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Obama's Incubatory Tyranny

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Surveillance. Assassination. Teleprompter. Three little words, but, unlike the song, which says, “I love you,” these signify incipient fascism in America under the Obama administration, the “love” bestowed on a systemic-structural formation of advanced capitalism increasingly dependent on military means to forestall a declining position of global hegemony. Surveillance is the leading edge of a police state in its massive intrusiveness and potential for the punishment and destruction of dissent. Assassination is the signature modality of so-called counterterrorism, in reality, in its armed-drone application, a flaunting of amoral solipsistic conduct in the world showing contempt for international law and advertising the use of terror without compunction or restraint. Teleprompter here denotes the construction of an image of fluent skillful leadership disguising an empty vessel filled first by Axelrod then Rhodes until, now finally coming into his own, Obama emerges—still needing artificial means of communication—the *Compleat Beguiler*, spokesperson for America's ruling groups and, particularly, its military, defense, and financial communities. No longer the empty vessel, although dependent as always on speechwriters for a gloss of liberal rhetoric on policies for articulating and advancing US hegemonic global purposes, Obama has taken rapid strides beyond his predecessors in clamping down a national-security mentality on American ideology and political consciousness.

Three little words, actually the three-cornered stool of a societal formation embarked on a trajectory of corporatism, confirm in practice the underpinnings of repression necessary to stabilize an hierarchical class system in which mega-banking and –business, enjoying the bounty and protection of government, can function free from internal challenge. Obama preaches

acquiescence through identification with and pride in the myth of exceptionalism, the 2013 model being humanitarian intervention, but as new models become needed, they are ready to be rolled out the showroom door. Although Waterboarding and rendition appear to be no longer “in” (one of its main practitioners remains Director of the CIA, and the sitting group of Obama’s national-security advisers is hardly a stranger to these practices), next year we shall find, or expect to find, to be the “pivot” the next big thing, only in this case more permanent for the years to come. At this moment, Obama impatiently seeks to clarify, for US geostrategic purposes, the situation in the Middle East, in order to reinforce, and through an elaborate scheme of multipronged diplomatic—bordering on intervention—efforts intensify the security of, America’s sphere of influence in the region on an uncontested basis. Why the impatience? As the term “pivot,” now in wide usage among think-tank devotees, attests through specific Pentagon planning and implementation, the big ticket item, the cynosure of all eyes of Team Obama, is CHINA.

The Middle East may not be old hat in US political-military thinking, not only because America is wedded to Israel’s security, but also because, with Israel as our regional-power fulcrum, American influence can extend in a widening arc embracing Southern Europe and North Africa, with the potentiality of placing pressuring both on Russia and China, *yet* old hat or not, foreign-policy attention has shifted markedly: a new enemy, a new Cold War, and therefore a whole new ballgame for solidifying the popular base on behalf of an enlarged military, the deregulation and strengthening of business and banking to accelerate trends toward monopoly capital, and the consolidation of the whole, with the implication of emergency powers, into the National-Security State. Obama has been on the ground floor of this enterprise from the first, with Geithner, Brennan, and Holder, among the more prominent, assisting in the shaping of an interrelated power structure of financial-military capitalism, stripped of traditional civil liberties, opaque in the workings of government, and increasingly beholden to paramilitary operations for navigating the obstacles of international politics and economics.

Bush II was the patriotic simpleton, Obama now the mellifluous predator to a hitherto credulous—but no longer unsuspecting—world, the more capable of mounting an ambitious program of strategic and economic-ideological dominance than his predecessor because instinctively less restrained about US engagement on a global basis, as witness his escalation of drone attacks, integration of CIA-JSOC joint activities, and international outreach in the cultivation of alliance systems. Under the counterterrorism umbrella, adventurism knows no bounds, especially in areas that Bush showed little interest, whether in Africa or Latin America. In sum, we see with Obama a unitary conception and execution of policy that is undreamed of at the less sophisticated hands of previous administrations possibly going as far back as Kennedy or Johnson—not because Obama is personally so intelligent, but because global circumstances point to America’s asymmetrical posture, declining financial-industrial power, ascending militarism as a way of arresting that decline, the sum of which is desperate measures to postpone or cushion the fall.

The result, so far as his presidency is concerned, is the militarization of liberalism, or the liberalization of militarism, in either case a hardening of attitude toward the social-moral obligations of government as that promoting the health, safety, and general welfare of its people. Obama better than anyone in the recent past demonstrates the unitary character of

domestic and foreign policy, inseparable the further one probes but especially prominent in liberal-themed administrations which, qua liberal, reveal their antiradical and probusiness dimensions. In foreign policy, we see an essential counterrevolution in world affairs, as in the maintenance of a two- or possibly three-tiered global economy buttressed by US-controlled international financial organizations, regional trade agreements, and treaty arrangements in regulating capital flows. And aside from this economic display of strength, there is the political aspect: regime change, pure and simple. Globally positioned military bases, ditto CIA stations, and, of course, the employment of foreign aid, all translate into a *presence* not to be discounted in the repression of dissident forces in search of autonomous growth and modernization, socialist or otherwise.

The perfect complement to repression abroad is repression at home, both to cover over, and avoid the criticism of, the use or threat of force in promoting American business, opening investment channels, and securing indispensable natural resources (oil, bauxite, the list is long), and to mold uncritical support for a *total* policy framework which tilts away from the well-being of the domestic society (as in providing for a genuinely-public health system and more generous social safety net than presently exists), instead prosecuting an aggressive foreign policy whose costs alone provide ideological justification for neglect of the welfare sector, interpreted broadly, beyond the safety net, as job creation, mortgage protection, the curbing of pollution, opportunities for higher education, early learning and school nutrition, health-care facilities and coverage comprehensive in scope, and an infrastructure (e.g., water systems, electric grids, sanitation protocols) conducive to healthful surroundings. The comparative lack of the latter, which are the very minimum requirements of domestic society in advanced nations, and hopefully the standard to be achieved by all nations and peoples, can be ascribed to hegemonic standing, largely if not inevitably at the expense of others. To finance militarism, as specifically is being done in America, is *generic rape*, the outrageous violation of the body politic. To countenance it, a collective blankness of mind obtains, homestyle repression, manipulative, patriotic-inducing, rather than overt practices in areas of foreign policy, where national security trumps law, humaneness, and civilized conduct.

The line is breaking down. Repression, like policy in general, is becoming unitary, its domestic locale and provenance being no guarantee of protection of basic rights. How do we know this, aside from celebrity cases like the treatment of Manning, the hounding of whistle-blowers under the Espionage Act, the tight policing of radical demonstrations, formal and informal pressure exerted on the press and other media, lack of government transparency, secret court decisions, and so forth? The answer is simple: go back to our three-legged stool, singly and combined, as at the very least premonitory signs of coming fascism. Surveillance is critically important; the violation of privacy leaves the individual defenseless, in a state of near-bewilderment, stripped down (the case of generic rape I noted) of uniqueness and self-identity, and therefore ripe for re-education, a politicization of mind leading to adoration of the Leader, extreme fear of making the “wrong” moves, and eating the crumbs cast out by the System. Hardly a flattering picture of democracy. Yet Obama, Holder, and the chain of command in DOJ and NSA persist, openly mocking the Constitution, which, in getting away with this, makes star-chamber proceedings only a matter of time.

Then too, assassination, which is deliberately a crude warning to all and sundry that opposition to US power is futile, the means used, themselves beyond barbarism, vaporizing the victim, leaving a blood spat where once stood a human being. Obama's resort to this practice very probably won over the intelligence and military communities, as one of the noble warriors who, in the beginning had been mistrusted by both—and quickly proved his worth. Drone assassination is genocide in microcosm, and, with its domestic production and use, not only a surveillance instrument to be widely adopted, but also a reminder of the power of the State—yes, faraway Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, but the nagging doubt, should civil liberties further erode, and counterterrorism lead to the belief that radicals are home-grown terrorists, the same violence meted out to Americans. Already US citizens have been struck abroad, with little stir or recrimination at home.

Finally, the teleprompter, perhaps a cheap shot at Obama, who cannot help that he seems incapable of thinking in an independent voice, much less possess the independence of mind which is not obligated to accepting the suasions of the business community down the line, from environmental destruction to the arcane accounting methods of hedge fund operators, to deregulation per se in practice and the abuses which stem from governmental failure in this regard. Still, more than symbolism is involved in singling-out this method of communication. Obama is enabled to convey a persona thereby completely at odds with his policies and record, including a vindictiveness and unwillingness to be held accountable for his violations of international law. Secrecy is his obsession; my hunch, as I've said before, is his fear of being judged guilty of war crimes, whether intervention and threats of it (as in bombing Syria, until much of the international community rebelled) in general, or the drone attacks in particular. He obviously is out for blood with respect to Manning and Snowden, and by his actions warns any similarly inclined of stiff penalties awaiting them. The teleprompter, like a mask, is handy to hide behind: the demagogue without appearing demagogic. He is not a stranger to power.

The term “incubatory” refers to conditions favorable to hatching, here, not full-scale tyranny, but the recognition that the eggs have been planted and institutionally sat on, the while warming and ready to spring out (my use of incipient fascism coincides with this preliminary phase, where the societal preconditions have been set in motion) as the police state, or National-Security State, all but assured in America's expansionist design, militarism, and distortions introduced in domestic class relations. Obama is a contributing factor to the transition—not the Maximum Leader so much as Servant of the Vested (Including Military) Interests. Meanwhile, as I write, Defense Secretary Hagel, soon to be joined by Secretary of State John Kerry, is on a mission of military-alliance building (Obama follows in two weeks, to the same end), visiting Pacific countries to implement the “pivot” strategy of containment of China, or, as we say in the trade, the “rebalancing” of “assets” including naval power to that end. This policy, somewhat outside the public eye, is, for me, even more damning evidence of incubatory tyranny than the more conspicuous examples—a cause célèbre necessitating still more militarism and the starvation of societal resources for socially humane purposes.