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Deception and double standards at Mandela funeral

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Western leaders who sow violence around the world to entrench capitalism were full of praise of Mandela as a man of peace. Yet from thousands of miles away, President Obama, who led the charade, decides who dies by the unmanned drone, whether they are at a wedding or funeral, women collecting firewood, infants or the elderly.

When the demise of Nelson Mandela was proclaimed to the nation by South African president Jacob Zuma, the streets were hushed and in restaurants, bars and nightclubs, there was pin drop silence as people listened in utter despondency.

ANC described him as a large baobab tree that had fallen, whose roots would nourish the soil forever.

Mandela was one of the founding fathers of the South African struggle against apartheid, who dedicated his life to emancipating his people from political bondage. He led them during the darkest days of apartheid; always resolute and standing tall for his principles.

He was the embodiment of the struggle against racist dictatorship and apartheid brutality, a constant inspiration to his people from the days of the Congress of the People, the armed resistance, the dark days in prison, right up to the negotiations and the freedom.

His passing thus triggered unprecedented tributes and outpouring of grief not only in South

Africa but throughout the world. The corporate media on its part was awash with tributes, falling over each other in showering flowery accolades on him.

They generously bestowed upon him abundant praise, describing him as an illustrious grand man, “conscience of his nation and the world at large, celebrated for his magnanimity, moral courage, and dignity; for his resilience, patience, and passion; distinguished for his charisma, charm, noble countenance and common touch; for his humility, visionary and political lustre; and most of all, for his spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation”.

Mandela’s memorial ceremony was likewise marked by the presence of world celebrities, personalities and super stars. Everyone who was someone jostled his/her way to South Africa. They described him as one of history’s last great statesmen, the embodiment of global moral authority, of humanity, “comparable to the twentieth century saintly paragons such as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King”.

They portrayed him as a disciple of pacifism, an embodiment of Mother Teresa and devotee of neo-liberal legality, obscuring the fact that after the Sharpeville massacre in the sixties, the African National Congress (ANC) adopted a strategy of armed struggle. The gap between rhetoric and reality was demonstrably clear.

Among the “mourners” was US President Obama who brought along his four predecessors. He “led the world” in paying homage to his “personal hero” while back home the United States flags were flown at half mast.

In showering tributes to Mandela, Obama was a masterpiece of self-glorification: “While I will always fall short of Madiba’s example, he makes me want to be better. He speaks to what is best inside us . . . we can change. We can choose to live in a world defined not by our differences, but by our common hopes . . . a world defined not by conflict, but by peace and justice”.

He then went on with false piety: “I studied his words and his writings . . .as long as I live I will do what I can to learn from him . . .It falls to us to forward the example that he set to make decisions guided not by hate, but by love”.

Yet the previous day, missiles fired from a U.S. drone had killed at least three people in Yemen. Two days later, seventeen people in a convoy heading for a joyous wedding party were killed. This was the eighth Yemeni wedding party to be decimated into charred remains. Two days later six people travelling in a boat in Afghanistan were killed by a drone attack.

It is said Obama personally issues weekly decrees for these summary assassinations.

He then travels to Mandela’s funeral in the tightly fortified Air Force One, arriving at the memorial stadium in the great armoured, reinforced limousine, flanked by a massive motorcade, all flown in from the US.

This is the ultimate protection for a president who claims to be the disciple of Mandela, while he has no compunction in deciding, from thousands of miles away, who dies by the unmanned drone, whether they are in a wedding or funeral parties, or women collecting firewood, whether infants or elderly. Yemen, Somalia, Pakistan and Afghanistan's mutilated. Drone victims are a result of Obama's roll call of terror.

So much for Obama's disingenuous call for "peace and justice" and the "oneness to humanity."

Corporate media hardly gives coverage to such blatant double standards. What also goes unstated is that it was the CIA that tipped off South African apartheid police to Mandela's location in 1962, leading to his capture.

What we are rarely told is that the CIA devoted more time and resources in locating Mandela and handing him over to the apartheid forces than the apartheid forces themselves. CIA actually located Mandela while he was disguised as a chauffeur, when he was stopped, arrested and subsequently served 27 years in prison.

Yet not a word of remorse or repentance from Obama who had the audacity to say, "We will not likely see the likes of Nelson Mandela again ... His acts of reconciliation ... set an example that all humanity should aspire to, whether in the lives of nations or our own personal lives."

Mandela, after 27 years in apartheid jail "forgave" his jailors and those who would have preferred to see him executed. On the other hand, Obama's election pledge to close Guantanamo is conveniently forgotten. The prisoners there resort to starvation as their only weapon of protest, in desperation and without hope of ever coming out alive.

So much for the Nobel "Peace" Laureate Obama who was there to shower praise on Mandela, the "peace maker".

Also present was Bill Clinton, describing Mandela as "a champion for human dignity and freedom, for peace and reconciliation ... a man of uncommon grace and compassion, for whom abandoning bitterness and embracing adversaries was ... a way of life. All of us are living in a better world because of the life that Madiba lived."

Clinton's victims must have turned in their graves, for it was he who, in utter violation of the international law, and in collusion with the UK, ordered the nonstop bombing of Iraq during his presidency (1993-2001). As if that is not enough he imposed a siege, with six thousand people dying every month as a result of the embargo.

As for George W. Bush, who hitched a ride with Obama on Air Force One, Mandela had the following to say about his illegal invasion and destruction of Iraq:

"One power with a president who has no foresight and cannot think properly is now wanting

to plunge the world into a holocaust. Why is the US behaving so arrogantly?” he slammed. Bush’s primary motive in Iraq was oil, while he was undermining the UN.

UK Prime Minister David Cameron was not to be left behind when it comes to two-facedness. He said: “A great light has gone out in the world. Nelson Mandela was a towering figure in our time; a legend in life and now in death – a true global hero... Meeting him was one of the great honours of my life.”

He ended his accolade with: “Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God.”

And on Twitter he said: “A great light has gone out in the world. Nelson Mandela was a hero of our time.”

Yet in 1989, when Mandela was still in prison, David Cameron, then a promising young celebrity in the Conservative Research Department unreservedly accepted an excursion to apartheid South Africa, paid by a firm that lobbied against the UN sanction on the apartheid regime.

This is the Conservative Party of David Cameron whose fellow members used to wear ‘Hang Nelson Mandela’ badges at university. Their leader at the time, Margaret Thatcher, described Mandela as a terrorist.

Former UK premier Tony Blair also took his turn to pay homage to Mandela, who was once so disgusted by Blair’s decision to join the US-led invasion of Iraq that he unleashed a fiery diatribe against him by saying: “He is the foreign minister of the United States. He is no longer prime minister of Britain.”

Notable no-shows at Mandela’s memorial ceremony were Israel’s prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu and his president Shimon Peres.

It was too costly, claimed Netanyahu, at estimated \$ 2 million just for transport and security. Peres pulled out a bout of strong ‘flu as his reason, yet he appeared publicly later free of any symptom.

It was hardly surprising that they were the odd men out, given their frosty relations with South African people who have not forgotten nor forgiven the fact that Israel was a close collaborator and main arms supplier of the apartheid regime.

Israel profited extensively from arms exports to apartheid South Africa, while South Africa gained access to advanced military arsenal at a time when the rest of the world had turned against the pariah apartheid state.

Worse yet, Israel allowed South Africa to develop advanced nuclear arms technology South Africa in turn provided Israel with the raw material and testing ground it needed to develop its arsenal of missiles and nuclear weapons.

Israel was, however, represented at the memorial by its parliamentary speaker Edelstein. He lives in illegal Jewish settlement on the West Bank, and is strong opponent of a sovereign Palestinian State.

Edelstein said of Mandela: “He was a man (who) knew that you do not correct an injustice with another injustice and violence with more violence.....I hope our region will have (such) leaders, who will say no more violence, no more armed battle, it’s time for peace.”

The helpless Palestinian victims of Israel’s Operation Cast Lead (2008), or the Operation Pillar of Cloud (2012) would endorse his words whole heartedly and wish he lived up to them. But they know it is nothing less than empty verbosity.

It is therefore anyone’s guess on which side Mandela threw in his lot. Once released, he visited the occupied Palestine where he walked down the streets, hugging the Palestinians, declaring: “I am Palestinian”.

This was Mandela whose \$ 3 billion “global” funeral took four years in the planning. It was a grand memorial ceremony with over 70 heads of state converging on South Africa to demonstrate their mourning. Indeed it was the biggest gathering of the state chief executives outside the United Nations.

The security plan was based on the 2010 World Cup, with 800-strong SA Infantry Battalion put in place. Air force bases across the country were on alert while at least two SA Navy frigates were stationed off the coast and a no-fly zone was imposed over airports, with continuous aerial surveillance.

Mandela was so committed to the ANC that he would often quip that upon his death he would join 'the nearest branch of the ANC in heaven."

Perhaps he would can carry on the struggle against those who today abuse his memory for personal aggrandisement inside South Africa and globally. He might find veterans like Oliver Tambo, Walter Sisulu, Joe Slovo and Chris Hani arguing as to what went wrong with the ANC and its Freedom Charter.

For what is hardly mentioned is that while Mandela and his comrades succeeded in toppling the political apartheid, they have hardly managed to dismantle the South African apartheid economy that has left millions of people in grinding poverty.

Thus the most uncomplimentary part of Mandela’s legacy is the economic apartheid that still exists in South Africa today.

As Prof Issa Shivji aptly put it, Mandela’s ‘long walk’ walked into the neo-liberal tunnel, the light at the end of which we still have to see.