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Barack Obama: The Peace Candidate?

by Sheldon Richman

Why would anyone think that presumptive Democratic presidential nominee Barack Obama is the peace candidate?

True, before President Bush sent an invasion force to Iraq and before Obama was in the Senate, he made a speech saying intervention would be a mistake. But after the invasion, in 2004, he said he wasn't sure how he would have voted when the resolution authorizing Bush to use force to overthrow Saddam Hussein came before the Senate. Since being in the Senate, he has voted to continue the occupation.

That doesn't sound much like a peace candidate, does it?

Obama has made speeches and written articles demonstrating his full embrace of the interventionist policy that has characterized the U.S. government's approach to the world for many years.

What's truly frightening is that Obama doesn't seem to realize that U.S. foreign policy has been interventionist. For example, he said, "We cannot afford to be a country of isolationists right now. 9/11 showed us that *try as we might to ignore the rest of the world*, our enemies will no longer ignore us. And so we need to maintain a strong foreign policy, relentless in pursuing our enemies and hopeful in promoting our values around the world." (Emphasis added.)

In the last hundred years, when have "we" ignored the rest of the world? U.S. administrations have been interfering in Middle Eastern affairs for more than 50 years. They have been interfering in Latin America even longer. Anyone who takes a close look with an open mind would know that 9/11 was a consequence of U.S. interventionism, not isolationism, which is a smear word. That someone opposes invading other countries doesn't mean he opposes commercial or cultural relations with them. The great liberals of history (when that word meant freedom and minimum government) favored peace *and* free trade,

Fear of nonintervention is something Obama has expressed before. In the July/August 2007 *Foreign Affairs* he wrote, "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.”

Those are not the words of peace candidate. Obama has often talked about the need for the United States to project its power around the world.

He has made it clear that he supports wars that are not strictly defensive and has expressed admiration for the first President Bush’s war against Iraq: “When we use force in situations other than self-defense, we should make every effort to garner the clear support and participation of others — the kind of burden-sharing and support President George H.W. Bush mustered before he launched Operation Desert Storm.”

Obama engages in the same fear-mongering that we have gotten accustomed to with George W. Bush. Obama says, “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.”

Again, he shows no understanding that it is interventionism, not “liberal democracy,” that makes Americans targets. He’s fallen for the Bush line that “they hate us because we are free.”

Even parts of the U.S. government know that is nonsense. As the Pentagon’s Defense Science Board put it in 2004, “Muslims do not hate our freedom, but rather, they hate our policies.”

And Osama bin Laden himself said that same year, “Contrary to what Bush says and claims — that we hate freedom — let him tell us then, why did we not attack Sweden?”

With Obama in the White House, we could look forward to more Wilsonian military adventures: “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. I agree.”

With a peace candidate like that, who needs a warmonger?

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