

Obama's "War on Terror"

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Global Research, February 10, 2009

10 February 2009

Theme: [Terrorism](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

The language is softened and deceptive. The strategy and tactics are not. The "war on terror" continues. Promised change is talk, not policy. Just look at Obama's "war cabinet," discussed in an earlier article. It assures:

- the "strongest military on the planet" by outspending all other countries combined;
- continued foreign wars;
- possible new ones in prospect; on February 7, vice-president Joe Biden outlined continuity of the Bush administration's policy toward Iran, including "preventive" wars under the National Security Strategy; demands also that Iran abandon its legal nuclear program meaning nothing going forward will change;
- permanent occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan is planned;
- a reinvented "Cold War" with Russia; perhaps also with China; "draw(ing) a new 'iron curtain' (between these) formidable Eurasian powers" to prevent their alliance from challenging America, according to F. William Engdahl;
- an "absolute" commitment "to eliminating the threat of terrorism (with) the full force of our power;"
- inciting instability for imperial gain, especially in resource-rich parts of the world;
- militarizing America; keeping Bush administration police state laws in force; dealing with a deepening economic crisis by preparing for hard line crackdowns should popular unrest arise; and
- readying for another major false flag attack?

Three times in his final week in office, George Bush warned: "Our enemies are patient and determined to strike again. There's still an enemy out there that would like to inflict damage on America - Americans. And that'll be the major threat. The most important job (for) the next president is....to protect the American people from another attack."

Late last year, similar talk came from figures like then Senator Joe Biden. In October, he told a Seattle audience that "We're gonna have an international crisis, a generated crisis, to test" Obama's mettle. He called it a "guarantee (and a) promise" and assured "tough (and) unpopular" decisions would follow.

Others like Colin Powell, Madeline Albright, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and Joe Lieberman gave

similar warnings. The UK Defence Ministry said Britain is teeming with extremists who'll attempt another London "spectacular," perhaps at airports, Parliament, Whitehall or Buckingham palace. Press reports circulated with London's Al-Quds Al-Arabi suggesting a forthcoming attack that will "change the face of world politics and economics." The London Times said Obama got "ominous advice from leaders on both sides of the Atlantic to brace himself for an early assault from terrorists."

Other media reports and from officials believe a new attack will rally popular support behind the president, but Ron Paul warned earlier that America "is determined to have martial law (to get people) fearful enough that they will accept the man on the white horse." It's an old tactic as far back as Plato. Reflecting on terrorism, false flag or real, he said: "This and no other is the root from which a tyrant springs; when he first appears (as) a protector."

James Madison believed "If Tyranny and Oppression come to this land, it will be in the guise of fighting a foreign enemy," and according to Hitler: "Terrorism is the best political weapon for nothing drives people harder than a fear of sudden death." Stalin added: "The easiest way to gain control of a population is to carry out acts of terror. (People) will clamor for such laws if their personal security is threatened."

American history is replete with them:

- criminalizing dissent under the 1798 Alien and Sedition Acts;
- suspending habeas and civil liberties during the Civil War;
- the Espionage (and) Sedition Acts during WW I;
- numerous Red scares, before and after WW I; and
- a history of repression against dissent, political opposition, subversion, people of color, the poor and disadvantaged, and anything called "un-American."

Pre-WW II repression was the most sustained legislative assault on civil liberties in the nation's history:

- the 1938 Foreign Agents Registration Act imprisoning anyone so-designated who was unregistered with the Secretary of State;
- enforcement of the 1917 Espionage Act;
- the 1934 - 1937 and 1938 House Un-American Activities Committees; the former against fascist subversion; the latter targeting suspected communists; then a standing or permanent committee from 1945 - 1975, again against communists;
- the 1939 Hatch Act excluding suspected communists from government jobs and restricting government employee freedoms;
- the 1940 Smith Act against suspected communists; prohibiting the advocacy of sedition; and requiring non-citizen adults to register with the government within four months or be prosecuted; and
- the 1940 Nationality Act that stripped naturalized immigrants of their citizenship for

espousing “radical” views.

Post-Pearl Harbor, tens of thousands of Japanese-Americans (between 110,000 - 120,000) were interned plus smaller numbers of Germans and Italians suspected of having Axis sympathies. Conscientious objectors were also targeted and imprisoned. An Office of Censorship was established. Dissent was stifled. Sedition trials were held. So were others for spying, suspected treason, anyone accused of un-American sympathies, and many convictions, denaturalizations, and/or deportations resulted.

Post-WW II brought McCarthyism; civil liberties struggles; internal spying; COINTELPRO against the American Indian Movement, Black Panthers, and other targeted organizations. Then Ronald Reagan’s war on international terrorism to George Bush’s police state version - now continued under Barack Obama.

Also, “Remember the Maine,” Pearl Harbor I, Gulf of Tonkin, Pearl Harbor II, and the wars in each case that followed.

Prospective Economic and Military Dangers

In his latest article, “The Looming Crisis at the Pentagon,” Chalmers Johnson explains “How Taxpayers Finance Fantasy Wars.” He cites daily headlines about US industries (like autos) losing out to emerging economies that have outpaced us “in innovative design, price, quality, service, and fuel economy, among other things.”

Less known is a crisis within “the military-industrial complex (with) roots in (long-standing) corrupt and deceitful practices (within the Pentagon, defense establishment, and) Congressional opportunists and criminals” looking to cash in on business for their districts and further their own self-interest. No promised change is forthcoming. Obama assures business as usual, perhaps more so than ever.

He wants to “invest in a 21st century military,” raise spending to higher levels, increase the army by 65,000 and marines by 27,000, double the US occupation force in Afghanistan, project greater naval strength, expand the offensive national missile defense by spending tens of billions more for it, maintain absolute supremacy in space, and militarize America for greater control at home.

“Given our economic crisis, the estimated trillion (or more) dollars we spend each year on the military and its weaponry is simply unsustainable....We face a double crisis at the Pentagon: we can no longer afford the pretense of being the Earth’s sole superpower (nor) a system (being enriched) off inferior, poorly designed (and unneeded) weapons.” Yet this “ludicrously wasteful spending....has gone on for decades....for fantasy wars that will only be fought in the battlescapes and war-gaming imaginations of Defense Department planners.”

Given today’s global economic crisis, this spending is vitally needed domestically, but don’t expect reform from the Pentagon or its related interests. All actors in this game are part of a “criminal intent to turn on the spigot of taxpayer money (just like Wall Street, then) jam it so it cannot be turned off.”

Johnson is blunt as he always is saying:

“Until we decide (or are forced) to dismantle our empire, sell off most of our (hundreds of) military bases (globally), and bring our military expenditures into line with those of the rest of the world, we are destined to go bankrupt in the name of national defense (if Wall Street doesn’t do it sooner). As of this moment, we are well on our way,” and no one in the Obama administration will to stop it.

Ending Torture As Official Administration Policy

Under George Bush, torture became policy through numerous “findings,” Military and Executive Orders, memoranda, and memos like the infamous March 14, 2003 “Torture Memo,” written by John Yoo, Alberto Gonzales, Jay Bybee and David Addington. It bypassed existing domestic and international laws to let interrogators use harsh measures amounting to torture. It said legal prohibitions don’t apply when dealing with Al Queda because of presidential authorization during wartime. It “legalized” everything in the “war on terror” and sanctioned supreme presidential power.

John Yoo put it this way: Inflicting “intense pain or suffering” is permissible, short of what would cause “serious physical injury so severe that death, organ failure, (loss of significant body functions), or permanent damage” may result. As we know, even those standards were violated, including use of psychological measures harsh enough to turn human beings into mush.

On January 22, Obama signed a series of Executive Orders (nominally) ordering Guantanamo’s prison closed, ignoring all the others, reviewing military trials of terror suspects, and banning the use of torture. The same day, the Center for Constitutional Rights said the following:

“We welcome” this important decision. “President Obama (took a first) step in restoring the rule of law.” Much more, however, must be done, and vague language must be clarified.

“The order to close Guantanamo....provides little detail. The government has to charge the rest of the detainees in federal criminal court (not military tribunals). There can be no third way, no new schemes.”

Secret CIA black sites must be closed. If not, Obama’s order “is more symbolic than a true reversal.” Enforcing Army Field Manual No. 27-10’s provisions is crucial. We “caution that (Obama’s) order may leave an escape hatch if the CIA” intends to continue certain practices. Only domestic and international laws must apply.

“Today’s orders are filled with promise” but follow-through accountability is crucial, and individual violators must be prosecuted as “the only way to deter future lawbreakers.” Domestic and international laws unequivocally ban torture of all kinds, for any purpose, with no exceptions under any conditions. By that standard, Obama’s EOs fall way short. As such, they’re woefully inadequate and may be little more than lip service deception to hide business as usual plans going forward.

The language refers to....”individual(s) in the custody or under the effective control of an officer, employee, or other agent of the United States Government, or detained within a facility owned, operated or controlled by a department or agency of the United States, in an armed conflict....”

It suggests that torture is permissible in non-conflict areas and everywhere by US proxies

under CIA, Pentagon, or other US supervision.

On February 1, the Los Angeles Times headlined: "Obama preserves renditions as counter-terrorism tool."

Whatever's planned, Obama's EOs still authorize the CIA "to carry out what are known as renditions, secret abductions and transfers of prisoners to countries that cooperate with the United States." Even worse, "Current and former US intelligence officials said that the rendition program might....play an expanded role" because it's "the main remaining mechanism....for taking suspected terrorists off the street....the Obama administration appears to have determined that the rendition program was one (tool) it could not afford to discard."

Another provision lets the CIA detain and interrogate suspects so long as they're not held long-term. But no definition of short or long-term is given, just the imprecise designation "transitory."

Human Rights Watch (HRW) carries water for America by failing in its mandate "to protect the human rights of people around the world (by) standing with victims and activists....upholding political freedom (and) bring(ing) offenders to justice." Its Washington advocacy director, Tom Malinowski, supports Obama by saying: "Under limited circumstances, there is a legitimate place" for renditions even though activists globally denounce it and persons subjected to it are tortured.

CIA's Long History of Torture

For over half a century, the CIA conducted experiments on various types of torture, including very harsh mind control measures. In his book, "A Question of Torture: CIA Interrogation, from the Cold War to the War on Terror," Alfred McCoy explained how techniques were developed, codified in manuals, used extensively in Southeast Asia, Central America, and now virtually anywhere, including in Iraq, Afghanistan and at secret US black sites globally.

McCoy refers to an offshore mini-gulag of information extraction in pursuit of the "war on terror." CIA and Pentagon sites exist globally with no oversight or legal compliance. Out of sight, they're a malignant cancer - on US bases, torture ships, and in prisons of torture-friendly allies. Nothing there is banned, including physical viciousness and psychologically crippling mind control methods that turn human beings into mush.

On February 5, The New York Times reported that head of CIA-designee Leon Panetta told a Senate confirmation hearing panel that in cases where interrogators can't extract vital information, he'd recommend methods excluded by the new rules. "If we had a ticking bomb situation (the old ploy that could apply to anyone for any reason), and obviously, whatever was being used I felt was not sufficient, I would not hesitate to go to the president....and request whatever additional authority I would need."

Panetta also told senators that CIA employees won't face prosecution and that he'll continue practicing rendition, but not to countries "that violate our human values" - more weasel words meaning nothing beyond rhetoric to affirm the same Bush administration practices going forward.

On January 11, ABC This Week's host George Stephanopolos asked Obama:

“Will you appoint a Special Prosecutor....to independently investigate the gravest crimes of the Bush administration, including torture and warrantless wiretapping?”

Obama responded:

“....I don’t believe that anybody is above the law. On the other hand, I also have a belief that we need to look forward as opposed to looking backward.” By that standard, no prosecutions will occur, and all lawless acts are permissible. Obama added:

“....part of my job is to make sure that (at CIA), you’ve got extraordinarily talented people who are working very hard to keep Americans safe. I don’t want them to suddenly feel like they’ve got to spend all their time looking over their shoulders and lawyering up....when it comes to national security, we have to focus on getting things right in the future (not looking at what we got wrong in the past.”

In his 2006 book “Nemesis: The Last Days of the American Republic,” Chalmers Johnson called the CIA “The President’s Private Army,” much like Rome’s praetorian guard. Its budget is black, its activities extrajudicial, and in all respects it’s “the personal, secret, unaccountable army of the president” through which the most mischievous, illegal operations are conducted, including ousting democratically elected governments, assassinating foreign leaders, propping up friendly tyrants, and renditioning and torturing state enemies in global black sites. Its power is unchecked and a threat to the nation.

Yet, Obama wants it strengthened, not curbed, given the possibility of martial law in the event of a national emergency. As Peter Dale Scott explained in his January 8 Global Research.ca article titled “Martial Law, the Financial Bailout, and War:”

“The US military has been training troops and police in ‘civil disturbance planning’ for the last three decades. The master plan, Department of Defense Civil Disturbance Plan 55-2, or ‘Operation Garden Plot,’ was developed in 1968 in response to the major protests and disturbances of the 1960s.”

Much more now is in place under Army Regulation 500-3 and other hard line provisions to assure “the execution of mission-essential functions without unacceptable interruption during a national security or domestic emergency.” The Pentagon, CIA, and other intelligence branches along with state and local authorities are networked to implement policies nationally.

Obama is doing more as well. His Justice Department is defending Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, John Ashcroft, John Yoo, and others in a case brought by torture victim Jose Padilla for his grievous treatment and violations of his constitutional rights. Defense attorney requests for dismissing all charges are clear evidence of where Obama stands on the law, his willingness to let Bush administration officials go unpunished, and likelihood he’ll continue the same practices going forward.

More indications emerged as well. After Britain’s High Court ruled that evidence of a UK resident’s Guantanamo rendition and torture stay secret (because the Bush administration threatened to halt intelligence sharing), the Obama administration told the BBC:

“The United States thanks the UK government for its continued commitment to protect sensitive national security information and preserve the long-standing intelligence sharing relationship that enables both countries to protect their citizens.”

In response, the ACLU's executive director, Anthony Romero, told the press:

"Hope is flickering. The Obama administration's position is not change. It is more of the same. This represents a complete turn-around and undermining of the restoration of the rule of law. The new administration shouldn't be complicit in hiding the abuses of its predecessors." The ACLU asked Hillary Clinton to "reject the Bush administration's policy of using false claims of national security to avoid judicial review of controversial programs" amounting to high crimes and misdemeanors.

On February 9, ABC News reported that "the Obama administration today announced that it would keep the same position as the Bush administration in the lawsuit Mohamed et al v. Jeppesen Dataplan, Inc." DOJ attorney Douglas Letter argued before the Ninth US Circuit Court of Appeals that charges should be dismissed because state secrets and national security are involved.

Five extraordinary rendition victims are involved - Binyam Mohamed, Abou Elkassim Britel, Ahmed Agiza, Bisher Al-Rawi, and Mohamed Farag Ahmad Bashmilah. They sued Boeing's Jeppesen Dataplan subsidiary for flying them to offshore secret CIA black sites where they were tortured.

ACLU attorney Ben Wizner responded in shock and disappointment "that the (Obama) Justice Department (chose) to continue the Bush administration's practice of dodging judicial scrutiny of extraordinary rendition and torture." Instead of change, it intends "to stay the course. Now we must hope that the court will assert its independence by rejecting the government's false claims of state secrets and allowing the victims of torture and rendition their day in court. Our clients did not ask to be abducted, chained to the floor of planes, dressed in diapers and taken to a foreign country. If you affirm (the District Court's dismissal), plaintiffs will forever be" denied justice.

Witch-Hunt Prosecutions Continuing under Obama

On June 23, 2006 in Miami, Florida, the FBI arrested and charged seven men (called the Liberty City Seven for the impoverished Miami neighborhood where they lived) with four counts of conspiracy to provide material support to a foreign terrorist organization, Al Qaeda, in a plot to blow up Chicago's Sears Tower, Miami's FBI federal building, and possible other government sites in the city.

In US v. Batiste, et al, charges were made against:

- Narseal Batiste, the claimed ringleader;
- Patrick Abraham;
- Stanley Grant Phanor;
- Naaudimar Herrera;
- Burson Augustin;
- Lyglenson Lemorin; and
- Rotschild Augustine.

No crime was committed, and no firearms, explosives, or other incriminating evidence was found. Yet Attorney General Alberto Gonzales claimed “these men were prepared to wage a full ground war against the US....as dangerous as Al Queda,” and when the indictments came down he hailed them as “yet another important victory in the war on terrorism.”

The men belonged to Miami’s Moorish Science Temple that combines Christian, Jewish, and Islamic teachings given their common roots. Its leader is Narseal Batiste who apparently drew attention by expressing opposition to Bush administration practices no different from civil libertarians and those in the anti-war movement.

As usual in these cases, two paid informants were DOJ’s key witnesses. Both had shady pasts and got \$130,000 for their services. The charges were entirely bogus, no more than a case of entrapment to put a ghetto face on terrorism as some in the neighborhood believed. FBI Deputy Director John Pistole even acknowledged that the alleged plot was “more aspirational than operational,” or, in other words, manufactured by the Bush administration for political advantage. Usually they target Muslims. This time, poor black men were arrested. Five are American citizens, one a Haitian resident, and the other a Haitian immigrant.

Twice the case went to trial, each time ending in mistrials with one defendant, Lyglenson Lemorin, acquitted, tried only once, then threatened with deportation to Haiti.

Nonetheless, Obama’s DOJ is picking up where Bush’s left off, and on January 26, The New York Times reported that “prosecutors (will) try for a third time (this week) to win convictions” after two failed efforts, but not without challenges according to legal analysts.

“The fear card was what they were playing,” said Miami University law professor Bruce Winick. “If it didn’t work (before), I think it’s less likely (now) because the fear of terrorism is a little more distant in our minds.”

Yet one week after the second mistrial, prosecutor Richard Gregorie said another trial was necessary to “safeguard the community,” meaning DOJ was embarrassed enough to try again. Law professor Jonathan Turley calls it “not a matter of the law of terrorism but the law of averages” hoping a new jury will buy what two previous ones rejected.

Winick said no new evidence is expected, and this time will likely fail like the others. “It’s a case where government informant(s) got a bunch of guys together” to concoct a plot for prosecutors. “It’s a B movie really, more than a criminal case,” yet Obama’s DOJ will pursue it - a disturbing sign that business as usual is planned, more witch-hunt cases will follow, and “war on terror” efforts will persist for another four years. It’s not change to believe in, in fact, none at all at a time the need is greater than ever.

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