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The Handshake That Never Happened

Posted By Justin Raimondo

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The world waited with bated breath as the day approached: would President Obama's speech to the UN General Assembly reflect positively on Iranian President Hassan Rouhani's "charm offensive" (as the Israelis derisively dub it)? Would the two meet up at a luncheon arranged by Ban Ki-Moon and – gasp! – actually shake hands?

We now know the answers to these two questions: no, and certainly not.

It's funny how subjective impressions can be. People often hear their hopes rather than what is actually being said: here's Phil Weiss, over at the militantly anti-Zionist MondoWeiss web site, who sees in Obama's speech evidence of a "bold opening to Iran," all but proclaiming the beginning of a new era in US-Iranian relations. On the other hand, here's Max Fisher over at the *Washington Post* with a much more sober – and, I would say, more accurate – assessment.

Rouhani never showed up at the luncheon, and therefore the handshake that was supposed to have shaken the world never happened. Maybe he'd had a big breakfast and just wasn't that hungry – or maybe he lost his appetite after listening to Obama's speech. I'm betting on the latter.

I'll pass over the obvious lies – obvious, at least, to those who follow these issues closely – such as the one about how "all our troops have left Iraq" (not so), and *this* real knee-slapper:

"We have limited the use of drones so they target only those who pose a continuing imminent threat to the United States where capture is not feasible and there's a near certainty of no civilian casualties."

Oy. And here's one that sticks out like a sore Snowden: according to Obama, we're reviewing "the way that we gather intelligence so that we properly balance the legitimate security concerns of our citizens and allies with the privacy concerns that all people share."

Suuure ya are!

But never mind the lies, let's look at where he's being truthful. We'll have to leave out the part where he claims the only concern that prompted him to call for a military strike on Syria was the alleged use of chemical weapons by the regime of Bashar al-Assad – because we all know the US and its Saudi ally have been engaged in a regime change operation there for at least a year if not more. But there *was* a glint of truth amid the smoke and mirrors when Obama said:

"It's an insult to human reason and to the legitimacy of this institution to suggest that anyone other than the regime carried out this attack."

Notice the careful wording: "*this* attack." The Ghouta incident is separate from three others – one in the village of Khan al-Asal, outside Aleppo, where the regime (and their Russian backers) contend the rebels used some kind of poison gas to take the town. (The location of the other two incidents were kept under wraps "for security reasons.") This was the reason the Assad government let the UN inspectors in to begin with: Damascus was hoping the UN team would verify their accusations, when it just so happened that the Ghouta incident occurred not four miles from where the inspectors were staying.

Oh, but never mind: that was then, and this is *now*. Citing the agreement with Putin to iron out the terms of dismantling Syria's chemical weapons arsenal, Obama takes a hard line:

"Now there must be a strong Security Council resolution to verify that the Assad regime is keeping its commitments. And there must be consequences if they fail to do so. If we cannot agree even on this, then it will show that the United Nations is incapable of enforcing the most basic of international laws."

This is aimed directly at the US Congress, and specifically at those members of his own party who refused to sign on to the Syria strike: he's saying "See, we're trying to do it multilaterally, just like you wanted!" Many liberal Democrats, such as my own congressman, Rep. Jared Huffman, said they opposed military action not so much because they're against the idea per se, but because of the lack of a UN mandate or support from our NATO allies. Liberal imperialism means giving inter-state aggression a "legal" gloss.

The President goes on to opine that he wants the chemical weapons agreement to "energize a larger diplomatic effort to reach a political settlement within Syria," and immediately contradicts himself by saying:

"I do not believe that military action by those within Syria or by external powers can achieve a lasting peace. Nor do I believe that America or any nation should determine who will lead Syria. That is for the Syrian people to decide."

If external powers can't achieve a lasting piece, then why have a "larger diplomatic effort" to accomplish just that? As for the utility of military action by Syrian forces to settle the question of who shall rule – history disproves the President's contention. Our own bloody civil war certainly did settle things: and, given all the blood shed, the cities burned, and the untold human misery unleashed, who are we to judge what is happening in Syria?

Yes, "that is for the Syrian people to decide" – but, hey:

"A leader who slaughtered his citizens and gassed children to death cannot regain the legitimacy to lead a badly fractured country. The notion that Syria can somehow return to a pre-war status quo is a fantasy. It's time for Russia and Iran to realize that insisting on Assad's rule will lead directly to the outcome that they fear: An increasingly violent space for extremists to operate."

Translation: the Syrian people will not be allowed to choose Assad over the rebels, and it's time Russia and Iran woke up and smelled the Turkish coffee. The US and its regional gendarmes are intent on regime change, and the UN – which exists only to rubberstamp and "legitimize" the actions of the Big Powers – isn't going to say boo about it. It's only the "aggression" of nations outside an exclusive club that concerns the Security Council.

A big part of Obama's peroration is about how the UN must begin intervening in "civil wars" – i.e. conflicts instigated by US-backed "rebels" – in order to reach a "political settlement" that ousts the targeted government. One can only imagine the look on the faces of the Russian and Chinese representatives as Obama delivered these remarks.

Addressing his critics at home as well as abroad, Obama outlined the parameters of American policy in the region, and the news is not good. In short, nothing's changed.

"The United States of America is prepared to use all elements of our power, including military force, to secure our core interests in the region. We will confront external aggression against our allies and partners, as we did in the Gulf War."

Interesting that he should invoke the first Gulf War – George Herbert Walker Bush's invasion of Iraq, dubbed "Operation Desert Storm," launched to keep the Emir of Kuwait on his royal throne. Of course, Obama couldn't very well invoke the *Second* Gulf War – Bush Junior's contribution to the history of American military disasters – and so he had to reach farther back in history to find an acceptable template. Yet the question arises: acceptable to whom?

While the kings of Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf states may be reassured by such rhetoric, this ought to make Americans uneasy. Are we really going to go to war in order to keep the royal dictator of, say, Qatar, from falling victim to a Shi'ite uprising? Must Americans die so that King Abdullah and his harem can lord it over a system renown for its cruelty and corruption?

Oh, but we'll be doing it to "ensure the free flow of energy from the region to the world," says Obama. As if the oil would just sit in the ground, which it most certainly would not. What this vow to use force really means is that our military has become the private police force of the oil industry, whose profits are guaranteed by the mightiest armed forces the world has ever seen.

The list of rationalizations for US military intervention continues as Obama plays the "terrorist" card, vowing to "dismantle terrorist networks that threaten our people." Forget all that malarkey about "sovereignty" and multilateralism: "When it's necessary [to] defend the United States against terrorist attack, we will take direct action."

How hard is it to imagine the appearance of a sudden "terrorist" threat in Syria, one that might credibly be accused of planning acts of terrorism on US soil? After destabilizing the country by supporting "moderate" rebels – who just happened to be aligned with Al Qaeda – we now have a full-fledged "terrorist haven" in Syria. Can US troops be far behind?

Finally, the President gets to the part we've all been waiting for, and the lead in isn't promising:

"And finally, we will not tolerate the development or use of weapons of mass destruction. Just as we consider the use of chemical weapons in Syria to be a threat to our own national security, we reject the development of nuclear weapons that could trigger a nuclear arms race in the region and undermine the global nonproliferation regime."

Iran is still in America's crosshairs, as Obama made quite clear:

"So what does this mean going forward?"

"In the near term, America's diplomatic efforts will focus on two particular issues: Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons and"

Let's stop the film right there.

The whole issue between the US and Iran is whether or not Tehran is in fact pursuing nuclear weapons: yet Obama states that they are indeed doing so as a given. This in spite of our own intelligence community's best assessment, a National Intelligence Estimate issued during the Bush administration which assures us "with high confidence" that they abandoned their nuclear weapons program in 2003 and haven't restarted.

In staking out this hard line, Obama is essentially taking the Israeli position, and that's the intended audience for this part of the speech: Netanyahu and his American amen corner.

Addressing the strenuous effort made by Rouhani and his government to reach some kind of understanding with the US, Obama puts on onus on Tehran:

"Conciliatory words will have to be matched by actions that are transparent and verifiable. After all, it's the Iranian government's choices that have led to the comprehensive sanctions that are

currently in place. ... The world has seen Iran evade its responsibilities in the past and has an abiding interest in making sure that Iran meets its obligations in the future."

What choices were those? The Iranians insist they are pursuing their right, guaranteed under the terms of the same Nonproliferation Treaty cited by Obama, to have a nuclear program for peaceful purposes. The "bomb-bomb-bomb Iran" crowd has yet to prove otherwise: various attempts to do so, by Israel, their Washington lobby, and the crazies of the *Mujahideen-e-Khalq*, have all turned out to be transparent hoaxes.

As for Iran's alleged evasion of its supposed responsibilities: the maddening vagueness of this accusation is a smokescreen that covers up the real regional malefactor, which is Israel. At least Iran has signed the NPT and the chemical weapons treaty: Israel has done neither. But Tel Aviv has no responsibilities to fulfill – only demands to make.

Enough already. I'm done with analyzing the maze of lies and half-truths that make up this compendium of rhetorical folly. To add insult to injury, the administration is claiming the Iranians refused to meet with them on the side of the UN confab, but that the offer was made. What they somehow neglect to mention is that so many conditions were attached to the offer that the Iranians decided to pass it up. Every time these people open their mouths, another falsehood leaps out at us. They couldn't tell the truth if their lives depended on it: the best they can come up with is the "least untruthful" explanation for their policy of untrammelled aggression in the region – with the threat of more to come.