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Obama: Three More Years of War in Afghanistan

By Matthew Rothschild
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Our war president promised more war. While he trumpeted his big Afghanistan speech as the first step in ending that war, Barack Obama essentially told the American people that tens of thousands of our soldiers would still be fighting there for at least three more years.

A year from now, Obama said all the additional “surge” troops will be back home. But the U.S. will still have close to 70,000 troops in Afghanistan, twice the number that were there when Obama took office.

Only “by 2014,” he said, will the Afghan people “be responsible for their own security.”

And even then, Obama appears to have left himself an out. “We’ll have to do the hard work of keeping the gains that we made,” he said. But what if those “gains” aren’t kept? Would he reverse course and keep more troops there?

He also said the United States would “build a partnership with the Afghan people that endures.” Beware a euphemism for permanent military bases.

The president’s rhetoric, overall, was hideous. “The tide of war is receding,” he said, and he repeated the “tide” metaphor a little later on. But war is not a fact of nature, like an ocean. It is a rash act of rulers.

Obama all but claimed to be clairvoyant, saying, “The light of a secure peace can be seen in the distance.” I’m not sure what telescope he’s using, but I wouldn’t rely on that, either in Iraq or in Afghanistan.

Then, when he decided to draw the lessons of Iraq and Afghanistan, Obama fed the American superiority complex. “We must embrace America’s singular role in the course of human events,” he said. He told us not to succumb to isolationism—a spiel that echoed George W. Bush. The only difference was that Obama stressed the need to be “pragmatic” about the way the United States responds, arguing that often “we need not deploy large armies overseas” or act alone.

So, in an act of chutzpah, he held up Libya as an example of how the United States ought to intervene in the future. This was odd because, in the very next sentence, he said, “What sets America apart is not solely our power; it is the principles upon which our union was founded.”

One of those key principles is abiding by the rule of law and by the Constitution, which gives Congress the sole power to declare war. Obama has violated the Constitution in his war on Libya and violated the War Powers Act, too.

He said, “We’re a nation that brings our enemies to justice while adhering to the rule of law.”

This use of the term “justice” is offensive (and Bushian again), because summary execution (of bin Laden, and of others by drone) is not in accordance with international law.

He said, “We stand not for empire, but for self-determination.”

That’s a joke.

Just ask the people of Gaza, who, when they exercised self-determination and voted for a government Washington didn’t like, got slapped with an embargo.

Or just ask the people of Bahrain, who had to suffer repression not only from their own government (a big U.S. ally) but also from an invasion by Saudi Arabia (a bigger U.S. ally).

When the United States has troops in 150 countries, it’s hard to maintain the assertion that we’re not an empire.

But Obama refused to come clean, choosing once more simply to play the role he’s carved out for himself: a more reasonable-sounding steward of a foreign policy that for more than a century has been awash in national delusions and has served the interests not of the American people but of the tiny slice at the top.