

Will Obama really rise to the occasion?

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Comment

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AMERICAN President Barack Obama, at a recent news conference on the Middle-East, wanted the US to "start by listening!" This was a departure from the previous US administration which Obama admitted would "start by dictating!"

There is no better time to start listening than now when the guns are largely silent on all fronts although their impact remains deafening given the horrific consequences.

This is the result of a blatantly asymmetric war that is causing pain and suffering to the majority who are defenceless. To be sure, it is a coward's war, an uncivilised way of settling age-old differences.

As US commander General David Petraeus once admitted, even the coalition of the willing (in Iraq) "could not kill its way out of the problems of insurgency and civil strife".

Such asymmetric wars are perpetuated by all kinds of support, especially military, where one side is armed to the teeth with the latest and sophisticated weaponry of the day in contrast with the other.

In a world crudely classified as the "favoured" and the "non-favoured" nations, including the possession of nuclear arms, the logic of an asymmetric warfare persists in tandem with larger hegemonic intents.

In this sense, asymmetric wars are not new. The American Revolutionary War was one of them. The same can be said of wars in the 20th century that were among the most unjust ever waged, sometimes by proxy, resulting in genocide of the worst kind.

Ironically, the genocide survivors are today's aggressors of a new kind of genocide!

What's interesting though was that as the warring guns fell silent, a series of gun salutes were heard in the US capital.

As expected, the new president was quick to invoke the "self-defence" argument for the well-armed belligerents; and indirectly assigned blame to lesser-armed belligerents.

One wonders how much the 44th president has listened to what former president Jimmy Carter wrote in *Palestine Peace Not Apartheid* (2006), a New York Times bestseller, especially the argument that Israel's continued control and colonisation of Palestinian land has been the primary obstacle to a comprehensive peace agreement in the Middle East.

One wonders, too, whether he would approve the ways the blacks were hunted down and killed as sub-humans during the days of the apartheid in South Africa. These were carried out by well-armed groups of people who also believed that they were acting in "self-defence" until the international community, including the US, "rubbished" it. Only then was a new and far more peaceful nation born.

Or are these too far off from his audacity of hope, or that of the dreams of his father—Hussein Obama?

Obama has shown great courage in dismantling the infamous Guantanamo Bay prison camp. Will he have the same courage to dismantle the "security fence" erected by the Israelis which Carter prefers to call an "imprisonment wall".

He may even want to ponder the words of Yitzhak Epstein when he predicted at a 1905 Zionist Congress in Switzerland: "Among the difficult questions connected to the idea of the renaissance of our people on its soil, there is one which is equal to all others: the question of our relations with the Arabs.

"We have forgotten one small matter: There is in our beloved land an entire nation, which has occupied it for hundreds of years and has never thought to leave it.

"While we feel a deep love for the land of our forefathers, we forgot that the nation who lives in it today has a sensitive heart and loving soul. The Arab, like every man, is tied to his native land with strong bonds."

Will the new president bring about a change that we can believe in?

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