

It's U.S. Election Showtime...

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Over the last 30 years, no U.S. presidential election has signaled a change in Washington's foreign policy of Washington. Important decisions have been made outside this time frame. It is quite obvious that the president is the superintendent of a policy of which he is not the architect. Will Yankee imperialism perform better under Obama's or Romney's smile?



President Barack Obama and Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney sharing a hearty laugh at charity gala held at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel on October 18, 2012 in New York City.

Every four years the U.S. presidential election becomes a planetary spectacle. The dominant press attempts to convince international public opinion that the American people are democratically designating the leader who will direct the affairs of the world.

In certain countries, notably in Europe, the media coverage is at least as saturated as the election of their own leader. Implicitly, the press is indicating that while these states may also be called democracies, their citizens have no real voice in determining their own future, a future subject to the good graces of the occupant of the White House. So how can it be said that these states are really democracies?

The problem is that voting has been conflated with democracy. This remark also applies to the United States. The electoral spectacle is supposed to be the proof that they are living under a vibrant democracy, but this is all smoke and mirrors. Despite the widespread conviction that the president of the United States is elected directly by the people, he is not, not even secondarily. In the United States the people are not sovereign and the citizens are not electors. The choice of President and Vice-President is determined in a winner-take-all process by an electoral college of 538 people where electors are designated by voters' and party choices at the state level. To win, the candidate must have at least 270 electoral votes, a number based on the population of each state. States are the true locus for presidential selection because they are subject to the politics of choosing electors. The national popular vote does not count; if no candidate reaches 270, the choice is made in Congress. The Gore vs. Bush election of 2000 and the Kerry vs. Bush election of 2004 were potent reminders that the voice of the people can be out-manoeuvred. In 2000, the Supreme Court decided that it was not going to wait for a recount of votes in Florida before proclaiming the winner. All that mattered was the Court's decision that in turn confirmed the Electoral College numbers despite anything the voters had said.



The illusion doesn't stop there. When George W. Bush resided in the White House, no one seriously imagined that so uneducated and incompetent a man was actually exercising power. It was thought that a team of advisors discretely exercised it for him. When Barack Obama succeeded him, and since he was thought to be more intelligent it was believed that he was truly in charge. But how can it be assumed that the team that exercised power under Bush would spontaneously renounce it under Obama?

The daily agenda of a U.S. president consists of ceaseless audience appearances, speeches and ceremonies. How can this individual find the time to really familiarize himself with the topics of his speeches? He is no more president than the newscasters on TV are journalists. They share in fact the same profession: teleprompter reading.

We may sense that, as in previous contests, there is more to the Obama-Romney Show than meets the eye, that something really is being decided. And it is. In the constitutional system of the U.S., the primary function of the president, in addition to his role as putative Commander in Chief, is to name over 6000 appointees to public office. This political rotation effectively entails a vast migration of elites. In the current context, thousands of high-level functionaries and tens of thousands of assistants and advisors could possibly be discharged and largely replaced by appointees from the Bush era. The presidential election determines the personal careers of all these people and brings with it the corrupt bidding process that favors this or that multinational. Indeed, there are real reasons for investing money, a whole lot of money, in this contest.

Where is international politics in all this? Over the last two decades, major campaign promises made during electoral campaigns became something fundamentally different during the president's term in office. Bill Clinton (1993-2008) pledged to reduce military budgets following the disappearance of the USSR and bring about economic prosperity. Instead, in 1995 he commenced an expanded program of military rearmament. George W. Bush (2001-2008) was going to rationalize the Pentagon and wage "war without end" but by the end of 2006 he had stopped the privatization of the military and begun the pull-out from Afghanistan and Iraq. Barack Obama (2009-2012) was going to continue the retreat and "reset" relations with Russia and the Muslim world. What occurred instead was the continued construction of the missile shield around Russia, U.S. support for the color revolution in Egypt and wars on Libya and Syria. Each time that these teleprompter readers did such an about-face, they betrayed their constituents and did so without qualm or hesitation.

The ongoing dilemma of the U.S. ruling class is to find the right teleprompter reader, the one who can most convincingly explain away the upcoming political turnarounds. In this sense, Romney represents a new kind of rhetoric. He constantly reaffirms that America has the vocation to rule the world while Obama maintains in principle that the world should be governed by international law. The current president is trying to resolve economic problems by significantly reducing military expenditures and transferring the war banner and the price tag to the allies, for example by subcontracting the destruction of Libya to the French and British. By contrast, Romney asserts that the U.S. economy, to function, has to have its armed forces patrol the air and all international waters. To do so, he intends to maintain the current level of military expenditures, despite the crisis but also as a way of resolving it.



Breathtaking suspense: who will be chosen to read the Presidential VSS-20 teleprompter, Barack Obama or Mitt Romney?

Whatever option is chosen, the basics will not change. The U.S. wants to disengage from the Middle East on which it has become less dependent as a source of energy. It can only do so by sharing power in the region with Russia. If he remains in the White House, Obama will present this course of action as as multilateral progress. If Romney replaces him, he'll seek to carry out a Reagan-type strategy and chain the foot of the Russian bear to enmesh it in interminable conflicts. Clearly, in this regard and in others, the only outcome of the U.S. election will be the choice of arguments employed to convince us that America is a democracy which acts with both power and good intentions. So what are we complaining about?

Translation Michele Stoddard

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