

Obama's State of the Union Address: Militarism mixed with "Empty Liberal Rhetoric"

America targets China. Financial crimes go unpunished

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"If we have to use force, it is because we are America. We are the indispensable nation. We stand tall. We see further into the future." Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, 1998

"America remains the one indispensable nation in world affairs—and as long as I'm President, I intend to keep it that way." President Barack Obama, State of the Union message, 2012

President Barack Obama's 2012 State of the Union message is an object lesson in contemporary U.S. class politics. Obama came into office three years ago on a wave of progressive hopes and even euphoria, very understandable given the bitter history of racism in this country and the fact that he was taking the place of his widely despised predecessor, George W. Bush.

What the last three years as well as this speech have reaffirmed is that, regardless of the particular personality or characteristics of the person assuming the U.S. presidency, it is a job that comes with a specific job description: CEO of the imperialist ruling class.

For militarism and chauvinism, combined with empty liberal rhetoric, President Barack Obama's 2012 State of the Union message would be hard to beat. That it was lavished with uncritical praise by liberal Democratic Party units like MoveOn.org—an allegedly "anti-war" group—was just another reminder that 2012 is an election year.

The president began by hailing the U.S. war on Iraq, a war he supposedly opposed when he was candidate Obama in 2008. Back then he was perceived by millions as the "peace candidate," a critical element in his election victory.

"Last month, I went to Andrews Air Force Base and welcomed home some of our last troops to serve in Iraq," said Obama. "Together, we offered a final, proud salute to the colors under which more than a million of our fellow citizens fought—and several thousand gave their lives. We gather tonight knowing that this generation of heroes has made the United States safer and more respected around the world."

Really?

In fact, the war in Iraq largely destroyed a country that posed no threat whatsoever to the

U.S. Millions of Iraqis were killed, wounded or forced into exile and its society torn to shreds. Not only did thousands of U.S. soldiers die in a war fought on entirely false pretenses, hundreds of thousands more suffered severe physical and psychological wounds. The total cost of the war will exceed \$3 trillion—\$3,000,000,000,000.

Obama portrayed the Afghanistan war as another impending success: “The Taliban’s momentum has been broken. ...” Even his top advisers, however, view the war as a stalemate, one where the U.S.—despite more than three decades of inflicting devastation on Afghanistan—cannot achieve a military victory.

He lauded the NATO overthrow of the government in Libya and predicted a similar outcome in Syria. But, of course, not a hint of criticism of the absolute monarchies that rule Saudi Arabia and other oil-rich countries in the Gulf.

Continuing his triumphalist world tour: “Ending the Iraq war has allowed us to strike decisive blows against our enemies. From Pakistan to Yemen, the al-Qaeda operatives who remain are scrambling, knowing they can’t escape the reach of the United States of America.”

US targets China

“We’ve made it clear that America [sic] is a Pacific power.” The primary target of the U.S. military buildup in Asia is China. The anti-China campaign is economic as well: “We’ve brought trade cases against China at nearly twice the rate as the last administration. Tonight I’m announcing the creation of a Trade Enforcement Unit that will be charged with investigating unfair trade practices in countries like China.”

Near the end of his remarks, Obama celebrated the damage that “crippling sanctions” are having on the Iranian people, and once again threatened Iran with military attack, including the use of nuclear weapons: “America [sic] is determined to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon, and I will take no options off the table to achieve that goal.”

Regarding the only country in the Middle East that actually possesses nuclear weapons, the president declared: “Our iron-clad commitment to Israel’s security has meant the closest military cooperation between our two countries in history.” Not even the usual ritual mention of the Palestinians this time around.

In between his imperialistic international pronouncements, the president lamented about the difficulties of life for workers without jobs and students burdened by high-interest debt, and called on employers, universities and Congress to do better. He spent a good deal of time advocating a “fairer” tax system. But he projected no actual new programs.

When it came to helping Big Oil, it was a very different story: “Tonight I’m directing my administration to open up more than 75 percent of our potential offshore oil and gas resources.” In addition he expressed unambiguous support for “fracking,” the extremely hazardous extraction of gas from underground shale rock by blasting it apart using massive amounts of water and chemicals. Fracking has polluted water supplies, has sickened many people and recently has caused earthquakes in non-quake-prone areas.

While on the one hand calling for “comprehensive immigration reform” and something like the Dream Act, he boasted of stepping up the militarization of the border with Mexico:

“That’s why my administration has put more boots on the border than ever before.”

Financial crimes go unpunished

Following more lamenting about bad things done by Wall Street and the big banks that led to the financial/economic crisis, what seemed to excite loyal Democrats more than anything else was this announcement by Obama: “We will also establish a Financial Crimes Unit of highly trained investigators to crack down on large-scale fraud and protect people’s investments. Some financial firms violate major anti-fraud laws because there’s no real penalty for being a repeat offender.”

But these two sentences raise more than a few questions, starting with, “What took so long?” followed by, “What—there is no real penalty for financial firms that repeatedly violate major anti-fraud laws?”

President Obama took office as the biggest financial/economic crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s was breaking. Countless articles and whole books dissecting widespread fraud, particularly in the multi-trillion-dollar mortgage banking business, have been written. Virtually none of those who reaped immense profits from these fraudulent operations have gone to jail or even lost their fortunes. The famous exception is Bernie Madoff, who made the mistake of stealing mainly from the rich.

There is no particular reason to believe that three years later, the “Financial Crimes Unit” is anything but another election ploy. Under capitalism, all are not equal before the law. The “justice system” is administered by the rich against the rest.

Echoing the words of Madeleine Albright, President Clinton’s war-mongering secretary of state from 1997 to 2001, Obama thundered: “America remains the one indispensable nation in world affairs—and as long as I’m President, I intend to keep it that way.” The implication, of course, is that all other countries and nations in the world are ... dispensable.

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