

President Obama's Race for the "Imperial Legacy": A World of Chaos and Disintegration

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This incisive analysis of Obama's legacy by award winning author prof. James Petras was first published by Global Research in April 2016

Introduction

President Obama is racing forward to establish his imperial legacy throughout Russia, Asia and Latin America.

In the last two years he has accelerated the buildup of his military nuclear arsenal on the frontiers of Russia. The Pentagon has designed a high tech anti-missile system to undermine Russian defenses.

In Latin America, Obama has shed his shallow pretense of tolerating the center—left electoral regimes. Instead he is has joined with rabid authoritarian neo-liberals in Argentina; met with the judges and politicians engineering the overthrow of the current Brazilian government; and encouraged the emerging far-rightwing regimes in Peru under Keiko Fujimori and Colombia under President Santos.



In Asia, Obama has clearly escalated a military build-up threatening China's principle waterways in the South China Sea. Obama encouraged aggressive and violent separatist groupings in Hong Kong, Tibet, Xinjian and Taiwan. Obama invites Beijing billionaires to relocate a trillion dollars in assets to the 'laundry machines' of North America, Europe and Asia. Meanwhile he has actively blocked China's long-planned commercial 'silk route' across Myanmar and west Asia.

Distinguished author Professor James Petras (right)

In the Middle East, President Obama joined with Saudi Arabia as Riyadh escalated its brutal war and blockade in Yemen. He directed Kenya and other African predator states to attack Somalia. He has continued to back mercenary armies invading Syria while collaborating

with the Turkish dictator, Erdogan, as Turkish troops bomb Kurdish, Syrian and Iraqi fighters who are engaged on the front lines against Islamist terrorism.

President Obama and his minions have consistently groveled before the Jewish State and its US Fifth Column, massively increasing US 'tribute' to Tel Aviv. Meanwhile, Israel continues to seize thousands of acres of Palestinian land murdering and arresting thousands of Palestinians, from young children to aged grandparents.

The Obama regime is desperate to overcome the consequences of his political, military and economic failures of the past six years and establish the US as the uncontested global economic and military power.

At this stage, Obama's supreme goal is to leave an enduring legacy, where he will have: (1) surrounded and weakened Russia and China; (2) re-converted Latin America into an authoritarian free-trade backyard for US plunder; (3) turned the Middle East and North Africa into a bloody playpen for Arab and Jewish dictators bent on brutalizing whole nations and turning millions into refugees to flood Europe and elsewhere.

Once this 'legacy' is established, our '*Historic Black President*' can boast that he has dragged our '*great nation*' into more wars for longer periods of time, costing more diverse human lives and creating more desperate refugees than any previous US President, all the while polarizing and impoverishing the great mass of working Americans. He will, indeed, set a 'high bar' for his incumbent replacement, Madame Hilary Clinton to leap over and even expand.

To examine the promise of an Obama legacy and avoid premature judgements, it is best to briefly recall the failures of his first 6 years and reflect on his current inspired quest for a 'place in history'.

Fear, Loathing and Retreat

Obama's shameless bailout of Wall Street contrasted sharply with the desires and sentiments of the vast majority of Americans who had elected him. This was a historic moment of great fear and loathing where scores of millions of Americans demanded the federal government reign in the financial criminals, stop the downward spiral of household bankruptcies and home foreclosures and recovery America's working economy. After a brief honeymoon following his 'historic election', the 'historic' President Obama turned his back on the wishes of the people and transferred trillions of public money to 'bailout' the banks and financial centers on Wall Street.

Not satisfied with betraying the American workers and the beleaguered middle class, Obama reneged on his campaign promises to end the war(s) in the Middle East by increasing the US troop presence and expanding his drone-assassination warfare against Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, Somalia and Syria.

US troops re-invaded Afghanistan, fought and retreated in defeat. The Taliban advanced. The US expanded its training of the puppet Iraqi army, which collapsed on its first encounters with the Islamic State. Washington retreated again. Regime change in Libya, Egypt and Somalia created predator-mercenary states without any semblance of US control and dominance.

Obama had become both a master of military defeats and financial swindles.

In the Western Hemisphere, a continent of independent Latin American governments had emerged to challenge US supremacy. The '*Historic President*' Obama was dismissed as a clueless hack of the US Empire who lacked any rapport with governments south of the Panama Canal. While trade and investment flourished between Latin America and Asia; Washington fell behind. Regional political and economic agreements expanded, but Obama was left without allies.

Obama's clumsy attempts at US-backed 'regime change' were defeated in Venezuela and elsewhere. Only the small, corrupt narco-state of Honduras fell into Obama's orbit with the Hillary Clinton-engineered overthrow of its elected populist-nationalist president.

China and Russia expanded and flourished as commodities boomed, wealth expanded and demand for Chinese manufacturers exploded.

By 2013 Obama had no legacy.

The Recovery: Obama's Lost Legacy

Obama began the road to establishing his 'legacy' with the US-financed coup in Ukraine, spearheaded by the first bona fide Nazi militia since WWII. After celebrating the violent 'regime change' against Ukraine's elected government, Obama's new oligarch-puppet regime and its ethno-nationalist army have been a disaster, losing control of the industrialized Donbas region to ethnic Russian rebels and completely losing the strategic Crimea when the population overwhelmingly voted to re-join Russia after 50 years. Meanwhile, the oligarch-'president' Poroshenko and his fellow puppets have pilfered several billion dollars in 'aid' from the EU...all in pursuit of the Obama legacy'.

Obama then slapped devastating economic sanctions against Russia for its role in the Crimean referendum and its support for the millions of Russian speakers in Donbas, and in the process forced the European Union to make major trade sacrifices. For their role in creating a real "American legacy" for Mr. Obama, the Germans, French and the other twenty-eight countries have sacrificed billions of Euros in trade and investments – alienating large sectors of their own agricultural and manufacturing economy.

The Obama regime placed nuclear weapons on the Polish border with Russia, pointed at the Russian heartland. Estonians, Lithuanians and Latvians joined Obama's military exercises stationing US ships and attack aircraft in the Baltic Sea threatening Russia's security.

Obama's Legacy in Latin America

The Obama regime intensified its efforts to re-establish supremacy with the demise of the center-left regimes following elections in late 2013 to the present.

Obama's '*legacy*' in Latin America is based on the return to power of neo-liberal elites in the region. Their successful elections were the result of several factors, including: (1) the rise of rightwing economic power in Latin America; (2) the decay and corruption of political power within the Left; 3) incapacity of the Left to develop its own independent mass media to challenge the media monopoly of the right; and (4) the failure of center-left regimes to diversify their economy and develop growth outside the boundaries defined by the dominant capitalist sectors.

The Obama regime worked closely with the political-business elite, organizing the political campaigns and controlling key economic policies even during the center-Left governments. The Left regimes had financed, subsidized and rewarded right-wing business interests in agro-mineral industries, banking, and the media as well as in manufacturing and imports.

As long as worldwide demand for primary materials was strong, the Center-Left governments had plenty of room to adjust their social spending for workers while accommodating business interests. When demand and prices fell, budget deficits forced the Center-Left to cut back on social spending for the masses as well as subsidies for the business elite. In response, the business sector organized a full-scale attack on the government – in defense of elite power. The Center-Left failed to counter the growing power and position of their business elite adversaries.

The business elite launched a full-scale propaganda war via its captive mass media – focusing on real or imagined corruption scandals discrediting Center-Left politicians. The Left lacked its own effective mass media to answer the Right's accusations, having failed to democratize the corporate media monopolies.

The Center-Left parties adopted the elite's technique of financing political campaigns – namely, through bribes, contract concessions, patronage other deal making with billionaire private and state contractors. The center-Left imagined it could compete with the free-market rightwing in financing campaigns and candidates via swindlers – and not through class struggle. This was a game they could never master.

The Right, however, mobilized their allies within police, judicial and public institutions to prosecute and disqualify the Center-Left for committing the same crimes the Right had evaded.

The Center-Left did not mobilize the workers and employees to establish even minimal controls over the elite and assume some managerial power. They thought they could compete with the Right on its own terms, through shady business and chicanery.

The Center-Left relied on financing its administration and policies through the commodity boom in demand for its natural resources – overlooking the fundamental instability and volatility of the global commodity market. While the Right openly condemned the 'weakness of the Center-Left' – in private, it pursued policies even more dependent on overseas speculators and narrow elites.

In Argentina, as the economy declined, the leadership of the rightwing, led by Mauricio Marci, launched a successful presidential campaign involving the mass media, banks, middle class voters and agro-mining elites. Immediately upon taking power, the Macri regime cut social services for workers and the lower middle class, slashing their living standards and lay off thousands of government employees. Obama saw Macri as his kind of legacy savior and viewed Argentina as the new center of US power in Latin America – with plans for more regime change in Brazil, Venezuela and throughout the region.

In Brazil, the Center-Left Workers' Party (PT) faced a massive attack on its power base by the extreme rightwing parties. Corruption scandals rocked the entire spectrum of the political class, but the PT was most heavily implicated by massive fraud in Brazil's huge national oil company, Petrobras. The PT regime's troubles intensified as the country entered a recession with the drop in demand for its agro-mining exports. Growing fiscal deficits

compounded the regime's problems. The Brazilian hard Right mobilized its entire apparatus of elite power – the courts, judges, police and intelligence agencies – in a bid to overthrow the PT government and impose an authoritarian neo-liberal regime seizing all financial, business and productive assets

The Center-Left had never been very left, if at all. Under Presidents Lula and Rousseff (2003-2016), the powerful mining and agricultural elites flourished; banking, investment and multi-national enterprises prospered. The Center-Left made some paternalistic concessions to the lowest income classes, and increased wages for labor and farm workers. But the PT relegated labor to the background while it signed business agreements and granted tax concessions to capital. It failed to engage Brazilian workers in class struggle.

The Right was never engaged in any struggle with a genuine leftist government pressing business for structural changes. Nevertheless, the Right sought to eliminate even the most superficial reforms. It would accept nothing short of total control, including: the privatization of the major national oil company, the reduction of wages, pensions and transport subsidies and a slashing of social programs. The Brazilian Rightwing coup – a fake impeachment organized by indicted crooks – is designed to vastly re-concentrate wealth, and re-establish the power of business, while plunging millions into poverty and repressing the principal organized mass movements. In Brazil, the elite-controlled media, courts and politicians act as judge, jury and jailers – against a center-left regime which had never taken control over the major institutions of elite power.

Obama and the Axis of his Legacy

Political rightists join police to control the multitudes and seize power, re-establishing deep ties among Brazil, Washington and Argentina. They will then move toward the neo-liberal re-conquest of all Latin America. Against this new wave, it must be understood that Obama's Latin American legacy is too recent, too hasty and too disjointed – the new Right exhibits the same or even worse features of the recently deceased Left.

Argentina's Marci borrows \$15 billion at 8% interest, when the economy is fracturing, employment is collapsing, exports and worldwide demand is declining. At the same time, President Mauricio Marci's cabinet is plagued by major financial scandals '*a la Panama Papers*'. The entire political party-trade union-employed working class is profoundly disenchanted with Marci's minority rule.

Argentina may not turn out to be *Obama's enduring Latin Legacy*: While Macri may open the door for a brief Washington take-over, the results will be catastrophic and the future, given Argentina's recent history of popular street uprisings, is uncertain.

Likewise in Brazil, the impeachment/coup will result in new and more numerous investigations with trials of post-impeachment politicians and a deepening economic crisis. Brazil's Vice-President, who turned against Rouseff, now faces corruption charges, as do his supporters. The prolonged confrontation precludes any basic continuity. The rightwing regime's policy of slashing wages, pensions and poverty 'baskets' will detonate large-scale confrontations with the polarized population. Obama's '*legacy*' will be a brief episode – celebrating the ouster of the Workers' Party President followed by a long period of instability and disorder.

Rightist regimes in Venezuela, Colombia and Peru will be part of Obama's '*legacy*' but to

what lasting end?

The Venezuelan rightwing congress – dubbed *the MUD* – seeks to overthrow the elected president. It demands the release of several right-wing assassins from prison, the privatization of the oil industry, and a deep cut in social programs (health and education). They would reduce employees' wages and eliminate food subsidies. *The MUD* has no competent plan or capacity to grow the oil economy and overcome chronic food shortages. The MUD would merely replace the Left's subsidized economy with massive price increases for basic commodities – reducing domestic consumption to a fraction of its current level. In other words, the right-wing offensive may defeat the *Chavista* left but it will not stabilize Venezuela or develop a viable neo-liberal alternative. Any new rightwing regime will deteriorate rapidly and the chronic problem of criminal violence will exceed the current levels. The alliance between Washington and Venezuela's far right will hardly support Obama's claim to a *historic legacy*. More likely, it will serve as another example of a failed right wing state unable to replace a weakening left regime.

Similar circumstances can be found among other '*emerging*' rightist regimes.

In Colombia, the current rightwing President Santos talks to the FARC guerrillas, but also accommodates the paramilitary death squads. His talks of peace settlements and social reform are linked to the genocidal right, led by the former President Uribe. Meanwhile, the economy stagnates with oil and metal prices collapsing on the world market. Colombian living standards have declined and the promise of a rightwing revival grows dim. The US-Colombian alliance may undercut the FARC but the rightwing does not offer any prospect for modernizing the economy or stabilizing the society.

Similarly in Peru, the rightwing wins votes and embraces free markets, but growth declines, investments and profits dry up and mass disenchantment grows among the poor

promising street conflicts.

The *Obama 'legacy' in Latin America* has followed a series of brutal victories, which have no capacity to re-impose a stable 'new order' of free markets and free elections. The initial wave of favorable investments and lucrative concessions will fail to revive and recalibrate a new growth dynamics.

More ominously, Obama relied on mass murder to replace an elected leftist-nationalist president in Honduras and imposed a regime of terror against the poor and indigenous population. Meanwhile, illicit offshore handouts reward speculators in Argentina.

Obama's legacy in Latin America reflects an entire spectrum from illicit-rightwing coups to oust the elected governments in Brazil and Venezuela, to elected authoritarian presidents in Peru and Colombia with historic links to death squads and multi-million dollar overseas accounts.

Obama's contemporary '*Latin American legacy*' reeks of gross electoral manipulation preparing the ground for bloody class wars.

Obama's Legacy in the Ukraine, Yemen and Syria

The Obama regime thought it could manage widespread conflicts, uprisings and wars to advance its global supremacy.

To that end, Obama spent billions of dollars in weapons and propaganda arming Neo-Nazi para-military troops to seize power in Ukraine. A grotesque, brutal gang of oligarchs (and disgraced, foreign fugitives – like the ousted Georgian leader, Mikhail Saakashvili) served Washington in the puppet Kiev regime. Critics, journalists, jurists and citizens are being assassinated. The economy has collapsed; prices skyrocket; incomes declined by half; unemployment tripled and millions have sought refuge abroad. Wars raged between Russian ethnic citizen armies in the Donbas and the puppet Kiev regime. The people of Crimea voted to rejoin Russia. Meanwhile, economic sanctions against trade with Russia have exacerbated shortages for the people of Ukraine.

Under Obama's stewardship the Ukraine became a *world-class... basket case*: so much for his *European legacy*. He can rightly claim credit for imposing a thoroughly retrograde regime of Klepto-capitalism with no redeeming feature.

Obama embraced Saudi Arabia's war against Yemen – destroying the life and cities of the poorest nation in the Middle East. *Obama's 'legacy' in Yemen* stands for the systematic obliteration of a sovereign people: Obama performs his tricks for billionaire Saudi despots while savaging the innocent. To the Israelis in Palestine and the Saudis in Yemen, Obama pays homage to the criminals responsible for millions of shattered lives.

What of the *Obama 'legacy' in Syria and Libya*? How many million Africans and Arabs have been murdered or fled on rotten boats in destitution. Only the rankest gang of corrupt media pundits in the US media can pretend this gangster President should evade a *war crimes tribunal*.

Conclusion

The Obama regime has pursued wars of unremitting destruction. It has forged partnerships with terrorists and death squads as it seeks short-term imperial victories, which end in dismal failures.

The *imperial legacy of this 'historic' president* is a mirage of pillage, squalor and destruction. The effect of his political lies has even begun register here among the American public: Who trusts the US Congress and the President? And in Europe, who trusts Obama's European partners as they eagerly pushed for wars in the Middle East and North Africa and now fear and loathe the millions of their victims—refugees fleeing to the cities of Europe, with the drowned corpses of uprooted communities spoiling their beaches?

Obama pushed for wars and the Europeans receive the victims – with fear and disgust.

Obama's victories are temporary, blighted and reversed.

Obama bombed Afghanistan yesterday and now flees renewed resistance.

Obama's allies are again plundering Latin America but face imminent ouster via popular uprisings.

Obama terrorized and fragmented Syria yesterday but lost elections the day after.

Obama threatens China's economy while eagerly buying China's products.

The *Obama legacy* began as a failed military and economic offensive accompanying a

profound social crisis. During his final year in office, Obama tries to forge alliances with the dregs of the hard right to save his legacy. His brief advance into this sordid world of neo-liberals, neo-Nazis and Saudi despots is a prelude to more retreat and chaos.

Obama's public celebration of the right turn in Asia, Latin America, Europe and the Middle East applauds the most retrograde alignment of forces in modern times: Saudis and Israelis; Egyptian generals and Libyan jihadis; neo-Ottoman Turks with Ukrainian gangster-oligarchs. Regime changes in Argentina and Brazil encourage Obama to claim vindication of his imperial legacy.

His 'moment' of imperial truth is brief, all too brief. Everywhere, we witness the rapid rise of imperial success followed by a series of debacles.

Throughout Latin America capitalist profiteers plunge into wild financial adventures, theft and chaos. In the Middle East, the US stands on the crumbling palaces of a moribund Saudi regime. The much-proclaimed imperial advances are based on grand theft everywhere, from Egypt and Turkey to the Ukraine.

Simply stated: the US formula for a successful legacy is failing at the precise moment that it claims success! Obama and the Right have created a world of chaos and disintegration. Obama and his legions, the US and Europe have no future in peace or war, election or defeats.

There is no imperial legacy for the 'historic' President Obama!

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