

September 3, 2012

Craig Pirrong reacts to the news that the president doesn't think he has campaigned enough.

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In it, his confidants identify his problem: He hasn't campaigned enough:

"Over his first term, Mr. Obama, 51 years old, has fundamentally shifted his view of modern presidential power, say those who know him well. He is now convinced the most essential part of his job, given politically divided Washington, is rallying public opinion to his side.

As a result, if he wins a second term, Mr. Obama plans to remain in campaign mode."

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Umm, when has he ever been out of campaign mode?

This explanation for his failures is a variant on a theme that he personally and his minions have flogged for the past several years: his biggest mistake has been that he hasn't taken the time to explain the brilliant wonderfulness of The One and his deeds to the boobs in the boonies and the burbs. So he will dedicate himself to righting that mistake and instructing us slow learners.

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Roger Kimball has the Obamanation of the Day. Pickerhead asks again, how sick is this guy?

I admit it, when it comes to Barack Obama, I think pretty low. But not, apparently, quite low enough. This exchange, from [an interview with Cathleen Falsani](#) of the Chicago Sun-Times, took even my jaded breath away:

Falsani: *Do you believe in sin?*

Obama: *Yes.*

Falsani: *What is sin?*

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Have you ever found a pithier summary of the narcissistic core of today's "progressive" Left-liberal ideology? I'm not sure I have.

Tim Dalrymple has another OMG example.

The liberal elites who are denigrating Clint Eastwood's speech at the Republican National Convention last night are only hurting themselves. Swing-state independents and undecideds like Clint Eastwood a lot more than they like liberal elites. They will only harden in their support for Clint's folksy commonsense the more it's contrasted with the cheap and scornful hyper-partisanship of the Daily Kos and HuffPo crowd.

I thought the premise was brilliant. Clint seemed a little nervous, a little out of his element, but that only made him more relatable, more like the kind of guy you'd have a beer with. (Seriously, who wouldn't want to have a beer with Clint Eastwood?) But the premise was perfect.

*To everyone who has not consumed the Kool Aid, Barack Obama seems strikingly insubstantial. "Senator Present" from Illinois became a U. S. Senator who was more interested in campaigning than legislating. Then he became an empty promise in the 2008 campaign, a micron-thin veneer of glitz and glamor over a hollow core, an empty screen onto which everyone projected their wishes. **Six weeks after the inauguration**, when he was thoroughly in the honeymoon phase and largely still campaigning against President Bush and on behalf of a stimulus, he uttered one of the [most vapid and immature things](#) I have ever heard from a President, when he told a bunch of television anchors at the White House: **"I like being President, and it turns out I'm very good at it."***

That's humility and wisdom for you: six weeks into a four-year term, and he's already prepared to declare himself "very good at it." I guess that's what happens when you're the kind of guy who gets a Nobel Peace Prize for doing nothing. Thank goodness he likes being President, though — because, you know, it's all about him. ...

Mark Thiessen comes up with a list of Obama's foreign policy failures.

(During the convention), Condi Rice took on President Obama's foreign policy leadership, declaring "We cannot be reluctant to lead and you [cannot lead from behind](#)." Here are ten areas where Obama's reluctance to lead has cost America dearly in the past three-and-a-half years:

1. Obama has failed to lead on Iran. Sanctions and negotiations are failing, and Iran has made more progress toward a nuclear weapon in the past three-and-a-half years under Obama than it has in the three *decades* since the Iranian revolution – with more centrifuges, more stockpiles of high enriched uranium, and more hardened facilities than when Obama took office. Iran has no fear that Obama will take military action to stop them – because they know full well that Obama has staked his presidential legacy on ending wars, not starting them.
2. Obama is failing to lead in Syria. Iran's closest ally in the Middle East is massacring tens of thousands of innocent men, women and children while America sits on the sidelines doing nothing – because Russia and China won't let us.
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Bret Stephens has more on the global has-been who never was.

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In June, the Pew Research Center released one of its periodic surveys of global opinion. It found that since 2009, favorable attitudes toward the U.S. had slipped nearly everywhere in the world except Russia and, go figure, Japan. George W. Bush was more popular in Egypt in the last year of his presidency than Mr. Obama is today. ...

Powerline says Liz Warren is increasingly compared to Martha Coakley who lost to Scott Brown the last time.

"Elizabeth Warren was supposed to be the Great Liberal Hope, the one Democrat tough enough to evict Scott Brown from Ted Kennedy's Senate seat. Then she started campaigning." So begins a devastating critique of Elizabeth Warren's candidacy that appeared in [Boston Magazine](#).

Shockingly, as the reader who alerted me to this article put it, the Harvard prof who lives in Cambridge isn't connecting in the suburbs with middle class and union folks:

To nearly everyone who knows her name, Elizabeth Warren has become a symbol. But in the months since she announced her intention to unseat Scott Brown, Elizabeth Warren has become something else: a candidate. And that is proving to be the challenge. . . .

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Streetwise Professor

[Obama Diagnoses His Worst Mistake: He Hasn't Campaigned Enough](#)

by Craig Pirrong

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In it, his confidants identify his problem: *He hasn't campaigned enough:*

Over his first term, Mr. Obama, 51 years old, has fundamentally shifted his view of modern presidential power, say those who know him well. He is now convinced the most essential part of his job, given politically divided Washington, is rallying public opinion to his side.

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This is a rather pathetic attempt to rationalize doing what he really likes to do, and for avoiding what he doesn't. He obviously has a distaste for governing, and performing executive functions. He relishes the adulation of swooning crowds. He doesn't like face-to-face pushback from political opponents or those all too few journalists who aren't flacking for him. He loves to be able to speak unchallenged to faceless masses of smitten acolytes.

Campaigning is what he likes. So he has succeeded in justifying in his own mind that it is what the nation needs. It is all about the personality cult. Governing, not so much.

And it gets better-or worse, depending on how you look at it. For what, pray tell, will he campaign? For this:

The president views a second term in some ways as a second chance, an opportunity to approach the office differently, according to close aides. He would like to tackle issues such as climate change, immigration, education and filibuster reform.

Again: Not the Onion.

Filibuster reform? I say again: Filibuster Reform? Yeah. That'll sweep the nation like a firestorm. And yeah, that's an obvious priority right now.

And the rest of the list is bizarre, given current circumstances. The economy is growing slowly. Unemployment remains chronically high, and the employment rate has declined to multi-decade lows. The nation's fiscal situation is fraught, and Europe is providing a real time example of what can happen when fiscal issues are allowed to fester. Entitlements are clearly unsustainable. These are the things that matter, in my mind objectively, and undoubtedly in the minds of most Americans.

But Obama intends to squander his second chance the way he squandered his first one, chasing progressive unicorns.

A common meme in many elections past was that Republican presidential candidates were "out of touch." What could possibly be more out of touch with pressing concerns than a focus on climate change, immigration, education and freakin' filibuster reform?

Heretofore Obama's campaign has been relentlessly negative, focusing on Romney's business past and his alleged extremism. (Romney extremist? Who knew?) This negativity is quite understandable, given the lack of positive accomplishments to run on: even his signature achievement-Obamacare-is a political albatross that he has to tippy-toe around. Claims that he will adopt policies that will restore growth, increase employment, and improve our fiscal future would immediately raise the question: why should you be given a second chance on these issues, given you've flubbed the first?

Romney and Ryan need to try to force Obama to state a positive program for a second term, and hope that he indeed runs on climate change, or even better, filibuster reform (which would be especially rich given that Obama was not shy about the filibuster when he was in the Senate). They need to turn around the "out of touch" meme.

The WSJ piece is intended to present a sympathetic portrait of Obama, but it is anything but. It portrays a self-pitying man who craves adulation who is overwhelmed by the real challenges and who detests the gritty reality of contending with the opposition in a closely divided country.

He is, in short, much more interested in being Messiah than Moses.

Pajamas Media

Obamanation of the Day

by Roger Kimball

I admit it, when it comes to Barack Obama, I think pretty low. But not, apparently, quite low enough. This exchange, from [an interview with Cathleen Falsani](#) of the *Chicago Sun-Times*, took even my jaded breath away:

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Philosophical Fragments

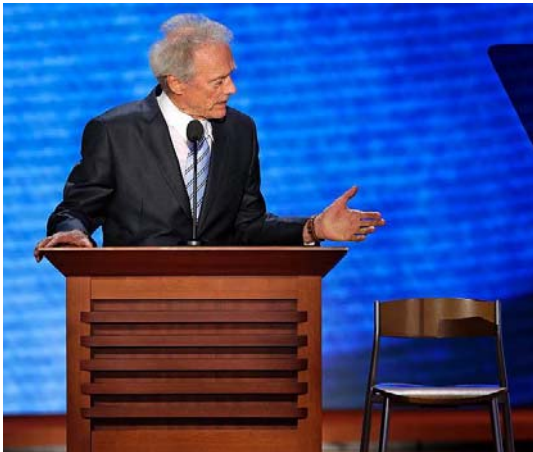
Barack Obama, the Empty Stool

by Timothy Dalrymple

The liberal elites who are denigrating Clint Eastwood's speech at the Republican National Convention last night are only hurting themselves. Swing-state independents and undecideds

like Clint Eastwood a lot more than they like liberal elites. They will only harden in their support for Clint's folksy commonsense the more it's contrasted with the cheap and scornful hyper-partisanship of the Daily Kos and HuffPo crowd.

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President MIA

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That's humility and wisdom for you: six weeks into a four-year term, and he's already prepared to declare himself "very good at it." I guess that's what happens when you're the kind of guy who gets a Nobel Peace Prize for doing nothing. Thank goodness he likes being President, though — because, you know, it's all about him.

President Obama has consistently been absent, more concerned about branding than leadership, with image and atmospherics than truly rallying the troops and harnessing our resources and solving our most pressing problems. He turned over the task of crafting solutions on the stimulus bill and the health care bill to Harry Reid and Nancy Pelosi, who predictably butchered it. He botched the budget compromise with John Boehner and withdrew from the process. When he thought that partisan gridlock in Congress might make him look bad, rather than forging into the gridlock and navigating a way forward he withdrew to the White House and played over 100 rounds of golf.

The problem for President Obama is that the soaring oratory will not work this time. The contrast between the rhetoric and his actual achievements is too great. So instead he can vilify the opposition and pretend that raising taxes on the rich will solve our financial mess. It won't.

Here is one of the key distinctions between the Obama campaign and the Romney campaign: one is centered on a theory of what will revive the economy, while the other is centered on a cynical ploy to rally the middle class against “the rich.” Or in Romney’s words from last night’s speech, one is focused on creating tomorrow’s prosperity while the other is focused on redistributing today’s. Even in theory, the centerpiece of Obama’s argument, if implemented, would accomplish virtually nothing to resolve our nation’s most serious problems.

According to most accounts, even friendly ones, President Obama is haughty and surly. To those with eyes to see, he is an act. A vacuous promise. An illusion. An empty stool.

My suspicion is that Clint intended to say more, but decided it was a good time to pack it in when the crowd was applauding the “make my day” performance. He’s suffering the slings and arrows now. One of the immediate “fact-checkers” pointed out, over against Eastwood’s barb that it was time for “a businessman” and not “an attorney” to occupy the White House, that Mitt too has a law degree. Which is true, but there’s a difference between a person with a law degree and an attorney, and Mitt took his dual JD/MBA and became precisely what Eastwood said, a businessman.

But the snarky complaints from the left and the spurious fact-checking only make Clint look better. They’re making his day.

Because Clint is fundamentally correct: the Barack Obama that was promised in 2008 never made an appearance. And now it’s time to give the seat to someone else.

American.com

[Top ten Obama foreign policy failures](#)

by Marc Thiessen

(During the convention), Condi Rice took on President Obama’s foreign policy leadership, declaring “We cannot be reluctant to lead and you [cannot lead from behind](#).” Here are ten areas where Obama’s reluctance to lead has cost America dearly in the past three-and-a-half years:

1. [Obama has failed to lead on Iran](#). Sanctions and negotiations are failing, and Iran has made more progress toward a nuclear weapon in the past three-and-a-half years under Obama than it has in the three *decades* since the Iranian revolution – with more centrifuges, more stockpiles of high enriched uranium, and more hardened facilities than when Obama took office. Iran has no fear that Obama will take military action to stop them – because they know full well that Obama has staked his presidential legacy on ending wars, not starting them.
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4. Obama is failing to lead on national defense. He cut \$330 billion from defense programs in 2009 and some \$80 billion in 2010 – and then announced another \$400 billion in cuts over ten years in 2011 – for a total of over \$800 billion. In other words, he has asked our men and women in uniform to pay for his failed stimulus. And that was *before* sequestration. In all, Obama has put us on track to cut defense spending by more than a trillion dollars beginning next year – cuts his own defense secretary says will leave us with the smallest ground force since 1940, the smallest Navy since 1915, and the smallest Air Force ever. Obama is the first president in history to try and reap a “peace dividend” when our nation is still at war.
5. Obama has failed to lead on trade. Obama enacted free trade agreements with Colombia, Panama, and South Korea, but as the saying goes, “he didn’t build those” — they were negotiated during the Bush administration. Obama has not enacted a single free trade agreement of his own since taking office – while China has signed 15 and is negotiating as many as 18 more.
6. Obama has failed to lead on China. He done nothing while China manipulates its currency to gain an unfair trade advantage. And he announced his much hyped “pivot to Asia” that was meant to reassure our allies, but has only done the opposite — because he has not given our military the resources they need to carry it out (see #4).
7. Obama has failed to lead in Latin America. He’s stood by while Hugo Chavez has welcomed Hezbollah with open arms and allowed them to establish a beachhead in our hemisphere.
8. Obama has failed to lead on Russia. As part of his vaunted “reset” of relations with Russia, he caved in to Moscow’s demands that we cancel our missile defense agreement with Poland and the Czech Republic – and did it on the 70th anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Poland. What did he get for it? Nothing. Russia is as intransigent as ever on Syria and Iran.
9. Obama has failed to lead on the Middle East peace. He can barely hide his contempt for Prime Minister Netanyahu, trash talking him with world leaders and publicly undermining the Israeli leader by declaring – without warning him and over the objections of his own advisers – that the borders of Israel and Palestine should be based on the [1967 lines](#).
10. Obama has failed to lead on Egypt. While Egyptians protested by the tens of thousands in Tahrir Square, his Secretary of State reminded them that Mubarak was a personal friend of her family and declared the Egyptian government stable. The Egyptian people never forgot it. Last week, their new president traveled to Iran in a trip that was seen as a declaration of independence from America.

(OK, ten was not enough to cover it, so here are two bonus failures):

1. Obama has failed to lead on Iraq. He withdrew not just combat forces but *all* U.S. forces – and then cut our training efforts and our diplomatic presence – effectively handing the country over to Iran and squandering the sacrifices of our troops. Imagine what Asia would look like today if Truman had done that in Japan and Korea.
2. And, finally, Obama has put our global leadership at risk by racking up more debt in the previous four years than any American president in history. As Rice put it, “When the world looks at us today, they see an American government that cannot live within its means. They see an American government that continues to borrow money, that will mortgage the future of generations to come. The world knows that when a nation loses control of its finances, it eventually loses control of its destiny.”

And even that only scratches the surface. I'm sure my AEI colleagues can find areas I've overlooked.

So in a sense, Condi Rice had it wrong last night. Obama is not leading from behind – he is not leading at all.

WSJ

Barack Obama, Global Has-Been

The president would rather be loved than feared. He is neither.

by Bret Stephens

A few days ago there occurred one of those telling little episodes that captures the essence and folly of the Obama administration's approach to foreign policy. The meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement is being hosted this week in Iran, and the administration had urged United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon not to attend as a signal of displeasure at Tehran's serial violations of U.N. Security Council resolutions.

Of course Mr. Ban is going.

The administration's response to Mr. Ban's decision was "muted," according to the New York Times, evidently out of sympathy for his delicate position: Most U.N. member states are also members of the Non-Aligned Movement, and it's customary for U.N. secretaries-general to attend the meetings. There's also hope Mr. Ban will make a public stink in Iran about its leaders' nuclear bid or their calls to wipe out Israel. And maybe he will.

Still, there's no overlooking the central point of this tussle: In the global popularity contest between Barack Obama and Ali Khamenei, the ayatollah is winning.

For Mr. Khamenei, the meeting is meant to underscore the failure of Western attempts to isolate Iran internationally. Iran has even picked up a new friend in Mohammed Morsi, Egypt's new Islamist president, who presumably isn't too offended that there's a street in Tehran named after Anwar Sadat's killer.

For Mr. Obama, on the other hand, the meeting should serve as another reminder that his core foreign policy concept—that global popularity generates global power—has failed. No U.S. president since John F. Kennedy has come to office with more global goodwill than Mr. Obama; no U.S. president since Jimmy Carter has been so widely rebuked.

Consider the record. His failed personal effort to bring the 2016 Olympics to Chicago. His failed personal effort to negotiate a climate-change deal at Copenhagen in 2009. His failed efforts to strike a nuclear deal with Iran that year and this year. His failed effort to improve America's public standing in the Muslim world with the now-forgotten Cairo speech. His failed reset with Russia. His failed effort to strong-arm Israel into a permanent settlement freeze. His failed (if half-hearted) effort to maintain a residual U.S. military force in Iraq. His failed efforts to cut deals with the Taliban and reach out to North Korea. His failed effort to win over China and Russia for even a symbolic U.N. condemnation of Syria's Bashar Assad. His failed efforts to intercede in Europe's economic crisis. ("Herr Obama should above all deal with the reduction of the

American deficit" was the free advice German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble offered this year.)

In June, the Pew Research Center released one of its periodic surveys of global opinion. It found that since 2009, favorable attitudes toward the U.S. had slipped nearly everywhere in the world except Russia and, go figure, Japan. George W. Bush was more popular in Egypt in the last year of his presidency than Mr. Obama is today.

It's true that these surveys need to be taken with a grain of salt: efficacy, not popularity, is the right measure by which to judge an administration's foreign policy. But that makes it more noteworthy that this administration should fail so conspicuously on its own terms. Mr. Obama has become the Ruben Studdard of the world stage: the American Idol who never quite made it in the real world.

That isn't to say that Mr. Obama hasn't had his successes. The Libya intervention was a triumph, albeit of an odd sort since it was carried out in such a reluctant, last-minute, half-embarrassed fashion. Killing Osama bin Laden and dramatically expanding the number of drone strikes will forever be to the president's credit—even if his administration's tawdry efforts to publicize them for political gain will forever diminish the achievement.

But note that the drone strikes have been pursued in spite of global public opinion—the U.S. is the only country surveyed by Pew in which the strikes enjoy majority support. Note, also, that the strikes are the sort of thing Mr. Obama's core supporters would have been shrieking about incessantly in a previous administration.

For the most part, however, Mr. Obama has steadfastly pursued his belief that it's better to be loved than feared, ignoring the old Florentine's warning that "men worry less about doing an injury to one who makes himself loved than to one who makes himself feared." And so the injuries have come: disses from Putin; mockery from Ahmadinejad. Maybe Mr. Obama thinks that, as the Most Powerful Man in the World, he can breezily afford to ignore their slights, and perhaps he can. But Americans can't and shouldn't.

I tend to think that the buzz about American decline mistakes the mediocrity of the president for the destiny of the nation. But we have an election on, the outcome of which will decide whether one man's mediocrity becomes a whole nation's destiny. Mr. Obama is now the world's leading has-been, trying to revive a career on the strength of a talent that was greatly exaggerated to begin with. But a country that's willing to reward mediocrity with a second chance risks becoming a has-been itself.

Powerline

[Is Elizabeth Warren Martha Coakley with a fake ethnicity?](#)

by Paul Mirengoff

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Shockingly, as the reader who alerted me to this article put it, the Harvard prof who lives in Cambridge isn't connecting in the suburbs with middle class and union folks:

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At public events, she sticks to her stump speech and rarely strays from her talking points. That means she only occasionally takes questions from supporters. Despite the fact that Warren owes much of her fame to her role as a media darling, her team limits press access. And Warren's delivery has become increasingly polished, with her campaign stops rarely looking like the bombastic performances that made her a celebrity. "She's toned down her rhetoric and style to make herself more palatable," says Boston University political historian Thomas Whalen. "At this point, she's talking more in platitudes."

But playing it safe can take a toll. At an event in Roxbury this April, I watched as the 300 community organizers in the room recoiled when Warren abruptly put down the mike after her speech. They'd been told she would be holding a Q&A. As she hugged supporters and took pictures on the far side of the room, a small debate took place on the sidelines, with the local politicians who'd hosted the event telling her staffers that this just isn't how things are done. (Left unanswered was whether the campaign didn't know about the anticipated Q&A or had decided that Warren simply wasn't ready for questions.) It felt like a missed opportunity.

The truth is that the supposed most-important Senate race in the country has been surprisingly lacking in substance, with the candidates seemingly less concerned about the state of the country than about debate formats, racial heritage, and whether they've held secret meetings with foreign monarchs.

When I ask Doug Rubin, Warren's campaign guru, about the lack of substance, he takes offense. "I think that's unfair to Elizabeth, honestly," he says. "If you go back and look at all the press releases and events we have done, we've talked about real issues. Substantive issues. It takes two to engage."

But her struggles are evident in the poll numbers. Though most surveys show the two locked in a dead heat, the numbers reveal that one of **Warren's key talking points-that a vote for Scott Brown is a vote for Wall Street-isn't resonating (only a third of voters agree)**. And Brown has scored much better on the all-important likability factor, with the Globe finding earlier in the race that 52 percent of voters thought he was the more likable candidate, while just 26 percent said it was Warren. **(Even Democrats "liked" Brown more by two points.)**

As for polling of the race itself, the only survey I know of from August, by the Democratic outfit PPP, showed [Brown leading by 49-44](#). All previous polls of which I'm aware had the race within the margin of error. Maybe the PPP poll is an outlier. Or maybe Elizabeth Warren has already morphed from crusading liberal icon into [Martha Coakley](#) with a fake ethnicity.

