

A Tapestry of Lies

Harold Pinter to Obama. The US has supported every right wing military dictatorship in the World since World War II

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Come and see the blood in the streets.
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Poem by Pablo Neruda

About a month before Barack Obama announced his candidacy for the presidency of the United States, former National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski appeared on PBS's Charlie Rose Show and was asked whether he thought Obama would be a good choice for president. Brzezinski paused for a minute, peered at Rose out of the corner of his eye, and answered, "Just think of the symbolism." As soon as he said that, Brzezinski and Rose broke out into laughter as though they were sharing a private joke.

Brzezinski was right, of course. Obama was the perfect choice for president. Not because of his experience. He had none. He was a two year senator with a resume' small enough to fit on the back of a matchbox. Still Obama had what Brzezinski and Co. were looking for, symbolism; the kind of symbolism that connected him to people around the world and made them feel like one of their own had finally clawed their way to the top. Even better, Obama was a charismatic populist who could fill stadiums with adoring fans and put a benign face on America's interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. What more could Brzezinski hope for? After 8 years of dragging "Brand America" through the mud, the country would finally get the emergency facelift it needed and begin to restore its battered image as the world's indispensable nation.

For leftists, Obama has been a total bust. He's escalated the war in Afghanistan, increased the cross-border bombings of Pakistan, hemmed and hawed about prosecuting war crimes, refused to actively lobby House members to make it easier for workers to organize (EFCA), and surrounded himself with bank industry reps who've committed \$12.8 trillion to sinking financial institutions with no assurance that the money would be repaid. Apart from a trifling bill on stem cells, Obama has done absolutely zero to confirm his bone fides as a liberal. The truth is, Obama is neither liberal nor conservative; he's simply an inspiring orator and a skillful politician who has no strong convictions about anything. If he achieves greatness, it will be because he was thrust into a crisis he couldn't avoid and reluctantly acted in the best interests of the American people. That possibility still exists, although it seems more unlikely by the day.

Foreign leaders are clearly relieved to see the last of George W. Bush, and they appear to be willing to give Obama every opportunity to mend fences and break with the past. But Obama has made little effort to reciprocate or show that he's serious about real change. The emphasis seems to be more on public relations than policy; more on glitzy photo ops, grandiose speeches and gadding about from one capital to another, than ending the chronic US meddling and militarism. Where's the beef or is it all just empty posturing?

No one's ready to write-off Obama just yet, but he needs to show he's the real-deal by taking steps to ratchet-down the war machine and reign in the corporate elites and bank vermin. But is it really possible for one man-however well-meaning-to change the course of a nation by standing up the gaggle of racketeers who pull the strings from behind the curtain? Keep in mind, America's history of violent interventions, unprovoked wars, color-coded revolutions and coup d' etats has a long pedigree that stretches from Bunker Hill to Baghdad. That river of blood did not begin with George Bush and it won't end with Barack Obama. Every generation has produced its own litany of crimes, from Wounded Knee to Nagasaki to My Lai to Falluja. In Harold Pinter's Nobel acceptance speech, the playwright invokes one such incident which epitomizes the pattern of hostility which has been repeated over and over again wherever the Washington mandarins detect opposition to their iron-fisted rule.

[Harold Pinter, Nobel Acceptance Speech:](#)

"The United States supported the brutal Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua for over 40 years. The Nicaraguan people, led by the Sandinistas, overthrew this regime in 1979, a breathtaking popular revolution.

The Sandinistas weren't perfect. They possessed their fair share of arrogance and their political philosophy contained a number of contradictory elements. But they were intelligent, rational and civilized. They set out to establish a stable, decent, pluralistic society. The death penalty was abolished. Hundreds of thousands of poverty-stricken peasants were brought back from the dead. Over 100,000 families were given title to land. Two thousand schools were built. A quite remarkable literacy campaign reduced illiteracy in the country to less than one seventh. Free education was established and a free health service. Infant mortality was reduced by a third. Polio was eradicated.

The United States denounced these achievements as Marxist/Leninist subversion. In the view of the US government, a dangerous example was being set. If Nicaragua was allowed to establish basic norms of social and economic justice, if it was allowed to raise the standards of health care and education and achieve social unity and national self respect, neighboring countries would ask the same questions and do the same things. There was of course at the time fierce resistance to the status quo in El Salvador.

I spoke earlier about 'a tapestry of lies' which surrounds us. President Reagan commonly described Nicaragua as a 'totalitarian dungeon'. This was taken generally by the media, and certainly by the British government, as accurate and fair comment. But there was in fact no record of death squads under the Sandinista government. There was no record of torture. There was no record of systematic or official military brutality. No priests were ever murdered in Nicaragua. There were in fact three priests in the government, two Jesuits and a Maryknoll missionary. The totalitarian dungeons were actually next door, in El Salvador and Guatemala. The United States had brought down the democratically elected

government of Guatemala in 1954 and it is estimated that over 200,000 people had been victims of successive military dictatorships.

Six of the most distinguished Jesuits in the world were viciously murdered at the Central American University in San Salvador in 1989 by a battalion of the Alcatl regiment trained at Fort Benning, Georgia, USA. That extremely brave man Archbishop Romero was assassinated while saying mass. It is estimated that 75,000 people died. Why were they killed? They were killed because they believed a better life was possible and should be achieved. That belief immediately qualified them as communists. They died because they dared to question the status quo, the endless plateau of poverty, disease, degradation and oppression, which had been their birthright.

The United States finally brought down the Sandinista government. It took some years and considerable resistance but relentless economic persecution and 30,000 dead finally undermined the spirit of the Nicaraguan people. They were exhausted and poverty stricken once again. The casinos moved back into the country. Free health and free education were over. Big business returned with a vengeance. 'Democracy' had prevailed.

But this 'policy' was by no means restricted to Central America. It was conducted throughout the world. It was never-ending. And it is as if it never happened.

The United States supported and in many cases engendered every right wing military dictatorship in the world after the end of the Second World War. I refer to Indonesia, Greece, Uruguay, Brazil, Paraguay, Haiti, Turkey, the Philippines, Guatemala, El Salvador, and, of course, Chile. The horror the United States inflicted upon Chile in 1973 can never be purged and can never be forgiven.

Hundreds of thousands of deaths took place throughout these countries. Did they take place? And are they in all cases attributable to US foreign policy? The answer is yes they did take place and they are attributable to American foreign policy. But you wouldn't know it."

Analysis

Pinter's speech is a somber indictment of US foreign policy; a policy which is now cloaked behind the rock-star facade of Barack Obama. Nothing has changed and, perhaps, nothing will change. The same barbarous campaign that thrived under Bush has been passed along to Obama intact. Wherever there is resistance to US ambitions; there lies the enemy. Whether its Marxists in Bogota, nationalists in Kosovo, Bolivarians in Caracas, Shia militias in Beirut, Islamic moderates in Mogadishu or Quakers in Toledo. They're all enemies, every one of them, and they need to be dealt with.

Obama is no fool; he knows he's being used. He knows he wasn't chosen for his enlightened views on health care and stem cells. He was picked because the men in charge needed a new posterboy to hide behind while they carry out their illicit activities. Obama is not so much of a Commander in chief as he is master illusionist, diverting attention from the stealth war that goes on relentlessly with or without his consent. Here's Pinter again:

"The crimes of the United States have been systematic, constant, vicious, remorseless, but very few people have actually talked about them. You have to hand it to America. It has exercised a quite clinical manipulation of power worldwide while masquerading as a force for universal good. It's a brilliant, even witty, highly successful act of hypnosis...It's a

scintillating stratagem."

Consider how the news was shaped to make it look like the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan were carried out for altruistic reasons. Thus, the war in Afghanistan became "Operation Enduring Freedom", stressing the selfless generosity of bombing a country into oblivion and reinstating the thuggish warlords to power. The same strategy was used for the invasion of Iraq which was celebrated as "liberation from a brutal dictator." Liberation which cost the lives of over 1 million Iraqis and the displacement of 4 million more. Still, no one in the UN or so called international community has pressed for removing the US from the Security Council or prosecuting its leaders for war crimes. It's a testimony to the success of the US media in upholding the "tapestry of lies" of which Pinter speaks. Under Obama, the charade has only gotten worse. The coverage of the war has stopped entirely. War? What war? What matters now is Obama's cheery banter with Jay Leno, or Michelle's well-proportioned arms or Malia's adorable Portuguese Waterdog. America is whole again. Let the killing resume.

Pinter: *"What has happened to our moral sensibility? Did we ever have any? What do these words mean? Do they refer to a term very rarely employed these days - conscience? A conscience to do not only with our own acts but to do with our shared responsibility in the acts of others? Is all this dead? Look at Guantanamo Bay. Hundreds of people detained without charge for over three years, with no legal representation or due process, technically detained forever. This totally illegitimate structure is maintained in defiance of the Geneva Convention. It is not only tolerated but hardly thought about by what's called the 'international community'. This criminal outrage is being committed by a country, which declares itself to be 'the leader of the free world'. Do we think about the inhabitants of Guantanamo Bay? What does the media say about them? They pop up occasionally - a small item on page six. They have been consigned to a no man's land from which indeed they may never return. At present many are on hunger strike, being force-fed, including British residents. No niceties in these force-feeding procedures. No sedative or anesthetic. Just a tube stuck up your nose and into your throat. You vomit blood. This is torture. What has the British Foreign Secretary said about this? Nothing. What has the British Prime Minister said about this? Nothing. Why not? Because the United States has said: to criticize our conduct in Guantanamo Bay constitutes an unfriendly act. You're either with us or against us."*

Obama doesn't need to solve the world's problems. He doesn't have to reverse global warming or slow peak oil, cure AIDS or end world hunger. All he needs to do is meet the minimal requirement of his job as president, which is to deliver justice to his people. That's why the prosecution of Bush for war crimes is more important than any other issue on the docket. Justice precedes everything; it's the thread that keeps the social fabric stitched together. Justice for the victims who were killed in their homes with their families while they were sleeping or eating dinner. Justice for the people who were bombed in wedding parties or going to work or at the mosque praying to God. That's what people want from Obama. Justice, nothing more. The Reverend Martin Luther King said, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice." It's up to Obama follow that arc and take at least one step on the path of legitimacy, accountability and justice.

Pinter: *"How many people do you have to kill before you qualify to be described as a mass murderer and a war criminal? One hundred thousand? More than enough, I would have thought. Therefore it is just that Bush and Blair be arraigned before the International Criminal Court of Justice."*

It's highly unlikely that a black man with a background in community organizing really believes that expanding the war in Afghanistan is the right thing to do. Nor is it likely that he supports wiretapping, the crackdown on immigrants, penalizing sellers of medical marijuana, trillion dollar bank bailouts or "enhanced" interrogation. He is merely reading from the script that he has been given. But as the economic crisis deepens and the country becomes more radicalized and politically unstable, that script will have to be tossed aside. Obama will have plenty of opportunities to shrug off his handlers and show what he's really made of. Perhaps he is great man after all.

Pinter: *"When we look into a mirror, we think the image that confronts us is accurate. But move a millimeter and the image changes. We are actually looking at a never-ending range of reflections. But sometimes a writer has to smash the mirror - for it is on the other side of that mirror that the truth stares at us."*

Go ahead, Barack. Smash the mirror.

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