

Obama's one-liner on Swiss funds sets tongues wagging

MalaysiaKini.com

Nov 23rd, 2016

Stephen Ng

COMMENT Make no mistake, even golf buddy President Barack Obama can turn against a kleptocrat, although his concern is largely veiled by political diplomacy.

Unlikely that it was a slip of the tongue, Obama's recent speech during the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) summit in Peru this year [contained a line](#) which has since been talked about by Malaysians on the social media.

In my opinion, this one-liner was mentioned with some care not to offend; nonetheless intended to stimulate some re-evaluation of what the world would become without America pushing for an inclusive world order.

After the defeat of the Democrats in the recent presidential election, Obama expressed his regrets that if America under president-elect Donald Trump cannot fill the void through its foreign policies, there is no other country that will be able to play the role of a troubleshooter to help make the world a better place.

Obama said neither China nor Russia are doing what America has been doing all this while to protect the world order. "Russia is not thinking about how to rebuild Haiti after the hurricane, but we are," he said.

This may lead to the collapse of world order, he warned.

Ears prick up

At exactly the 46th minute into his speech, Obama clearly said: "We all have responsibilities... every nation, respecting the dignity and the worth of its citizens and America can't do it all for everybody else.

"There are limits to our reach in other countries if they are determined to oppress the people, not provide good education, (pause) or siphon off development funds into Swiss bank accounts because their leaders are corrupt..."

Although Obama did not mention names of the kleptocrats specifically, and his speech was regarded as respectful to say the least, it shows that he is at least well-informed of the kinds of problems that are plaguing some Third World countries, including Malaysia.

On July 20 this year, the US Justice Department (DOJ) had filed a civil suit to recover some US\$1 billion in assets said to be illegally siphoned off from 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB). In filing the suit, Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's own stepson Riza Aziz and his close associate, Low Taek Jho, or the infamous Jho Low, were named.

Although Najib was not mentioned personally in the civil suit, his identity as the Malaysian

Official 1 (MO1) as clearly spelt out by the Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, Abdul Rahman Dahlan, could not be denied.

This has led many in Malaysia and worldwide to conclude that Najib has a major role to play in the 1MDB scandal after more evidence based on investigations conducted by the US, Switzerland and Singapore, have been brought into the public arena. Najib has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing.

And with Obama hinting that he is aware of things happening around the world, this one-liner has caught the attention of Malaysians and set a lot of tongues wagging as well, whether the US president was trying to shame the MO1 during the Apec summit.

The answer is, "No", as the president was speaking on a broader subject. However, it can be surmised from this one-liner that the US president is well-briefed about the unique situation in Malaysia.

It is impossible that Obama would not be aware of the DOJ's civil suit; after all, it was during his second term that the civil suit was filed.

Despite being a golf buddy, the US president did not obstruct the DOJ from filing the civil suit, where the word 'kleptocracy' was also used probably for the first time by the United States on a friendly nation, Malaysia.

Who was Obama referring to?

So, who was Obama referring to when he said those words?

When Bersih chairperson Maria Chin Abdullah was nabbed under the Security Offences (Special Measures) Act 2012 (Sosma), Najib was not around in the country.

After hearing it directly from Obama that it is important that every nation should "respect the dignity and the worth of its citizens", it is timely for Najib to rectify all the wrongs done by the ruling party.

Surely, someone would have already briefed Obama by now about the latest social and political developments in Malaysia to warrant him quoting the example of Malaysia, albeit generally, in his speech, when dissenters were arrested and placed under detention.

It is likely that Obama would have heard by now about Maria's arrest and the use of Sosma against her, despite the government's promise that the draconian law was only to be used to counter terrorists.

He may be leaving the oval office soon, but his successor is unlikely to have the same level of diplomacy or care.

We will have to wait and watch to see if President-elect Donald Trump would be more direct and hard-hitting in his approach, but surely, every Malaysian would like to hear from Najib what he thinks of Obama's final speech at the Apec summit, especially the line that

Malaysians think Obama had targeted at Najib.

Copyright © 1999-2016 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd

Source: <http://www.malysiakini.com/news/363803>