

June 23, 2013

Our national embarrassment went to Berlin last week. [Jennifer Rubin](#) starts our look at the speech he gave.

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*That said, I'll be more specific about the speech's faults. There are more, but I will focus on 10 of them:*

1. *"Today, 60 years after they rose up against oppression, we remember the East German heroes of June 17th. When the wall finally came down, it was their dreams that were fulfilled. Their strength and their passion, their enduring example remind us that for all the power of militaries, for all the authority of governments, it is citizens who choose whether to be defined by a wall, or whether to tear it down." The president frequently leaves out what brought down that wall — the West's determination over decades not to relent against the Soviets. I know it's incompatible with his agenda, but to leave the Soviets, the Americans and the Cold War out of the equation is absurd. ...*

[Andrew Malcolm](#) has his thoughts.

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*"People of Berlin, people of the world," the ex-state senator intoned on that long-ago day, "This is our moment. This is our time."*

*Well, what a difference 1,791 days makes. American presidents often travel abroad to change the subject from troubles at home. In Obama's case, things like serial scandals involving the IRS, the FBI, the State Department, the Justice Department and still unexplained lack of security and emergency response that got four Americans killed in Benghazi.*

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**Scott Johnson** at Power Line notes George Will's take.

*Reading Obama's speeches is a little like reading New York Times editorials. They don't withstand close scrutiny, but that's the least of it. They should be accompanied by a warning that they may be hazardous to your health. They kill brain cells.*

*George Will suffers through Obama's speech at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin so that we don't have to. Will takes up the arms control thread in Obama's speech.*

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Here's **George Will**.

*The question of whether Barack Obama's second term will be a failure was answered in the affirmative before his Berlin debacle, which has recast the question, which now is: Will this term be silly, even scary in its detachment from reality? ...*

*... In Northern Ireland before going to Berlin, Obama sat next to Putin, whose demeanor and body language when he is in Obama's presence radiate disdain. There Obama said: "With respect to Syria, we do have differing perspectives on the problem, but we share an interest in reducing the violence." Differing perspectives?*

*Obama wants to reduce the violence by coaxing Syria's Bashar al-Assad, who is winning the war, to attend a conference at which he negotiates the surrender of his power. Putin wants to reduce the violence by helping — with lavish materiel assistance and by preventing diplomacy that interferes — Assad complete the destruction of his enemies.*

*Napoleon said: "If you start to take Vienna — take Vienna." Douglas MacArthur said that all military disasters can be explained by two words: "Too late." Regarding Syria, Obama is tentative and, if he insists on the folly of intervening, tardy. He is giving Putin a golden opportunity to humiliate the nation responsible for the "catastrophe." In a contest between a dilettante and a dictator, bet on the latter.*

Obama's vanity is a wonder of the world that never loses its power to astonish, but really: Is everyone in his orbit too lost in raptures of admiration to warn him against delivering a speech soggy with banalities and bromides in a city that remembers John Kennedy's "Ich bin ein Berliner" and Ronald Reagan's "Tear down this wall"? With German Chancellor Angela Merkel sitting nearby, Obama began his Berlin speech: "As I've said, Angela and I don't exactly look like previous German and American leaders." He has indeed said that, too, before, at least about himself. It was mildly amusing in Berlin in 2008, but hardly a Noel Coward-like witticism worth recycling.

His look is just not that interesting. And after being pointless in Berlin, neither is he, other than for the surrealism of his second term.

### Bill Kristol's turn.

... Half a century ago, President Kennedy declared, "All free men, wherever they may live, are citizens of Berlin, and, therefore, as a free man, I take pride in the words 'Ich bin ein Berliner!'" A quarter-century ago, President Reagan challenged the general secretary of the Soviet Union: "Come here to this gate. Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate. Mr. Gorbachev—Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" President Obama, by contrast, declared nothing notable and challenged no one powerful. With the Berlin Wall down and the Cold War won, the president of the United States talked at length and had nothing to say.

It would be too harsh, perhaps, to say that Obama's remarks served only to ratify the judgment rendered the week before by Bill Clinton: that President Obama is pretty much "a total wuss." It wouldn't be too harsh to say of Obama's foreign policy what Winston Churchill said in 1936 about the Stanley Baldwin government: He is "decided only to be undecided, resolved to be irresolute, adamant for drift, solid for fluidity, all-powerful to be impotent." ...

We close today with Power Line's post on "Our Dimwitted President."

President Obama seems incapable of going abroad without embarrassing himself. Via InstaPundit, we learn that when he was in the U.K., Obama couldn't keep Chancellor George Osborne's name straight. Obama repeatedly called him "Jeffrey." The repeated gaffe became so obvious that Obama apologized:

According to the Sun and the Financial Times, Mr Obama apologised to the chancellor for calling him Jeffrey three times during the meeting – saying: "I'm sorry, man. I must have confused you with my favourite R&B singer".

That would be this Jeffrey Osborne. The real Jeffrey Osborne was excited to hear about the mishap, and George Osborne was gracious about it. But good grief: the first obligation of a diplomat is to keep track of whom he is speaking to. One can imagine the hilarity if George W. Bush had referred to Gordon Brown, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and Prime Minister during his administration, as "James Brown," confusing the Prime Minister with his favorite R&B singer. Or perhaps, given Bush's musical tastes, Sawyer Brown, or Zac Brown. Would such a gaffe have been laughed off? I doubt it.

Speaking of embarrassments, [Telegraph, UK](#) with Hagel's latest.

*Chuck Hagel, the US defence secretary, has apologised to a professor of Indian descent after jokingly asking if he was a member of the Taliban.*

*Mr Hagel's spokesman insisted the offhand remark, which came after a speech at the University of Nebraska on Wednesday, was not meant to refer to anyone in the audience or to the professor's Indian heritage.*

*At Wednesday's event, after discussing prospects for talks with the Taliban insurgency, Hagel waited for another question and pointed to the back of the hall, saying:*

*"OK, so who has a – way up in the back there. You're not a member of the Taliban are you?"*

*His attempt at humour appeared to fall flat, judging by the long pause that followed, according to a video of the event broadcast by the Pentagon channel. ...*

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## Right Turn

### [The president's foolhardy speech](#)

by Jennifer Rubin



*Obama appears at the Brandenburg Gate.*

One hardly knows where to begin when it comes to President Obama's speech at the Brandenburg Gate, but I will start with an overarching point. There is no reason — with Iran edging closer to nuclear weapons capability; jihadism on the march in the Middle East; China engaging in cyberterrorism; and Bashar al-Assad continuing his mass murder with Iran's and Russia's assistance — for the president to be talking about nuclear arms reduction. This is the triumph of ego and cluelessness over common sense. His speech has *nothing* to do with the multiple threats and challenges we face. It seems he has nothing useful to offer on our real problems so he'll go back to an oldie-but-really-bad-idea from his college days — a nuclear freeze. (This is what comes from the White House running national security policy rather than anyone with a modicum of appreciation for the world as it is.)

That said, I'll be more specific about the speech's faults. There are more, but I will focus on 10 of them:

1. *"Today, 60 years after they rose up against oppression, we remember the East German heroes of June 17th. When the wall finally came down, it was their dreams that were fulfilled. Their strength and their passion, their enduring example remind us that for all the power of militaries, for all the authority of governments, it is citizens who choose whether to be defined by a wall, or whether to tear it down."* The president frequently leaves out what brought down that wall — the West's determination over decades not to relent against the Soviets. I know it's incompatible with his agenda, but to leave the Soviets, the Americans and the Cold War out of the equation is absurd.

2. *"Today, people often come together in places like this to remember history — not to make it. After all, we face no concrete walls, no barbed wire. There are no tanks poised across a border. There are no visits to fallout shelters. And so sometimes there can be a sense that the great challenges have somehow passed. And that brings with it a temptation to turn inward — to think of our own pursuits, and not the sweep of history; to believe that we've settled history's accounts, that we can simply enjoy the fruits won by our forebears."* Isn't that precisely the course the president has championed? Retreat, retrenchment, unilateral reduction in our forces and willful blindness to threats have characterized his foreign policy for five years.

3. *"Today's threats are not as stark as they were half a century ago, but the struggle for freedom and security and human dignity — that struggle goes on."* I think we've got some pretty stark threats (a nuclear-armed Iran, 100,000 dead in Syria, North Korea), but he isn't talking about them. The president seems unimpressed with the challenges that face us now so he chooses to leap into the realm of fantasy — a nuke-free world.

4. *"Peace with justice means extending a hand to those who reach for freedom, wherever they live. Different peoples and cultures will follow their own path, but we must reject the lie that those who live in distant places don't yearn for freedom and self-determination just like we do; that they don't somehow yearn for dignity and rule of law just like we do."* This is perhaps his most galling passage. Did he lend a hand to the Green Revolution? What was he doing when 100,000 Syrians died? Has he taken Vladimir Putin to task for throwing out NGOs and suppressing dissent?

5. *"Peace with justice means pursuing the security of a world without nuclear weapons — no matter how distant that dream may be."* It's remarkable that with North Korea and Iran emerging as new threats in their own right and opening up the potential for nuclear proliferation on a massive scale, he points dreamily to some distant horizon where our disarmament encourages our adversaries to do the same.

6. *"So today, I'm announcing additional steps forward. After a comprehensive review, I've determined that we can ensure the security of America and our allies, and maintain a strong and credible strategic deterrent, while reducing our deployed strategic nuclear weapons by up to one-third. And I intend to seek negotiated cuts with Russia to move beyond Cold War nuclear postures."* This is the clincher — he will reduce our arsenal, but merely seek that Russia do the same. This is by definition unilateral disarmament. That offer is being made to the very same power that snubbed him this week in dealing with Assad.

After the speech, former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton told me, “The president still has no idea of nuclear strategy in a multipolar world, or what role America’s nuclear capabilities play in preserving global peace and security. His proposals are ideologically driven, founded on the mistaken and dangerous belief that U.S. nuclear weapons increase the danger of international conflict.” (Indeed the college kid who wrote about the nuclear freeze seems caught in a time warp and oblivious to the world around him.) As Bolton noted, “Our nuclear umbrella does precisely the opposite [reduces the danger of international conflict].”

7. *“For over a decade, America has been at war. Yet much has now changed over the five years since I last spoke here in Berlin. The Iraq war is now over. The Afghan war is coming to an end. Osama bin Laden is no more. Our efforts against al Qaeda are evolving.”* There he goes again. He assumes that because we exit, war ends. Iraq is now again rife with sectarian violence, and Afghanistan teeters on the brink as the Taliban stand ready to reap their rewards from the battlefield. He suggests that no matter what the provocations (Iran, Syria, etc.) war is behind us. No wonder our adversaries are running wild.

8. *The president seems to think he can strike a handshake deal on his own with Russia.* Russia is already in violation of numerous arms control commitments, so this strikes us as a particularly inept approach. Moreover, the [Senate Republican Policy Committee](#) reminds us in a memo that “this path is at odds with past Administration representations on the matter. Secretary of Defense Panetta assured Congress that arms reductions would take place in the Obama Administration only as a result of an arms control treaty process. Ignoring the treaty process is also at odds with the vast body of past practice on arms control matters.”

In a letter co-signed by two dozen of his colleagues, Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) writes:

It is our view that any further reductions in the U.S. nuclear arsenal should only be conducted through a treaty subject to the advice and consent of the Senate. This view is consistent with past practice and has broad bipartisan support, as you know from your service in the Senate. Indeed, then-Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Joseph R. Biden, Jr. and then-Ranking Member Jesse Helms, in a March 2002 letter to Secretary of State Colin Powell stated that “With the exception of the SALT I agreement, every significant arms control agreement during the past three decades has been transmitted pursuant to the Treaty Clause of the Constitution...we see no reason whatsoever to alter this practice.”

9. *He falsely suggests that Russia is the only power that matters.* Not only does this confer a status that is entirely unwarranted and misguided (why boost Putin’s ego now of all times?), but it also ignores China, Pakistan, North Korea, etc. (He mentions other nations in passing and none by name.)

10. *“Our current programs are bound by the rule of law, and they’re focused on threats to our security — not the communications of ordinary persons. They help confront real dangers, and they keep people safe here in the United States and here in Europe.”* This is the part of the speech that Obama should have given to *our* nation, from the Oval Office, in defense of his programs. That he would make his case to Germans shows how much more he cares about European opinion than American. Is he afraid they’ll take away his Nobel Prize?

[Investors.com](http://Investors.com)

## [Obama to Berliners: Ich bin ein awful speaker](#)

by Andrew Malcolm

This was not the moment he was looking for.

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Well, what a difference 1,791 days makes. American presidents often travel abroad to change the subject from troubles at home. In Obama's case, things like serial scandals involving the IRS, the FBI, the State Department, the Justice Department and still unexplained lack of security and emergency response that got four Americans killed in Benghazi.

And presidents go to Berlin to say famous things. Ronald Reagan: "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" John Kennedy: "Ich bin ein Berliner!" (I am a Berliner.)

But there Obama was Wednesday before a foreign invitation-only audience 1/50th the size of 2008. To the distant crowd watching him behind a thick bullet-proof glass barrier, Obama was a diminished stick figure.

As you can see on the C-SPAN video below, the Democrat was sweating profusely. (Obama's remarks begin about the 13:35 mark.) He doffed his coat, apologized for his family's absence; they were again touring elsewhere, on the taxpayer dime. And he launched into a 29-minute address that seemed much longer in the mid-afternoon sun.

Obama 's 2013 speech was a peculiar and awkward one. Awkward because his teleprompter was malfunctioning. Obama is a poor public speaker without that visual crutch feeding the words to his gazing eyes. Instead, the president was reduced to reading from a text on the podium, not his strong suit.

And it was a peculiar speech for this time because of its marginal subject matter. Did Obama address the ongoing slaughter in Syria, the ongoing global struggle with terrorism, the world's stubborn economic and employment problems, the ongoing clash of cultures and religions that threaten peace in so many places?

No, he focused on reducing nuclear weapons. Now, this is an important topic that has passed its time. But it has fascinated Obama since his dopey university days. The United States and Russia reached an agreement three years ago to cut their nuclear arsenals to 1,500 warheads apiece.

Wednesday Obama proposed taking it down another 33% to 1,000.

Trouble is, that idea is going nowhere because Russia isn't interested. And for a pretty good reason: Such a new bilateral agreement would have no impact on the world's other emerging nuclear-weapon holders--China, India, Pakistan, North Korea and -- *oh, look* -- Iran, which is getting Russian help in that area. Not to mention, any rogue groups of terrorists that get their paws on such a device.

Back home, Texas Republican Sen. Ted Cruz observed: "The irony, of course, is that President Obama was free to stand on the formerly-Soviet side of the Brandenburg Gate and opine about global peace with justice because of the strength of the very nuclear arsenal he now proposes to dismantle."

Obama also warned of "a complacency among our Western democracies" where people "come together to celebrate history, not make it."

"I come here today, Berlin, to say that complacency is not the character of great nations," Obama asserted to no great controversy.

He added: "We may no longer live in fear of global annihilation, but so long as nuclear weapons exist, we are not truly safe. We may strike blows against terrorist networks, but if we ignore the instability and intolerance that fuels extremism, our own freedom will eventually be endangered."

Obama drew applause when he urged tolerance and a welcoming spirit to immigrants pursuing their dreams, and when he promised a "redoubling" of his nonexistent efforts to close the Guantanamo prison. But he got silence when he urged standing up for the rights of "our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters."

Obama is no longer claiming that al Qaeda is "on the run" or "decimated." He said, "Our efforts against al Qaeda are evolving." Whatever that means.

And Obama promised "tightly controlling our use of new technologies like drones." His assurance came the same day as FBI Director Robert Mueller informed Congress that his agency does, in fact, use drones domestically. He claimed their use was infrequent.

One other difference with Obama's 2008 moment speech: On Wednesday he did not once utter that word. It seems the moment is gone.



## Power Line

### Obama hits a wall in Berlin

by Scott Johnson

Reading Obama's speeches is a little like reading New York Times editorials. They don't withstand close scrutiny, but that's the least of it. They should be accompanied by a warning that they may be hazardous to your health. They kill brain cells.

[George Will suffers](#) through Obama's [speech](#) at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin so that we don't have to. Will takes up the arms control thread in Obama's speech.

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Will takes up Obama's desire to negotiate nuclear arms reduction with Russia and then notes:

Shifting his strange focus from Russia's nuclear weapons, Obama said "we can...reject the nuclear weaponization that North Korea and Iran may be seeking." Were Obama given to saying such stuff off the cuff, this would be a good reason for handcuffing him to a teleprompter. But, amazingly, such stuff is put on his teleprompter and, even more amazing, he reads it aloud.

Neither the people who wrote those words nor he who spoke them can be taken seriously. North Korea and Iran may be seeking nuclear weapons? North Korea may have such weapons. Evidently Obama still entertains doubts that Iran is seeking them.

Will doesn't pause to ask what it means to say that "we can...reject the weaponization that North Korea and Iran may be seeking." Will credits the statement with meaning, but I'm not sure. Even that is unclear. What does it mean to "reject weaponization"? I think it means approximately nothing, in line with the rest of the speech.

This, however, means something: "Our efforts against al Qaeda are evolving." How are they evolving? Obama doesn't say, but he implies they are evolving from war to a higher form of conflict or conflict resolution. I'm not sure which.

Our efforts against al Qaeda may be evolving, but Obama's rhetoric is stuck in an antediluvian swamp of meaningless left-wing platitudes.

## Washington Post

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by George F. Will

The question of whether Barack Obama's second term will be a failure was answered in the affirmative before his Berlin debacle, which has recast the question, which now is: Will this term be silly, even scary in its detachment from reality?

Before Berlin, Obama set his steep downward trajectory by squandering the most precious post-election months on [gun-control futilities](#) and by a [subsequent storm of scandals](#) that have made his unvarying project — ever bigger, more expansive, more intrusive and [more coercive government](#) — more repulsive. Then came Wednesday's [pratfall in Berlin](#).

There he vowed energetic measures against global warming (“the global threat of our time”). The [16-year pause of this warming](#) was not predicted by, and is not explained by, the climate models for which, in his strange understanding of respect for science, he has forsworn skepticism.

Regarding another threat, he spoke an almost meaningless sentence that is an exquisite example of why his rhetoric cannot withstand close reading: “We may strike blows against terrorist networks, but if we ignore the instability and intolerance that fuels extremism, our own freedom will eventually be endangered.” So, “instability and intolerance” are to blame for terrorism? Instability where? Intolerance of what by whom “fuels” terrorists? Terrorism is a tactic of destabilization. Intolerance is, for terrorists, a virtue.

It is axiomatic: Arms control is impossible until it is unimportant. This is because arms control is an arena of competition in which nations negotiate only those limits that advance their interests. Nevertheless, Obama trotted out another golden oldie in Berlin when he vowed to resuscitate the [cadaver of nuclear arms control with Russia](#). As though Russia's arsenal is a pressing problem. And as though there is reason to think President Vladimir Putin, who calls the Soviet Union's collapse “[the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century](#),” is interested in [reducing the arsenal](#) that is the basis of his otherwise Third World country's claim to great-power status.

Shifting his strange focus from Russia's nuclear weapons, Obama said “we can□.□.□. reject the nuclear weaponization that [North Korea and Iran may be seeking](#).” Were Obama given to saying such stuff off the cuff, this would be a good reason for handcuffing him to a teleprompter. But, amazingly, such stuff is put on his teleprompter and, even more amazing, he reads it aloud.

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[In Northern Ireland](#) before going to Berlin, Obama sat next to Putin, whose [demeanor and body language](#) when he is in Obama's presence radiate disdain. There Obama said: “With respect to Syria, we do have [differing perspectives](#) on the problem, but we share an interest in [reducing the violence](#).” Differing *perspectives*?

Obama wants to reduce the violence by coaxing Syria's Bashar al-Assad, who is winning the war, to attend a conference at which he [negotiates the surrender](#) of his power. Putin wants to reduce the violence by helping — with lavish materiel assistance and by preventing diplomacy that interferes — Assad complete the destruction of his enemies.

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Obama's vanity is a wonder of the world that never loses its power to astonish, but really: Is *everyone* in his orbit too lost in raptures of admiration to warn him against delivering a speech soggy with banalities and bromides in a [city that remembers John Kennedy's "Ich bin ein Berliner"](#) and Ronald Reagan's "[Tear down this wall](#)"? With German Chancellor Angela Merkel sitting nearby, Obama began his Berlin speech: "As I've said, Angela and I don't exactly look like previous German and American leaders." He [has indeed said that, too](#), before, at least about himself. It was mildly amusing in Berlin in 2008, but hardly a Noel Coward-like witticism worth recycling.

His look is just not that interesting. And after being pointless in Berlin, neither is he, other than for the surrealism of his second term.

## Weekly Standard

### [Ich bin ein Big Talker](#)

by William Kristol

On June 19, President Barack Obama delivered a lengthy speech in Berlin, in front of the Brandenburg Gate. The shades of John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan surely wept.

Half a century ago, President Kennedy declared, "All free men, wherever they may live, are citizens of Berlin, and, therefore, as a free man, I take pride in the words 'Ich bin ein Berliner!'" A quarter-century ago, President Reagan challenged the general secretary of the Soviet Union: "Come here to this gate. Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate. Mr. Gorbachev—Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" President Obama, by contrast, declared nothing notable and challenged no one powerful. With the Berlin Wall down and the Cold War won, the president of the United States talked at length and had nothing to say.

It would be too harsh, perhaps, to say that Obama's remarks served only to ratify the judgment rendered the week before by Bill Clinton: that President Obama is pretty much "a total wuss." It wouldn't be too harsh to say of Obama's foreign policy what Winston Churchill said in 1936 about the Stanley Baldwin government: He is "decided only to be undecided, resolved to be irresolute, adamant for drift, solid for fluidity, all-powerful to be impotent."

To be fair, there were times when President Obama sounded resolute. He said, for example, that "the struggle for freedom and security and human dignity—that struggle goes on. And I've come here, to this city of hope, because the tests of our time demand the same fighting spirit that defined Berlin a half-century ago."

But nowhere in Obama's speech does he actually demonstrate the fighting spirit he says the times demand. Nowhere does he cite an actual place where it is just and necessary that we fight, or even one where it has been just and necessary that we have fought. Nowhere does he praise those who actually have fought on our behalf. In Obama's world, the "struggle for freedom and security and human dignity" is more like a group hug. It's not really a struggle against anybody. Obama is for "extending a hand to those who reach for freedom." But it's a limp hand. And it never gets used as a fist against those who deny freedom.

So Syria is never mentioned by Obama. Iran is mentioned once: “We can forge a new international framework for peaceful nuclear power, and reject the nuclear weaponization that North Korea and Iran may be seeking.” The nuclear weaponization that North Korea and Iran may be seeking? Isn’t North Korea past the “may be seeking” stage? And Iran? In any case, there was no pledge in Berlin by Obama that he would act to prevent Iran from getting such weapons.

Indeed, there was virtually no mention of military action or of keeping our military strong enough to deal with the world as it is. What Obama did say is that while we have been at war for over a decade, the good news is “the Iraq war is now over. The Afghan war is coming to an end.” You might note that the Afghan war won’t come to an end just because we choose to stop fighting in it. You might note that there is more conflict in Iraq today than there was before the Iraq war “was over,” when we had won it and still had troops there to enforce the peace. But if you note that, then you have failed to understand that “we must move beyond a mindset of perpetual war.”

How nice it must be to believe in mind over matter, and in mindsets over reality. We can be exhorted to move beyond a mindset, but there is a reality out there, and we’re being mugged by it. Barack Obama is remarkably impervious to this. Or perhaps he’s simply one of those liberals who, when mugged by reality, has no interest in pressing charges. Pressing charges would mean seeking victory. Needless to say, the word victory never appears in Obama’s Berlin speech.

After all, victory would mean one country or one set of countries—the free world, perhaps—prevailing over others. But we should “care more about things than just our own self-comfort, about our own city, about our own country,” Obama said. He’s right that we should care about more than just our own country. But another president would have emphasized that it’s fine to begin by caring about and struggling on behalf of one’s own country.

Not Obama. He’s a citizen of the world: “For we are not only citizens of America or Germany—we are also citizens of the world.” He talks abstractly to the world and about the world. He talks, and talks, and talks some more .□□.□□. as the world burns around him. And around us.

## Power Line

### Our Dim-Witted President

by John Hinderaker

President Obama seems incapable of going abroad without embarrassing himself. Via [InstaPundit](#), we learn that when he was in the U.K., Obama [couldn’t keep Chancellor George Osborne’s name straight](#). Obama repeatedly called him “Jeffrey.” The repeated gaffe became so obvious that Obama apologized:

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**Telegraph, UK**

**[Chuck Hagel apologises over Taliban joke](#)**



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Chuck Hagel, the US defence secretary, has apologised to a professor of Indian descent after jokingly asking if he was a member of the Taliban.

Mr Hagel's spokesman insisted the offhand remark, which came after a speech at the University of Nebraska on Wednesday, was not meant to refer to anyone in the audience or to the professor's Indian heritage.

At Wednesday's event, after discussing prospects for talks with the Taliban insurgency, Hagel waited for another question and pointed to the back of the hall, saying:

"OK, so who has a – way up in the back there. You're not a member of the Taliban are you?"

His attempt at humour appeared to fall flat, judging by the long pause that followed, according to a video of the event broadcast by the Pentagon channel.

The video did not show who he was referring to, but the question that followed his remark came from a man who introduced himself as Robin Gandhi, an assistant professor the university.

"This was an off the cuff remark not directed at anyone in particular in the audience, and he recognises that even though it was a joke that it was perhaps off-key," press secretary George Little said.

"I would emphasise it was completely unintentional and not directed at anyone in particular."

Although the Pentagon maintained Mr Hagel was not aiming his remark at anyone, the defence secretary called the academic afterward to express regret, Mr Little said.

"Secretary Hagel did reach out to the professor a few hours after the speech and had a very good discussion. He wanted to leave no impression that this joke was directed at anyone in particular, including the professor," he said.

"He expressed regret for any trouble that this caused to the professor."

Prof Gandhi, an assistant professor of information assurance who received his bachelor's degree from Sardar Patel University in Gujarat, India, issued a statement saying he was honoured for a chance to ask the Pentagon chief a question.

"I was able to ask a question, and I thoroughly enjoyed hearing his answer. Before I rose to ask a question, there was apparently some confusion that did not involve me," his statement said.



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