

Nov 04, 2016 by **Rob Asghar**

In PD, Obama Shows That Style is Substance ^[1]

The more things stay the same, the more they change.

An American president traveled to Iraq to praise American soldiers for giving that nation time to stand on its own feet. He told Muslims that the United States respected their religion. He expressed his commitment to an American military presence in Afghanistan. And he refused to back down from regularly violating Pakistani sovereignty as he fights anti-American forces there.

President Bush did all that too – and yet audiences around the world see such actions, when taken by Obama, as signaling a new day in American-global relations. Is it just hype and hypocrisy?

No, there's more to it than that. Americans believe in the power of ideas, and prefer to see our wars as wars of ideas rather than wars against foreign peoples. Americans believe our nation is uniquely built on shared ideas rather than shared ethnicity or culture. So we should appreciate that the rest of the world senses new ideas at play on our shores, even as our outward actions seem unchanged.

While neoconservatives have attempted to portray America as locked in a cosmic struggle against a radical ideological fringe within the Islamic world, they left much of the world with the impression that the war was against Muslims as a group. That had much to do with how many influential conservatives -- Franklin Graham, Mark Steyn, Robert Spencer and various Fox New pundits come to mind -- insinuated or trumpeted that Muslim civilization was irredeemable, even while the president that they supported claimed that his invasion of Iraq would benefit Muslims. George Bush's practiced cowboy persona, combined with anti-Muslim propaganda from his more militant allies, meant that no American action would be viewed favorably by much of the Muslim world.

Enter Barack Hussein Obama. While much of the world cheered for him, few expected him to win office in a country that has been seen more as John Wayne than Mahatma Gandhi. Obama's election served notice that these Americans, who had been loudly warned by neoconservatives not to vote for a relative pacifist, were suppler than they seemed.

Those same pro-Obama legions around the globe are supple enough to realize that America will not suddenly pop flowers into its muskets, and that U.S. interests will still bring a certain military toughness. Yet when Obama declares that his nation is not at war with Islam -- the same words that his predecessor uttered -- they believe him.

In PD, style is substance, though President Bush never seemed able to fully grasp this. Bush's style signaled an America that the world distrusted -- a provincial and prickly one that

presumed that what was best for America was best for the world. Obama's style recalls the America that the world most respects and envies -- a multicultural person who rose from obscurity, through opportunity, to build bridges rather than walls among peoples. Because of that, he will be given grace in coming months by the world community as he continues his bridge-building.
