

Obama, the People and the Facts

Exclusive: The political crisis facing President Obama and the Democratic Party results from a profound loss of faith in the U.S. government, made worse by Obama's obsessive secrecy. But he could address both problems by opening the books on some key hidden chapters relevant to today, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

There is much handwringing among Democrats about the deepening pessimism that pervades the American people as they question the value of governance and even the viability of a democratic Republic. As the rich get richer, the middle class shrinks and foreign wars go on endlessly, many people feel powerless to change things. They don't trust politicians and are not even inspired enough to vote.

In November, this malaise meant the electorate, in effect, ceded control of the House and Senate to the Republicans who find their anti-government themes at least reinforced in this despairing environment. The Democrats have a tougher sell amid the cynicism. To alter the dynamic, they must convince people that the government is on their side and can make a positive difference.

But there is a simple way for President Barack Obama to address this political crisis: He could give an old-fashioned Oval Office speech that shares with the people key facts about what has been going on around the world over the past dozen years or so. He could engage the public not by spinning with clever rhetoric but by telling some unvarnished truths much like Dwight Eisenhower did in his "military-industrial complex" speech or John Kennedy did when saying "we all inhabit this small planet."

Obama could start by releasing the secret section of the 9/11 Report that discusses Saudi financing of the hijackers who attacked the Twin Towers in New York and the Pentagon outside Washington. Americans have the right to know these facts, especially with Saudi Arabia now pressing the United States to join in overthrowing the government of Syria, a move which could open the gates of Damascus to a victory by al-Qaeda's Nusra Front or the even more extreme Islamic State. Just whose side is Saudi Arabia on?

By giving the American people facts about this erstwhile ally, Obama could let the public better assess whether another "regime change" war in the Middle East is in U.S. national interests or not. [See Consortiumnews.com's "Israeli-Saudi Alliance Slips into View."]

Secondly, Obama could disclose as much of the Senate's torture report as possible, overriding the quibbling complaints of his CIA Director John Brennan.

America's descent into torture and other war crimes is a chapter of U.S. history that the public should know so no sequel will ever be written. There is an old saying that sunlight is the best disinfectant and if anything needs the light of day, it is the dark side where Vice President Dick Cheney and the neoconservatives took the country.

But Obama should go beyond the secrets of the last administration and update the American people on some more recent events. I'm told that U.S. intelligence has changed its assessments of several key incidents that raised tensions in the Middle East and Eastern Europe.

There was the sarin gas attack outside Damascus on Aug. 21, 2013, that Secretary of State John Kerry and other senior officials rushed to blame on the government of President Bashar al-Assad. Kerry urged a punitive military campaign against Syria's military. But many of the pillars of Kerry's argument including the number of sarin-laden missiles and the actual range of the one rocket that was found to carry sarin have since collapsed.

Increasingly, it appears that some extremist Syrian rebels may have carried out the attack as a provocation to force Obama's hand and get him to retaliate against Assad for crossing the "red line" that Obama had drawn earlier on chemical weapons use. [See Consortiumnews.com's "Was Turkey Behind Syria-Sarin Attack?"]

Though Obama pulled back from a military strike at the last minute and accepted Russian President Vladimir Putin's help to get Assad to surrender all his chemical weapons, the mistaken allegations from Kerry and others have never been retracted and thus contribute to a political climate favorable to attacking Assad's military just as the Saudis, al-Qaeda, the Islamic State, the neocons and Israel want.

Whatever the current intelligence assessment about the sarin attack, Obama could share it with the American people, taking them into his counsel rather than treating them like suckers whose only purpose is to be manipulated into doing what the powers-that-be have already decided.

Ukraine Crisis

Obama could do the same regarding two violent incidents that plunged the world into another crisis in Ukraine. On Feb. 20, there was mysterious sniper fire around Kiev's Maidan square that killed both police and protesters, thus escalating the violence. U.S. officials and the mainstream U.S. press pinned the sniper shootings on elected President Viktor Yanukovich, setting the stage for the Feb. 22 coup that ousted him.

Since then, ethnic/political violence has torn Ukraine apart and sparked a new Cold War between Russia and the West. But the identity of the snipers has remained a mystery and some evidence has suggested that they were actually working for extremists within the anti-Yanukovych movement, i.e. a provocation. Some investigative journalists have traced some of the sniper fire to buildings controlled by the neo-Nazi Right Sektor.

Accelerating the Ukraine crisis was the shoot-down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over eastern Ukraine on July 17. The incident prompted another rush to judgment by Secretary Kerry and the U.S. political/media establishment blaming the disaster which killed 298 people on the ethnic Russian rebels and, indirectly, Russia and Putin for supposedly supplying the anti-aircraft missile that brought down the civilian plane.

The MH-17 hysteria got the European Union to sign off on anti-Russian sanctions that began a trade war that has harmed both Russia's and the EU's economies as well as edging the world toward a new and costly Cold War.

Yet, some and maybe all of the initial MH-17 assumptions now appear to have been wrong, with Western intelligence services seemingly unable to confirm that Russia provided the rebels with an anti-aircraft system that could bring down a plane at 33,000 feet. Russia's slow-moving Buk missile batteries are quite large and would be easily detected by American spy satellites and other intelligence capabilities.

According to Der Spiegel, German intelligence has dismissed the idea of the Russians supplying the system, saying the rebels may have captured a missile battery from a Ukrainian military base and shot down the passenger plane by accident. I've been told that some U.S. intelligence analysts now suspect that a rogue element of the Ukrainian government was responsible for the tragedy, not the rebels.

The question of what U.S. intelligence now knows about the MH-17 case is particularly important since Congress may move to pass a highly belligerent resolution that amounts to a declaration of a new Cold War against Russia and calls for sending U.S. military equipment and trainers to Ukraine. One of the justifications is that "Malaysia Airlines Flight 17, a civilian airliner, was destroyed by a Russian-made missile provided by the Russian Federation to separatist forces in eastern Ukraine, resulting in the loss of 298 innocent lives."

[Update: The sense-of-the-House resolution passed on Dec. 4 in a 411-10 vote with only five Democrats and five Republicans voting no.]

This intemperate legislation, House Resolution 758, has the earmarks of a new Gulf of Tonkin resolution, which started the Vietnam War based on what turned out to be a rush to judgment over a murky military incident in the Gulf of Tonkin off North Vietnam in 1964. But the Ukraine situation is arguably more hazardous since Congress is considering a confrontation on the border of nuclear-armed Russia. If Obama knows better – regarding the circumstances of the Malaysia Airlines shoot-down – it is crucial that he speaks out now.

Whatever the ultimate truth, it's clear that the U.S. government's understandings of the circumstances surrounding the sniper fire at the Maidan and the MH-17 disaster have changed since the first frantic days of those two pivotal incidents. Given the costs and dangers of a new Cold War, President Obama could show respect for the American people by at least updating them on what is now known and correcting earlier false reports.

Simply by admitting some errors in the hasty U.S. finger-pointing, Obama could have a positive effect in cooling down passions and creating political space for a more rational debate.

A stark presidential speech with straightforward information and minimal theatrics also could go a long way toward convincing Americans that they are not being treated like sheep getting herded to the slaughterhouse, that their government trusts them and thus maybe they should trust their government.

Politically, it's even hard to identify the downside for Obama for giving such a speech. By taking the American people into his confidence, Obama would finally fulfill his campaign pledge of maximum "transparency." He would energize his now demoralized progressive "base." And, he could even win support from many conservatives since the Right's libertarian wing has been calling for less government secrecy and more public knowledge about these foreign crises.

Yes, Obama might offend the elitist neoconservatives who have long believed that the American people should be manipulated through propaganda themes, not empowered by honest information. And, some officials in his and his predecessor's administrations surely would prefer to keep their dirty deeds and their hasty misjudgments secret.

No one likes to admit error or face accountability, but it is misfeasance or worse for Obama to conceal government wrongdoing or to maintain false accusations when exculpatory evidence is now available. That is especially true when the erroneous impressions risk taking the United States into another hot war, as is the case with Syria, or into another Cold War, as is the case with Ukraine and Russia.

If Obama can't find the courage to share important facts with the American people – if he can't rise to the occasion as Eisenhower and Kennedy once did – he will only confirm the growing sense that he is just another elitist politician who feigns respect for the public but does the bidding of the rich and powerful.

Even worse, Obama will contribute to a historic loss of faith among the citizenry toward their constitutional government, which asserted in 1787 that national sovereignty was based on "We the People of the United States."

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). For a limited time, you also can order Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America's Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click here](#).
