

Obama's Failed Presidency

by Conrad Black



Like most people, I had hoped for the customary settling down after the very tumultuous and nasty election. We have been denied that, not by the candidates, who have been dignified, but by the outgoing administration. I have written here and elsewhere before that this has been the most incompetent administration since James Buchanan brought on the Civil War, but I had not realized how the immunity to severe criticism afforded President Obama, because of his pigmentation, had been allowed to disguise how inept this administration has been, how authoritarian and sleazy, and how the president's demiurgic vanity has gone almost unnoticed as the toadies and bootlickers like Tom Friedman and David Remnick went into overdrive.

Only now, when, instead of simply expressing solidarity with his party's narrowly or even questionably defeated nominee, as Dwight Eisenhower did with Richard Nixon in 1960 and Lyndon Johnson did with Hubert Humphrey in 1968 (and even Bill Clinton slightly managed with Al Gore in 2000), President Obama has disparaged Hillary Clinton. He said the election was "about my legacy," and that he would have won had he been

allowed constitutionally to seek a third term, and for good measure he has incited the inference that the election was determined by unspecified illegal computer-hacking by the Russian government.

The president is correct that the largest issue in the election was the Obama legacy: the 125 percent increase in federal debt while the national work force shrank by 10 percent, the shameful Iran nuclear and sanctions giveaway, the shambles of the "red line" and other flip-flops and miscues all over foreign policy, the haughty disparagement of large sections of the electorate (in which he was almost outdone by Mrs. Clinton), the immigration policy of proudly admitting to the U.S. whomever might be seized by the ambition to enter, and the slavish adherence to the most alarmist versions of the faddish climate apocalypse, whatever the cost in American jobs and the current-account deficit, and without waiting for evidence adequate to justify radical measures. The president has had a whim of iron, informed by bygone reflexively socialistic pieties, and while he has not been popular and the majority has thought throughout his administration that the fundamental direction of the country was mistaken, about half the people either like him as a public personality or are afraid, because he is not white, to admit that they don't.

He may be, as he often seems, a charming man, but when he has gone and the issue of race is not much involved in assessing his performance, he will be seen to have failed as president, as did, though for somewhat different reasons, and not without some successes, his predecessor, George W. Bush. That is their shared legacy: failure, for four terms. There has never been such a sequence in the country's history. Which is why, for the first time in the country's history, a person who has never held a public office or senior military command took over one of the main parties by winning the primaries and went on to win the election: an unprecedented solution to an unprecedentedly prolonged period of presidential failure.

Viewed in this light, President Obama's shameful attack on Israel last week – in effectively passing a United Nations Security Council resolution laying the entire blame for the impasse in the Middle East on Israeli settlements in the West Bank (which it did not occupy prior to the 1967 War, which the Arabs unleashed and lost) – is quite consistent. The Obama regime betrayed the forces of democracy in Iran over the rigged 2009 election in that country, preparatory to the surrender to Iran of scores of billions of impounded dollars and a free pass into the nuclear-military club in ten years (if it chooses to wait that long).

Obama betrayed Iraq by his petulant departure from that country, which was only tepidly and tardily reversed when ISIS arose out of the ashes of the Obama Iraq policy – an ineffectual about-face that the president, with his customary modesty, informed the country was “in the highest foreign-policy traditions of the United States.” Lend-Lease, the Marshall Plan, Atoms for Peace, Open Skies, the response to the Cuban Missile Crisis, the opening to China, the sponsorship of the Camp David Agreement, the treaty removing intermediate ballistic missiles from Europe, the Gulf War coalition to evict Saddam Hussein from Kuwait, the Partnership for Peace in Europe, and the U.S.–India strategic partnership could all be so described, and have been. But Presidents Roosevelt, Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Nixon, Carter, Reagan, Clinton, and both Bushes left it to others to say so. Obama betrayed the Syrian moderates who rose against Assad, and the civilians whom Assad gassed (having assumed, correctly, that the Obama red line was an empty threat).

The administration lied about the murder of the U.S. ambassador to Libya in Benghazi in 2012, and sent Secretary Clinton out to make her groveling speech of apology to the Muslims of the world. It waffled about Libya, appeased the corrupt Communist regimes of Venezuela and Cuba, and finally crowned the entire farrago of incompetence and betrayal by

agreeing that the Jewish quarter of Jerusalem is a settlement in illegally occupied territory, and holding Israel solely responsible for the Arab–Israeli dispute, as if the general Muslim refusal to recognize Israel as a Jewish state (as it was created by the United Nations) had nothing to do with it.

It is also of a piece with the entire foreign-policy career of Secretary of State John Kerry. He entered public life whitewashing the odious and murderous regime of North Vietnam, even as he made false claims to being a war hero, and he exits with his 78-minute pastiche of lies and defamations of Israel at the State Department last week. “Israel cannot be both Jewish and democratic,” he said; he must be mad. How anyone can contemplate the horrifying fact that George W. Bush, inept as he largely was (though not in fighting terrorism), almost lost to Al Gore and then to John Kerry, and can reflect on the practical and moral disaster of the Obama Gong Show, and can still be seriously nervous about a Trump presidency escapes my comprehension. In less than three weeks the United States will take off and disarm the self-destructive devices it has been swaddled in for many years. Only a person burdened by a pessimism not of this world could think the State of the Union is about to deteriorate from where President Obama leaves it.

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