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How Obama Consolidated the Legacies of Bush and Clinton

Keeping Bad Ideas Alive

by JASON HIRTHLER

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As the presidency of Barack Obama has evolved, or devolved, as it were, it's become clearer to everyone that he is little more than an imperial caretaker committed to expanding the American empire. Those who expected a circumspect constitutional law professor to build a Hadrian's Wall on the Iraqi border and declare the republic overextended, have been sorely disappointed. Instead, proving himself a true foot soldier of exceptionalism, Obama has continued two foreign policy initiatives, one pursued by George W. Bush, the other by Bill Clinton. Despite the puerility of one and cynicism of the other, Obama has followed both plotlines into the political abyss, cementing forever his role in the decline of the West.

The Bush Legacy

The purblind Bush administration was never capable of anticipating the predictable outcome of its desultory Iraq venture, namely that a Shia-led Iraq would instantly build ties with Tehran, further solidifying the Shia Crescent that the U.S. had been trying to undermine for years. Belatedly recognizing the ineptitude of their Iraqi enterprise, the administration settled on a "redirection," as Seymour Hersh's *New Yorker* 2007 article laid plain.

The redirection was basically a plan to rollback the growing Iranian influence that dynamiting Iraq had initiated. The strategy was to back Sunnis against Shias in what would become, under the direction of Obama's deft hand, a sectarian inferno. Washington sanctioned and aided the Saudi Arabian effort to arm Sunni extremists, launch them into Syria, and provide sanctuary for them in Jordan, Turkey, Iraq, and even Israel whenever they were chastened by the Syrian military. The immediate goal was to topple the Assad government. The ultimate goal was a confrontation with Iran.

As regards Syria, Obama has hardly wavered from the blueprint. He amplified funding to rebels and constructed the lame rationale that the U.S. was only arming "moderate" forces. (The New York Times employed the term almost as often as it had "enhanced interrogation techniques" in years prior.) Obama then used the pretext of ISIS to send America back into Iraq and to try to channel extremist violence westward into Syria.

In his diligent application of the Bush redirect, President Obama has assembled quite a list of achievements in the Middle East:

- * He facilitated the near total dismemberment of Iraq and Syria, for starters.
- * He supercharged a sectarian face-off between Shia and Sunni nations—with the Saudis, Turks, and Qataris on the Sunni side, and Iran, Syria, and Hezbollah on the Shia side.
- * He abetted the formation of a rudimentary Salafist caliphate on the usurped lands of Syria and Iraq, confirmed by Defense Intelligence Agency documents to have been foreseen and desired by Western interests.
- * He disregarded Syrian sovereignty in his effort to overthrow its democratically elected leader, Bashar al Assad, a president with far higher approval ratings than himself.
- * He used fabrications and international peacekeeping institutions to overthrow the most socially progressive mind in Africa, Muammar Gaddafi. In so doing, he transformed Libya from the security anchor of northern Africa into a festering filling station for depleted terrorists clans.
- * He has taken us back into Iraq and left us in Afghanistan, where some 11,000 troops will burn through \$35 billion this year to pursue a failed counterterrorism strategy.

But this is just one of the Caretaker-in-Chief's many foreign policy achievements. Aside from setting the Middle East on fire, Obama has refocused the Pentagon's attention on Russia, perhaps the most dangerous shift of all. In this, he follows the blueprint of Democratic mentor Bill Clinton, who conceived of the harebrained idea of reviving the animosities that underpinned decades of hostility between the United States and Soviet Union.

The Clinton Legacy

With what former U.S. Ambassador and Cold War planner George Kennan called a "fateful error," Clinton broke American promises to Russia on eastward expansion and engineered the

entry of Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland into NATO in 1999. Thus began an eastward march that has since absorbed all the former Warsaw Pact nations and the Baltic countries. In addition, to the Czechs, Hungarians, and Poles, George Bush happily added Albania, Croatia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Ukraine is evidently shortlisted for entry.

Once the scree of former Soviet colonies had been re-colonized by NATO, the next step was to lead an arms build up on the borders of the Russian Federation. This job fell to Obama. He has certainly pleased his patrons in this regard.

First, he committed \$1B to solidifying NATO forces in Eastern Europe. To make sure everyone was aware what that billion-dollar binge had bought, the U.S. orchestrated high-profile war games in the Black Sea, effectively in Russia's back yard. It sent some "748 metric tons of steel and rubber" sailing across the Black Sea to Georgia, equipping the puppet state with heavy weaponry. As Sunday's *New York Times* noted on the front page, heavy weapons are bound for all NATO states to the east.

He then used the NATO slush fund to set up six military bases in Eastern Europe. A "spearhead" force of 5,000 troops are being spread across Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria. Three of those nations share borders with Russia. Two share the Black Sea with Russia.

To further emphasize NATO belligerence, a U.S. Army infantry convoy conducted a "Dragon Ride" through Eastern Europe. This largely consisted of armored Stryker vehicles cruising 1,100 miles through the Baltic nations of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, then through Poland, the Czech Republic, and finally into Germany, posing for snapshots and selfies along the way. This foolhardy publicity stunt was said to have been necessary to reassure trembling Europeans that NATO would defend it against Slavic imperialists to the East.

Obama and his groupthink cohorts are still evaluating locations for a missile defense shield, a program hotly contested by Moscow. It views the system as a threat to its first strike capabilities. Implementing the shield may very well kick start another arms race between the behemoths, another piece of good news for Raytheon and Lockheed shareholders.

Not content with this degree of provocation, Obama then used the G7 meeting—the annual party of the club that ejected Russia last year—to reapply sanctions on Moscow as punishment for their fabricated invasion of Ukraine.

Backed by Doctrinal Delusions

All along, Obama has persistently reiterated the "Russian aggression" trope that has no basis in reality, even as Cold War fantasists hurriedly reboot their backyard bomb shelters. Sadly, this false narrative is taking root in America. Polls suggest Americans now see Moscow as its leading enemy, a testament to the efficacy of Washington propaganda. In 2002, 66 percent of Americans had a favorable view of Russia. That number is down to 24 percent. Thanks, Barack.

Unsurprisingly, given British and French and German obsequiousness, Europeans also view Russia as a major threat. To the East, Russians themselves increasingly view the West as a real and present danger, a stance also confirmed by Russian military doctrine in 2014, which named NATO as its leading threat.

Oh, for a single moment of candor from the establishment media that attends Obama's press conferences. Those bought lemmings that gaze up admiringly as the president performs his cheap parody of the earnest humanitarian. Yet honesty is not on the agenda.

As such, none bother to ask how exactly Russia could be an "aggressor" when despite assurances to concerned Soviet leaders about to dissolve the Union, NATO absorbed 12 Eastern European countries in 12 years, many of them on the Russian border, and is now rapidly arming them while issuing threats aimed at Moscow. It also consistently denounces Russian defensive actions, such as annexing Crimea and planning to place nuclear-capable missiles in Kaliningrad, by the Polish border. Nowhere is there a mention that the Crimean annexation was in direct response to the U.S.-backed fascist coup in Kiev, and that the Kaliningrad plan is a direct reply to the NATO military shield initiative, which as Kennan might have noted, could hardly be seen by Moscow as anything but a provocation.

To the warped NATO mind, Russia need only move missiles within its own borders to become an expansionist aggressor threatening Europe. Yet when NATO deliberately expands to Russian borders, builds needless military bases, populates them with "rapid response" units, and launches unnecessary missile initiatives under flimsy pretexts, it is being neither aggressive nor expansionist.

What a ludicrous conclusion. The NATO website even provides a comically obtuse rebuttal of claims that it is "encircling" Russia. It employs geographic references to prove that NATO is *not literally creating a circle around Russia* (which of course it cannot since it is a "North Atlantic" organization). Naturally, it makes no mention of its massive eastward expansion or the legitimacy of Muscovite fears of trigger-happy NATO forces camped along their common border.

Yet this is the quality of Western thought that the rest of the planet must confront. It has been so thoroughly vitiated by doctrinal deceits that it can no longer distinguish fact from fabrication. Suppose you asked a clan of NATO acolytes how exactly might Russia be the major threat to the world when it has a mere 10 foreign military bases, while the United States has 800. You can envision the response. Blank stares. A complete absence of irony. Finally a dogmatic retort that the U.S. is protecting the world from aggression, defending the weak from the strong, and so on. Presenting a small mountain of evidence to the contrary would have little effect. You would eventually be written off as a conspiracy theorist and end up on a no-fly list. But such is the fate of the freethinker in a society based on groupthink.

Kurt Vonnegut once said that if working stiff in Austrian beer halls had simply laughed young Adolf Hitler out of the room, the Nazi party would have never come to power. Perhaps. There is certainly an element of truth in Vonnegut's words. Namely, that when a society becomes inured

to absurdities such that it can no longer recognize them, it becomes incredibly vulnerable to the fascist impulse.

The Bi-Partisan Legacy

Sad to say, our vaunted Nobel Peace Prize winner is merely partaking in the fine bipartisan tradition of lying to the American people on behalf of the American empire. The more extravagant the lie, it seems, the more creditable the liar. Over the past few years, the president has earned his place in the pantheon of Western duplicity. He lied about Russia. He lied about Libya. He lied about Ukraine. He lied about Iran. He lied about Syria. He lied about ISIS. Why would anyone trust a word this man says? Oh, I forgot the liberal rationale: *surely he means well*.

But guile is the price of full-spectrum dominance. The idea of world dominion traces back to Manifest Destiny and the Monroe Doctrine. But the modern aspect of the imperial project it gained a policy foothold when President Truman was advised that Saudi oil was a “stupendous source of strategic power and one of the greatest material prizes in world history.” Shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Paul Wolfowitz’s 1992 National Security Planning report for President Clinton stressed the need to prevent the rise of another rival, a policy that naturally identified Iran as the threat in the Middle East and Russia in Eastern Europe.

Likewise Eurasia, as beltway heavyweight and former Carter administration National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski outlined in *The Grand Chessboard*, would be the pivot point of 21st century geopolitics. Who controlled it controlled the world. Later still members of the neoconservative think tank Project for the New American Century (PNAC), notably former Deputy Secretary of Defense Wolfowitz and former Vice President Dick Cheney, were most likely behind a plan to take down seven countries in five years across the Middle East, as revealed by an incredulous General Wesley Clark. These policy goals were fully liberated by the expansive Bush Doctrine, which effectively authorized the United States to conduct unilateral preemptive military actions whenever and wherever it perceived a terrorist threat or where “American interests” were at stake.

In this context, Obama is the latest caretaker CEO. A corporate fixer brought in to repair the company’s compromised image. A well-compensated contractor executing the to-do list handed to him on his first day. An adjunct professor taking up someone else’s lesson plan. To be sure, each custodian adds his special twist, his personal signature. Clinton? Venality. Bush? Unilaterism. In Obama’s case, the signature strike is his special stamp of indifference. Automation. But why debate tactics if the strategy is wrong? In each case, these temporary helmsmen are steering the ship of state along a course that has long been set. It’s the course itself that needs changing, not just the name on the Oval Office door.

Were we a society of engaged political beings, we would recognize the singular objective of Democrats and Republicans. Then we’d charter a new course. The president’s absurd press conferences would be backdropped by a soundtrack of American artillery fire going off around the word. The buzz of drones. Exploding mortar shells. Collapsing homes. The president’s voice would be drowned out by the groan of the developing world beneath the apocalypse of American ordnance. Then his words would wield all the moral authority of the policies they disguise. But

in the sycophant and superficial cultural milieu of the West, there is only silence and acquiescence, and the echo of a lie emanating from a billion backlit screens. It's a lie that's long been told. The face, race, and gender of the messenger may change with time, but the message never does.