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## The Nobel War Prize

By: Thaddeus Russell

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**Obama didn't apologize for being a wartime president receiving a peace prize in Oslo—he laid the groundwork for battle, and outdid Bush in arguing for American supremacy.**

Much was made about the irony of awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to a president overseeing one war while escalating another. But with breathtaking boldness, in his speech accepting the award, Barack Obama marched past the irony and into a declaration of war on much of the rest of the world.

Liberal pundits John Nichols of The Nation and Joe Klein of Time praised Obama's speech for being "exceptionally well-reasoned and appropriately humble" and for its "intellectually rigorous and morally lucid" qualities. Writing for The Daily Beast, Peter Beinart offered a fuller commendation by arguing that it rejected what he calls the Bush administration's "moral chauvinism" and "self-righteousness" in foreign relations. According to Beinart, while the previous foreign-policy makers believed that they were instructing "our moral inferiors on how to behave," Obama in his speech declared "that we are not inherently better than anyone else."

Yet Obama's central argument was precisely that national, religious, and "tribal" cultures which do not uphold the values of Americans (and some Europeans) are not only inferior to ours but also must be transformed—by any means necessary. Obama audaciously rejected not only the pacifism of Gandhi and his own purported role model, Martin Luther King, Jr., but also the concept that war is justified only in self-defense. And though some commentators have praised Obama for what they see as his commitment to multilateralism, his speech was as strident a call for American primacy in international relations as anything delivered by his predecessor.

Obama scolded those who hold "a reflexive suspicion of America" and gave primary credit to the United States rather than "international institutions" for saving the world from communism, fascism, and economic crisis. In a line that could have been delivered by any member of the infamously unilateralist Bush foreign policy team, Obama admonished his European audience that "the United States of America has helped underwrite global security for more than six decades with the blood of our citizens and the strength of our arms."

Significantly, Obama defended his escalation in Afghanistan on "the recognized principle of self-defense" but then pledged to go "beyond self-defense"—with armed intervention when necessary—anywhere "the inherent rights and dignity of every individual" are denied. Establishing that a just use of military action "extends beyond self-defense or the defense of one nation against an aggressor," Obama asserted his belief that "force can be justified on humanitarian grounds."

The president then named several violators of "inherent rights"—Iran, Burma, Sudan, Zimbabwe, and The Democratic Republic of Congo—and warned that "there must be consequences" if diplomacy fails to reform them. Those rights, which include the freedom of speech and assembly, the right of people to "worship as they please," and the right to democracy are, according to Obama, not only natural and God-given but also "universal aspirations." Speaking for the seven billion inhabitants of the earth, he proclaimed that "we're all basically seeking the same things."

Obama dismissed the claim made in "some countries" that such statements are tantamount to cultural imperialism by calling it a "false suggestion that these are somehow Western principles, foreign to local cultures or stages of a nation's development."

But where did those principles originate? Obama cited the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948. Yet representatives from only 48 of the world's nearly 200 nations voted for the declaration, and it was written not by God or Mother Nature but by a Canadian law professor named Peter Humphrey.

More importantly, the rights enumerated in the Universal Declaration and the idea that they are inherent were invented in a particular time, in particular places, and by very particular human beings—specifically, during the 17th and 18th centuries, in Europe and America, by wealthy, powerful, white, male philosophers and politicians like John Locke and Thomas Jefferson. The idea that there are natural or God-given rights to speech, assembly, worship, and the vote simply did not exist before then. Moreover, were one to account for all the public statements and popular movements for the president's idea of inherent rights over the last four centuries and even in recent decades, they would constitute only a tiny percentage of the earth's population.

Polls taken in the contemporary Middle East, for example, show that an overwhelming majority reject at least one of Obama's "universal aspirations."

At the end of the speech the president went even farther in claiming grounds for military intervention, adding that "a just peace includes not only civil and political rights—it must encompass economic security and opportunity" as well as "swift and forceful action" against climate change. He ominously asserted that economic development "rarely takes root without security" and that "military leaders in my own country" believe that "our common security hangs in the balance" so long as climate change is not swiftly and forcefully addressed.

In a crowning irony, Obama attacked the believers of absolute, universal truth for "the murder of innocents." No "Holy War", he said, "can ever be a just war." For "if you truly believe that you are carrying out divine will, then there is no need for restraint—no need to spare the pregnant mother, or the medic, or the Red Cross worker, or even a person of one's own faith." Such total adherence to belief is "incompatible with the concept of peace."

Given Obama's orders as commander-in-chief, their deadly consequences for civilians and U.S. soldiers, and his justifications for them, one might say, indeed.