

REALNEWS

Reflections at Day's End

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**The Gates of Hell
William Blake, 1806**

Turning Point or Tipping Point?

The past decade has seen a major transformation in both the state of the planet and the state of human consciousness. There can no longer be any doubt that we are in the early stages of a series of escalating crises that will eventually affect every living being on this planet, some more than others.

Ten years ago, most of the people in the developed world had perhaps heard the term “climate change”, but few had any real sense of the meaning of that term. The Kyoto agreements were something that had been embraced by the European Union and a number of other nations, but rejected by the US and Australia. There had been earlier problems with acid rain and the depletion of the ozone layer, but these appeared to have been sorted out. The rising level of greenhouse gases and the talk of global warming would no doubt be similarly sorted out in time.

The situation has since turned around completely. The recent dithering and inconclusive Climate Summit at Copenhagen has brought our collective attention to the fact that the developed world is unwilling to relinquish its extravagant ways despite the damage wrought upon the earth by its methods and practices.

We have over the past decade witnessed dimensional shifts in the way national and international politics have been conducted, in the way that wars have been executed, and in the way that financial institutions can disregard the consequences of their ruinous excesses.

The new millennium began with what many perceive to be the theft of a presidency in the United States. Many questions remain unanswered regarding the outcome of the vote count in Florida, the home ground of Jeb Bush, the brother of George W. Bush.

Blood has ever been thicker than water.

With George W. Bush comfortably settled in the White House, the groundwork laid over the previous decade by Dick Cheney, Ronald Rumsfeld, Richard Perle, Paul Wolfowitz, John Bolton, Don Kagan, William Kristol, Scooter Libby and a few select others was brought closer to fruition. This shadowy group had already mapped out their preferred trajectory in *Rebuilding America's Defences. Strategy, Forces and Resources for a New Century*, a report published in September 2000. With Bush the Younger now in the White House, they were now poised to realise their collective ambitions.



The attack on the Twin Towers provided the desired “Pearl Harbour Event” that they had earlier invoked as necessary to justify the implementation of their imperious project. Within four weeks of 9/11, the people of

Afghanistan were visited by endless volleys of new and devastating munitions. This new assault scattered both the Taliban and depleted uranium dust deep into the valleys of northern and eastern Afghanistan, mildly disturbed Osama bin Laden's peace, and brought yet further grief and tragedy to an already grievously travestied people.



The program charted in the *Project for the New American Century* began with a plan to remove from power Saddam Hussein, through the use of a new military strategy labelled *Shock and Awe*. Truth was deemed irrelevant in the deceitful propaganda used to justify the attack issuing from high political quarters and parroted by a compliant and unquestioning media.

Eight years later, the people of Iraq continue to be shocked and shattered by deathly explosions in mosques, marketplaces and employment queues.

The missionary project of bringing democracy to the Middle East took a peculiar turn in February 2006 when the people of Gaza, exhausted by decades of oppression, subjection and corruption chose - democratically - to elect a group of Hamas officials as their political representatives. This was not part of the plan of the democracy-bringers. Steps were immediately taken to overturn the people of Gaza's decision and do whatever was

necessary to install a group more to the liking of the big powers. (See *The Dismembering of Gaza, Part 1*, REALNEWS 7, July/August 2009)

Before the 2006 elections, the Israeli government had already reduced Gaza to a parched ghetto enclosed by heavily fortified border crossings patrolled by pilotless drones and helicopter gun ships. Within a short time of the 2006 election, Gaza had been isolated even further.

Three years later, Gaza was subjected to a merciless assault at the hands of the Israeli military that saw the death of 1,400 inhabitants, half of them women and children. A year after the desolation wrought by *Operation Cast Lead*, Gaza remains a physical and existential ruin. It was recently described by Noam Chomsky as "one of the most disgraceful situations in the world."

A similarly disgraceful situation emerged from the unconscionable conduct of US investment banks after the deregulation of US financial institutions by the Clinton Administration during the late 1990s. Within a few short years, newly created and recklessly administered financial instruments created catastrophic financial losses around the world. Within the US, millions of families lost their homes. Further afield, the superannuation and retirement funds of millions of individuals collapsed into an insatiable void of greed and usury. (See *Dressing Mammon's Wounds*, REALNEWS 2, September/October 2008 and *The Feast of the Giants*, REALNEWS 5, March/April 2009)

Wearied by the violence, the excesses and the neglects of the Bush Administration, many within the US - and many within other nations - placed their yearning for fairness, measure and

political intelligence onto the person of Barack Obama whose impassioned rhetoric and revolutionary promises regarding the conduct of US politics nourished a collective will for hope and change.

Within twelve months of his taking office, most of Obama's formerly ardent supporters feel themselves betrayed as they come to realise that nothing has really changed.

As new coal-fired power stations begin to appear everywhere in China, as winter ice in the Arctic begins to melt and disappear, as great glacial shelves begin to fracture in Antarctica and drift into the southern ocean, as vast peatlands and thawing tundra in the Arctic Circle begin to release their reserves of stored methane gas, representatives of nearly 200 nations met in Copenhagen in December 2009 in an eleventh hour bid to agree on how we are to change our ways before truly catastrophic changes engulf the planet.



The twelve days of discussion at Copenhagen served only to reinforce what many have long known: Political decisions continue to be manipulated and directed by powerful interests in the corporate world determined to make sure that business will continue as usual for as long as they can get away with it.

Our so-called leaders have yet to understand what is truly going down.

Our actions or inactions over the next decade will determine whether we struggle together to secure our children's futures and work towards the creation of a new civilisation based on a deeper understanding of our place within nature or whether we collectively descend into the wailing and gnashing of teeth.

MALALAI JOYA A True Voice in a Broken Land

It is men who wage war. It is men who design the instruments of war. It is men who engage in the cold calculus of death and destruction that is visited upon nominated enemies. It is men who rape, dismember and hold in terror those who would stand in their determined way. And it is men who have waged ruinous war in Afghanistan for over three decades.

From this bloodstained ground, the voices of women call out to the wider world the plight of a people doubly smitten by the cruelty of their own men of war and the dispassionate commands of foreign military logisticians and planners of air strikes.



Among those voices is that of Malalai Joya, a young and passionate presence determined to awaken those who would hear to the tragedy that has befallen her

people. Malalai Joya was born in the days before the Soviets moved their troops, tanks and helicopters into Afghanistan thirty years ago. The intervening time has been one of war without end for the people of Afghanistan.

Even at the age of twenty, Malalai Joya was committed to the betterment of her people. She defied the decrees of the then-ruling Taliban and actively pursued the cause of freedom in Afghanistan. She brought together a group of women and secretly conducted school classes for girls, something that was strictly forbidden under Taliban rule.

After the scattering of the Taliban in the wake of the US occupation in 2001, she was determined to serve in the new Parliament created by the US to install their chosen man, Hamid Karzai. Malalai Joya was elected to office in 2005. She soon after showed herself to be a fearless speaker in a cabinet of powerful men, most of whom were intent on serving their own interests rather than creating a just and democratic society from the ruins of a broken land. Within two years of being elected, Malalai Joya had been expelled from Parliament. She had spoken too strongly for the liking of her colleagues, having often denounced the greed and corruption that drove the actions and decisions of many within the Chamber. She constantly challenged and questioned the legitimacy of Karzai's government and on several occasions, had described the Afghan Parliament as a zoo filled with criminals and warlords.

While on a lecture tour of Canada in November 2009, Malalai Joya referred to the recent Afghan elections into which \$250 million was poured as "the most ridiculous and fraudulent election

in the world." She described Hamid Karzai as "a shameless puppet man" and called his warlord associates within the Afghan Parliament "a bunch of killers".

Since her removal from office, Malalai Joya has continued to work tirelessly for her people and has sought to bring the attention of Westerners to the real conditions within her country with great urgency. Since her expulsion from the Afghan Parliament, Malalai Joya has suffered numerous death threats and survived several actual attempts on her life.

Some Recent History

There will be some among the readers of REALNEWS who still recall that until the late 1970s, Afghanistan and its capital Kabul were obligatory ports of call for travellers, artists and musicians travelling the trail from Australia to Europe, or from Europe to India. Afghanistan was lavishly described as a place of vibrant markets, deep culture and artistic freedom. How is it that Afghanistan has descended to such a state of chaos and misery in such a short time?



Until half a century ago, the Afghan people lived under a feudal system with most of the land owned and controlled by a small minority of hereditary

landholders. During the 1960s, small groups of Marxist reformers and intellectuals began to join forces, forming the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDP) in 1965. As the group gained in institutional and political power, it began to promote a range of democratic reforms in Afghanistan.

In 1973, the King of Afghanistan, Mohammad Zahir Shah, was deposed by his cousin, General Daoud. Daoud's government was so unpopular that it was forced out of office in a popular uprising supported by the Afghan military in 1978. Soon after, Nour Mohammed Taraki, who had been Secretary-General of the PDP since its formation became leader of a new government.

Under Taraki, social and political reforms were rapidly and dramatically implemented. Michael Parenti reports: "The Taraki government proceeded to legalize labor unions, and set up a minimum wage, a progressive income tax, a literacy campaign, and programs that gave ordinary people access to health care, housing and public sanitation. . . . The government also continued a campaign begun by the king to emancipate women from their age-old tribal bondage. It provided public education for girls and for the children of the various tribes." (*Afghanistan, Another Untold Story*, CommonDreams.org, December 2, 2008)

One of Taraki's first acts as President was to shut down the opium farms that supplied the raw materials for the manufacture of 70% of the world's heroin. Land redistribution programs were implemented soon after, and programs aimed at bringing about universal education and equality for women were stepped up.

Taraki's new government soon found itself under attack from many fronts. Feudal landlords, local mullahs and tribal chiefs rallied to protest land redistribution and the granting of new freedoms to women. Many within the general Afghan population also felt threatened, believing that the "communist" and "atheist" reforms were undermining the cultural practices that they had lived by for centuries.

Further afield, Washington started to have its own concerns about the Taraki's socialist programs and collectivist economic policies. Quoting Parenti again, "Almost immediately after the PDP coalition came to power, the CIA, assisted by Saudi and Pakistani military, launched a large scale intervention into Afghanistan on the side of the ousted feudal lords, reactionary tribal chieftains, mullahs, and opium traffickers."

Taraki visited Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev in March 1979 and asked for ground troops to help deal with the growing opposition to his program of reforms. Brezhnev refused, saying that the presence of the Soviet military in Afghanistan would help no one. He did, however, provide Taraki with helicopter gunships, military advisors and hundreds of thousands of tons of wheat. Brezhnev also advised Taraki to keep a close eye on his Deputy Prime Minister, Hafizulla Amin.

Brezhnev's words of warning proved to be prophetic. Taraki was assassinated by Amin in September 1979. Hafizulla Amin proceeded to eliminate all those within the PDP who were sympathetic to Taraki. Within weeks, over 500 members of the PDP had been assassinated. Thousands more were jailed or fled into exile. As popular opposition to Amin's takeover gathered momentum, what little political stability

was left in Afghanistan began to fall apart.

Fearing that a full-blown civil war was in the making, Brezhnev sent in a group of specialist KGB agents, who summarily despatched Amin in December 1979. The Soviets installed their own puppet, Babrak Karmal as the new Prime Minister. Along with Taraki, Karmal had been one of the founding members of the PDP in 1965.

The Soviets proceeded to move thousands of ground troops into Afghanistan in an attempt to forestall civil war. They were of the view that this would help bring some stability while Karmal consolidated his position. They had expected that it would be all over within a few months, after which time the troops could return home.



The Soviets not only had to deal with the unexpectedly difficult terrain of Afghanistan and the legendary ferocity and determination of Afghan warriors, but soon found themselves under attack from mighty arsenals of heavy weaponry manufactured in US munitions factories.

What was to have been a short foray ended in a brutal 10-year war that resulted in the death of fifteen thousand Soviet soldiers and nearly one and a half million Afghans. The war also brought about the creation of a group of

Islamic guerrilla fighters, the mujahideen, who eventually morphed into powerful militias controlled by Afghan warlords. It brought into existence the Al Qaeda network. And it catalysed the formation of a Pakistani-trained group of Islamists well trained in the doctrines of Jihad and Wahabi law, the Taliban.

Counterforce and Blowback

Even before the Soviet troops moved into Afghanistan after Taraki's assassination in 1979, the Carter Administration had thrown its weight behind Muslim militants in order to counter what they perceived to be increasing communist influence in Afghanistan. As well as providing these hardliners with huge amounts of money and military hardware, the CIA began to organise the recruitment, training, and arming of foreign Islamic mercenaries.

Once Soviet troops were on the ground in Afghanistan, all restraint was abandoned. In the words of Michael Parenti, "The CIA and its allies recruited, supplied, and trained almost 100,000 radical mujahideen from forty Muslim countries including Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Algeria, and Afghanistan itself."

Australian journalist John Pilger fills in a few more details: "[In 1986], CIA director William Casey had given his backing to a plan put forward by Pakistan's intelligence agency, the ISI, to recruit people from around the world to join the Afghan jihad. More than 100,000 Islamic militants were trained in Pakistan between 1986 and 1992, in camps overseen by the CIA and MI6, with the SAS training future al-Qaida and Taliban fighters in bomb-making and other black arts. Their leaders were trained at a CIA camp in Virginia. This

was called Operation Cyclone and continued long after the Soviets had withdrawn in 1989.” (*What Good Friends Left Behind*, The Guardian, 20/9/2003)

Over the course of the Soviet war in Afghanistan, the US, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan poured \$40 billion in military aid to the mujahideen and Islamic Jihadists intent on removing the “godless” Soviets from Afghanistan. During the 1980s, tens of thousands of tons of weapons and ammunition manufactured in the U.S. were delivered every year, often via Pakistan’s ISI (Directorate of Inter-Services Intelligence), to the militias. Among the recipients of this military largesse was a certain Osama bin Laden, who later took the war back to America.



Another of the CIA’s favoured men on the ground at that time was Gulbuddin Hekmatyer. Hekmatyer had shown his dark colours early in the piece. While a student of engineering at Kabul University during the 1970s, he would often carry bottles of acid secreted from the chemistry laboratory and throw their contents into the faces of unveiled female students on the campus.

During the war with the Soviets, Hekmatyer received millions of dollars and vast tonnages of weaponry from the CIA.

After the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, Afghanistan plunged deeper into the abyss. Heavily armed warlords now began to fight among themselves for control of the different regions. Hekmatyer set his sights on Kabul. His troops failed in their attempts to overrun the capitol, but succeeded in inflicting unspeakable damage on the city and its inhabitants. Michael Parenti reports: “They [the warlords] ravaged the cities, terrorized civilian populations, looted, staged mass executions, closed schools, raped thousands of women and girls, and reduced half of Kabul to rubble.” Over 65,000 civilians were killed in Kabul alone in the civil war unleashed by Afghan warlords between 1992 and 1996.

Yet within a decade, many of those same military commanders and their fighters had been magically transformed into the Northern Alliance, and had once again become the allies of the US when it occupied Afghanistan in October 2001.

Pakistan’s Gift to the Afghans

Massive casualties occurred among Afghani civilians throughout the conflict. Tens of thousands of children were orphaned and families from entire regions fled the fighting. Many retreated to the Pashtun tribal areas in Pakistan. Others went to Iran. In order to guarantee the future allegiance of those Afghan refugees who fled to Pakistan, the ISI, encouraged and supported by CIA, created a vast network of Islamist schools or madrassas. Tens of thousands of boys were taken into these male-only seminaries, and inducted into the principles of Jihad, holy war. They were instructed that their task was to eventually reclaim Afghanistan from its occupiers.

The “teachings” received by these young men consisted of an extreme form of Islamist indoctrination, with a curriculum modelled on Saudi Wahabism. The madrassas did not teach mathematics, science, history, geography or art. There was no instruction given in farming, herding or manufacturing. Those taken into the madrassas were isolated from their own hereditary and social groups and were effectively cut off from all knowledge of their tribal and clan lineages. They were, however, well instructed in the methods of Jihad and warfare and the domination of women.



Soon after the Soviet withdrawal, these “Taliban”, or “students of Islam” (*talib* is the Arabic term for student, *taliban* is the plural of *talib*) began to be mobilised into a political force under the direction of Mohammed Omar, a former Afghan military commander who had been wounded several times during the war with the Soviets.

Throughout its early years as a political entity, the Taliban was bankrolled by the Pakistani government. It received tens of millions of dollars every year in the form of food, fuel, money and military hardware. They soon became a formidable force. By 1994, Taliban fighters had captured Kandahar. In September 1996, Kabul was taken.

One of their first actions in Kabul was the capture of the former president, Mohammad Najibullah, who had been under UN protection for the previous four years. He was savagely tortured, castrated, and then killed. His broken and blood-soaked body was strung up on a large beam in the centre of Kabul. The new rulers made sure everybody understood that they meant business. This was but the beginning of a horrendous reign of terror and abuse.

These acts of violence did not prevent the establishment of diplomatic relations with the Clinton administration in Washington. High-level discussions were held between Taliban leaders and the energy company Unocal in Texas during 1997 to negotiate the construction of a pipeline through Afghanistan for the transport of gas from the Caspian Basin to Pakistan. Geostrategic interests have ever been an unspoken element in the US militarisation of Central Asia.

And Today?

In a public lecture delivered in Vancouver in late November 2009, Malalai Joya spoke of how many of the warlords who tore her country apart for two decades continue to wield power as members of Hamid Karzai’s Cabinet, and how the situation for women in Afghanistan is “as bad as it was at the time of the Taliban.”

Corruption is now endemic in Afghan politics, regardless of US meddling. Before Noor Muhammed Taraki came to power in 1978, Afghanistan produced enough opium to supply 70% of the world heroin market. Afghanistan now produces over 90% of the world’s illicit opium, which generates over \$500 million yearly for the Taliban and its remnants.

It is common knowledge that one of the big players in the opium trade has been Ahmed Wali Karzai, the younger brother of Hamid Karzai. Ahmed Wali Karzai is also renowned for his prowess as a gun-runner. His great wealth is regularly supplemented by payments from the CIA. For the past 8 years, he has been a recipient of CIA munificence for “negotiations” with militias in and around Kandahar. (See Dester Filkins, Mark Mazzetti and James Risen, *Brother of Afghan Leader Said to be Paid by CIA*, NY Times, 27/10/09).

The government of Hamid Karzai has received \$36 billion in so-called aid since 2001. Malalai Joya rails at the fact that most of that money has gone into the pockets of the numerous corrupt elements within the Karzai administration. All this while 18 million Afghans continue to live on less than \$2 per day.

So how are the people of Afghanistan ever to come up for air in this suffocating reality? Where is any wisdom to be found? How many more wedding parties are to be incinerated by missiles launched from fighter aircraft and pilotless drones? For how long can the growing resentment of Afghan civilians who have lost family members and friends to warlords, to the Taliban, and to foreign military forces be contained? And will Obama’s sending of an additional 30,000 troops to Afghanistan simply add more fuel to a fire that inexorably creeps towards a possibly greater conflagration in Pakistan?

In a recent article, Malalai Joya reflects: “This week’s announcement of upwards of 30,000 more troops to Afghanistan will have tragic consequences. Already this year we have seen the impact of an increase in troops occupying

Afghanistan: more violence and more civilian deaths. My people, the poor of Afghanistan who have known only war and the domination of fundamentalism, are today squashed between two enemies: the US/NATO occupation forces on the one hand and warlords and the Taliban on the other.

While we want the withdrawal of one enemy, we don’t believe it is a matter of choosing between two evils. There is an alternative: the democratic-minded parties and intellectuals are our hope for the future of Afghanistan.” (*A Troop Surge Can Only Magnify the Crime Against Afghanistan*, The Guardian, 30/11/2009)

Afghanistan’s present woes have been largely created by outside forces. The US and Saudi Arabia brought together and trained tens of thousands of men in the methods of violence and armed them with the instruments whereby they could perpetrate such violence. Many of these men have since left Afghanistan, and are now scattered throughout the Middle East and elsewhere where, to the consternation of their earlier masters, they continue to practice the arts in which they were instructed with great effect. Afghan warlords and chieftains were similarly trained and armed by the CIA and the ISI. And the Taliban was a direct import from Pakistan.

The Afghan people themselves have had little say or influence on the thirty years long maelstrom that has descended upon them. *They* did not create the militias that raped the women and destroyed the towns and cities. *They* did not create the Taliban who flogged men whose beards were too short, who beat women whose clothing was deemed inappropriate, who forbade the performance of all music and the viewing of films and videos, who

stoned to death and publically beheaded those deemed to have offended their version of Islamic Law. *They* did not seed Afghanistan with the millions of land mines that have killed and disfigured over 750,000 of their members, one third of them children. *They* were not responsible for the destruction of over half of their villages and communities, over a quarter of their paved roads, and most of their agricultural lands.



Malalai Joya calls for a revisioning of the future for her people. She calls for a vision based on education and not on military supremacy; a vision based on increasing autonomy and not on increasing subjection; a vision based on the freedom of women and not on domination by men; a vision based on a growing democracy and not on the rule by puppets and their criminal associates installed by foreign powers; and a vision based on cultural respect and not on cultural imperialism.

Malalai Joya offers a realisable vision: “We are not a backward people, and we are capable of fighting for democracy, human and women’s rights in Afghanistan. In fact, the only way these values will be achieved is if we struggle for them and win them ourselves.”

Further Sources

1. An audio presentation of Malalai Joya’s talk in Vancouver in November 2009 was broadcast by *Against the Grain* in early December. It can be accessed at: <http://www.kpfa.org/archive/id/56602>
2. Tariq Ali also discussed the situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan in Vancouver one year beforehand. His presentation fills in many further details. It can be heard at: <http://www.kpfa.org/archive/id/46263>
3. John Pilger’s remarkable piece in *The Guardian* of September 2003 documents his experiences and observations during a visit to Afghanistan. It is available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2003/sep/20/afghanistan.weekend7/print>
4. The situation in Afghanistan in more recent years is reviewed in *Wounding Further the Already Wounded*, REALNEWS 3, November/December 2008

LETTER FROM ALEXANDRA

DISARMING THE DISTANCE The Risk of Faith

It is impossible to truly live without risk. It may be possible to avoid the chaotic unpredictability of life by safely disengaging from any perceived danger, but this cannot be called living. Just about any kind of growth we can imagine is predicated upon the taking of some kind of risk. Even each step we take is always a little risky as we wrestle with gravity and pit our sense of balance against the earth spinning beneath our feet. The earth, for its part, refuses to stop spinning, so that even if we hold on to safety and even defend ourselves behind the small mean barricades of routine and security, the road will still pitch us relentlessly into unfamiliar territory. Not even our virtue will protect us.

Moving in an inescapably vast country constantly calls to mind the sheer spaciousness of reality. There is simply so much out there. Beyond the horizon, beyond our daily preoccupations, a

larger reality lurks. Despite our creature habits we know this only too well, if only in those moments of life's wipeouts, when we are ambushed by a larger, more piteously demanding life; moments that may be bitter sweet with adventure, with romance, with longing, moments dense with both pain and joy. Whilst we may be glad for the dust to eventually settle, we hold onto such moments and will even chisel out special places in our memories with our bare hands so that the moment may be honoured and somehow retained. Even if in the end we prefer a more bland and a more even taste from the menu of life, many of us venerate these in breaks of a larger life when we have been tumbled out of the security of our defensive personae to have the salty end of life rubbed into us. Tumbling away in that wipeout on the edge, we may still pause to lick the salt from our fingers.

Faith is risking such a taste. Faith is the open door to that faraway country of life in all its fullness. As the New Testament tersely puts it, faith is that conviction based upon the experience of blessings hoped for and the encounter with realities unseen (Heb. 11:1). It is a kind of knowing based upon a radical openness to life. Rather than trying to work out or to control and manipulate the extent of reality as we experience it, faith endeavors to connect to what can neither be controlled nor manipulated. This effort to connect to the larger picture is like the act of journeying itself, full of surprises. Faith knows that you cannot know. As St John of the Cross puts it, "in order to arrive at what is known, one must walk by a way of not knowing." Instead of trying to map the road ahead of time we must simply walk it instead. How risky! Yet Faith is that willingness to be invited to the unknown way where even God cannot be depended on, only encountered.

Faith is then only another way of openness to the mystery of life.

The road, among other things, invites such openness and will often confront us with the inflexibility of our lack of faith. As a new age natural therapist who had a broad smorgasbord of beliefs once remarked to a no-nonsense medical doctor's dogged rationalised atheism, "How can you have so much faith?!"

Vincent Jewell
Alexandra, Victoria

ON WAR AS AN INSTRUMENT OF PEACE

Barack Obama did not ask to be awarded the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize. In commencing his acceptance speech in Oslo with the statement, "I am at the beginning, and not the end, of my labours on the world stage", he was perhaps acknowledging the curious and perhaps premature decision to award him the prize. This is particularly significant in view of the fact that just nine days before receiving the prize in Oslo, he had authorised the deployment of an additional 30,000 US troops to Afghanistan. One can only surmise that Obama was selected for the Peace Prize as an expression of the deep desire and fervent expectation that he would somehow break the mould of his political predecessor and begin to do things differently. Their decision was clearly based more on aspiration than on actuality.

One of the more curious aspects of this event is that both sides of the political divide in the US have enthusiastically rallied behind Obama's acceptance speech at Oslo. Many hardcore Republicans - including a number of prominent neoconservatives - have praised Obama's explicit declaration of

the American way of war at Oslo. Democrats and liberals have similarly praised his performance.

What has now been dubbed “The Obama Doctrine” is claimed by some as a vindication of Bush-era foreign policy. Political journalist Kevin Drum comments: “I really don’t think neocons have much to complain about even if Obama didn’t use the opportunity to announce the construction of a new generation of nuclear missiles or something. Given that he was, after all, accepting a peace prize, it was a surprisingly robust defence of war and America’s military role in the world. Surprisingly Bushian, really.” (Quoted by Glenn Greenwald in *The Strange Consensus on Obama’s Nobel Address*, 11/12/09, Salon.com)

So is the new President really beginning to do things differently?

One thing that was consistently evident in Obama’s presentation at Oslo was the same eloquence and rhetorical skill that carried him to victory in his campaigns against Hilary Clinton and John McCain in 2008. His intelligence and passion were welcomed by a people sickened by the self-serving, hubristic and destructive methods of the Bush Administration and hopeful of more socially, diplomatically and environmentally conscious policies from their government.

A careful examination of the text of Obama’s speech raises the question of how long political leaders in the US can remain blind to the excesses and destructive actions of their own nation and repeatedly fail to acknowledge its role in the creation of conditions that either result in war or plant the seeds of inevitable future conflict.

On several occasions during the course of his acceptance speech, Obama projected either a remarkable naiveté regarding his own nation’s role in fomenting conflict in many parts of the world, or a surprising amnesia regarding recent history. But knowing the man’s intelligence, such lapses more likely reflect his own collusion with the historical whitewashing of the sepulchral politics of US foreign interference and domination that has occurred over the past half century.

Obama comments in regard to the role of the US after World War II: “America led the world in constructing an architecture to keep the peace: a Marshall Plan and a United Nations, mechanisms to govern the waging of war, treaties to protect human rights, prevent genocide and restrict the most dangerous of weapons. In many ways, these efforts succeeded.”

Of course it depends on one’s definition of success. One could also argue that the implementation of the Marshall Plan in 1947 served as much to further the interests of the US by introducing American models into European industrial and business practices as to stimulate European economic activity. Noam Chomsky reminds us that the hundreds of millions of dollars handed over to Holland and France simply served to fund their military activities in South East Asia at the time.

The dismissive attitude of the US towards the United Nations is well known. Its role as a mediator and regulator in the conduct of nations towards each other has been many times disregarded by the US, as evidenced by its persistent refusal over many decades to support numerous resolutions condemning or criticising Israeli behaviour in the Middle East. And we all know that the views of the

UN were completely dismissed by the US in the invasion of Iraq in 2002 that has led to such chaos and misery.

Obama went on: “The United States of America has helped underwrite global security for more than six decades with the blood of our citizens and the strength of our arms. . . . We have borne this burden not because we seek to impose our will. We have done so out of enlightened self-interest – because we seek a better future for our children and grandchildren, and we believe that their lives will be better if other people’s children and grandchildren can live in freedom and prosperity.”

The implication here is that the US has been a reluctant participant in military adventures and that it has always used its military power justly. Again, one can only marvel at this cynical glossing over of the numerous opportunistic conflicts created by the CIA and the US military in Vietnam, Africa, Central and South America, Central Asia, and in the Middle East. And one can rightfully query the nature of the “better future” brought about by the creation of the balance of terror that has come to be euphemistically termed “nuclear deterrence.”

Our memories may be short, but one would expect a deeper awareness of recent history by the leader of the most powerful nation on earth, although there has not been a particularly good record here if one considers the policies and actions of such predecessors as Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush.

Obama mentions both Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein in his speech, yet says nothing about the role of the CIA and the US military in contributing to the creation of the present conditions in

Afghanistan. Nor is there any mention of the decades-long role of the CIA in providing support for Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi military during the Iraq-Iran War of 1980-1988, which included the provision of the such hardware as helicopters equipped with agricultural spray arms for the conduct of chemical warfare.

An even more curious perspective is offered in Obama’s speech regarding the role of the US as the world’s largest manufacturer and supplier of weaponry: “Yes, the instruments of war do have a role to play in preserving the peace.” This is an absurd and contradictory notion in light of the military arming by the US of such nations as Israel and Saudi Arabia. It is not that peace is preserved by the instruments of war, but that the conduct of war is more strategically determined and executed.

Obama continues: “I believe that the United States must remain a standard bearer in the conduct of war.” But it must be asked whether the US has **ever** been a standard bearer in the conduct of war, and whether it is even possible for **any** nation to be a bearer of standards in the conduct of war, which is always ruinous, bloody, and tragic. What standards were applied in the fire bombings of Dresden and Tokyo, the atomic incineration of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the destruction by defoliants and napalm of Vietnam, and the creation of chaos in Iraq?

The US has a long history of interfering militarily in the affairs of governments of which it disapproves. In Africa, the CIA supported repressive regimes in Angola, Zaire, Uganda, Sudan and Somalia for many decades. It also supported the apartheid regime in South Africa. The CIA has been instrumental in the overthrow of democratically elected governments in Brazil in 1964

and Indonesia in 1965. They were implicate in the overthrow of Salvador Allende by Augusto Pinbochet in 1970, and were instrumental in fomenting civil conflicts in Nicaragua and El Salvador. One can only wonder about the standards that guided the activities of the CIA in each of these theatres of war.

While acknowledging the role and influence of Mohandas Ghandi and Martin Luther King, both of whom were earlier recipients of the Nobel Peace Prize, Obama explicitly rejects the non-violence that each of them espoused: “I know there is nothing naive in the creed and lives of Ghandi and King. But as a head of state sworn to protect and defend my nation, I cannot be guided by their examples alone.”



Apart from the fact that this is a critical misreading of his role as president where, in his oath of office, he has sworn to “preserve, protect and defend the **Constitution** of the United States” the question naturally arises, then by whose example is Obama to be guided? The CIA, with its litany of interference with governments and its covert and material support for repressive regimes? The Pentagon? The defence contractors and manufacturers of military equipment in the US who provide

massive employment and generate massive wealth for the US?

When he received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964, Martin Luther King fully recognised the immensity of the task that awaits humanity and made it clear that a commitment to peace must be made manifest at every level: “I venture to suggest to all of you and all who hear and all who eventually read these words, that the philosophy and strategy of non-violence become immediately a subject for study and for serious experimentation in every field of human conflict, by no means excluding the relations between nations. . . . We have ancient habits to deal with, vast structures of power, indescribably complex problems to solve. But unless we abdicate our humanity altogether and succumb to fear and impotence in the presence of the weapons we have ourselves created, it is as imperative and urgent to put an end to war and violence between nations as it is to put an end to racial injustice.”

One is left wondering why Barack Obama did not suggest to the Nobel Committee that they wait at least for the first fruits of his actions as to manifest rather than obliging him to use the peace platform at Oslo as a theatre within which to justify the making of war as an essential and integral dimension of US foreign policy.

Further Sources

The full text of Barack Obama’s acceptance speech for the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize has been made available by The Huffington Post at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/12/10/obama-nobel-peace-prize-a_n_386837.html

POETICA

It All Depends On Who You're Fighting

Light armour and swift-footedness
Can overcome giants
So long as you keep your distance
They also serve those who would walk
city streets and high roads
Deflecting and evading occasional
dangers

Brute force is hard to handle at close
range
Without diamond-fast sight or
diamond-hard fist
Not to shatter
But to block the shattering blow

The warlike man in times of peace
Must now make peace within himself

Stay light on your feet, and swift in
smile and presence
Keep concealed the mental blade
That cuts through all obstruction and
deceit
The ocean too long travelled now to
harbour doubt

Make peace not war within yourself
And then the rest will follow