Reason Magazine reviews two books in the historian's war over the end of the Cold War.

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Twenty years ago this month, and nine months after the murder of Gueffroy, the Berlin Wall, that monument to the barbarism of the Soviet experiment, was finally breached. The countries held captive by Moscow began their long road to economic and cultural recovery, and to reunification with liberal Europe. But in the West, where Cold War divisions defined politics and society for 40 years, the moment was not greeted as a welcome opportunity for intellectual reconciliation, for fact-checking decades of exaggerations and misperceptions. Instead, then as now, despite the overwhelming volume of new data and the exhilaration of hundreds of millions finding freedom, the battle to control the Cold War narrative raged on unabated. Reagan haters and Reagan hagiographers, Sovietophiles and anti-communists, isolationists and Atlanticists, digested this massive moment in history, then carried on as if nothing much had changed. A new flurry of books timed to coincide with the 20th anniversary of communism’s collapse reinforces the point that the Cold War will never truly be settled by the side that won. ...

Paul Greenberg says the UN is outrageous again.

It won't do, at least not in polite society, to propose wiping a country off the map. That mantra has been left to Iran’s raving leader.

Instead, this year's tactic at the always-busy United Nations is to deny Israel the right to defend itself. Which would lead to its destruction soon enough. And that would be the practical effect of bringing its generals and ministers to trial for their “war crimes” in Gaza. That's where the Israelis, after absorbing years of rocket attacks across their southern border, went in and attacked the source of the attacks. Their border with Hamas-controlled Gaza has been quieter since.

Naturally the United Nations, which is a lot better at condoning aggression than enforcing the peace, is outraged -- and doing its best to stir things up again. Its "Human Rights" Council, which has little if anything to do with protecting human rights, especially in Islamic dictatorships, has demanded that Israel be brought before the International Court of Justice for daring to defend itself. ...

David Warren on making decisions.

The extreme delay in getting decisions out of Washington that were urgent many months ago, on how to proceed in Afghanistan, was made sickly comic on Monday when President Barack Obama told a military audience that he would not "rush the solemn decision of sending you into harm's way."
Morale had been descending in Afghanistan, from what I could make out, among an under-manned allied force in serious need of reinforcement; casualties rising on uncovered flanks.

And then they hear this strange man in Washington, playing Hamlet with himself, dramatizing his own role in what should be a clear-headed and quick, unemotional decision-making process. After all, he announced his (vacuous) "comprehensive new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan" to great fanfare last March. All he has to do now is give it substance.

The Bush administration was, for all its misjudgments in other areas, good at making clear, clean, practical decisions with troops in harm's way. Bush himself commanded overwhelming support in the military vote for his re-election in 2004. John McCain, who could also be taken as having some idea about military issues, largely kept that vote. If Obama thinks he can now win the trust of soldiers, by blathering to them about the solemnity of his own august personal angst, he is as much of a fool as he looks to them already.

**Thomas Sowell** wonders if we'll recognize our country when Obama is finally dispatched back to Chicago.

Just one year ago, would you have believed that an unelected government official, not even a Cabinet member confirmed by the Senate but simply one of the many "czars" appointed by the President, could arbitrarily cut the pay of executives in private businesses by 50 percent or 90 percent?

Did you think that another "czar" would be talking about restricting talk radio? That there would be plans afloat to subsidize newspapers — that is, to create a situation where some newspapers' survival would depend on the government liking what they publish?

Did you imagine that anyone would even be talking about having a panel of so-called "experts" deciding who could and could not get life-saving medical treatments? ...

**WSJ's Bill McGurn** says he's not the post-partisan prez. He's the post-gracious one.

Nine months after Barack Obama entered the Oval Office, his most adamant critics must concede he's delivered on "change." And we see it in our first post-gracious presidency.

The most visible manifestations of the new ungraciousness are the repeated digs the president and his senior staffers continue to make against George W. Bush. Recently, the administration has given us two fresh examples. The first is about Afghanistan, the other about the economy.

On Afghanistan, Mr. Obama's chief of staff went on CNN's "State of the Union" earlier this month to discuss the presidential decision on Afghanistan that everyone is waiting for. "It's clear that basically we had a war for eight years that was going on, that's adrift," said Rahm Emanuel. "That we're beginning at scratch, and just from the starting point, after eight years." Translation: If we screw up Afghanistan, blame Mr. Bush. ...

**Toby Harnden** in Telegraph, UK says it's time to put aside campaigning and start governing.

Perhaps we should not be surprised that the land of the permanent campaign has produced a president like Barack Obama. During his White House bid, Mr Obama's staff argued that his masterful oversight of the machinery that ultimately got him elected was his highest achievement.

In many respects this was true, though Mr Obama was more chairman than CEO. Even Republican political operatives acknowledge that the Obama '08 campaign was a thing of beauty.
Essentially, however, Mr Obama won because of his persona – post-racial, healing, cool, articulate and inspirational. In a sense, therefore, his greatest achievement in life is being Barack Obama. Or the campaign version, at least.

Therein lies the problem. While campaigning could centre around soaring rhetoric, governing is altogether messier. It involves tough, unpopular choices and cutting deals with opponents. It requires doing things rather than talking about them, let alone just being.

Mr Obama is showing little appetite for this. Instead of being the commander-in-chief, he is the campaigner-in-chief. ...

Jillian Melchior in Contentions reports how trade wars get started.

Predictably, Beijing has retaliated against Barack Obama’s protectionist trade policy. (Last week), the Chinese Ministry of Commerce issued a preliminary ruling that puts a 36 percent tariff on U.S.-made nylon. That tariff, like the initial one, will hurt American industry and American consumers, and it could have been avoided.

If only Obama had been more … diplomatic. By upholding his campaign promises to labor unions, he backtracked on his promise to avoid protectionism. And tariffs are a surefire way to irk overseas friends.

The fray began in September. The United Steelworkers, who make the metal wiring that goes into tires, complained to the International Trade Commission that the high number of Chinese tire imports was disrupting and directly threatening the market. ...

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Reason

The Cold War Never Ended

Twenty years later, historians still can’t figure out why the West won.

by Michael C. Moynihan

The Year That Changed the World: The Untold Story Behind the Fall of the Berlin Wall, by Michael Meyer, New York: Scribner, 272 pages, $26


We don’t know the exact hierarchy of motives, but it is certain that Chris Gueffroy was willing to leave his family and friends to avoid conscription into the army. Considering the associated risks, it’s likely that the 20-year-old was also strongly motivated to escape the stultifying sameness, the needless poverty, the cultural black hole that was his homeland. In his passport photo, he wore a small hoop earring, an act of nonconformity in a country that prized conformity above all else. But Gueffroy’s passport was yet another worthless possession, for he had the great misfortune of being born into a walled nation, a country that brutally enforced a ban on travel to “nonfraternal” states.

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survived, only to be put on trial and sentenced to three years in prison for “attempted illegal border-crossing in the first degree.”

Twenty years ago this month, and nine months after the murder of Gueffroy, the Berlin Wall, that monument to the barbarism of the Soviet experiment, was finally breached. The countries held captive by Moscow began their long road to economic and cultural recovery, and to reunification with liberal Europe. But in the West, where Cold War divisions defined politics and society for 40 years, the moment was not greeted as a welcome opportunity for intellectual reconciliation, for fact-checking decades of exaggerations and misperceptions. Instead, then as now, despite the overwhelming volume of new data and the exhilaration of hundreds of millions finding freedom, the battle to control the Cold War narrative raged on unabated. Reagan haters and Reagan hagiographers, Sovietophiles and anti-communists, isolationists and Atlanticists, digested this massive moment in history, then carried on as if nothing much had changed. A new flurry of books timed to coincide with the 20th anniversary of communism’s collapse reinforces the point that the Cold War will never truly be settled by the side that won.

It is bizarre to revisit pre-1989 journalism and punditry on Soviet communism. The suffering of the bit players, those pitiable citizens stranded behind the Iron Curtain, was largely ignored in favor of larger political goals. If Ronald Reagan believed the Kremlin to be the beating heart of an “evil empire,” many of his angriest critics believed, then Moscow couldn’t be all bad. Writing in The Nation in 1984, historian Stephen F. Cohen hissed that, in a perfect world, “fairness would not allow us to defame a nation that has suffered and achieved so much.”

Although uniformly anti-Soviet, some conservatives too were guilty of a Cold War–induced moral blindness, defending authoritarian governments in Africa, Latin America, Asia, and Iberia as bulwarks against communist expansion. Columnist Pat Buchanan celebrated the authoritarian leaders Augusto Pinochet of Chile and Francisco Franco of Spain as “soldier-patriots” and referred quaintly to the racist regime in South Africa as the “Boer Republic.” Others accused America’s most anti-Soviet president of impuissance. As early as 1983, neoconservative writer Norman Podhoretz proclaimed that Reagan’s policies toward the Soviet Union amounted to “appeasement by any other name.”

When the whole rotten experiment suddenly failed, eventually bringing to an end not just Moscow’s Warsaw Pact client governments but the proxy civil wars it fought in the Third World, instead of engaging in overdue self-criticism many commentators clung to shopworn shibboleths. In 1990 the academic Peter Marcuse, also writing in The Nation, bizarrely claimed that East Germany “had never sent dissidents to gulags and rarely to jail” and expressed outrage that the “goal of the German authorities is the simple integration of East into West without reflection,” instead of heeding the pleas of the intellectual class who were at work on a more humane, less Russian brand of socialism.

The weeks and months following the fall of the Wall saw relentless worries, from left and right, about the corrosive influence of Western capitalism, consumerism, and commercial television on the untainted comrades of the Ost. The “prospect of rampant consumerism,” CBS News reported in July 1990, “has East Germany’s newly elected Christian Democratic Prime Minister, Lother De Mozier, worried.” By 1993 Ukrainian National Self Defense, a right-wing populist movement that loathed Russian power, was rallying against the “Americanization of Ukraine through Coca-Cola culture.” Even the famously anti-communist Pope John Paul II warned that “the Western countries run the risk of seeing this collapse of Communism as a one-sided victory of their own economic system, and thereby failing to make necessary corrections in that system.”

When the “shock” of capitalism didn’t jump-start the moribund economies of the East within a calendar year, many in the Western news media declared the entire project dead on arrival. In 1990 ABC Evening News told viewers that East Germany was already a “victim of an overdose of capitalism.” In Southeast Poland, CBS reported, “the transition from communism to capitalism is making more people more miserable every day.” Every new election, even in firmly Western-oriented countries such as Hungary and Poland, was greeted with scare stories about backsliding into communism, lurching into neo-Nazism, or both. Even some
of the early 20th-anniversary retrospectives last summer trotted out the same familiar story lines, exponential gains in freedom and prosperity notwithstanding.

With the proliferation of “Old Hopes Replaced by New Fears” stories, the long-running intellectual battle over the Cold War retreated into the halls of academia, where the newly (and, it turned out, briefly) opened Soviet archives further undermined the accepted narratives about Alger Hiss, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, I.F. Stone, and scores of other causes célèbres of the anti-anti-communists. Western intellectuals were more interested in Francis Fukuyama’s contention that we were witnessing “the end of history” than in who was most responsible for bringing that history to an alleged close.

But when that debate began to revive, it took up right where it left off in the 1980s: at the feet of the decade’s most controversial figure, Ronald Reagan. To his legion of critics, Reagan was an unalloyed Cold Warrior, recklessly dragging America toward the precipice of nuclear confrontation and taking the credit that rightfully belonged to reform Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. This school of interpretation was influential enough that the anti-communist commentator Arnold Beichman, writing in Policy Review in 2002, accused liberal academics and pundits of “trying to write President Reagan out of history.” But after the Berlin Wall fell, the pendulum swung the other way. Reagan’s loyal foot soldiers have persistently argued, with some degree of success, that the inspirational rhetoric of the 40th president, in the words of Margaret Thatcher, “won the Cold War without firing a shot.”

No phrase is more associated with Reagan’s presidency—and his lifelong crusade against communism—than his 1987 exhortation that Gorbachev, if he really believed in freedom, would come to Berlin and “tear down this wall.” Reagan’s national security adviser, Colin Powell, thought the line needlessly provocative; the State Department cautioned against “condemn[ing] the East too harshly.” The day after the speech, which would become Reagan’s most famous, Washington Post foreign policy columnist Jim Hoagland derided it as a “meaningless taunt” that history would surely ignore. Reagan’s acolytes, on the other hand, would strenuously argue that the speech was, if not directly responsible for the events of November 1989, at the very least helpful and prescient.

Neither of these readings is accurate, argues journalist James Mann in The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan: A History of the End of the Cold War. While the Gipper loathed Soviet totalitarianism—his aide Ken Adelman commented that it was the “only thing he actually hated”—Reagan was, Mann argues, a pragmatist who rejected the more belligerent figures in the Republican foreign policy establishment and helped enable Gorbachev’s reforms through engagement, not confrontation.

That Reagan was more dovish than his contemporary critics would allow isn’t a particularly radical argument, having been made previously by historians Paul Lettow and John Patrick Diggins and by former Reagan official Jack Matlock. And it is no longer controversial to claim, as Mann does, that Reagan was driven to the bargaining table by a combination of a deeply held revulsion for nuclear weapons and a gut instinct that Gorbachev was a different type of Soviet leader, a man Thatcher believed the West “could do business with.”

While Reagan supporters often provide a simple narrative of the Soviet Union’s collapse in which resolve alone won the Cold War, Mann’s attempt at balancing the historical record leads him to ignore evidence that might muddle his thesis. For instance, he gives short shrift to the financial costs of Reagan’s economic warfare—from the arms race to the embargo of the Soviet gas pipeline—that, according to Russian estimates, sucked billions out of the Soviet economy. Instead, he writes, it was “Reagan’s willingness to do business with Gorbachev that gave the Soviet leader the time and space he needed to demolish the Soviet system.”

But were it not for the nuclear disaster at Chernobyl, the American-funded anti-Soviet insurgency in Afghanistan, and a withering economy—events not seriously engaged by Mann—would Gorbachev have chosen the path of radical reform? The author of perestroika privately acknowledged that, unless concessions were made to Reagan, the Soviet Union would “lose because right now we are already at the end of our tether.” And Mann comments, in passing, that Gorbachev was “eager, if not desperate…to work
out agreements that would limit Soviet military spending.” As historian Christopher Andrews and former KGB archivist Vasili Mitrokhin wrote in *The World Was Going Our Way*, their accounting of Soviet operations in the Third World, Gorbachev inherited, and for a time continued, the “ruinously expensive flow of arms and military hardware to Afghanistan, Nicaragua, Vietnam, Syria, South Yemen, Ethiopia, Angola, Algeria, and elsewhere.”

The idea that Reagan’s Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI, or “Star Wars,” as it was derisively known) single-handedly bankrupted the Soviets, as commonly presented by the president’s most partisan defenders, is, as Mann argues, almost certainly wrong. But it wasn’t just the conservatives at *Human Events* who believed the SDI narrative. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the dissident author Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn maintained that “the Cold War was essentially won by Ronald Reagan when he embarked on the Star Wars program and the Soviet Union understood that it could not take this next step.” Gen. Nikolay Detinov, a high-ranking Red Army official and member of Soviet arms control delegations, admitted that “the American defense spending increase, SDI, and other defense programs greatly troubled the Soviet leadership.” But it didn’t necessarily bankrupt them.

Recent disclosures from Russian archives suggest that Soviet defense spending, which the CIA could only roughly estimate at the time (only four members of the Kremlin’s inner sanctum reportedly knew the true numbers), did not increase significantly in response to SDI. This was perhaps because the system, so battered by the time Gorbachev took the reins of power, simply didn’t have the money.

Mann is surely correct that Reagan’s instincts “were much closer to the truth than were those of his conservative critics.” And he is also right that, contra those same conservatives, Gorbachev too deserves tremendous credit for opening, and therefore destroying, the Soviet system. But as Henry Kissinger—himself a fierce critic of engagement with Gorbachev at the time—later observed, “the Soviet empire may have disintegrated on President George H.W. Bush’s watch, but it was Ronald Reagan’s presidency which marked the turning point.”

Mann writes that there is “no reason to think” Reagan opposed nuclear weapons upon entering the White House, putting the starting date of his conversion to antinuclearism at “late 1983.” But Reagan expressed a deep dislike of nuclear weapons long before his presidency, a fact well-documented by historian Paul Lettow, and there is an obvious continuity between his liberal activism in Hollywood, during which he agitated against atomic warfare, and the 1986 Reykjavik summit with Gorbachev where, to the horror of his advisers, Reagan nearly surrendered America’s entire nuclear arsenal. Michael Deaver, who worked for Reagan during his tenure as both California governor and president, later said that “even in those early years...he would say, ‘That’s our goal. We want to get rid of them altogether.’”

The details of the Cold War are still disputed enough that a market exists for books claiming to hold the new key that unlocks the truth. Michael Meyer, a former correspondent for *Newsweek* and current flack for United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, covered Germany and Eastern Europe during the waning years of the Cold War. In *The Year That Changed the World: The Untold Story Behind the Fall of the Berlin Wall*, Meyer declares that his is the “largely unknown” account of the Cold War’s end, finally “shorn of mythology.” Meyer offers a combative, journalistic rendering of the events of 1989, bookended with warnings that the triumphalist (read: Reaganite) reading of the Cold War was “tragically costly,” because “it was a straight line from the fantasy of Cold War victory to the invasion of Iraq.”

This might be a unique, if unconvincing, theory of the Cold War’s ultimate costs, but contrary to the book’s subtitle there is little, if any, information here that makes for an “untold story.” Nor is it easy to take *The Year That Changed the World* seriously when it is threaded with so many factual mistakes and dubious claims. Meyer asserts that the great post-communist film *The Lives of Others*, which dramatizes Stasi surveillance, is an example of *Ostalgie* (nostalgia for the East), when in fact *Ostalgie* was its target. Yuri Andropov, contrary to Meyer’s claim, certainly did not see substantial “flaws in the Soviet system.” It is risible to call East German novelist (and, it turned out, former Stasi collaborator) Christa Wolf a “dissident.” Gorbachev’s book *Perestroika* is hardly the “ultimate indictment of communism,” considering Gorbachev’s admonition that the world “must learn from Lenin” and keep on celebrating the October Revolution. The famous Berlin Wall
mural of two Communist leaders kissing, skillfully used by the Hungarian opposition party Fidesz, is of East German President Erich Honecker and Leonid Brezhnev, not Honecker and Gorbachev. The opposition movements in Hungary and Czechoslovakia were hardly “nonexistent.”

There are larger errors too. Meyer is right that President George H.W. Bush was often disengaged from the world-changing events unfolding in Eastern Europe, but he mangles the truth in making this point. While ignoring Bush’s shameful address in Kiev warning Ukrainians against independence (famously dubbed his “Chicken Kiev” speech by New York Times columnist William Safire), Meyer instead oddly mocks Bush’s 1990 visit to Poland, when “at a reception in Warsaw, he regaled guests with a list of Polish baseball ‘greats’…Stan Musial, Tony Kubek, Phil Niekro.” Meyer adds that “as they followed the president around Warsaw and Gdansk, many reporters wondered whether he was fully in touch. Baseball greats?” What Meyer neglects to mention, besides any detail of the backroom diplomacy behind the trip, was that Bush’s “reception” was a brief stop to visit 30 kids inaugurating Poland’s first-ever chapter of Little League Baseball.

Meyer is exercised by the onerous Cold War “myths” that we all cling to, yet he never engages or identifies those who supposedly propagate them. He rightly denounces the America-centric view of Cold War history but barely mentions the pivotal role played by German Chancellor Helmut Kohl in reunification. France’s Francois Mitterand, Great Britain’s Thatcher, and Pope John Paul II are similarly absent from the narrative. (As Polish dissident writer Adam Michnik later observed, “It will be a long time before anyone fully comprehends the ramifications of [the Pope’s] nine-day visit” to occupied Poland in 1979.)

In place of the old myths, Meyer erects new ones: “For all the problems they faced…most East Germans had no desire to leave their country,” he insists, “contrary to the impression fostered in the West. Many if not most were perfectly comfortable with the socialist system that guaranteed them work, low-cost housing and free lifelong health care and schooling.” There is no source for this fantastical claim. That a certain measure of nostalgia for the East German dictatorship exists from a distance of 20 years is undeniable, but an opinion poll taken in 1990 showed that 91 percent of East Germans favored unification and, by definition, the dissolution of the “worker’s state.”

When a free election was finally held in Poland, Meyer writes, “Here and there, a fair-minded minded few appreciated that communists such as General Czeslaw Kiszczak and others had made [elections] possible.” In Meyer’s view, totalitarians deserve praise because, abandoned by Moscow, they ultimately buckled to mounting pressure from the independent trade union Solidarity. In essence, he is asking the abducted to thank their captors for allowing them to go free. Most Poles likely had feelings closer to those of Adam Michnik, who in 1983 wrote a letter to Kiszczak calling him a “disgrace to the nation and a traitor to the Motherland” and a “dishonorable swine.”

In his epilogue, with its digressions on the second Iraq war, Meyer flagellates himself for a post-1989 article he wrote that had a “triumphalist tone,” and he urges readers to ponder the wisdom of a Lewis Carroll metaphor: “The world is always partly a mirror of ourselves.” As Meyer explains, “We see all things, enemies especially, through the lens of our own hopes and fears and desires, inevitably distorted.” One wonders if Meyer believes the Soviet Union—responsible for the forced starvation of Ukrainians in the 1930s and for Stalin’s bloody purge trials, to name just two of countless atrocities—deserves that notoriously crude yet ultimately accurate label, “evil empire.”

Reagan, of course, had his flaws, as voluminously documented by scholars, enemies, and sympathizers alike. But Gorbachev, Time’s “Man of the Decade” for the 1980s (unlike Reagan) and a Nobel Peace Prize winner (unlike Reagan), often escapes similar scrutiny. Meyer is more interested in score settling, pointing out that many hard-liners in the Reagan and Bush administrations, several of whom later joined George W. Bush’s administration, misjudged Gorbachev’s seriousness.

Gorbachev’s economic reforms were vague and ad hoc, and they wound up being tremendous failures. His chief foreign policy aide, Anatoly Chernyaev, grumbled during glasnost that Gorbachev “has no concept of where we are going. His declaration about socialist values, the ideals of October, as he begins to tick them off, sound like irony to the cognoscenti. Behind them—emptiness.” As historian Robert Service has
observed, Gorbachev intended glasnost as “a renaissance of Leninist ideals,” while his books “still equivocated on Stalin.” He avoided repeats of 1956 and 1968, when the Soviet military ruthlessly cracked down on its restive satellites, but did send troops to murder residents of Vilnius, Tblisi, and Baku. As Mary Elise Sarotte observes in her new book 1989: The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe, Gorbachev “had not sought to introduce completely democratic politics into the Soviet Union.”

Both Mann and Meyer are correct that without Gorbachev, the end of the Cold War wouldn’t have arrived so quickly. And Vaclav Havel is surely right when he argues that Gorbachev’s “historical achievement is enormous: communism would have collapsed without him anyway, but it might have happened 10 years later, and in God knows how wild and bloody a fashion.” But Mann’s case is convincing that the man of the decade, the great peace laureate, destroyed the Soviet Union “unintentionally,” not as an expression of any democratic desires.

It is difficult to accept heroic portrayals of those who were complicit in the mass enslavement and murder of their unwilling subjects. The Soviet Union's leaders, out of at least partial desperation, opened the door to democracy a crack, and their restless captives barged right through. On the other side they found VHS players, compact discs, supermarkets overflowing with fresh produce, press freedom, the hurly-burly of markets, multiparty democracy—and an army of fallible historians, journalists, politicians, and pundits, all desperate to prove that they had been right all along.

Michael C. Moynihan (mmoynihan@reason.com) is a senior editor at reason.

Townhall
The United Nations is Outraged Again, Or: Department of Mideast Static.
by Paul Greenberg

It won't do, at least not in polite society, to propose wiping a country off the map. That mantra has been left to Iran's raving leader.

Instead, this year's tactic at the always-busy United Nations is to deny Israel the right to defend itself. Which would lead to its destruction soon enough. And that would be the practical effect of bringing its generals and ministers to trial for their "war crimes" in Gaza. That's where the Israelis, after absorbing years of rocket attacks across their southern border, went in and attacked the source of the attacks. Their border with Hamas-controlled Gaza has been quieter since.

Naturally the United Nations, which is a lot better at condoning aggression than enforcing the peace, is outraged -- and doing its best to stir things up again. Its "Human Rights" Council, which has little if anything to do with protecting human rights, especially in Islamic dictatorships, has demanded that Israel be brought before the International Court of Justice for daring to defend itself.

With fine impartiality between aggressors and defenders, an investigation sponsored by the UN produced a report that blamed both Hamas and Israel for their conduct during the late unpleasantness in Gaza, ignoring expert testimony and the conclusions of the Israelis' own extensive investigations.

The UN's Human Rights Council then turned its dubious report into another of its customary anti-Israeli resolutions. The prejudice here was so blatant that even the author of the report said he was saddened by the partisan use to which it was put.
The U.S. delegation and a few scattered European ones objected to this kind of lynch law, but both China and Russia, those great exemplars of human rights, joined the mob. So did the Arab bloc, another bastion of human rights.

The result: A biased jury brought in a biased verdict. What a surprise. Let it be said that at least this arm of the UN has been consistent: According to one count, 80 percent of the condemnations it's ever issued have been aimed at the Jewish state.

In the irony-free precincts of the United Nations, the chairman of the UN's Arab bloc this month is the delegate from Sudan, whose government presided over the genocide in Darfur, which is rapidly being forgotten.

These days even the United States, under our new administration, is adopting a softer, gentler tone toward the genocidal regime in Khartoum. For that matter, Washington is moving to "engage" Teheran and Moscow, too. And the military dictatorship in Burma to boot. Any regime that really violates human rights can hope to get a sympathetic hearing from this new crew at the State Department.

Nothing is likely to come of this latest diplomatic provocation at the United Nations except another delay in the always-stalled peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians. But any chance of those negotiations succeeding has always been only an abstraction. Even if the Israelis negotiated under this threat from the UN, with which Palestinian rump state/militia/gang/Iranian front group would they negotiate with? The one in Gaza or Damascus or Beirut on the West Bank?

The essential aim of the Arab side in this "peace process" that produces regular incidents and sporadic wars has never been to create a Palestinian state next to the Jewish one. Or that objective could have been achieved at almost any time during the past century by accepting one of the many proposals for partition of that overly promised land -- going back as far as the Peel Commission of 1937. Or as recently as the Oslo Accords of the 1990s. Or the summit that Yasser Arafat walked out of in the waning days of the Clinton administration in 2000.

Failure has followed failure because this diplomatic charade has never really been about creating still another Arab state in the Middle East but about destroying the Jewish one.

Ottawa Citizen

Presidential decision making
by David Warren

The extreme delay in getting decisions out of Washington that were urgent many months ago, on how to proceed in Afghanistan, was made sickly comic on Monday when President Barack Obama told a military audience that he would not "rush the solemn decision of sending you into harm's way."

Morale had been descending in Afghanistan, from what I could make out, among an under-manned allied force in serious need of reinforcement; casualties rising on uncovered flanks.

And then they hear this strange man in Washington, playing Hamlet with himself, dramatizing his own role in what should be a clear-headed and quick, unemotional decision-making process. After all, he announced his (vacuous) "comprehensive new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan" to great fanfare last March. All he has to do now is give it substance.

The Bush administration was, for all its misjudgments in other areas, good at making clear, clean, practical decisions with troops in harm's way. Bush himself commanded overwhelming support in the military vote for his re-election in 2004. John McCain, who could also be taken as having some idea about military issues,
largely kept that vote. If Obama thinks he can now win the trust of soldiers, by blathering to them about the solemnity of his own august personal angst, he is as much of a fool as he looks to them already.

Of course, it is the soldier's duty to follow orders, and not to second-guess them. In principle, he has no opinions on the competence of his commander-in-chief, and it makes no difference to action in the field. And American soldiers are, from everything I have learnt about them, and in communication with many over the past eight years, like our own Canadian soldiers: solid, "professional," undistractable guys who get the job done without posturing. They are also, right down to the lowest ranks, resourceful people, who will make the best of what they have; and the officer corps is likewise impressive.

Indeed, I should confess that, as a person with no taste for bureaucracy, I'm almost at a loss to explain how well the U.S. strategic, logistical, and field operations are conducted; how dedicated the men (and women) are, serving down the line. For these soldiers are dealing with bureaucratic constraints on a scale never before self-imposed in history.

For example, I was following after the fact one operation in Afghanistan, a couple of years ago, in which everything in and above the field had been broadcast in live time, back into an office in Florida full of military lawyers. Old veterans of former wars must try to imagine this: your life on the line with bullets flying, while waiting for legal advice from some air-conditioned suit on another continent. (Contemporary technology makes this possible: but is a mixed blessing for that very reason.)

Life and death are real. President Obama must surely know that, and I must not doubt he has sometimes paused to consider the meanings of the words he uses. That he has no military experience whatever, and was entirely formed in "left-liberal" environments where military people are held in contempt, need also not go without not saying. He was under more pressure than a Bush or a McCain would ever be, to prove he could act as commander-in-chief.

But that requires making hard, and prompt, decisions. Bush was good at it, because Bush really did understand his responsibilities. A long procession of military families, including many widows and orphans, passed through the White House during his terms. The overwhelming impression from them was of a president who was not just words and gestures.

It is because military families are so well acquainted with the realities of life and violent death, that you can't speak glibly to them. They don't appreciate crocodile tears. They have a much better than average appreciation of rhetoric, however -- of what rings false and what rings true. I truly think Obama is out of his depth with them, as any man must be who does not know what he is talking about to a room full of people who do know.

He left Congress to stitch together its own trillion-dollar package of bailouts and give-always. He has let cumbersome and consequential medicare legislation write itself, as the vested interests lobby, tussle and conspire on Capitol Hill. He has watched the U.S. money supply pile up in very frail banks, and the dollar slide toward potential hyper-inflation. He has left all executive details to a group of fairly radical backstage "policy czars" -- many of whom seem utterly unqualified for their stations.

I can, in fact, find nothing, in his record so far, resembling a presidential decision, or specific presidential direction; only purple prose, almost never to the point. It is surely evident by now, this is a president who cannot make decisions. It grieves me that the soldiers must pay for that.
On Obama's latest speech on Afghanistan:
"It does, of course, impress us with the urgency of the matter and how it has to be decided.

But I want to point out one thing about what Obama said when he talked about the “long years of drift.” There is something truly disgusting about the way he cannot refrain from attacking Bush when he is being defensive about himself. I mean, it is beyond disgraceful here.

He won the election a year ago. He became commander in chief two months later. He announced his own strategy — not the Bush strategy, his strategy — six months ago. And it [the announcement] wasn't offhanded. It was in a major address with the secretary of defense and the secretary of state standing with him.

And now he is still talking about the drift in the Bush years? What is happening today is not as a result of the drift, so-called, in the Bush years. It is because of the drift in his years. It is because of the flaws in his own strategy, which is what he is now reexamining.

He has every right as commander in chief to reexamine his own strategy, but he ought to be honest, forthright, and courageous enough as the president to simply say: "I'm rethinking the strategy I adopted six months ago" — and not, once again, in a child-like way, attack his predecessor."

Jewish World Review
Dismantling America
by Thomas Sowell

Just one year ago, would you have believed that an unelected government official, not even a Cabinet member confirmed by the Senate but simply one of the many "czars" appointed by the President, could arbitrarily cut the pay of executives in private businesses by 50 percent or 90 percent?

Did you think that another "czar" would be talking about restricting talk radio? That there would be plans afloat to subsidize newspapers — that is, to create a situation where some newspapers' survival would depend on the government liking what they publish?

Did you imagine that anyone would even be talking about having a panel of so-called "experts" deciding who could and could not get life-saving medical treatments?

Scary as that is from a medical standpoint, it is also chilling from the standpoint of freedom. If you have a mother who needs a heart operation or a child with some dire medical condition, how free would you feel to speak out against an administration that has the power to make life and death decisions about your loved ones?

Does any of this sound like America?

How about a federal agency giving school children material to enlist them on the side of the president? Merely being assigned to sing his praises in class is apparently not enough.

How much of America would be left if the federal government continued on this path? President Obama has already floated the idea of a national police force, something we have done without for more than two centuries.
We already have local police forces all across the country and military forces for national defense, as well as the FBI for federal crimes and the National Guard for local emergencies. What would be the role of a national police force created by Barack Obama, with all its leaders appointed by him? It would seem more like the brown shirts of dictators than like anything American.

How far the President will go depends of course on how much resistance he meets. But the direction in which he is trying to go tells us more than all his rhetoric or media spin.

Barack Obama has not only said that he is out to "change the United States of America," the people he has been associated with for years have expressed in words and deeds their hostility to the values, the principles and the people of this country.

Jeremiah Wright said it with words: "G0d damn America!" Bill Ayers said it with bombs that he planted. Community activist goons have said it with their contempt for the rights of other people.

Among the people appointed as czars by President Obama have been people who have praised enemy dictators like Mao, who have seen the public schools as places to promote sexual practices contrary to the values of most Americans, to a captive audience of children.

Those who say that the Obama administration should have investigated those people more thoroughly before appointing them are missing the point completely. Why should we assume that Barack Obama didn't know what such people were like, when he has been associating with precisely these kinds of people for decades before he reached the White House?

Nothing is more consistent with his lifelong patterns than putting such people in government — people who reject American values, resent Americans in general and successful Americans in particular, as well as resenting America's influence in the world.

Any miscalculation on his part would be in not thinking that others would discover what these stealth appointees were like. Had it not been for the Fox News Channel, these stealth appointees might have remained unexposed for what they are. Fox News is now high on the administration's enemies list.

Nothing so epitomizes President Obama's own contempt for American values and traditions like trying to ram two bills through Congress in his first year — each bill more than a thousand pages long — too fast for either of them to be read, much less discussed. That he succeeded only the first time says that some people are starting to wake up. Whether enough people will wake up in time to keep America from being dismantled, piece by piece, is another question — and the biggest question for this generation.

WSJ
The Post-Gracious President

Whenever he must make a difficult decision, Mr. Obama complains it's Bush's fault.
by William McGurn

Nine months after Barack Obama entered the Oval Office, his most adamant critics must concede he's delivered on "change." And we see it in our first post-gracious presidency.

The most visible manifestations of the new ungraciousness are the repeated digs the president and his senior staffers continue to make against George W. Bush. Recently, the administration has given us two fresh examples. The first is about Afghanistan, the other about the economy.

On Afghanistan, Mr. Obama's chief of staff went on CNN's "State of the Union" earlier this month to discuss the presidential decision on Afghanistan that everyone is waiting for. "It's clear that basically we had a war
for eight years that was going on, that's adrift," said Rahm Emanuel. "That we're beginning at scratch, and just from the starting point, after eight years." Translation: If we screw up Afghanistan, blame Mr. Bush.

The other came from Mr. Obama himself, speaking at various Democratic fund-raisers last week. "I don't mind cleaning up the mess that some other folks made," the president said. "That's what I signed up to do. But while I'm there mopping the floor, I don't want somebody standing there saying, 'You're not mopping fast enough.'"

This is a frequent Obama complaint. The logic is clear if curious: While it's OK to blame Mr. Bush for spending too much, it's not OK to point out that Mr. Obama is already well on track to spend much more.

Far from one-off asides, Mr. Obama's jabs at his predecessor have been a common feature of his speeches, fund-raisers and the like. They seem especially to pop up whenever Mr. Obama discovers some decision he must make is not as easy as he'd thought. And they date back to the first moments of his presidency.

After a perfunctory thank you to Mr. Bush, a newly sworn-in President Obama declared that Americans had gathered for his inaugural "because we have chosen hope over fear," that his administration would "restore science to its rightful place," and that he would never allow America to "give [our ideals] up for expedience's sake." In other words, President Bush had chosen fear over hope, was being "expedient" rather than defending the nation, and had chosen religious fundamentalism over science when making decisions in areas such as embryonic stem-cell research.

In his first trip overseas, Mr. Obama continued the Bush bash. In France, he declared that in recent years "there have been times where America has shown arrogance and been dismissive, even derisive." In answer to a question he underscored the point, suggesting that European solidarity over 9/11 was lost when America allowed itself to be "sidetracked by Iraq."

In May, when it became obvious that his administration would not make good on his promise to close Guantanamo by this coming January, he explained it this way in a speech on national security. "We're cleaning up something that is, quite simply, a mess . . . [T]he problem of what to do with Guantanamo detainees was not caused by my decision to close the facility, the problem exists because of the decision to open Guantanamo in the first place."

In August, he returned to the theme that while he can criticize his predecessor, it's unfair to criticize him. "I expect to be held responsible for these issues because I'm the president. But I don't want the folks who created the mess . . . to do a lot of talking. I want them just to get out of the way so we can clean up the mess."

Nor is it only a matter of rhetoric. In September 1993, Bill Clinton invited his predecessor, George H.W. Bush, to the White House to help promote the North American Free Trade Agreement to a divided Congress. In contrast, when Mr. Obama announced our withdrawal from Iraq in February at Camp Lejeune, N.C.—an honorable withdrawal Mr. Bush's surge helped make possible—the president limited himself to a quick "courtesy call." Mr. Bush was neither present nor mentioned at what might have been a healing moment on a divisive war.

Policy differences, of course, are fair game for sharp debate, and in the end history will apportion the credit and blame due Mr. Bush. By any measure, however, Mr. Obama's ongoing snipes against a predecessor who is no longer involved in setting policy are extraordinary. They are more extraordinary still issuing from a president who campaigned on a promise to transcend the political divisions of the past.

Barack Obama may believe that his incessant whining about all the challenges his predecessor left him lets America know how tough he has it. The danger to his presidency is that it can sound awfully like "I'm not up to the job."
Barack Obama must stop campaigning and start governing
President Barack Obama still steems to be running for office, rather than running the country.
by Toby Harnden

Perhaps we should not be surprised that the land of the permanent campaign has produced a president like Barack Obama. During his White House bid, Mr Obama's staff argued that his masterful oversight of the machinery that ultimately got him elected was his highest achievement.

In many respects this was true, though Mr Obama was more chairman than CEO. Even Republican political operatives acknowledge that the Obama '08 campaign was a thing of beauty.

Essentially, however, Mr Obama won because of his persona – post-racial, healing, cool, articulate and inspirational. In a sense, therefore, his greatest achievement in life is being Barack Obama. Or the campaign version, at least.

Therein lies the problem. While campaigning could centre around soaring rhetoric, governing is altogether messier. It involves tough, unpopular choices and cutting deals with opponents. It requires doing things rather than talking about them, let alone just being.

Mr Obama is showing little appetite for this. Instead of being the commander-in-chief, he is the campaigner-in-chief.

After a disastrous summer that saw his approval rating drop more than any other president at the same stage since Harry Truman in 1953, Mr Obama has temporarily abandoned the campaign-style events promoting his stalled health-care reform initiative.

Now, he is stumping for Democratic candidates in states he won last year but which are now in danger. Last Wednesday in Hackensack, Mr Obama took to the stage to proclaim: "Your voice can change the world. Your voice can elect Jon Corzine, governor once again of New Jersey." Change the world? Mr Corzine is a former Goldman Sachs executive whose political career was launched when he spent $57 million of his own money on a Senate seat in 2000.

The rally was an attempted 2008 reprise. There was the spontaneous (or not) cry of "I love you!" bashfully acknowledged by Mr Obama with a "I love you back." There were the Obama-led chants of "Fired up! Ready to go!" and the ubiquitous "Yes We Can" signs.

And as he always does, Mr Obama blamed every economic woe on the Bush years, conveniently forgetting that Republicans are no longer in office and it's been his mess for nine months now.

Campaigning and raising cash is what Mr Obama does best. Next week's fundraising events in Florida and Virginia will bring to 24 the number of such functions he had headlined since entering office in January. During his first year in office, Mr Bush attended just six fundraisers.

Just as instructive is Mr Obama's war on the cable channel Fox News.

Everyone knows that Fox leans Right and contains some of the most virulent critics of the president. Most prominent is Fox's weeping, ranting Glenn Beck, who fulminated bizarrely in July that Mr Obama "has a deep-seated hatred for white people".
Rather than ignoring or even repudiating Fox commentators, the White House has instead sought to marginalise Fox News in its entirety. Top Obama aide David Axelrod even lectured that Fox was not a news organisation and the rest of the media "ought not to treat them that way".

This was the same Mr Axelrod who advised Mr Obama in a 2006 campaign memo: "You care far too much what is written and said about you."

Also in the doghouse is the US Chamber of Commerce, which Obama aides have branded as representing "special interests" and a Bush agenda. Never mind that moderate Democratic candidates across the country proudly tout endorsements for the Chamber, which is hardly part of any radical Republican fringe.

All this says much about Mr Obama's priorities at a time when he is sitting on an urgent request for 40,000 more troops to Afghanistan, seemingly unsure about whether the counter-insurgency strategy he announced in March is the right one.

Late-night comics, although unabashedly liberal and at a loss last year as to how to poke fun at the rather humourless Mr Obama, are having a field day portraying him as a do-nothing prevaricator obsessed with his own image.

"President Obama agreed to commit an additional 40,000 troops to help fight Fox News," quipped NBC's Jay Leno. "Senior White House adviser David Axelrod told reporters that Fox News is just pushing a point of view. Well, yes, but at least they've got a point of view." Mr Obama was elected on a promise of being post-partisan to Washington and transforming the country. Thus far, he has won the support of only a single Republican for his health-care plan and has shown himself to be as aggressive a Democratic partisan in office as anyone in the fabled Clinton war room.

Beyond the grand announcements, fine speeches and his eager acceptance of the Nobel Peace Prize, Mr Obama has yet to achieve anything of substance. It is time for the campaign to end.

**Contentions**

**Obama’s Trade Faux Pas**

by Jillian Melchior

Predictably, Beijing has retaliated against Barack Obama’s protectionist trade policy. (Last week), the Chinese Ministry of Commerce issued a preliminary ruling that puts a 36 percent tariff on U.S.-made nylon.

That tariff, like the initial one, will hurt American industry and American consumers, and it could have been avoided.

If only Obama had been more … diplomatic. By upholding his campaign promises to labor unions, he backtracked on his promise to avoid protectionism. And tariffs are a surefire way to irk overseas friends.

The fray began in September. The United Steelworkers, who make the metal wiring that goes into tires, complained to the International Trade Commission that the high number of Chinese tire imports was disrupting and directly threatening the market.

The president has the final say about enforcing ITC recommendations. Unlike George W. Bush, who four times dismissed similar complaints, Obama sided with the labor union. If only Obama had used his Nobel-winning charm to sate the labor-union leader with dinners and discussions, and if only he had worried about how provoking Beijing might impede goals like international security, global warming, and especially the economy. Instead, he ultimately conceded an internationally important decision to a powerful domestic lobby.
How? Obama enforced a 35 percent tariff on Chinese tires in addition to the existing 4 percent one, ensuring that trade hostility would escalate. And, as the Wall Street Journal reports, Americans got shot in the foot:

Since the tariff announcement on September 11, U.S. tire wholesalers have been warning that their sales prices to retailers will increase by about 15 percent on average. In some cases, the hikes are as high as 28 percent. The only reason prices haven’t risen by the full 35% tariff rate yet is that wholesalers still have some pre-tariff inventory stocks in their warehouse.

Beijing countered. It filed a complaint against the U.S. with the World Trade Organization and threatened tariffs on American poultry and car-part exports. And on Monday came the decision to impose the tariff on Nylon 6, “a synthetic filament that ends up in a wide array of products including toothbrushes, auto parts, socks and the handles of Glock handguns,” the New York Times reports. Who knows where this will end?

None of this should come as any surprise; Chinese trade retaliation has been brewing for more than a month. The irony is that this is one instance where Obama’s conciliatory international approach could have served him well.
TRICK OR TREAT!
I'M FOX NEWS!

AHHH!
THE LATEST VERSION HAS REMOVABLE PARTS