

Obama Bungles War on Terror

There is something deeply disturbing about the Obama administration's handling of the Islamic-terrorism issue, from Iraq and Syria to San Bernardino; and with its feckless preoccupation with climate-change questions. The country is about to enter the last year of Obama's administration, which opened with a powerful mandate to end the economic crisis, replace the policy of miring almost all of America's conventional-ground-forces military capability in the Middle East, make medical care more satisfactorily available to a larger number of people, and generally create a more convivial and intellectually effervescent atmosphere in Washington than had George W. Bush. All this was in the vastly hopeful atmosphere of the election of the country's first non-white president.

And it all started to go disturbingly amiss at the beginning. The president's speech at Cairo shortly after taking office pandered to pro-Arab mythmaking, and seemed to imply that whatever abrasions there may have been between the United States and any country in the African or Muslim worlds would now fall away because the president of the U.S. was now, for the first time, partially African and from a partly Muslim background. Though he obviously didn't dwell on the fact, it was well-known that he had spent 20 years attending the ostensibly Christian religious services of Jeremiah Wright, who holds that AIDS was a white plot against the Africans, and that the 9/11 attacks were a provoked and, to some extent, deserved chastisement for American bigotry and hypocrisy. Obama broke with Wright, but his pastor's views did not come as a revelation to him. In navigating even these early public-relations inconveniences, President Obama showed a resistance to embarrassment that, in comparison with the famous Teflon of Ronald Reagan, seemed like the armor of an *Iowa*-class battleship.

Of course, the personalities and aptitudes of national leaders can help bridge gaps between countries, but it is the interests of those countries that will determine international relations, though these evolve, sometimes unpredictably. The whole notion that an American president of African pigmentation and one Muslim parent would in itself be a Balm of Gilead for Arab–American relations was a facile and hubristic concept. It soon emerged that Obama ardently desired to resolve the Israeli–Palestinian dispute and be godparent to a Palestinian state. He started by pretending that the agreement between Ariel Sharon and the Bush administration, to evacuate Gaza and confine settlement expansion to natural growth that would not be contested, had not occurred. When faced by the resistance of Israel, and by the duplicity of the PLO in refusing 1) to abandon the right of return of allegedly displaced Palestinians and their descendants to Israel, inundating that country with Arabs, and 2) to accept the legitimacy of Israel as a Jewish state, Obama allowed that reaching a solution to the problem would be more difficult than he had expected. It seemed that he had imagined that the efforts of the eleven presidents who had preceded him in those efforts had been the mere dabbling of amateurs. There remains no progress, though on past form we should be ready for some unilateral U.S. recognition of Palestine in its 1967 borders as a parting gift from the outgoing administration. Any such unilaterally imposed step would not be a solution and would promote war and not peace. For peace to occur, the Arab powers have to tell Palestinians – who should by now have tired of serving them as mere cannon-fodder – that the right of return is to Palestine and not Israel and that it is time to resolve this, along the lines of the Taba (2001) modifications of the 1967 borders. These were a deeper West Bank for Israel and a deeper Gaza for Palestine, with a secure road between them to connect the two parts of the new state; and an open Jerusalem, capital of both countries, with each controlling its respective neighborhoods and holy places.

The Obama line from the beginning has been that there has been no such thing as Islamic terrorism; there are many euphemisms for it, but Islam has nothing to do with terror, so it is isolated acts of terror or misconduct by individuals who happen to be Muslims. The administration's desire to avoid mis-typecasting and inciting collective racial or sectarian hate is commendable, but it does not justify mendacious verbal acrobatics. Readers will recall the initial effort to will Islamic terror away, while airbrushing out its Islamic character. Thus, after the murder of the American ambassador to Libya in Benghazi in 2012, then-secretary of state Hillary Clinton, at the behest of the White House, delivered to an astonished world a televised address to Muslims assuring them that Americans had great respect for Islam, and seconding Obama's efforts to blame critics of Islam for a misperception of the nation's abiding affection for the current followers of the Prophet. The Republican National Committee will presumably refresh the country's memory about this address during the election campaign, as the crystalline fatuity of it may have faded in memory a little.

The abrupt American withdrawal from Iraq came after a dispute with the corrupt ingrate Nouri al-Maliki, after Obama tolerated his fraudulent reelection as Iraqi prime minister. Maliki has effectively delivered the 60 percent of Iraqis who are Shiites to Iran, and left Baghdad a sitting duck to the hitherto undetected Islamic State (ISIS), an unprecedentedly barbarous terrorist organization that humiliated the Iraqi army and threatened to achieve the complete disappearance of Sunni Iraq. Obama's response has been a half-hearted air campaign, which cooperates with Russia in Iraqi airspace, but only occasionally with Russia in Syrian air space, as both countries oppose ISIS but back separate sides in the Syrian civil war. But none of the antics of the enemy are ever called Islamic terror, and when the massacre occurred last week at San Bernardino, Calif., and the first reaction was that it was a malcontent disturbing a municipal employees' Christmas

celebration, the president's initial comments were about gun control, a theme he returned to in his televised address. I happen to agree with most of what he says on that subject, but it obviously has nothing to do with tragedies like San Bernardino. When Islamic fanaticism, by cyber-osmosis, not direct recruitment and training, emerged as the motivation of the murderers, Attorney General Loretta Lynch all but sat like a toad on FBI director James Comey during his press conference last week, ready to censor anything indelicate about Islam. (Comey is not without his faults, including the persecution of Martha Stewart and his complicity with the disgraced former Chicago U.S. attorney Patrick Fitzgerald, who falsified evidence in the prosecution of Vice President Cheney's chief of staff, Scooter Libby, but he is not afraid to call Islamic terror by its rightful name.)

The attorney general has been at pains to say that her "greatest fear" is of retaliatory attacks on Muslims, and has promised to prosecute anyone considered guilty of "anti-Muslim speech," a preposterous idea in a country where the civil tort of defamation was effectively jettisoned by *New York Times v. Sullivan* in 1964. This is also a bit rich given the emergent facts of the San Bernardino case: A radicalized Pakistani woman apparently brainwashed her Illinois-born Muslim husband, and they quickly became a terror cell in sympathy with ISIS but not even directed by it. They built up an arsenal of weapons and attacked the holiday celebrations of his co-workers, seeking death for themselves and leaving their six-month-old baby behind. Again, stereotyping should be avoided and no one wants to treat civilized Muslims, doubtless the great majority, as enemies. But at such a time the premier concern of the attorney general should not be avoidance of criticism of Islam, any more than the president should have been responding to these horrible incidents, over the last year, with asinine references to the Crusades and the Inquisition, and wistful musings about gun control. These weren't Saturday-night specials in San Bernardino, they were

machine guns and pipe bombs.

As one who remembers the Red Scare of the Fifties, I know that we must not go back to mass hysteria that everyone's wife or neighbor or workmate could be a spy for ISIS, but let us know our adversary. The distinguished publisher of *The New Criterion*, Roger Kimball, had *le mot juste* in describing Lynch's performance at the Comey press conference as "disgusting." And not greatly more uplifting is the president's apparent failure to recognize the proportions of this problem in any of its manifestations, from the drilled suicide soldiers of ISIS on the ground in Iraq and Syria, being lethargically strafed by the Allies as long as they do not get in the way of the Russians propping up the Assad regime in Syria, to a young Muslim couple in a nondescript California city, brought together by the Internet, where the groom's family never saw the bride's face because she wears a niqab, and, presto, 14 people are dead, 17 are injured, and the enthusiastic Muslim newlyweds deliberately make their baby an orphan. This is a serious international challenge and we must rally as many Muslims as possible, in the U.S. and abroad, to a civilized course, but we are not going to get there by mumbling about gun control, whitewashing Islam, reminiscing (unrigorously) about the Middle Ages, and seeking the world's attention with a classic burlesque in Paris over climate change.

There is no evidence that human conduct affects the world's temperature, which has been effectively stalled for 18 years and has moved only one Centigrade degree in 35 years; the world has several times been warmer than it is now. Decarbonization is much more damaging than increased carbon use, and no one at this conference in Paris is going to give more than a feebly attested best-efforts promise to cut carbon use. It is a sham, and Obama's undimmed enthusiasm for it is nonsense, seven years after he promised immense American job creation in green products. His own promise of an at least 26

percent reduction in carbon use in ten years is undercut by his own officials' estimates that only half that could possibly be attained, and there is no chance the Senate will approve any of it. The first and third carbon emitters, China and India, with nearly 40 percent of the world's population, have said, in effect, that they will pay no attention to the eco-verbal terrorism at Paris about carbon; President Obama is a rather belligerent voice in that chorus, but this is what psychologists call displacement, as he declares climate change a greater problem than terrorism. His countrymen are being murdered by real terrorists, insidiously spreading like ants even in California, and he bombinates with the demented pomposity of the purblind appeaser. Thirteen months to inauguration day: Hillary would be a leap in the right direction, but only from the fire to the frying pan; the office has to seek its occupant this time. We're on the verge of 1788, 1860, 1932, and 1980, and the choice is less clear than it was then (though Lincoln, Roosevelt, and Reagan were widely underrated before they took office).

First published in