

Nobel Committee Celebrates War As Peace

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On Thursday December 10 U.S. President Barack Obama will receive the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo, Norway.

The Norwegian Nobel Committee announced its selection for the prize on October 9 of this year, less than nine months after Obama assumed the mantle of the American presidency and less than a month after that announced the doubling of his nation's troops for the world's longest-running war in Afghanistan. The first contingent of new forces, consisting of 1,500 Marines, is to arrive next week, right before Christmas.

Ten days before the bestowal of the Nobel Peace Prize, the American president delivered a speech at the West Point Military Academy in which he pledged an additional 30,000 troops for a war now in its ninth year. His (and his predecessor George W. Bush's) Defense Secretary Robert Gates hastened to add that 3,000 more support troops would be deployed, bringing the total to over 100,000, only 20,000 short of American soldiers in Iraq, and with as many as 50,000 more non-U.S. forces serving under the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force. In his West Point address Obama reminded his listeners that "When I took office, we had just over 32,000 Americans serving in Afghanistan...." He has ordered that number to be more than tripled.

A brief report on Obama's peace prize appeared on the CBS News website on December 7 with the seemingly paradoxical title "A Peace Prize for a War President" by the news agency's White House correspondent, Mark Knoller.

Neither the title nor the article it introduced was ironic. They reflected the straightforward truth.

The feature stated "There'll be no effort by Barack Obama to disguise or obscure the fact that he's a war president when he accepts the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo on Thursday.

"The ceremony takes place ten days after he announced plans to escalate the U.S. military engagement in Afghanistan by deploying another 30,000 American troops there."

The selection of Obama evoked a prompt and aptly indignant response from Michel Chossudovsky at the Centre for Research on Globalization, who on October 11 published a piece called "Obama and the Nobel Prize: When War Becomes Peace, When the Lie becomes the Truth" [1] which stated inter alia that "When the Commander in Chief of the largest military force on planet earth is presented as a global peace-maker," then "the Lie becomes the Truth."

Although there are no firm, codified guidelines for nominating and agreeing upon a Peace Prize recipient, Alfred Nobel's will states that it should be conferred upon a "person who

shall have done the most or the best work for fraternity between nations, for the abolition or reduction of standing armies and for the holding and promotion of peace congresses.”

Those criteria have arguably never been honored or strictly abided by since the annual prize was first awarded in 1901. Several winners have been cited for helping to end wars – often by simply prevailing in them. One of the two American presidents previously awarded the prize, Woodrow Wilson, is such a one.

The other was Theodore Roosevelt, who as Assistant Secretary of the Navy in 1897 said “I should welcome almost any war, for I think this country needs one.”

Both Roosevelt in 1906 and Wilson in 1919 were standing presidents when they received the prize. The first had fought in Cuba during the Spanish-American War (the war he demanded a year before it began) and Wilson brought the United States into the First World War.

The Spanish-American War inaugurated the expansion of the U.S. from a hemispheric to an Asia Pacific power. And an empire. World War I placed the American army on the European continent for the first time and signaled its emergence as an international military power. Theodore Roosevelt became president in 1901 when William McKinley, who launched the conflict with Spain and acquired Cuba, Guam, the Philippines and Puerto Rico as spoils of war, was assassinated; Wilson not only sent over one million soldiers to France but also deployed 13,000 troops to fight the new Russian government of Vladimir Lenin in 1918.

But neither Roosevelt nor Wilson were commanders-in-chief of a war when they were given the Nobel Prize. And they received it for, at least in theory, contributing to ending wars; the Russo-Japanese War and World War I, respectively. Granting the Nobel Peace Prize to a head of state escalating a war already in its ninth year half a world away from his own nation is a precedent that was reserved for this year.

Reuters quoted White House spokesman Robert Gibbs on December 7 stating “We’ll address directly the notion that many have wondered, which is the juxtaposition of the timing for the Nobel Peace Prize and – and his [Obama’s] commitment to add more troops around – into Afghanistan.”

Juxtaposition, paradox, irony, contradiction and so forth are terms too weak and inaccurate to describe the timing of the announcement of this year’s Nobel Peace Prize recipient, coming as it did between two pledges of military reinforcements for the world’s largest-scale and longest-running war. Travesty is a better word.

Speculation was rife after October 9 regarding the Norwegian Nobel Committee’s rationale and motives for awarding Obama the prize, and press pundits were not amiss in offering explanations. But actions are more revealing than assumed or imaginary intentions and what the Nobel Committee has accomplished is to yet further tarnish its reputation and that of the prize it grants.

It is hard to think of any recipient, and surely any recent one, who personifies the qualities indicated by Alfred Nobel himself. Advocating and working for peace seem to have little if anything to do with being awarded the nominal Peace Prize. But twice in the last three years it has been conferred upon individuals far more deserving of indictment for violating the Principles of the Nuremberg Tribunal, especially that section of Principle VI, Crimes against

peace, which is defined as “Planning, preparation, initiation or waging of a war of aggression or a war in violation of international treaties, agreements or assurances.”

Two years ago the prize was shared by Al Gore, who as the vice president of the U.S.’s first post-Cold War administration helped preside over deadly street battles in Somalia and bombing – incessant bombing – attacks in Iraq, Bosnia, Afghanistan, Sudan and Yugoslavia. And the launching of Plan Colombia in 1999, the latest fruit of which is the Pentagon’s acquisition of seven new military bases in the country and the resulting threat of armed conflict with its neighbors. Arranged by this year’s Peace Prize recipient. But, again, Gore received the prize years after leaving office and for work in an area unrelated to his former government posts.

Obama’s December 1 speech was larded with lines evocative of the worst rhetorical excesses of his predecessor combined with allusions to broadening the war reminiscent of Richard Nixon’s and Henry Kissinger’s expansion of what had previously been America’s longest war from Vietnam into Cambodia in 1970. “[S]hortly after taking office, I approved a long-standing request for more troops. After consultations with our allies, I then announced a strategy recognizing the fundamental connection between our war effort in Afghanistan, and the extremist safe-havens in Pakistan. I set a goal that was narrowly defined as disrupting, dismantling, and defeating al Qaeda and its extremist allies....”

The current administration has, in addition to plans to boost combined U.S. and NATO (“our allies”) military forces to 150,000 in Afghanistan, dramatically escalated drone missile attacks inside neighboring Pakistan and, as the above quote demonstrates, declared western and southern Pakistan part of the expanding war theater.

The president mentioned or alluded to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization several times in his address, in one instance with a degree of hyperbole that is as frightening as it is extravagant. “For what’s at stake is not simply a test of NATO’s credibility – what’s at stake is the security of our Allies, and the common security of the world.

“We are in Afghanistan to prevent a cancer from once again spreading through that country. But this same cancer has also taken root in the border region of Pakistan. That is why we need a strategy that works on both sides of the border.”

The entire world is threatened by a spreading cancer. This alarmist and crude phraseology was employed by a 21st century leader of the world’s superpower, a Harvard graduate, but could as well have been lifted from the lowest yellow journalism screed of the Cold War.

In attempting to deny the obvious – the inevitable – Obama continued by stating that “there are those who suggest that Afghanistan is another Vietnam. They argue that it cannot be stabilized, and we are better off cutting our losses and rapidly withdrawing. Yet this argument depends upon a false reading of history. Unlike Vietnam, we are joined by a broad coalition of 43 nations....” Troops from America’s NATO and NATO partner vassals and tributaries in the war against barbarians – the terms are those of Zbigniew Brzezinski from his 1997 *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives* – will not be limited to the war in Afghanistan, which in fact is a laboratory for a far broader global strategy, as “The struggle against violent extremism will not be finished quickly, and it extends well beyond Afghanistan and Pakistan....Where al Qaeda and its allies attempt to establish a foothold – whether in Somalia or Yemen or elsewhere –

they must be confronted by growing pressure and strong partnerships.”

U.S. National Security Adviser James Jones said in October that “according to the maximum estimate, al Qaeda has fewer than 100 fighters operating in Afghanistan without any bases or ability to launch attacks on the West.” Government estimates for Taliban fighters in Afghanistan are in the neighborhood of 20,000.

This is the global cancer that requires 150,000 U.S. and NATO troops and an Afghan army of a quarter million or more troops. And a war that will continue well beyond the 2011 deadline mentioned in the West Point speech and be fought with intensified vigor and as far from Afghanistan as the Horn of Africa, the Arabian Peninsula and the Southeast Asian archipelago.

With the deployment of “senior members of Mr. Obama’s war council,” as the New York Times characterized them, on the Sunday morning television news program circuit on December 7, the scope and the length of the already biggest and longest war in the world became undeniable.

The National Security Adviser, former Marine general and NATO top military commander James Jones, told CNN’s State of the Union: “We have strategic interests in South Asia that should not be measured in terms of finite times. We’re going to be in the region for a long time.”

He added that the influx of more American and NATO troops “will allow us to move our forces back towards the border regions, where really the most important struggle that we’re going to have is to make sure that on the Pakistani side of the border, that we eliminate the safe havens.”

Pentagon chief Robert Gates said on NBC’s Meet the Press that although there would still be over 100,000 American troops in Afghanistan in 2011, only “some handful, or some small number, or whatever the conditions permit, will begin to withdraw at that time.”

The Pentagon’s Central Command chief, General David Petraeus, appeared on Fox News Sunday and acknowledged that there were no plans for a “rush to the exits” and that there “could be tens of thousands of American troops in Afghanistan for several years.” [2]

Little noted with the expansion of the war is that its range is widening as its intensity is deepening.

The top U.S. Air Force commander in Europe and Eurasia, General Roger A. Brady, was in Georgia on December 7 and in the neighboring South Caucasus nation of Azerbaijan on the 8th to discuss both nations’ increased troop deployments to Afghanistan and solidifying strategic military relations.

The president of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, has recently and once again threatened war against Nagorno Karabakh and by unavoidable implication Armenia, which is a member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization with Russia. The latter is obligated to provide Armenia military assistance under terms of the treaty in the event of it becoming the victim of aggression. With the American commander listening attentively, defense minister of Azerbaijan Colonel-General Safar Abiyev said that ongoing negotiations over Nagorno Karabakh “were not fruitful and such a situation forced Azerbaijan to use other ways to liberate its lands from the occupation.” [3]

On December 4 the president of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili, who fought a five-day war with Russia in August of last year, spoke of his offering the U.S. and NATO 1,000 more troops for the Afghan war and ominously added: "This is a unique chance for our soldiers to receive a real combat baptism.

"We do not need the army only for showing it in military parades....While our allies - in this case the United States and Europe - are concentrating on other issues [Afghanistan and Iraq], our enemy is getting active. The sooner the Afghan situation is resolved and sooner the war is over in Iraq, [the sooner] Georgia will be more protected." [4]

The enemy is Russia and the quid pro quo is U.S.-trained Georgian troops receiving a war zone "baptism" for a future conflict with their "numerous, dangerous and perfidious" adversary. The adjectives are also Saakashvili's, as are these words: "We need an army that knows how to fight. And participation in the operation in Afghanistan is a unique chance to study this and receive experience....Our final aim is to free the occupied territories [Abkhazia and South Ossetia] and unite and integrate Georgia." [5]

Other nations are obtaining combat experience in Afghanistan under NATO auspices for use in and on the borders of their homelands, including, like Azerbaijan and Georgia, nations bordering Russia - Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Mongolia, Norway, Poland and Ukraine - as well as future belligerents in conflicts elsewhere like Colombia, South Korea and the United Arab Emirates.

If the world's sole superpower and its NATO entourage can employ the military necessity at will to advance their interests abroad, their "vassals" will be emboldened to do so nearer home and will receive the arms and training to execute their designs.

Far from promoting peace, even an enforced peace, a Pax Americana, the war in Afghanistan and U.S. foreign policy in general are igniting power kegs around the world.

If it can be argued that Obama inherited the war in South Asia from George W. Bush and is intent on "finishing the job," his signing of the \$106 billion Iraq and Afghanistan War Supplemental Appropriations in July and the \$680 billion 2010 National Defense Authorization Act in late October belies any claim of objection to the enhanced use of the military in general and war in particular.

Next year's Pentagon budget is the largest, in both current and real U.S. dollars, since 1945, the last year of World War II. Although it contains \$130 billion for the war in Afghanistan and the occupation of Iraq that previously would have been appropriated as separate supplemental funds, immediately after the signing of the Defense Department budget the chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Michael Mullen, stated "he expected the Pentagon to ask Congress in the next few months for emergency financing to support the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan," [6] with the first request to be approximately \$50 billion.

With the announcement on December 1 of another Afghan troop surge, the Pentagon's requests for "emergency financing" can be expected to grow in both size and frequency. As with the claim of a troop withdrawal (or "drawdown") by 2011, the alleged ending of war supplements is a public relations ploy and sleight of hand trick employed to beguile a gullible public.

Even in a world that over the last decade has been afflicted with such logical and moral

affronts as humanitarian war and preemptive retaliation, awarding a peace prize to a war president represents a new nadir of cynical realpolitik and a flagrant endorsement of militarism, however well-disposed many may have been toward its most recent recipient.

Notes

- 1) <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?aid=15622&context=va>
- 2) New York Times, December 7, 2009
- 3) Azeri Press Agency, December 8, 2009
- 4) Civil Georgia, December 5, 2009
- 5) Rustavi2, December 4, 2009
- 6) Associated Press, November 1, 2009

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