

[heralding the hawk]

Make the World Safe for Hope

Can Barack Obama, who campaigns as an icon of peace, actually be more bellicose than Bush? Yes, he can.

By Brendan O'Neill

OBAMA-MANIA is getting out of hand. Full-grown and well-educated men—from swooning Andrew Sullivan to the entire staff of *GQ* magazine—are developing “man crushes” on Barack Obama, going weak in the knees for his immaculately pressed suits, oratorical skills, and shameless hope-mongering.

“I’ve never wanted anyone more than I want you,” warbles Obama Girl in a song called “I Got a Crush on Obama,” which has been viewed over 6 million times on YouTube. Celebs are queuing up to fall at his feet. “My heart belongs to Barack,” says Scarlett Johansson. There’s a palpable whiff of semi-religious hysteria at Obama rallies. As Joel Stein wrote in the *Los Angeles Times*, “Obamaphilia has gotten creepy,” and its “fanatical” adherents are starting to embarrass themselves.

Actually, it’s worse than that: they are deluding themselves. Many Democrats have become so goggle-eyed, so insanely convinced that Obama is the savior of American politics (potentially rescuing both the Democratic Party from political ruin and America herself from the decadence and violence of the Bush era), that they are beginning to suffer political hallucinations. They fantasize that he is pure and righteous, a miracle-worker who, in a pique of rage, will overturn the conventions of neocon-ruled America.

The blind hope in Obama-as-messiah is most clearly expressed in the widespread delusion that he would be a “president of peace,” welcomed by a world eager to bury the warmongering ways of the office’s former occupant and renew its respect for America. Columnist Michael Kinsley praised Obama’s “valuable experience ... as what you might call a ‘world man’—Kenyan father, American mother, four formative years living in Indonesia, more years in the ethnic stew of Hawaii, middle name of Hussein, and so on—in an increasingly globalized world.” But from my sedate Obamarama-free home in London, I’m not cheered by the prospect of this “world man” in the White House. Rather, I see him for what he is—or for what he threatens to become. Having never been stirred by the sight of Obama giving an MLK-style speech on the need for change, I can only take the candidate at their words. And Obama’s words are ominous indeed.

President Obama would be a warmonger. He would be a wide-eyed, zealous interventionist who would not think twice about using America’s “military muscle” (his words) to overthrow “rogue states” and to suppress America’s enemies, real and imagined. He would go farther even than President Bush in transforming the globe into

America’s backyard and staffing it with spies and soldiers. He would relish the “American mission” to police the world and topple tyrannical regimes.

After eight years of Bush’s military meddling in the Middle East, if you want more war, vote Obama.

Two myths must be exploded: first, that Barack Obama was a principled and passionate opponent of the war in Iraq; second, that if he were installed in the White House he would resist the temptation to launch new wars and would instead usher in an era of peace.

Iraq is the Obamabots’ favorite fault-line in the clash of the two Democrat contenders: Clinton supported the invasion and Obama opposed it. An open-and-shut case of one candidate being “for the war” and the other being “against the war,” right? Not quite. Obama’s position over the past five years has been strikingly similar to Clinton’s. And that ought to be an issue of serious concern for Obama’s army of acolytes and the peace protesters who have latched on to his campaign because, as Jeff Taylor pointed out in *Counterpunch*, “Clinton herself provides no substantive alternative to the neoconservative philosophy of the Bush administration.” Obama is little different from Clinton, and Clinton is little different from Bush.

Obama's campaign frequently invokes his 2002 "speech against the war," but very rarely quotes directly from it. Why? Because this mysterious speech—which has become the stuff of legend in Obamaphilic circles, talked about but rarely read—is a pro-war tirade. Yes, Obama described the planned invasion of Iraq as "dumb" and "rash," but his overriding concern—expressed repetitively throughout the speech—was that the Bush administration was damaging the legitimate case for American-made wars of intervention and potentially making it harder for future administrations (Democratic, for example) to send soldiers around the world to depose unfriendly regimes.

Obama gave the speech at an antiwar rally in Chicago in October 2002. Perhaps nervous about being seen at a gathering of critics of American military intervention, he straight away outlined his pro-war credentials: "Let me begin by saying that although this has been billed as an anti-war rally, I stand before you as someone who is not opposed to war in all circumstances." He reiterated his non-opposition to war another four times in the 921-word speech.

Then Obama went to Washington, where he obediently voted to fund the war in Iraq and opposed the withdrawal of American troops. In 2004, he even talked about sending more troops to Iraq to stabilize the country—he had the idea of a surge before the Bushies did. When he and Hillary Clinton had a chance to enact Sen. Russ Feingold's measure ordering Bush to withdraw most U.S. troops from Iraq by July 1, 2007, both voted no. Both senators also voted against a June 2006 amendment proposed by John Kerry for the redeployment of U.S. troops out of Iraq. It wasn't until May 2007 that Clinton and Obama voted to cut off funds.

It is a myth, pure bunkum, that Obama is a brave anti-warrior. He made

a brief speech in 2002—peppered with reminders of his generally pro-war leanings—and then, like Clinton, used his muscle in the Senate to fund the war and extend its bloody duration. It is only during the past year, as he has thrown himself into the presidential race, that Obama has decided to pose as a long-standing, level-headed critic. As Taylor argues, "An adept politician, Obama began emphasizing his 'anti-war' stance as the war became increasingly unpopular among Democrats across the country and he began gearing up for the 2008 presidential campaign."

But there is more going on here than Iraq-related opportunism. If elected president, Obama would make it a priority to smash the argument for non-interventionism and to rehabilitate America's imperial mission to right the wrongs of the world.

THOSE FOOLISHLY CHEERING OBAMA'S PROMISE TO BRING THE WAR IN IRAQ TO A "RESPONSIBLE END" SHOULD RECOGNIZE WHY HE IS PLANNING THIS: NOT TO LIBERATE IRAQ BUT RATHER TO LIBERATE THE INTERVENTIONIST PROJECT FROM THE "IRAQI DISTRACTION."

His main beef with the war in Iraq is not that it has failed in its stated objectives, fomented terror, and killed thousands, but rather that it has made the American people skeptical about military intervention. "There is one ... place where our mistakes in Iraq have cost us dearly, and that is the loss of our government's credibility with the American people," he says. Citing a Pew Survey that found that 42 percent of Americans agree that the U.S. should "mind its own business internationally and let other countries get along the best they can on their own," Obama retorted, "We cannot afford to be a country of isolationists right now. ... We need to maintain a

strong foreign policy, relentless in pursuing our enemies and hopeful in promoting our values around the world."

Those foolishly cheering Obama's promise to bring the war in Iraq to a "responsible end" should recognize why he is planning this: not to liberate Iraq but rather to liberate the interventionist project from the "Iraqi distraction" and rebuild America's military sufficiently to send its forces to hotspots around the globe. In a long piece for *Foreign Affairs* in July/August 2007, he argued, "After Iraq, we may be tempted to turn inward. That would be a mistake. The American moment is not over, but it must be seized anew. We must bring the war to a responsible end and then renew our leadership—military, diplomatic, moral—to confront new threats and capitalize on new opportunities." He calls for adding 65,000 soldiers to the

Army and 27,000 to the Marine Corps and vastly expanding their mission. "[D]eposing a dictator and setting up a ballot box" is not enough: Obama wants \$50 billion to promote "sustainable democracy," a gauzy scheme that aims to "build healthy and educated communities, reduce poverty, develop markets, and generate wealth."

Yet for all his focus on the "politics of hope," when it comes to outlining his program of international interventionism, Obama parrots precisely the Bush regime's panic-packed arguments about the horrendous threats facing America. Paying tribute to earlier battles against fascism and Soviet communism, Obama

said last year, “This century’s threats are at least as dangerous and in some ways more complex than those we have confronted in the past. They come from weapons that can kill on a mass scale and from global terrorists who respond to alienation or perceived injustice with murderous nihilism. They come from rogue states allied to terrorists and from rising powers that could challenge both America and the international foundation of liberal democracy.” Here, Obama the celebrated new Democrat sounds startlingly like the clapped-out dinosaurs of the neocon project. Like

said, “We have heard much over the last six years about how America’s larger purpose in the world is to promote the spread of freedom.” The anticipated twist never came. “I agree,” Obama told the crowd. Turns out we haven’t done enough to mold the world in America’s image: “America must lead by reaching out to all those living disconnected lives of despair in the world’s forgotten corners.”

Making Bush’s foreign policy look nearly as “humble” as initially promised, Obama declared that America’s security is “inextricably linked to the security of

“American hegemony” so that we can continue to fulfill our “responsibility to lead the world.” Obama has updated this outlook in PC, Democrat-friendly lingo: “The mission of the U.S. is to provide global leadership grounded in the understanding that the world shares a common security and a common humanity.” Little wonder that Kagan sees in Obama a kindred spirit: “Obama believes the world yearns to follow us,” he writes. “Personally, I like it.”

If President Obama pursued a neocon foreign policy, only with a touch more East Coast-style diplomacy than was ever employed by the Stetson-wearing Bush, that would be bad enough. But he might actually be worse than the neocons.

Obama continually criticizes the Bush administration for pursuing its interests on the international stage instead of spreading “values” and “principles.” He says Iraq was a war based “not on principle but on politics.” Yet if there could be anything worse than the Bush foreign policy, it would be Obama’s principled meddling. At least interventions driven by narrow interests and politics have some kind of endpoint: when the interest has been protected or the political goal realized, the intervention might come to an end. Obama, by contrast, inflamed by his self-defined “values” and motivated by a vision of good versus evil in which it is America’s role to lead the world toward its “common humanity,” would be more reckless and unwieldy than Bush ever was. There is nothing quite so dangerous as a well-armed leader convinced that he has an historic moral purpose on the world stage.

Barack Obama’s Inaugural Address wouldn’t require much work: George W. Bush delivered the first draft in 2005. ■

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MAKING BUSH’S FOREIGN POLICY LOOK NEARLY AS “HUMBLE” AS INITIALLY PROMISED, OBAMA DECLARED THAT AMERICA’S SECURITY IS “INEXTRICABLY LINKED TO THE SECURITY OF ALL PEOPLE,” OPINING THAT FLU-STRICKEN INDONESIAN CHICKENS AND LATIN AMERICAN CORRUPTION PUT AMERICANS AT RISK.

them, he compares today’s shoddy and stateless terror networks to the powerful regimes of fascist Germany and Soviet Russia. And like them he suggests that America is threatened by “weapons that can kill on a mass scale”—a dark hint at the much feared “dirty nuke,” the existence of which has never been established, either in al-Qaeda’s caves or in the nuclear facilities of Iran.

Besides plagiarizing the Bush regime’s book of fear-mongering, Obama embraces two other aspects of Bushite foreign policy: unilateralism and pre-emption. He argues, “No president should ever hesitate to use force—unilaterally if necessary—to protect ourselves and our vital interests when we are attacked or imminently threatened.”

Those expecting the age of Obama to bring a repudiation of the Bush agenda hope in vain. In a speech to the Chicago Council on Global Affairs last April he

all people,” opining that flu-stricken Indonesian chickens and Latin American corruption put Americans at risk. No, they don’t. Obama’s stress on how everything is interconnected not only sets up the United States to intervene everywhere, but it makes any coherent strategy impossible. If every problem is an American problem, how would Obama set priorities or address one crisis instead of another? It’s a question he hasn’t begun to answer.

Neoconservatives are only too happy to fill in the blank. In a *Washington Post* column entitled “Obama the Interventionist,” Robert Kagan celebrated the repudiation of the realist consensus: “Obama’s speech ... was pure John Kennedy, without a trace of John Mearsheimer.” In 1996, Kagan co-wrote with Bill Kristol a *Foreign Affairs* essay entitled “Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy,” which argued that U.S. foreign policy should seek to preserve

[nuclear family]

Defining Deterrence Down

What's the return address of a non-state actor with a bomb?

By James Kurth

THE NUCLEAR AGE was inaugurated by the largest and most advanced industrial power in history, the United States. Only the greatest of great powers had the capacity to mobilize the vast and diverse resources necessary to acquire the first nuclear weapons. The U.S. then announced the advent of the new age with a big bang, over Hiroshima and again over Nagasaki.

The next power to acquire nuclear weapons was the only other superpower, the Soviet Union. Although never as super as the United States, the Soviets possessed the second-largest industrial capacity in the world, so it was altogether natural that the USSR took silver in the nuclear-weapons race.

Neither was it surprising that the next states to join the club were also major industrial powers, although not really super ones—Britain in 1952, France in 1960, and China in 1964. When India tested its “nuclear device” in 1974 (it did not then call it a nuclear weapon), even this merely developing economy did not seem to be very far below the previous capacity standard. Clearly, as the nuclear age was advancing in years, the required capacity for acquiring nuclear weapons was becoming smaller. Finally, in 1998, when Pakistan tested its first nuclear weapon, it demonstrated that nuclear weapons could be acquired by a state that was hardly an industrial power at all. The nuclear tests by North Korea in 2006 emphasized this new real-

ity, and if and when Iran develops its own nuclear weapons, that will underscore the point.

In the course of the first six decades of the nuclear age, advances in technology and, more importantly, in the ability to obtain technologies already developed by more advanced nations, have steadily lowered the threshold for acquiring nuclear weapons. Technological advances have driven the necessary capacity downward, successively from superpowers, to major powers, to minor powers.

Now, in the seventh decade of the nuclear age, the great fear is that we will soon see—perhaps with another big bang—the next step in this drive downward. Nuclear weapons will be acquired by an organization that is no power or state at all, a subnational but transnational terrorist network, such as al-Qaeda, which has already said that it is intent upon using nuclear weapons against America.

Not being a state, a sub- and transnational network does not possess territory or population for which it would be responsible—assets that it seeks to preserve and protect, which would be the targets of retaliatory attacks by other states. Thus sub- and transnational networks cannot be the objects of classical, state-against-state deterrence, a principal foundation of the international order (such as it is) that we have been living in ever since the advent of the nuclear age.

Moreover, one can imagine that technological advances will eventually drive the capacity threshold even lower, from the sub- and transnational network or group to its logical endpoint: just one or two persons by themselves. The long-predicted age of the “super-empowered individual” would at last have arrived.

At present, however, we are only in the midst of the downward transition to the sub- and transnational network. That is still enough to get our attention. Unless deterrence can be re-invented to fit transnational Islamist terrorist networks, we are about to witness the end of an epoch—and the end of many Americans as well.

The reality of the threat from transnational Islamist terrorist networks was clearly revealed on Sept. 11, 2001. But the potential for that threat to also become a nuclear one has been ticking away ever since Pakistan acquired nuclear weapons in 1998. Not only was the Pakistani bomb the first “Islamic bomb” (if not quite an Islamist one), but Pakistan acquired it with the aid of an extensive transnational nuclear network orchestrated by its chief nuclear scientist, A.Q. Khan. It became obvious that Islamists in Pakistan might use a similar transnational network to pass on Pakistani nuclear weapons to other Islamists elsewhere. In any event, other Muslim countries, most obviously Iraq and Iran, seemed to be good candidates to acquire the