

# ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

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## PERSPECTIVE NUMBER ONE

### *FOREIGN POLICY CHOICES*

The world is a chaotic, unstable place right now: Iran and North Korea with nuclear weapons; the seething Middle East; pacifistic Europe meeting an increasingly aggressive Russia; and of course there is China, which is using its newfound wealth to push into areas of the world where no Asian nation has ever been. In this *Perspective*, I hope to survey this situation through the grid of both Harry Truman and Jimmy Carter. Our current president will need to choose.

- First, a summary of the approach. Harry Truman learned much while president. He slowly abandoned his Wilsonian idealism for an acceptance of the brutality of Soviet Russia under Stalin. Historian Victor Davis Hanson writes that “Against the advice of his angry State Department, Truman supported the establishment of the Jewish state of Israel in 1948. The Berlin airlift, the Marshall Plan, the salvation of Greece and Turkey, and success pushing the Communists north of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel in Korea all established the parameters of the next half-century of bipartisan American foreign policy.” He carefully crafted a policy of communist containment around allies who shared the “common purpose” of the US. Ever since, most Democrats have embraced Truman’s “common purpose” approach. But Jimmy Carter’s presidency was a departure from that common purpose. Carter cut the defense budget and questioned the containment policy toward North Korea. There was the short-sighted decision to arm radical Islamists in Pakistan, the abrupt abandonment of the previously allied Shah of Iran, and the initial courting of the Ayatollah Khomeini. Carter appeared stunned by the rise of radical Islam. The Soviet invasions of Afghanistan, Communist inroads into Central America and the alienation of European governments further weakened American interests during his presidency. So, which presidential perspective is President Obama embracing? He is totally inexperienced in this area but has framed the question of radical Islam with the demeanor of a contrite America apologizing to the Muslim world. He has so far refused to address the endemic intolerance of Islam, its autocracy, tribalism and gender apartheid. So far, the president has reached out to Ahmadinejad of Iran, Bashar al Assad of Sudan, the Castro brothers of Cuba and Hugo Chavez of Venezuela. In a unilateral move, the president withdrew the promise of a land-based antiballistic missile defense from Eastern Europe, hoping that this move would appease Russia into changing its patronage of Iran; it has done no such thing. Hanson writes: “But so far the centrifuges keep spinning while we appear unreliable to friends, compliant to rivals, and weak to enemies. The administration has also promised greater support to the UN, seemingly unworried that the organization’s illiberal majority has often appeased or abetted autocratic governments.” Now we face this major question: Will President Obama’s inexperience cause him to learn that the world is chaotic and dangerous and can only be dealt with through strength and an unabashed confidence in

America's historic role against aggressors? Or will he follow the baseless sermonizing of Jimmy Carter? The future of the US and the stability of the world rests on which one Obama chooses.

- Second, consider what is occurring in Turkey. When Obama recently visited Turkey in April, he emphasized Turkey's historic modern role as a bridge between East and West. Turkey has been a rather stable ally of Israel and has sought membership in the European Union. But there are now fears that Turkey is abandoning its bridge-building role. It recently canceled air force exercises with Israel. Turkey's Prime Minister castigated Israel's President over the war in Gaza. Turkey had been facilitating secret negotiations between Israel and Syria and felt betrayed by Israel's attempt to end the rocket attacks from Gaza. Turkey has also called on the world to recognize Hamas. Further, Turkey has made alarming overtures to Iran and Syria. Turkey was one of the first nations to offer congratulations upon Ahmadinejad's fraudulent election in Iran. In addition, because France and Germany both stand opposed to Turkey's desire to join the EU, this has enraged the present government of Turkey. Finally, there is growing evidence that Turkey is turning to Russia, which has been courting Turkey as a distribution point for energy supplies. Turkey seems to be moving from its strategic commitment to the West (e.g., a key member of NATO) and toward the developing Russia-Syria-Iranian alliance. This is a dangerous development and one that the new president must watch carefully. The West cannot lose Turkey to this emerging alliance. This will be a real test of Obama's leadership of the western alliance.
- Third, the new president has launched a "new era of engagement" as its approach to foreign policy. Robert Kagan of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace poses two questions: "If engagement fails, will the Obama team ever acknowledge that it has failed? And what then?" The major test for this new policy of engagement is Iran. The US, France, and Russia have proposed that Iran ship 70% of its low-enriched uranium to Russia this year for processing. Theoretically, it is designed as a compromise to test Iran's intentions. So far, the results are not exactly encouraging. This proposal will not stop Iran from continuing to enrich uranium; only delay its nuclear bomb program for about one year. Kagan writes that "Tehran is obviously probing to see whether President Obama can play hardball or whether he can be played. If Obama has any hope of getting anywhere with the mullahs, he needs to show them he means business, now, and immediately begin imposing sanctions." Further, another test of this policy of engagement is Russia. Obama canceled the antiballistic program for Central Europe in advance of getting Russia's help with Iran. If Russia continues to act as Iran's facilitator, as it is now doing, Obama will need to make clear that just as cooperation brings rewards, so noncooperation brings consequences. What are those consequences for Russia? Kagan argues that in this situation, "Russia thus reaps all the rewards of engagement without ever having to make a difficult decision." Most analysts fear that Iran is merely bringing the US along hoping to buy more time and putting off any Western sanctions that could produce new and potentially explosive unrest within Iran. The country is somewhat unstable politically as the unrest over the fraudulent election of Ahmadinejad demonstrated. Kagan observes that "Many of us worry that, for Obama, engagement is an end in itself, not a means to an end. We worry that every time Iran rejects one proposal, the president will simply resume negotiations on another proposal and that this will continue right up until the day Iran finally tests its first nuclear weapon, at which point

the president will simply begin negotiations again to try to persuade Iran to put its nuclear genie back in the bottle.” The new policy on engagement seems to me to be simply a policy of talking with Iran, while it continues on its long, costly pursuit of nuclear weapons. President Obama has not given Iran any reason why it should stop its program. Russia and China will never support strengthened sanctions and France and pacifistic Europe will never support any kind of military action against Iran. So, it would seem that the US is buying some variation of the policy of appeasement when it comes to Iran. History has demonstrated incontrovertibly that appeasement of a dangerous regime never works. Perhaps, engagement is just another word for appeasement. If so, this will be viewed by future historians as a disaster—a very costly disaster!

See George Will in the *Washington Post* (4 October 2009); Robert Kagan in the *Washington Post* (29 October 2009); Dan Bilefsky in the *New York Times* (28 October 2009); Victor Davis Hanson in the *Wall Street Journal* (29 October 2009).

## **PERSPECTIVE NUMBER TWO**

### ***AMERICAN CULTURE AND COMPARTMENTALIZATION***

There is a strong tendency within American culture to compartmentalize certain issues, refusing to see how interconnected everything is within our culture. We often isolate and compartmentalize cultural issues to our detriment as a civilization. Several thoughts.

- First, consider marriage. Science tells us that puberty comes earlier for American teens and as a result sexual activity results earlier as well. However, the average age when people marry has grown later—26 for women and 28 for men. The result is a decade or more of sexual activity before marriage. Columnist Michael Gerson writes: “The casual sex promoted in advertising and entertainment often leads, in the real world of fragile hearts and STDs, to emotional and physical wreckage. But it doesn’t seem realistic to expect most men and women to delay sex until marriage at 26 or 28. Such virtue is both admirable and possible—but it can hardly be a general social expectation.” Typically, churches and parachurch ministries ignore this reality—to the detriment of these young adults. So, because courtship is gone, young adults are now institutionalizing cohabitation. From 1960 to 2007, the number of Americans cohabiting has increased fourteenfold. About 40% of children are now products of such arrangements. Social science evidence is now confirming that such arrangements are not stable and are devastating for children born from cohabiting arrangements. Our culture can no longer compartmentalize the institution of marriage and simply argue that it works for some but not all. Gerson argues that “Marriage is the most effective institution to bind two parents for a long period in the common enterprise of raising a child—particularly encouraging fathers to invest time and attention in the lives of their children. And the fatherless are some of the most disadvantaged, betrayed people in our society, prone to delinquency, poverty and academic failure. Cohabitation is no place for children.” American culture can no longer compartmentalize the issue of marriage. It is one of the most important institutions for civilization. It remains the only institution where responsibility, commitment and sacrifice for the sake of children works. We cannot set it

aside and deem it irrelevant. It does not belong in a compartment for a select few who still want it. It is the vital center of a vibrant, robust civilization.

- Second, consider David Letterman. Prompted by a failed blackmail attempt, Letterman revealed that he had had sex with a number of female employees involved with his program. He followed up two shows later with an uncharacteristically sober apology. Few have shown such contempt for women in public than David Letterman. He had the power to fire the women with whom he had sex; most would consider that something akin to sexual harassment. James Poniewozik, *Time* columnist, writes that “Comedians don’t joke about sex scandals because they themselves are morally pure. They do it because sex scandals are funny. Letterman’s is too—maybe as hypocrisy insurance—he’s already been skewering himself over it.” That a man like David Letterman remains a national late-night celebrity speaks volumes about American culture’s desire to compartmentalize things. We compartmentalize our entertainers’ morals and values from our own and from their performances. Instead of holding entertainment heroes to a moral standard, we overlook their horrific lifestyle because they make us laugh! We will tolerate gross and offensive philandering and adultery because they entertain us. Is there any wonder that our culture rightly deserves the charge of hypocrisy! American culture should shun a man such as David Letterman. What he did stands opposed to everything that is decent, ethical and acceptable. But the culture accepts him because he is entertaining. Shame on the broader culture for not holding him accountable and boycotting his show and his advertisers. But the culture compartmentalizes his behavior and ignores it because he makes us laugh!
- Finally, consider the matter of abortion. Dinesh D’Souza writes that “It seems bizarre that many who claim the political virtue of compassion are champions of abortion rights. These people are able to cry tears for just about every vulnerable group in the world. They feel the pain of seals, they grieve over sex trafficking in Asia, and they are worried about the plight of children in Darfur. They react with genuine indignation and mobilize to take action. Why, then, do the unborn persons in their own communities not usually inspire a similar compassionate response?” There is no greater example of this culture’s penchant to compartmentalize than abortion. It is thoroughly inconsistent and hypocritical, but there it is! D’Souza correctly argues that abortion is the logical result of the sexual revolution. If women are going to have control over their bodies and deal with a pregnancy they reject, they must be able to kill their child. “It is not only painfully embarrassing, it is also painful to one’s self-image to acknowledge a willingness to sustain permissive sexual values by killing the unborn.” We can no longer ignore this compartmentalization. Abortion is not simply a right that some women want to maintain; it is inextricably linked to the sexual revolution. If we are going to do away with abortion, the culture is soon going to need to address the matter of sexual libertinism! And that will not be easy!

See Michael Gerson in the *Omaha World Herald* (20 October 2009); James Poniewozik in *Time* (19 October 2009); Dinesh D’Souza in *Christianity Today* (September 2009), p. 78.