

Obama's Terror Summit: An Exercise in Hypocrisy, Falsification and Self-delusion

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President Barack Obama, on both Wednesday and Thursday, addressed sessions of a summit on “countering violent extremism” convened in Washington and attended by representatives of 65 countries.

While repeatedly insisting on the need to talk “squarely and honestly” about “root causes” of terrorism, the American president’s remarks amounted to a string of barely coherent banalities—including quotations from a Valentine’s Day card from a 12-year-old—all aimed at covering up the incontrovertible causal connection between terrorism and the chain of catastrophes unleashed by US wars of aggression over the past decade.

The three-day talk shop involved no decisions, commitments or changes in policy. Threadbare rhetoric about religious inclusion was joined with laughable tips on how to recognize a young person being swung to “radical extremism” that seemed to have been cribbed from a Drug Enforcement Administration brochure on warning signs that your child may be using marijuana.

To the extent that the gathering had a discernible purpose, it was to bolster propaganda justifications for continuing war abroad and police state measures at home.

Obama vowed that the US would remain “unwavering in our fight against terrorist organizations,” outlining plans to continue and expand US military operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Nigeria and beyond.

He argued that the crusade against “violent extremism” was to be waged not just against “terrorists who are killing innocent people,” but also at the “ideologies, the infrastructure of extremists—the propagandists, recruiters, the funders who radicalize and recruit or incite people to violence,” a category so broad and ill-defined as to potentially include virtually anyone who condemns the supposedly “moderate” policies of US imperialism.

The contradictions underlying the propaganda exercise were beyond glaring. Obama proclaimed in his speech that the struggle against terrorism required “more democracy” and “security forces and police that respect human rights and treat people with dignity.” Yet Washington counts as its closest allies in this struggle the tyrannical monarchy in Saudi Arabia and the military-controlled regime that rules Egypt, infamous for their repression, beheadings and mass killings.

Obama absurdly attempted to present terrorism as the product of “twisted ideologies” of groups like Al Qaeda and ISIS along with mistaken “ideas,” “notions,” and “strains of thought” among broader sections of the Muslim world.

“The notion that the West is at war with Islam is an ugly lie,” Obama insisted in his remarks. Indeed, Washington is an equal opportunity aggressor. It is preparing even bigger wars against non-Muslims from Eastern Europe to East Asia.

This “notion” may have arisen from the fact that the populations residing in countries containing some of the world’s greatest energy reserves as well as pipeline routes for their extraction happen to be majority Muslim, and therefore have borne the tragic brunt of Washington’s drive to militarily assert hegemony over these lands.

The struggle against terrorism, Obama stated, requires confronting the fact that too many people

“buy into the notion that the Muslim world has suffered historical grievances—sometimes that’s accurate—... buy into the the belief that so many of the ills in the Middle East flow from a history of colonialism or conspiracy ...”

Historical grievances? Who does Obama think he’s kidding? Millions throughout the Arab world do not have to harken back to French and British colonialists in pith helmets when it comes to grievances. In recent decades, US imperialism has laid waste to one predominantly Muslim country after another.

It thrust Afghanistan into never-ending carnage that has killed millions since the US-sponsored mujahideen war of the 1980s. In Iraq, it carried out an illegal war of aggression that claimed over a million lives. In Libya it backed a war for regime change that left the society in ruins and ravaged by armed conflict between rival militias. And in Syria, it has stoked a civil war that has killed nearly 200,000 and turned millions into refugees.

In Iraq, Libya and Syria, Washington has carried out interventions to overthrow secular Arab regimes, acting as the catalyst for the growth of Islamist forces like Al Qaeda and ISIS. In the last two countries, it actually armed and supported these elements, using them as proxy forces.

If the top officials in the Bush and Obama administration had been paid agents of Osama bin Laden, they could not have done a better job at promoting the rise of those ostensibly targeted by the US-sponsored summit against “violent extremism.”

All of the hypocrisy, deceit and self-delusion on display at this week’s summit could not mask the fact that the policies pursued by Washington over more than a decade have resulted in a debacle.

In the wake of the Soviet Union’s dissolution, US imperialism embarked on a series of escalating interventions based on the conception that it could use its military superiority to offset its economic decline. The end result has been havoc and destruction.

This extends now to Ukraine which has been plunged into a civil war that has torn the country in two as its economy implodes and its army disintegrates, and which threatens to draw the US and nuclear-armed Russia into military confrontation. Washington’s fostering of a fascist-led coup to effect regime change in Kiev, portrayed as a master stroke a year ago, has only produced another disaster.

In any functioning democracy, there would be consequences for global catastrophes on the order of those produced by the last two US administrations. They would not only be the subject of public debate and congressional hearings, but the cause of forced resignations and criminal prosecutions.

In the US, there is nothing. There is no mechanism for any criticism of a government that only continues lying to the public and lying to itself. No one takes responsibility, and no one is held accountable.

With next year's presidential campaign taking shape, the front-runners are Republican Jeb Bush, whose brother oversaw the criminal war in Iraq, and Democrat Hillary Clinton, who as secretary of state hailed the savage lynch-mob murder of Libya's Muammar Gaddafi by an Islamist militia, declaring amid gales of laughter, "We came, we saw, he died." There could be no clearer measure of the sclerotic character of the US political system.

Responsibility extends beyond the White House, Congress and the two major parties to the media, whose "terrorism experts" continuously churn out lies and drivel justifying US militarism, and to academia, which remains either directly complicit or silent.

That every section of the US ruling establishment is deeply implicated in these crimes and catastrophes is symptomatic of profound economic, social and political crises gripping a capitalist system that is fully subordinated to the enrichment of a tiny minority engaged in financial parasitism at the expense of working people, the vast majority of the population.

With no progressive solution to these crises, the American ruling class is driven toward even more bloody military adventures, posing the increasing threat of the ultimate act of "violent extremism," a Third World War.

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