

## **BARACK OBAMA: SPITTING ON ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S GRAVE**

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### **Introduction**

The United States has never been a friend of Burma. President Lyndon Johnson invited Ne Win to Washington in 1966, near the beginning of the first modern tyrant of the country's reign of terror. Johnson did so as a means to contain China. The actual suffering that the people of Burma went on to experience, meant nothing whatsoever to him, or later presidents, or their policy advisors.

This only changed following the junta's massacre in 1988, after which Washington could no longer openly support the regime. The Administration, and one lawmaker after another, expressed solidarity with the freedom and democracy aspirations of the people.

However, this was all for show. No one did anything. Washington could have backed the pro-democracy resistance, which was trying to bring down the Burma Army. It didn't. It could also have orchestrated much greater pressure on the regime, both publicly and through diplomatic channels. It didn't do this, either.

### **Obama's policy**

Barack Obama has now decided that this pro-democracy posturing is a waste of time. The regime has implemented an elaborate political theatre, to give his Administration an excuse to reverse its public, but fraudulent, commitment to democracy. Once again, America policymakers can work to contain China, and ignore abominable suffering, and even open up a new production and sales market for American companies - those companies that don't mind getting dollars that are soaked in blood!

I believe in both Republican and Democratic Party ideals. For the former, I believe in carefully-limited and controlled government, personal responsibility, and capitalism. I am not a communist. For the latter, I believe that the disadvantaged in society need to be given assistance, and more generally that government does have some role to play in ensuring that our basic needs, including for health care, are satisfied. As part of this, I believe that markets and markets participants need to be very carefully regulated. The power of greed is too strong. It requires steadfast checks and balances.

When Obama was first elected, I wrote of the prospect that he would extend Abraham Lincoln's legacy. As the first African American President, he was the perfect person to shift U.S. foreign

policy from the realist or pragmatic, to the idealistic. America, which likes to tout the ideals of democracy and human rights, could for once consistently and systematically support them. Who better to demonstrate that Lincoln's sacrifice, not to mention the entire Civil War, and everything else that has followed in the struggle for racial equality, was justified.

We all had such high hopes. Of course, Obama's a politician, which isn't saying much. But, he's clearly very intelligent, and his campaign words in 2008 were so inspiring. The fact that he has turned out to be just one more slick and polished opportunist, and that he has abandoned the pretense of even supporting human rights, has been devastating.

At least Republican presidents were vocal on democracy, even if they never followed up their words with actions. But what Obama has done, starting with China, and then with one country after another, including Syria, Iran and Zimbabwe, has been shocking.

I don't understand why it is so hard to be principled. If the U.S., through NATO, will help the Libyans get rid of Gaddafi, then why not the Syrians and Assad (where Obama recently turned tail on his own usage of chemical weapons "red-line"). Now, I don't expect the U.S. to get involved in - to aggressively assist - every pro-democracy struggle. But let's not forget that the U.S. itself wouldn't have been free, without French support. There's a reason why the park across the street from the White House is named after the Marquis de Lafayette.

I don't understand why the U.S. can't draw a policy line in the sand, for human rights and democracy. The President should announce that the United States firmly supports, and where feasible will help, the freedom and democracy aspirations of all the repressed people of the world. This is surely the way to demonstrate global leadership.

It's true that we live in an interconnected world, so the U.S. should maintain some semblance of relations with everyone. But, it must firmly and unequivocally stand with the people of China, and Iran, and North Korea, and Syria, and Saudi Arabia, and Zimbabwe, and Burma, and all of the other countries where the select and entrenched few, are exploiting if not destroying the lives of the many.

The U.S. is offering a \$5 million bounty for Uganda's war criminal Joseph Kony. Why not a similar reward for Senior General Than Shwe?

### **Obama's calculation**

Another good question is what lies behind Washington's intransigence to back democratic ideals. Surprisingly, it is not our own history of repression, starting with slavery, the domination of women, the preferential status given to corporations, and now the secret police surveillance of ordinary Americans. While all of this is certainly significant - how can one dictator, even a mild one, oppose a brother - there is something else at work.

In his first term, Obama came to recognize three things. First, his highest priority was to help the U.S. escape the recession that had been caused by Wall Street's financial crisis. Secondly, many Republican leaders are racist against him, and further they only care about power, the neoconservative goal to achieve a one party state, with all three branches of government under their control. Thirdly, most ordinary Americans don't give a damn about the rest of the world. If other people are suffering, that's just too bad. Why should we help?

Obama realized that he had to ensure some sort of legacy as the first black president. If he could help right the economy, that would be all that was required. His historical reputation would be assured. And, since the Republicans were doing everything that they could to sabotage the economy, this obviously required a lot of work. He could ignore the world, not only because Americans don't care, but because foreign policy is messy and difficult, and there are no guarantees of success. Better just to ignore it, and let the State Department do its thing. The only exceptions to this were Afghanistan and Iraq, because of the wars.

### **State Department corruption**

It was therefore surprising that Obama, and Hillary Clinton at State, took such a proactive approach to Burma. The U.S. for the most part had been studiously avoiding the country for decades. Why the sudden interest?

Obviously, someone senior at State finally woke up and saw that China was colonizing a good part of Southeast Asia, and that maybe this wasn't such a good thing, but not because of the impact on the people of the region - Washington doesn't care about them - but for American geopolitical interests. However, I believe there is more to it than this.

The Administration's Asian pivot was reportedly driven by Undersecretary Kurt Campbell. It's also likely that he was one of the prime motivators behind the policy reversal on Burma. Interestingly, Campbell has now retired from State, and started a new company, The Asia Group (what a grand name!), which is lobbying for American businesses in Burma, including to expand the airport in Rangoon. Lest anyone have any doubts, this is Big Business - billions of dollars are at stake. Campbell is on his way not only to becoming a millionaire, but a deca-millionaire, if not more, particularly if he sets up a private equity operation. Don't be surprised if he hires Derek Mitchell, once his ambassadorship is up.

The main reason why Washington has become corrupt is the influence of corporate money. Companies not only fund congressional and presidential campaigns, they also draft much of the legislation that ultimately is passed into law, and which they write to serve their interests. The detrimental impact of the revolving door, where top regulators from departments and agencies, when they leave their posts, cash in by joining the private sector, has also long been understood.

Earlier I asked, in effect, why not one single modern American president was ethical. (I will admit that Jimmy Carter tried.) Lord Acton wrote in 1887 that "*power tends to corrupt, and*

*absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men.*” The implication of this is that the temptations of high office are simply too great. But now, because of the influence of corporate money, U.S presidents are corrupted before they even attain office. It appears that U.S. presidential candidates are chosen by what is effectively an evolutionary process, and that to be selected, you have to be immoral.

The one exception to this overall pattern, though, has been the State Department. Foreign Service Officers are among the best and brightest people of the country, and they serve for low pay and regularly in postings with great risk. I’ve met many over the years, and have never sensed even a hint of corruption. Most of the FSOs and Military Attaches that I have met also agreed on Burma that the regime was among the worst of the worst. But, they all said that the White House would never support, much less fund, strong resistance and action.

It seems now that State, at least in its top echelons, and in the Far East, has also become corrupt. What a surprise. One wonders how many former State officials are now involved in business in China.

### **U.S. support for genocide**

Of course, I am not suggesting that Obama personally is corrupt on Burma, merely that he is ignorant, meaning not well-informed. No president can be an expert on every issue. That’s why they have advisors. It seems clear that Clinton and Campbell sold Obama a bill of goods on the country, convincing him that the SPDC’s reform was sincere, and also that with enough bribes the regime would stop buying nuclear and missile technology from North Korea. This was a huge mistake on his part. The audacity to hope, is not an excuse to be stupid.

One thing Obama can’t ignore, though, is racism and genocide. Racism is where you target some one not because of their individual characteristics (in other words, as by the police, when they are demonstrably criminal), but because of an attribute that they cannot avoid having. It is a form of collective branding and guilt. And, as I just said, even today racism is alive and well in the U.S. This obviously extends to all the Republican leaders and followers, who simply can’t stomach the idea of a black president, that someone who as far as they are concerned to this day should still be a slave, would have power of them. Moreover, it goes much deeper than this. Research has show that hidden biases and prejudices are commonplace.

Humans are such primitive creatures. We see someone that looks a little different, and our natural inclination is to be suspicious and defensive. It actually takes a major exertion of will, not to profile, and to let people be themselves.

You would think that Obama, as an African American, would be extremely sensitive to this. You would think that he would reject even the mildest forms of racism out of hand, and further that this would extend to his Administration’s foreign policy - that America would never do anything on his watch to support the racism that also permeates the rest of the world.

It's therefore shocking, his position on Burma. The country has been undergoing extraordinary spasms of racism-driven violence, which very arguably - certainly for the Rohingya - rise to the level of genocide, and which have also been orchestrated by the regime.

Moreover, Obama cannot plead ignorance of this. It is too well documented. There have been four separate instances of genocidal violence in the last year against Rohingya and other Muslims. And, there are widespread campaigns, starting with the comments of President Thein Sein himself, to perpetuate this violence, until its goal is achieved. This goal is nothing less than the extermination of the Rohingya, ideally with their deaths - kill them on land, or force them to flee and drown in the sea - or their expulsion.

Two hundred Rohingya people drowned last week: two hundred distinct individuals - men, women and children - are now gone; and the regime tried to force others to move to the beach, in the hopes that they would be killed by the recent cyclone.

### **Let's not forget Suu Kyi**

I should add, concerning Burma's Lady of the Immaculate Silence, or, as I like to call her, the Racist Mouse (because she is now as quiet as a mouse), that if you openly appeal to racists (your spokesperson said that there are "no" Rohingya), and if you work hand in hand with other publicly avowed racists, that makes you a racist, too. If you stay silent, you are a sympathizer. If you actively court racists, you are an organizer.

Even more, if your desire for power is so great that it is more important than freedom for the people, and that you will ignore literally any crime, as long as nothing gets in the way of that desire, then you are not only the most un-Buddhist person of which I have every heard, you truly are the worst person in Burma.

### **Conclusion**

Because of Obama and Suu Kyi, Burma will now be destroyed in a way that even the junta, when the generals ruled openly, couldn't do. Said another way, in the past, it was the present that was being destroyed. Now, it is the future.

The Strand and other high-end hotels are full of carpetbaggers (George Soros!). Thaksin Shinawatra, Than Shwe, and the top leaders of the new corrupted KNU, are carving up Dawei. Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, the first foreign leader who visited Burma after 1988, has even returned to discuss business as well.

It used to be readily apparent who in Burma was bad, and who was good. It was one of the clearest cut examples of right and wrong, even David and Goliath, in the world. Now, this

distinction has evaporated - it has disappeared. The bad people are still there, of course - there are now more than ever - and, they are winning.

Well, President Obama has just met the public racist in chief, Thein Sein. But rather than oppose, with all America's might, a regime that is nothing less than a genocidal dictatorship, he is actually exchanging pleasantries. Through the increased U.S. aid that has been announced, he is even rewarding crimes against humanity.

This is disgusting beyond words. What a failure! What a letdown! Obama's Presidency is not a fitting tribute to Abraham Lincoln's sacrifice, and the sacrifices of so many Americans who believed with him that equality was not only self-evident, but that it also had to be won. Instead, he has betrayed our nation's ideals. He is spitting on Lincoln's grave.