

WORLD LOSING FAITH AND HOPE IN OBAMA

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Thomas Walkom, [The Toronto Star](#), 6 September 2013

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While controversial at home, Obama has always been viewed outside of the United States as a larger-than-life figure.

In part, this is because he is America's first black president. But in part, Obama's electoral successes convinced many that the U.S. was returning to sanity — that the dark malevolence represented by his predecessor George W. Bush (and particularly by Bush sidekick Dick Cheney) had finally passed; that America was preparing to become once again a force for good.

Perhaps, this was a naive hope. The U.S. is a great power and great powers are not always nice. Washington's involvement in blatantly illegal enterprises predated Bush and Cheney.

Yet around the world, America was viewed — in general — as a country whose heart was in the right place.

And Obama was viewed as the leader who could makes U.S actions reflect that heart.

So high were the hopes around Obama that he was awarded the Nobel peace prize simply for being elected.

Over time, the cruel world of reality eroded those hopes. Obama promised to close the Guantanamo Bay prison camp. He didn't. He promised a short, sharp war that would defeat the Taliban and bring peace to Afghanistan. That never happened.

He authorized drone strikes against nations with which the U.S. is not at war, strikes that killed not only Americans but others whose only crime was to be in the wrong place.

He permitted the U.S. National Security Agency to snoop on U.S. citizens and foreign allies in an unprecedented manner.

He promised openness but went after whistleblowers like Bradley (now Chelsea) Manning and Edward Snowden with unprecedented zeal.

In an earlier time, any U.S. president who called for international action against chemical weapons would have received a sympathetic response from much of the world.

True, it is hypocritical to single out chemical weapons. Syria has not signed the international convention against chemical weapons. But the U.S. has not signed a similar convention against cluster bombs, which can be just as devastating.

Still, chemical weapons have the capacity to frighten. The idea of civilians being killed in war seems bad enough. The idea of civilians being killed without visible marks upon them seems, for some reason, worse.

In an earlier time, the moral outrage expressed by Obama and U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry would have resonated worldwide.

These days, it does not. When Obama claims he has proof that the Syrian regime of Bashar Assad used chemical weapons, a great many people around the world — people who count themselves as friends of the U.S. — simply don't believe him.

Russian President Vladimir Putin insists that Syrian rebels were behind any chemical attack. He calls Kerry a liar. In earlier times, Putin would have been discounted as a propagandist for Syria's regime.

But so jaded is today's world about American motives that the former KGB thug seems more credible than Obama.

Britain won't join any U.S. attack because the British people no longer trust American leadership. Ditto Germany. Ditto most other nations. That became obvious at the two-day G20 summit in St. Petersburg.

Only 10 of the 20 signed a statement accusing Syria's government of using chemical weapons. Of those 10, only France has suggested it would participate in a U.S. attack.

Even Canada's vigorously pro-U.S. Conservative government refuses to lend Obama anything beyond moral support.

Ironically, Jean Chrétien offered the U.S. more military assets for its 2003 attack on Iraq — although the former prime minister technically opposed that war.

Yet in their reluctance to sign on fully to America's latest war, Harper and Obama's other recalcitrant allies are being politically rational. Their voters no longer give the U.S. and its vigorous young president the benefit of the doubt.

They are suspicious and rightly so.

Thomas Walkom's column appears Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday.

