that adroitly and accessibly pierce through the substantial deceptions in real time.

Another thing that’s needed is that people from what we call the “left” and “right” need to join together and pursue policies that undermine the grip of Wall Street and the war makers. They should not be drawn into loving or hating personalities or take satisfaction from principleless partisan barbs.

Only when there’s adherence to real values and when solidarity is acted upon will the cycles of betrayal be broken.