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Obama Rewrites History at the UN *The Man Without Irony*

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This week US President Barack Obama addressed the UN General Assembly and the unintended irony in his speech would be humorous if it were not so cruel—and dangerous. Obama touched on a variety of global issues from the Ebola epidemic to the Ukraine to the Islamic State (formerly known as ISIS). So what was this unintended irony so prevalent in Obama's speech?

Well, here are a few choice nuggets for you to consider:

"We see the future not as something out of our control, but as something we can shape for the better through concerted and collective effort."

Obama neglected to note that the reason that the future may seem out of control is directly related to US interventionist actions in faraway regions such as Iraq and the Ukraine. The illegal and unilateral action—rather than a legal collective effort through the United Nations—to conquer and occupy Iraq lies at the root of the new US intervention in that country and in Syria.

“Russia’s actions in Ukraine challenge this post-war order. Here are the facts. After the people of Ukraine mobilized popular protests and calls for reform, their corrupt President fled. Against the will of the government in Kiev, Crimea was annexed.”

This is a shocking misrepresentation of the “facts,” but one that is believable to most Americans because it is the tale we have been repeatedly fed by the corporate media. After being told by our political leaders and the corporate media at the time that the protests by the Euromaidan movement in Ukraine constituted a popular uprising, the events that followed laid bare that lie. The Euromaidan movement represented a section of the Ukrainian population that was allied with US and EU interests. Furthermore, it was being supported by Washington long before the protests began in order to destabilize the country and overthrow the democratically-elected president because he was more closely-aligned with Russia than Western Europe. While Russia is undoubtedly meddling in the Ukraine, at least it is a neighbour with intimate and even ethnic ties to many Ukrainians. Imagine Washington’s response if Russia were to politically intervene in Canada in order to install an anti-US government.

And Crimea was not “annexed,” the Crimean people voted to secede in a referendum. The fact that the new illegal and unelected government in the Ukraine argued that the secession of Crimea violated the Ukrainian Constitution was truly ironic given that same government came to power through the unconstitutional overthrow of the country’s democratically-elected president. And given the number of people in Crimea who voted to secede and the vast numbers of people in Eastern Ukraine who are fighting for secession rather than live under the new US and EU backed government, it is clear that the Euromaidan movement did not speak for all Ukrainians.

“This is a vision of the world in which might makes right — a world in which one nation’s borders can be redrawn by another, and civilized people are not allowed to recover the remains of their loved ones because of the truth that might be revealed. America stands for something different. We believe that right makes might — that bigger nations should not be able to bully smaller ones, and that people should be able to choose their own future.”

Where to begin with this one? Without a doubt the most graphic example of a nation’s borders being redrawn by another over the past half century is not ISIS in Iraq and Syria, but Israel in Palestine. Following World War Two, Palestinians lived in 94% of the territory known as Palestine. Today, they reside in 15% of the territory and more than 5 million of them live in refugee camps in surrounding countries. Meanwhile, Israel continues to militarily occupy the West Bank and move Jewish settlers into the Occupied Territories in violation of international law. The primary supporter of Israel politically, militarily and economically is the United States.

Obama’s statement that “bigger nations should not be able to bully smaller ones” directly contradicts the reality of US foreign policy in recent decades. Since 1980, the United States has militarily intervened 37 times in 27 countries. In his five years as president, Obama himself has ordered US attacks against seven nations (Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen, Libya and now Syria). Among the other countries bombed and/or invaded during this period are Panama, Haiti and Grenada, hardly equals to the United States in either geographic size or

military power. In fact, there is no other country over the past half century that has even come close to the United States when it comes to “bullying smaller nations.”

“Iraq has come perilously close to plunging back into the abyss. The conflict has created a fertile recruiting ground for terrorists who inevitably export this violence.”

Obama came close to the truth with this statement, but he completely omitted the most crucial aspect of what took Iraq to the abyss: the US invasion and occupation. The abyss that Obama referred to was the period during which the Iraqi insurgency fought against the illegal US military occupation of the country. It was the US invasion and occupation of Iraq, in violation of international law, that opened the door for al-Qaeda to enter the country and that also eventually gave birth to ISIS. It was the imperialist actions of the United States against a nation that posed no threat to it that created a “fertile recruiting ground for terrorists.” Let’s not forget, there were no Islamic extremist groups in Iraq before the US invaded.

“The countries of the Arab and Muslim world must focus on the extraordinary potential of their people — especially the youth.”

This statement is not so much ironic as incredibly arrogant. The same imperialist arrogance that fuels Washington’s military interventions in the Middle East and around the world also allows Obama to believe he has the right to tell the Arab and Muslim world what it “must” focus on.

“No external power can bring about a transformation of hearts and minds. But America will be a respectful and constructive partner.”

I’m not sure that the thousands of families whose loved ones have been blown to bits by US bombs in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen, Libya and Syria view the United States as a “respectful and constructive partner” in the quest to combat extremism. And, as a matter of fact, the United States has brought about a “transformation of hearts and minds” in the Middle East; its military aggression in the region and its unconditional support for Israel has radicalized significant numbers of Muslims. The day before Obama’s UN speech, the initial US airstrikes against Syria killed 31 civilians. The continued slaughter of civilians in this manner will likely radicalize increasing numbers of Syrians. In short, the very same tactics that have bred extremism will not eliminate extremism; they will only breed more extremism.

“The United States will never shy away from defending our interests.”

Perhaps the truest statement uttered by Obama in his speech. After all, US military intervention in the Middle East is primarily motivated by US interests rather than the promotion of democracy and human rights. After all, if US foreign policy were motivated at all by the latter then Washington would have long ago overthrown the ruthless dictatorship that governs its close ally Saudi Arabia as well as its other authoritarian friends. Oh, and by the way, the Saudi government beheaded eight citizens last month.

