

In The Great Tradition: Obama Is A Hawk

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John Pilger reaches back into the history of the Democratic Party and describes the tradition of war-making and expansionism that Barack Obama has now left little doubt he will honour.

In 1941, the editor Edward Dowling wrote: "The two greatest obstacles to democracy in the United States are, first, the widespread delusion among the poor that we have a democracy, and second, the chronic terror among the rich, lest we get it." What has changed? The terror of the rich is greater than ever, and the poor have passed on their delusion to those who believe that when George W Bush finally steps down next January, his numerous threats to the rest of humanity will diminish.

The foregone nomination of Barack Obama, which, according to one breathless commentator, "marks a truly exciting and historic moment in US history", is a product of the new delusion. Actually, it just seems new. Truly exciting and historic moments have been fabricated around US presidential campaigns for as long as I can recall, generating what can only be described as bullshit on a grand scale. Race, gender, appearance, body language, ritual spouses and offspring, even bursts of tragic grandeur, are all subsumed by marketing and "image-making", now magnified by "virtual" technology. Thanks to an undemocratic electoral college system (or, in Bush's case, tampered voting machines) only those who both control and obey the system can win. This has been the case since the truly historic and exciting victory of Harry Truman, the liberal Democrat said to be a humble man of the people, who went on to show how tough he was by obliterating two cities with the atomic bomb.

Understanding Obama as a likely president of the United States is not possible without understanding the demands of an essentially unchanged system of power: in effect a great media game. For example, since I compared Obama with Robert Kennedy in these pages, he has made two important statements, the implications of which have not been allowed to intrude on the celebrations. The first was at the conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (Aipac), the Zionist lobby, which, as Ian Williams has pointed out, "will get you accused of anti-Semitism if you quote its own website about its power". Obama had already offered his genuflection, but on 4 June went further. He promised to support an "undivided Jerusalem" as Israel's capital. Not a single government on earth supports the Israeli annexation of all of Jerusalem, including the Bush regime, which recognises the UN resolution designating Jerusalem an international city.

His second statement, largely ignored, was made in Miami on 23 May. Speaking to the expatriate Cuban community - which over the years has faithfully produced terrorists, assassins and drug runners for US administrations - Obama promised to continue a 47-year crippling embargo on Cuba that has been declared illegal by the UN year after year.

Again, Obama went further than Bush. He said the United States had “lost Latin America”. He described the democratically elected governments in Venezuela, Bolivia and Nicaragua as a “vacuum” to be filled. He raised the nonsense of Iranian influence in Latin America, and he endorsed Colombia’s “right to strike terrorists who seek safe-havens across its borders”. Translated, this means the “right” of a regime, whose president and leading politicians are linked to death squads, to invade its neighbours on behalf of Washington. He also endorsed the so-called Merida Initiative, which Amnesty International and others have condemned as the US bringing the “Colombian solution” to Mexico. He did not stop there. “We must press further south as well,” he said. Not even Bush has said that.

It is time the wishful-thinkers grew up politically and debated the world of great power as it is, not as they hope it will be. Like all serious presidential candidates, past and present, Obama is a hawk and an expansionist. He comes from an unbroken Democratic tradition, as the war-making of presidents Truman, Kennedy, Johnson, Carter and Clinton demonstrates. Obama’s difference may be that he feels an even greater need to show how tough he is. However much the colour of his skin draws out both racists and supporters, it is otherwise irrelevant to the great power game. The “truly exciting and historic moment in US history” will only occur when the game itself is challenged.

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