

ONE YEAR OF OBAMA....CHANGE YOU STILL BELIEVE IN?

“Change you can believe in.” That was Barack Obama’s campaign mantra. His key promises included ending the Iraq war, closing Guantanamo, and ending torture and illegal detention, promises he repeated in his January 27 State of the Union speech (“As a candidate, I promised that I would end this [Iraq] war, and that is what I am doing as President”—“Let’s reject the false choice between protecting our people and upholding our values”—“We’ve prohibited torture”).

Such promises and Obama’s rhetoric led many to believe—and desperately hope—that he would represent a sharp break from the nightmares of the Bush years; that he would reverse the Bush regime’s course, especially its unending global war and its escalating (and often illegal) spying and repression.

Obama has now been in office a year. What does his record on war and repression show? That Obama has reversed the Bush course, or that he’s continuing—and in many ways escalating—the Bush program of unbounded global war and savage, often illegal repression? Has Obama’s first year in office proved that he is an agent of change and that this system is capable of reforming itself, of change you can believe in? Or has it instead proven that Obama’s actions are dictated by the needs and dynamics of the imperialist system which he represents and serves, that this system is based on global exploitation backed by massive violence, and that it’s totally unreformable no matter who is in the White House?

(Our focus here is war and repression, but an examination of Obama’s record in any other area would reveal the same pattern and demonstrate the same logic and dynamics.)

	Bush	Obama
War	<p>Seized on Sept. 11 to launch the “war on terror”—an unbounded war for greater imperialist empire, which involved committing war crimes and crimes against humanity on a massive scale, including the unjust, immoral and illegal invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, and a global campaign of assassinations, illegal and indefinite detention without due process, and torture. When he left office the U.S had 275,000-300,000 military personnel (troops and contractors) in Iraq, 103,000 in Afghanistan, and 535,000 in the Middle East-Central Asian region. The U.S. was spending nearly as much on its military—\$822.48 billion—as the rest of the world combined.</p>	<p>Obama no longer uses the words “war on terror,” but he’s continuing—and in many ways escalating—the global war Bush began. He accelerated the shift of focus begun in Bush’s second term from Iraq to Afghanistan, tripling the number of troops there to over 100,000 and escalating the war in Pakistan. In 2004-2008, Bush authorized 46 drone attacks. In the year Obama’s been in office, he’s authorized at least 63. “During his first nine and a half months in office, [Obama] has authorized as many C.I.A. aerial attacks in Pakistan as George W. Bush did in his final three years in office.” Obama has kept 250,000 military personnel in Iraq (with plans for keeping at least 50,000 there indefinitely, despite his pledge to “end this war”). When Obama’s latest surge is complete the U.S. will have over 220,000 military personnel in Afghanistan and over 600,000 in the Middle East-Central Asian region overall. Obama further boosted military spending to \$872.70 billion and expanded the U.S. Army from 547,000 to 569,000.</p>

	Bush	Obama
CIA global war and assassinations	As part of “war on terror,” Bush authorized, directed and deployed CIA in many countries and globally to capture, interrogate, and/or kill “terrorists”—including U.S. citizens—in contravention to U.S. and international laws.	Obama has escalated and expanded CIA operations in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia and other countries. The CIA has built up “an archipelago of firebases in southern and eastern Afghanistan;” and “in effect running a war” in Pakistan. In Yemen, Obama is escalating covert operations and drone strikes, and deploying more Special Forces, and turning the country into a “covert front” in terror war. On Jan. 27 Obama bragged, “in the last year, hundreds of al Qaeda's fighters and affiliates, including many senior leaders, have been captured or killed—far more than in 2008.” Jane Mayer writes, “There is no longer any doubt that targeted killing has become official U.S. policy.” Obama has continued Bush’s policy of targeted killings of U.S. citizens without due process, with a “hit list” of U.S. citizens he’s personally authorized to be killed. “Barack Obama, like George Bush before him, has claimed the authority to order American citizens murdered based solely on the unverified, uncharged, unchecked claim that they are associated with Terrorism and pose ‘a continuing and imminent threat to U.S. persons and interests.’ They're entitled to no charges, no trial, no ability to contest the accusations.”
Torture	Created legal framework for torture and carried it out on unprecedented scale, while claiming “the U.S. does not torture.”	In his State of the Union, Obama claimed, “We’ve prohibited torture.” In reality, Obama banned some interrogation methods, while allowing his CIA director to reserve the right to use them if needed. Obama has fought for immunity for Bush torturers and continued rendition of prisoners to countries where torture is carried out. “This administration is shielding Bush administration officials from civil liability, criminal investigation and even public scrutiny for their role in authorizing torture.”

	Bush	Obama
Rendition / Guantanamo	Expanded policy of “rendition” – seizing people without charges and taking them to secret prisons for torture and interrogation. U.S. prison at Guantanamo became hated global symbol these brutal and illegal practices.	Formally ended CIA renditions, closed CIA prisons, forbade CIA officers from interrogating terror suspects, and promised to close Guantanamo. Yet retained authority to use renditions, authorized CIA to continue rendering suspects to third countries for detention, torture and interrogation, and continues to operate secret prisons in Afghanistan where prisoners are detained indefinitely without charges. Writer Nat Hentoff calls Obama “the President of Permanent Detention.” Guantanamo remains open, and prisoners report conditions have gotten worse: “I am in the very same cell, wearing the same uniform, eating the same food, yet treated much worse compared to mid-2008,” with prison authorities inflicting “humiliating punishments,” including “intentional mental and physical harm.”
Spying / Wiretapping	Authorized massive, widespread illegal wiretapping and spying, including on millions of U.S. citizens	Left Bush surveillance program intact and embraced Patriot Act. Argues presidential “sovereign immunity,” means US officials can’t be sued for violating federal surveillance laws. “By bestowing bipartisan acceptance on [Bush spying programs], Mr. Obama is consolidating them as entrenched features of government.”
Bush v. Obama on torture and repression		“The new administration has copied most of the Bush program, has expanded some of it, and has narrowed only a bit. Almost all of the Obama changes have been at the level of packaging, argumentation, symbol, and rhetoric,” writes Jack Goldsmith, a former Bush official. “Viewed this way,” Glenn Greenwald sums up, “President Obama is in the process of strengthening the presidency to fight terrorism.”

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