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Obama's Prissy America

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The liberal writ was that a strutting "bring 'em on" George W. Bush for eight years did what he pleased on the international scene. His "unilateral" America supposedly did not consult with either allies or international organizations, as he rammed through democracy in Iraq and Afghanistan. President Bush's "my way or the highway" personal credo resulted in an America alone.

Obama, of course, was hailed as the multifaceted antidote to all that. The new nontraditional America would reach out to the world. We would now listen rather than lecture. This was a welcome reflection of Barack Obama's own cool and tolerant approach to politics, learned as a seasoned community organizer in Chicago.

But things have not quite worked out as planned. Barack Obama to all appearances is certainly more relaxed than Bush. And he resonates abroad as a nontraditional American. Indeed, Obama is now the paradigm of America's ongoing metamorphosis into something more like the rest of the planet.

Yet in his own way Obama projects a far more prissy, self-indulgent America than we had under Bush. And that self-centeredness seems a logical extension of the new commander-in-chief himself.

How can that be, given Obama's well-known apologies -- for everything from slavery and our treatment of Native Americans to being imperious toward Europeans and Muslims? In obsequious fashion, we have sought to assure the Russians that we won't deploy anti-ballistic missile defenses in Poland and the Czech Republic. Obama has reminded the Chinese that they enjoy sovereignty over Taiwan. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Bashar al-Assad, the Castro brothers, Hugo ChÃ¡vez, and assorted other old enemies of the United States are suddenly considered either neutrals or friends.

It seems counterintuitive, then, to suggest that Obama's America is increasingly self-absorbed.

GLOBAL PENITENT

But consider first the nature of his apologies. America deigns to apologize to Muslims without much mention of a murderous Islamic radicalism that almost daily fuels a terrorist attack on some portion of the world's civilian population.

Left unsaid by the global penitent is that Russia flattened Grozny and butchered hundreds of thousands of Chechens in serial wars. No need to talk of the absorption of Tibet by China or of the 70 million Chinese who were killed or starved to death under Mao. Will the adjudicator Obama not say who was at fault in Rwanda, who needs to apologize -- and how?

Obama is conflicted over Hiroshima, but not so much over the millions of Chinese, Koreans, Australians, British, and Americans who were slaughtered by the legions of the Co-Prosperity Sphere -- and were desperate to find a way to stop Japanese militarism.

The point is this: When Obama takes it upon himself to adjudicate, in quite ahistorical fashion, who is culpable and who not, the resulting verdicts are consistent only in terms of the president's own Chicago-style race/class/gender politics.

Detention in Guantanamo is Bush's transgression against the Constitution, but the incineration of terrorists and their families by judge/jury/executioner Predator drones in Waziristan is Eric Holder's approved cosmic justice.

The New York trial of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the architect of mass murder, proves to the world that war can become a refined legal matter in the prissy new age of Obama. But there is no need to go into the morality of blowing apart the head of a negotiating Somali pirate with sniper fire, since the killing had a presidential seal of approval.

What is lost in all this "Bush did it" moral posturing is any sense of American humility, of tragic acceptance that in bad/worse alternatives there is no good choice.

Instead, Obama's America arrogantly sermonizes to the world that it alone, in its singular wisdom and morality, has redefined war as a courtroom drama -- but not quite when it is a matter of what America wants.

Just wait: If a few unhinged jury members, ACLU lawyers, and showboating judges collude to acquit KSM as only 99 percent guilty, then Obama will, for 2010 political purposes alone, connive to find a way to keep the acquitted killer in prison.

Obama lectures the world on new American values, and then does pretty much what he pleases -- whether it is not quite "shutting Guantanamo down" in a year, or not quite ushering in a new global age of his radical cap-and-trade environmentalism.

The more Obama confesses to America's shortcomings, the more his bored hosts abroad sense that such loud self-righteousness is psychodrama -- Obama's angst about his own country. The world has a lot on its plate -- hunger, war, plague, poverty, histories of mass murdering -- without adding yet another private sermon by Obama about how his own miraculous presidency is moral redemption for an array of past American sins.

GIVE ME YOUR CASH

Consider next the matter of debt. Obama inherited the Bush budget deficits -- and then drove them through the roof. Indeed, he is on schedule not only to run up consecutive trillion-dollar-plus annual shortfalls, but also in his tenure nearly to match the aggregate debt

piled up by all previous administrations combined.

A large portion of the new Obama borrowing has to be covered abroad, mostly through Chinese and Japanese purchase of U.S. government bonds.

The Obama administration expects to borrow yearly hundreds of billions of dollars from the Chinese to expand American health care. In some sense, therefore, 400 to 500 million Chinese -- most of them without much access to even rudimentary medicine, doctors, and hospitals -- will be working overtime to loan Americans enough money to ensure universal access to hip replacements, gastric bypasses, and flu shots.

Cut through the soaring rhetoric: We are left with an America that assumes the world's less well-off will directly subsidize our own better-off.

No wonder that Obama has cooled his rhetoric on Chinese smoky coal plants, Tibet, mercantile trade policies, and human rights. All such idealism falls before America's voracious appetite for borrowed cash.

For Obama to fulfill his grand visions of expansionary American entitlements in health, education, and welfare, he must jettison the idealistic international rhetoric, and instead concentrate on the money. We want dollars that we haven't earned. And, like a grasping heir, we will do or say almost anything to get them.

I NEED YOUR OIL

Our energy policy reveals the same prissy sense of self. For all the campaign rhetoric about using all America's energy resources, the administration seems focused on subsidizing relatively small amounts of wind and solar power.

Green talk is preferable to encouraging American industry to exploit our sizable gas, oil, shale, tar sands, and nuclear resources. Apparently, we want to boast to the world about our new solar farms, while quietly continuing to import Hugo ChÃ¡vez's messy goo.

Since American consumption of gasoline and traditional generation of electricity remains steady even in the new age of wind and solar power, Obama's message is, again, hardly subtle: The rest of the world is supposed to keep drilling in the ecologically fragile Persian Gulf, tap the tundra of Siberia, and pump out of the Latin American jungle -- while we pay for it with borrowed Japanese and Chinese money.

That way we are assured that the California coast, the Alaskan frontier, and much of the American West stay off limits from exploitation -- in accordance with our ever more refined environmental and aesthetic sensibilities.

OUR EXCEPTIONAL PRESIDENT

Again, much of this disconnect between utopian rhetoric and national selfishness reflects Obama's own conflicted persona.

When the common man Obama travels abroad, foreigners witness the strange spectacle of soothing "We are the world" sloganeering, coupled with an imperial entourage of jumbo jets, caravans of SUVs, and an array of flacks who allot precious seconds of face time with Him.

During the campaign there was Obama the Humble, offering creepy messianic rhetoric about subsiding seas and cooling temperatures, in a mise-en-scÃ¨ne of faux-Greek temple convention sets, Latin mottos and the Obama "seal," schoolchildren singing Obama songs, and the staged Victory Column backdrops. All that led right into ten months of an even more megalomaniac climate in which dissent -- whether from Fox News, the Tea Party protests, or the Chamber of Commerce -- was seen as blasphemous.

We have now hit bottom with government requests to report "fishy" critics. The NEA schemes to advance the agenda of the new Caesar. And official communiquÃ©s announce fictitious jobs in fictitious congressional districts "saved" by more quite real government borrowing.

The net result of all this is that America is becoming as self-righteous, self-centered, and prissy as its president is himself.

By Victor Davis Hanson
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