

December 23, 2014

Yes, we're still covering what the fool is up to. [Jennifer Rubin](#) posts on the Cuba betrayal.

There are many reasons to condemn President Obama's decision to sell out the Cuban people. It is perfectly consistent with Obama's disdain for human rights, addiction to coddling dictatorships and contempt for Congress.

The Post's editorial board points out that "the accelerating economic collapse of Venezuela meant that the huge subsidies that have kept the Castros afloat for the past decade were in peril. A growing number of Cubans were demanding basic human rights, such as freedom of speech and assembly. On Wednesday, the Castros suddenly obtained a comprehensive bailout — from the Obama administration."

Indeed, just when we have the most leverage — be it economic sanctions against Russia (Sen. John McCain likes to call it "a gas station masquerading as a country"), Iran or Cuba — Obama prefers capitulation. Marketing the policy shift as a tactical move to improve human rights insults our intelligence. ("Mr. Obama says normalizing relations will allow the United States to be more effective in promoting political change in Cuba. That is contrary to U.S. experience with Communist regimes such as Vietnam, where normalization has led to no improvements on human rights in two decades. Moreover, nothing in Mr. Obama's record of lukewarm and inconstant support for democratic change across the globe can give [dissident blogger Yoani Sánchez] and her fellow freedom fighters confidence in this promise.") ...

[Craig Pirrong](#) of Streetwise Professor posts on subjects in the president's recent presser.

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Which brings me to the other issue: Cuba.

I am ambivalent about the embargo, or the lack of diplomatic recognition. I can argue either side. But there are many things about this initiative that make me uneasy.

For one thing, Cuba is in dire straits. This is where Venezuela comes in. The Bolivarian paradise has been carrying the Castros' shambolic regime for years, but is now itself on the verge of economic collapse. Default is imminent, and at the current level of oil prices economic collapse is a real possibility. Venezuela is already cutting back support to the Cuban regime, and will cut it back further. Given that, the Castros are desperate, and Obama could have extracted a much better deal. A deal that would have given some benefit to the Cuban people, rather than bailing out the regime and allowing to continue its repression and depredations.

Obama's rhetoric was also offensive, and at times historically ignorant. He characterized the embargo as a "failed policy." Pretty rich for a serial failure to insult 9 previous presidents and 26 Congresses. He could have made an affirmative case for a new policy, and recognized the reasons for the previous policy, without such condescension.

Moreover, he made mention of the need to move beyond “the legacy of colonialism and communism.” Communism isn’t a legacy in Cuba: it is a daily reality. Insofar as colonialism is concerned, is Obama referring to Spain? Because he sure as hell can’t be referring to the US: Cuba was never an American colony. ...

... I could go on, but I’ll close with one point. People have compared this to Nixon’s opening of China. Superficially, this is plausible. But there is a major difference.

Nixon could go to China because his stalwart anti-Communist credentials (which had won him the intense enmity of the left) made it credible that Nixon was acting in the interests of the US, rather than indulging his ideological preferences: if a McGovern or a Henry Wallace had attempted the same there would have been justifiable suspicions of their motives and the benefits to the US. In contrast, Che is worshipped as a hero rather than condemned as a psychopathic murderer in Obama’s political circles. His administration has taken a very benign approach to leftist Latin American regimes, including Venezuela and Nicaragua. This raises doubts about what his Cuba initiative will entail, and whether it will advance American interests or benefit the long-suffering and repressed Cuban people.

So to summarize Obama’s last press conference: he slammed a long-time ally and sucked up to a long-time enemy. Which pretty much summarizes his foreign policy, generally.

Jennifer Rubin thinks it's cool to see Hollywood thrown under the bus.

Hollywood execs should have seen this coming. For six years, the world has seen how President Obama betrays and belittles friends of the United States while extending the hand of friendship and acceding to the demands of dictators from Moscow to Havana. It was only a matter of time, then, before the president threw the Hollywood elite — who raised money by the boatload for him, gloried his presidency, swooned at his speeches, populated his parties and ignored his blunders — under the bus. Had the glitterati vilified him instead, raised money for the GOP and snubbed White House state dinners, he might have treated them better. Instead, his best friends are treated like America’s best friend, Israel.

With Obama, it invariably means blaming the victim. In the case of Israel, he blames the Jewish state for the death of peace talks, condemns it for civilian deaths which the IDF strenuously tried to minimize in the Gaza war and excoriates the government for every new building complex. In the case of Hollywood, Obama blames the film studio for being bullied by North Korean threats.

At his Friday news conference, Obama declared Sony Pictures Entertainment “made a mistake” pulling the film. He lectured the beleaguered studio: ...

... Next time the Hollywood elites might be a little more circumspect about whom they anoint as the next political messiah. And they might begin to take national security seriously. They might consider how precarious is their own safety (financial and otherwise) without a decisive commander in chief, a well-funded military and an adept intelligence community. When it is about them, by gosh, it might be time to get serious.

Jonathan Tobin is looking at other areas where the president can try to act extra-legally; before the Supremes start slapping him around.

... Looking ahead to other possible presidential actions, if he makes enough concessions and the Iranians are feeling generous, Obama may get a nuclear deal with the Islamist state. That, too, will be interpreted as a sign of life in what would otherwise be considered a lame duck presidency.

But none of this will change the fact that Obama's ideological fixation with outreach to tyrants has not made the world better or increased America's security or influence. To the contrary, with ISIS on the rise in the Middle East, Iran successfully challenging for regional hegemony via its successes in Syria, its alliance with Hamas and its intimidation of moderate Arab nations, and likely to gain U.S. acquiescence to it becoming a nuclear threshold state, Obama is leaving the world a more dangerous place than when he entered the White House. Nor will his Cuban gambit make the island a more democratic or free place.

On domestic policy, his admirers cite his immigration executive orders as a sign that he can govern despite the opposition of Congress. But by acting in this extralegal fashion, Obama has actually doomed for the foreseeable future any chance of working out a compromise with Republicans to pass some kind of immigration reform. Flexing his muscles in this fashion and showing his contempt for the law has convinced even many moderate Republicans that he can't be trusted to enforce any legislation that he doesn't like or benefit from. Nor will the problems that he postponed in the implementation of ObamaCare but which will begin to be felt in 2015 do much to bolster confidence in his judgment or the wisdom of his efforts. ...

David Harsanyi calls it the president's "imaginary winning streak."

... Would the media describe a string of Republican victories won exclusively through executive action a "winning streak"? Today, somehow, even after a historic repudiation of his policies, Obama is not only reinvigorated and freed from the constraints of annoying process, but according to some in the media, he has been "politically triumphant." There are two ways to explain this phenomena: Some folks are engaged in a lot of wishful thinking or we've severely downgraded the meaning of winning. Then again, maybe it's a little of both.

Andrew Malcolm with some quotes he says prove the prez needs a vacation.

**** "I'm being absolutely sincere when I say I want to work with this new (Republican) Congress to get things done." ROTFL (**Rolling on the floor laughing**) Beware of politicians who say "Frankly," "To be perfectly honest" and "I'm being absolutely sincere." They aren't.**

**** "Like the rest of America, black America in the aggregate is better off now than it was when I came into office." That's breaking news for all the unemployed African Americans. November unemployment nationally was 5.8%. For blacks, it was more than twice that, 11.9%.**

**** "We cannot have a society in which some dictator someplace can start imposing censorship here in the United States. Because if somebody is able to intimidate folks out of releasing a satirical movie, imagine what they start doing when they see a documentary that they don't like, or news reports that they don't like."**

Wait, wasn't it Obama and then-Secy. of State Hillary Clinton who had the maker of that obscure YouTube anti-Islam video arrested and jailed as the phony fall guy for the Benghazi massacre in 2012? And sought to have the video taken down?

All of which leads [Jennifer Rubin](#) to conclude the Dems are in more trouble than they think.

... Among registered voters, his approval is near an all-time low (39 percent), while his handling of issue like the economy (42/55), immigration (35/58 percent) and international affairs (36/58) score miserably with voters. The Post's pollsters provided me with a look at how those numbers for registered voters look over time. Graphically, his presidency looks like a lesser-than symbol (<) with his handling of issues, the gap between disapproval and approval, rising over time and disapproval increasing, particularly in the second term. The last time Obama was in positive territory on the economy, for example, was the tail end of 2012. In short, the longer voters know him, the less they like what he is doing. It seems hard to imagine he could get into positive territory on these top issues with registered voters.

That is not only bad news for Democrats who have tied themselves to his mast but for the next Democratic presidential nominee. Looking over at the NBC/Wall Street Journal poll, we find, "A whopping 71 percent of American voters want the next president to take a different approach than President Barack Obama's; [Hillary] Clinton served as his first-term secretary of state. And by 40 percent to 38 percent, voters prefer a Republican to win the White House in 2016 instead of a Democrat." ...

Right Turn

[Obama's Cuba betrayal](#)

by Jennifer Rubin

There are many reasons to condemn President Obama's decision to sell out the Cuban people. It is perfectly consistent with Obama's disdain for human rights, addiction to coddling dictatorships and contempt for Congress.

[The Post's editorial board](#) points out that "the accelerating economic collapse of Venezuela meant that the huge subsidies that have kept the Castros afloat for the past decade were in peril. A growing number of Cubans were demanding basic human rights, such as freedom of speech and assembly. On Wednesday, the Castros suddenly obtained a comprehensive bailout — from the Obama administration."

Indeed, just when we have the most leverage — be it economic sanctions against Russia (Sen. John McCain likes to call it "a gas station masquerading as a country"), Iran or Cuba — Obama prefers capitulation. Marketing the policy shift as a tactical move to improve human rights insults our intelligence. ("Mr. Obama says normalizing relations will allow the United States to be more effective in promoting political change in Cuba. That is contrary to U.S. experience with Communist regimes such as Vietnam, where normalization has led to no improvements on human rights in two decades. Moreover, nothing in Mr. Obama's record of lukewarm and inconstant support for

democratic change across the globe can give [dissident blogger Yoani Sánchez] and her fellow freedom fighters confidence in this promise.”)

It surely does not pay to be a “friend” of the United States these days. If you are an ally, you are [insulted](#), [reprimanded](#), [abandoned](#) and [bullied](#). If you are fighting for your freedom or very survival, you are [snubbed](#), [ignored](#), denied the [means to defend yourself](#) and [dismissed](#). But [gas](#), [imprison](#), [rape](#), [kill or maim](#) innocents and the administration will dream up reasons to remain inert, court you and blame the United States for years of “misunderstanding.”

As badly as Obama treats allies and freedom fighters, however, he treats Congress even more shabbily. How did Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.), incoming chairman of the Senate Appropriations subcommittee on state and foreign operations, learn about the reversal of more than 50 years of U.S. policy toward Cuba? “I saw it on TV,” Graham told me Wednesday night. “He [Obama] finds out about most of his mistakes on TV, and we find out most of his policy choices on TV.” Graham pledges to hold hearings on Cuba, and with the State Department budget under his purview, expect to see Congress exercise the power of the purse. It will be a cold day in Havana before the GOP Senate and House fund a U.S. Embassy there, I predict.

Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) was similarly apoplectic, both because of the egregious human rights abuses that gave Obama no pause and because Obama’s nominee for the No. 2 job at the State Department, [Tony Blinken](#), did not let on when asked directly whether a change was in the works and even [promised](#) that the “administration would not unilaterally change its Cuba policy without ‘full consultation’ with Congress.” The Senate should haul Blinken back, put him under oath and determine whether he purposely misled Congress.

This episode is not merely bad for the Cuban people and for legislative-executive branch relations (at an all-time, post-Watergate low). It sends a signal to the world’s oppressed and oppressors, to aggressors and victims, that the United States will appease bad actors and abandon its friends and innocents under the boot of thugocracies. And if members of Congress think the administration misled lawmakers on Cuba, is willing to appease tyrants and is acting in contravention of existing law, they better prepare themselves for Iran. Cuba was the opening act and Iran the grand finale of Obama’s disastrous foreign policy of appeasement. Quite simply, the president’s word has become meaningless and, as a result, so has the word of the United States.

Streetwise Professor

[Obama’s Press Conference: Bad Economics, Dissing a Friend, Embracing an Enemy](#)

by Craig Pirrong

Hard on the heels of Putin’s press conference, Obama held one of his own. Blessedly, it was shorter. That’s the only good thing I can say about it.

At least Putin’s pressers offer some entertainment, some of it intentional, some of it accidental. Obama’s appearances are as entertaining as a root canal performed to the accompaniment of fingernails on a blackboard.

I will limit myself to comments on two issues.

First, yet again Obama slagged on Keystone XL. And yet again, [he delivered a disingenuous, economically ignorant attack on the pipeline](#):

“There is very little impact – nominal impact – on U.S. gas prices, what the average American consumer cares about,” Obama told reporters during an end-of-year press conference.

....

“It’s good for the Canadian oil industry, but its not going to be a huge benefit to us consumers,” he said.

Obama stressed that the issue at hand for Keystone is “not American oil, it is Canadian oil.”

“That oil currently is being shipped out through rail or trucks and it would save Canadian oil companies, and the Canadian oil industry enormous amounts of money if they could simply pipe it all the way down to the Gulf,” Obama said during his final press conference of 2014.

“It’s very good for Canadian oil companies, and it’s good for the Canadian oil industry but it’s not going to be a huge benefit to U.S. consumers, it’s not even going to be a nominal benefit to U.S. consumers,” Obama said.

Where to begin?

1. What the hell did the Canadians ever do to him? Does he hate them because they are members of the British Commonwealth? (And we know he loathes Britain.) It is truly astounding to see a president who is so solicitous of many thuggish regimes be so dismissive of a longtime friend and ally. Speaking about Keystone, Obama turns into an American Firster nativist, rather than his usual pose as *Citoyen du Monde*.
2. Last time I checked, the oil would be refined-and value added to it-in American refineries. That would benefit American oil companies, American workers, and the owners and employees of companies that supply the refineries. The money savings would be split between American and Canadian companies. But maybe because the refineries are located in Texas and Louisiana, which have repudiated Obama massively, that’s a bug not a feature. Or maybe Obama doesn’t understand that oil doesn’t magically transform itself into gasoline, diesel, etc.
3. Or maybe Obama persists in the delusion that the oil will be exported, disregarding basic economics, common sense, and the analysis of his own State Department.
4. There would be no impact on gas prices only if the supply of Canadian crude is completely inelastic: in this case, the quantity of oil produced and refined would be the same, regardless of how costly it is to transport it to market. If supply is somewhat elastic, lowering transportation costs increases output, which lowers product prices; moreover, holding output fixed, reducing transportation costs reduces the final product price. And perhaps most importantly, the alleged justification for stopping Keystone is the environmental damage Canadian heavy crude inflicts. But if supply is perfectly inelastic, there is no environmental benefit of raising transportation cost, because this will not affect the amount of oil produced, and hence will not affect the amount of CO2 it produces. (Not to mention that pipelines are a safer, more environmentally sound way of transporting this oil.) So if Obama is right about gas prices he is wrong about environmental benefits, and *vice versa*.

Unbelievable.

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I am ambivalent about the embargo, or the lack of diplomatic recognition. I can argue either side. But there are many things about this initiative that make me uneasy.

For one thing, Cuba is in dire straits. This is where Venezuela comes in. The Bolivarian paradise has been carrying the Castros' shambolic regime for years, but is now itself on the verge of economic collapse. Default is imminent, and at the current level of oil prices economic collapse is a real possibility. Venezuela is already cutting back support to the Cuban regime, and will cut it back further. Given that, the Castros are desperate, and Obama could have extracted a much better deal. A deal that would have given some benefit to the Cuban people, rather than bailing out the regime and allowing to continue its repression and depredations.

Obama's rhetoric was also offensive, and at times historically ignorant. He characterized the embargo as a "failed policy." Pretty rich for a serial failure to insult 9 previous presidents and 26 Congresses. He could have made an affirmative case for a new policy, and recognized the reasons for the previous policy, without such condescension.

Moreover, he made mention of the need to move beyond "the legacy of colonialism and communism." Communism isn't a legacy in Cuba: it is a daily reality. Insofar as colonialism is concerned, is Obama referring to Spain? Because he sure as hell can't be referring to the US: Cuba was never an American colony. The Teller Amendment to the declaration of war against Spain in 1898 forbade the US from annexing Cuba. It was under US administration for four years, but achieved full independence in 1902. (Obama made the colonialism/communism remark in a discussion of Latin America generally, but this doesn't really save him. Cuba is the only longstanding Communist country in Latin America; colonialism ended in Latin America in the 1820s; the US-via the Monroe Doctrine-kept out colonial powers in the 19th century; and colonialism is the least of Latin America's problems, which tend to be very much home grown. In mentioning colonialism, Obama was just regurgitating a standard prog trope.)

Obama also engaged in his self-indulgent habit of making history all about him. He noted that Fidel Castro assumed power two years before Obama's birth, and the Bay of Pigs invasion occurred soon before he was born. (Interesting that he uses the "I" word to refer to Bay of Pigs, but not Ukraine.) Who cares? What does this have to do with anything? Does he have to bring himself into everything?

I've therefore decided that I will hereafter designate all dates by BO and AO: Before Obama and After Obama. Castro assumed power in 2BO. Bay of Pigs occurred in Year Zero. Obama elected in 47 AO.

The means by which Obama pursued this policy was also typically high handed, and failed to include or consult with anyone in Congress. And no, I don't include corrupt tax scofflaw Charlie Rangel, who was photographed lounging like a beached whale in the Cuban sun after helping in the negotiations.

The means and the outcome of the Cuban opening also make me uneasy about deals with Iran.

I could go on, but I'll close with one point. People have compared this to Nixon's opening of China. Superficially, this is plausible. But there is a major difference.

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Right Turn

[Obama throws Hollywood under the bus](#)

by Jennifer Rubin

Hollywood execs should have seen this coming. For six years, the world has seen how President Obama betrays and belittles friends of the United States while extending the hand of friendship and acceding to the demands of dictators from Moscow to Havana. It was only a matter of time, then, before the president threw the Hollywood elite — who raised money by the boatload for him, gloried his presidency, swooned at his speeches, populated his parties and ignored his blunders — under the bus. Had the glitterati vilified him instead, raised money for the GOP and snubbed White House state dinners, he might have treated them better. Instead, his best friends are treated like America's best friend, Israel.

With Obama, it invariably means blaming the victim. In the case of Israel, he blames the Jewish state for the death of peace talks, condemns it for civilian deaths which the IDF strenuously tried to minimize in the Gaza war and excoriates the government for every new building complex. In the case of Hollywood, Obama blames the film studio for being bullied by North Korean threats.

At his Friday news conference, Obama declared *Sony Pictures Entertainment* "made a mistake" pulling the film. He lectured the beleaguered studio: "Again, I'm sympathetic that Sony as a private company was worried about liabilities and this and that and the other. I wish they'd spoken to me first. I would have told them, do not get into a pattern in which you're intimidated by these kinds of criminal attacks." The notion that he, as the leader of the free world, would have taken the initiative to reach out, provide security and political support in defense of the First Amendment never seemed to cross his mind. In an interview on Sunday he made matters worse by declaring this to be a mere act of "cyber vandalism," dismissing the idea it was an act of war. (Obama's preference for ignoring or downplaying provocations, which invite further aggression, is well established.)

And wait. Sony Pictures says it *did* consult with the White House.

[The Hill reported:](#)

“Sony Entertainment CEO Michael Lynton on Friday contradicted President Obama and said he had spoken with a senior White House official about the controversy surrounding “The Interview.” “A few days ago, I personally did reach out and speak to senior folks in the White House and talked to them about this situation and actually informed them that we needed help,” Lynton said during an excerpt of an interview with CNN’s Fareed Zakaria, which airs in full Friday night on “Anderson Cooper 360.”

You mean the president passed the buck, didn’t own up to his own passivity and sought to blame the innocent victim in a grotesque instance of aggression which he, as commander in chief, should have addressed? Well, it sure wouldn’t be the first time.

Unfortunately, Hollywood sycophants will learn nothing from this incident. They won’t re-examine the president’s character or credibility, nor will they consider the possibility that his own serial weakness has signaled to rogue states that they can take pot shots at America — even them!

It has been a bad year for the anti-George W. Bush crowd. Media elites considered Bush 43 a dunderhead and cowboy who didn’t understand how to get along with others and insisted on being the world’s policeman. (The cowboy continues to paint and this year wrote a beautiful biography about his father, in between trips to Africa to help AIDS victims and work with Wounded Warriors.) A smart sophisticated guy like Obama would use *diplomacy* to keep the peace, liberal elites declared. They cackled together with Obama over the people in fly-over country (the gun ad Bible huggers), pondered the fate of the planet together and mourned the midterm losses together. Now, after the film is pulled, he blames *them*?!

They should have caught on a long time ago. Obama has signaled weakness over and over again to America’s enemies — their enemies and the enemies of all free peoples. It is now time for dictators and terrorists (whether Islamist or North Korean) to press their advantage, confident that there will be few if any repercussions. Maybe now the need for a robust military and intelligence-gathering operations will be a little more meaningful in the Manhattan and Santa Monica salons. They, thank God, were not incinerated in a terrorist bombing (in part because of the water boarding of Khalid Shek Mohammad, an act they consider to be “torture”), but their lives have been turned upside down and their fortunes put at risk by cyberterrorism. And they have to suffer the indignity of this president telling them *they* made a mistake and *they* were cowards.

I know, it’s all so unfair. They were cooing this week over the president’s decision to lift the embargo against their BFF Raul Castro’s regime. Fidel, they considered to be a Renaissance man. One studio exec whose office I sat in a number of years back displayed proudly a painting on his wall by El Commandante himself. (Imagine Louis B. Mayer hanging Stalin’s art work in his office.) But now their liberal icon (the president, not Castro, in this case) has kicked them to the curb. How hurtful. How disloyal. *How perfectly fitting.*

Next time the Hollywood elites might be a little more circumspect about whom they anoint as the next political messiah. And they might begin to take national security seriously. They might consider how precarious is their own safety (financial and otherwise) without a decisive commander in chief, a well-funded military and an adept intelligence community. When it is about *them*, by gosh, it might be time to get serious.

Contentions

Obama's Still In Charge But Also Still Failing

by Jonathan S. Tobin

President Obama used the opening statement for his end of year press conference to boast of his achievements even if many of the questions revolved around his lackluster response to the North Korean cyber terror attack on Sony. But the main theme of most of the coverage of the president today centered on the theme that he has responded to his party's landslide defeat in the midterm elections by seeking to revive his presidency with unilateral actions. These initiatives, such as his opening to Cuba and executive orders on immigration show he's still in charge and capable of using his power and establishing his legacy despite the opposition of Congress and even the majority of Americans. But while the mainstream media is applauding the signs of life out of White House that appeared dead in the water last month, this recent surge of activity should not be mistaken for policy success. Though any president has the ability to act whenever he wants, the same failures that have dogged him during his first six years in office haven't disappeared.

There's no doubt that those who were completely writing off the president's ability to influence events after the beating Democrats took were exaggerating. Though his policies, which he said were on the ballot, were repudiated, Congress in the hands of Republicans and his personal favorability ratings continuing to head south, the president remains the most powerful man in the world. With the vast power of the federal government at his disposal and no limits on his ability to act, save those specifically charted out by the Constitution and Congress, any president can dominate any news cycle or make a wide variety of decisions that can not easily be reversed by either the legislature or the judiciary.

Moreover, unlike some of his predecessors, Obama's personality is such that he views checks on his actions, whether in the form of Congressional action or the verdict of the ballot box, as challenges to be met rather than judgments that must be respected. Just as this is a top-down administration in which the Cabinet acts as a body of sycophants and middlemen rather than advisors, this is not a president who listens to advice or criticism that doesn't conform to his original ideas. It should therefore come as no surprise that now that he is faced with a Congress controlled by his opponents, Obama should come to the conclusion that Constitutional boundaries should be ignored in his zeal to do, as he likes.

But his ability to act on his own should not be mistaken for actual policy successes.

On immigration, the president has finally done what some of his supporters wanted in terms of granting amnesty to more than 5 million illegal aliens and there is very little that is effective that his critics can do about it.

On Cuba, the new Congress can block funding for a new embassy in Havana, refuse to lift the embargo or confirm a new ambassador. But much of the new opening to the despotic regime will go one no matter what Congress says.

Looking ahead to other possible presidential actions, if he makes enough concessions and the Iranians are feeling generous, Obama may get a nuclear deal with the Islamist state. That, too, will be interpreted as a sign of life in what would otherwise be considered a lame duck presidency.

But none of this will change the fact that Obama's ideological fixation with outreach to tyrants has not made the world better or increased America's security or influence. To the contrary, with ISIS on the rise in the Middle East, Iran successfully challenging for regional hegemony via its

successes in Syria, its alliance with Hamas and its intimidation of moderate Arab nations, and likely to gain U.S. acquiescence to it becoming a nuclear threshold state, Obama is leaving the world a more dangerous place than when he entered the White House. Nor will his Cuban gambit make the island a more democratic or free place.

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So while the last month has been full of presidential sound and fury, these actions only mask a deeper malaise that won't be fixed by Obama's characteristic hubris about his actions. The failures of his first six years still hang over this presidency and are why he remains deeply unpopular. He will retain the ability to impact the country until the moment his successor takes the oath of office. But no one should mistake this flurry of activity for presidential success. As the months wind down in what he termed today the fourth quarter of his time in the White House, Obama will be relevant but his failures will continue to haunt the nation and cloud his legacy.

The Federalist

[Let's Talk About Obama's Imaginary 'Winning Streak'](#)

by David Harsanyi

There's a big story emerging in D.C.: Barack Obama is making a comeback.

Politico's newest contribution to this flourishing genre is titled "[Obama libre](#)." The piece oscillates between the president's success with executive power – "He's spent a year nudging Americans to judge him less on legislative accomplishments and more on his executive actions" – and the long-peddled fiction that he's merely a centrist in search of unanimity. "Obama's always ready to make a deal, often at the expense of brushing off his base ..." says Politico. It comforts me to believe that the person who typed that sentence may have winced just a little.

But, as you've no doubt have heard, Obama has been on a roll since the midterms. After the president announced that he would restore a full diplomatic relationship between Cuba and United States, [Al Hunt claimed](#) that no president in history had ever "experienced as severe an election drubbing as Barack Obama did in November and followed it with such a politically triumphant six weeks." (Gloria Borger just goes ahead and [compares him to Superman](#).)

To be fair, there is a rather narrow sample size for that kind of declaration. But what exactly does triumph looked like? The Cuba issue, while a good talker, probably isn't the kind issue that most Americans are exceedingly concerned about. As we see how that shakes out, there are other wins that exist only in the imagination.

Hunt and Politico both tout the fact that [2.5 million Americans recently signed up in Obamacare marketplaces](#). For starters, meeting self-declared enrollment expectations for a program that is

both coerced and subsidized is probably a lot less impressive as a policy achievement than the DC media might imagine. As for voters, it's just as plausible that those who oppose Obamacare – [still a majority of Americans](#) – look at the solidifying of bad policy as a negative development rather than a win.

Another hopeful comeback storyline hinges on the idea that the president is *finally* going to be credited for the longest job growth streak since the 1990s. That seems to lack a certain context. Though there are sycophantic partisans ready to put Obama on the \$20 bill, the fact remains we are living through one of the most brittle and stagnant recoveries in the history of the United States – a recovery that is, in part, being driven by the kind of low energy prices Obama [has opposed and worked against](#). Perhaps a rare example of the wisdom of crowds, voters have probably hit a point where they believe the economy is recovering despite the help of Washington. Certainly an improving economy is bound to alleviate some of the electorate's anxiety. But the idea that Obama's tenure will be remembered fondly for a time of economic growth seems to be a longshot.

Otherwise, there is even less than meets the eye.

"Obama's done more on environmental protections than any previous president," Politico says. Part of this is the new EPA standards and part of this can be attributed to new international climate deals.

Though I imagine the people who passed the Clean Water Act or the Clean Air Act might disagree with this assertion, I'm told that huge things are going on. Though executive fiat is no way to run a country, we should probably wait to see the economic consequences of the EPA crackdown on modern energy production before we judge its political worth. And, though in theory, most people support climate deals, the media's exhilaration over a non-binding climate deal [that demands the Chinese do nothing until 2030](#) – perhaps ever – wasn't exactly shared by the public. I imagine there will be similar contrived enthusiasm generated about the feeble climate deal being [worked out in Peru](#). It is unlikely that the deal will ever be ratified by the United States Senate. But even if Obama worked his executive magic and bypassed the process, and even if by some miracle emerging economic powers took the deal seriously, as it stands now, [the deal isn't even a victory for liberals](#).

We can also argue on what immigration policy should look like, but [there is little evidence](#) that Obama's executive action shielding up to 5 million illegal immigrants from deportation is a political win. In an NBC/Wall Street Journal poll released before Obama's speech, 48 percent opposed Obama's plan to unilaterally legislate immigration reform, while 38 percent support such action. Fourteen percent had no opinion or were unsure. And since then, most polls have shown – depending on how you ask the question – that this is a deeply divisive issue. When you specifically ask about the unilateral nature of the action, polling is negative.

Would the media describe a string of Republican victories won exclusively through executive action a "winning streak"? Today, somehow, even after a historic repudiation of his policies, Obama is not only reinvigorated and freed from the constraints of annoying process, but according to some in the media, he has been "politically triumphant." There are two ways to explain this phenomena: Some folks are engaged in a lot of wishful thinking or we've severely downgraded the meaning of winning. Then again, maybe it's a little of both.

Investor's Business Daily

[6 Obama quotes show he really needs this vacation](#)

by Andrew Malcolm

A new Gallup Poll finds less than a quarter of Americans ([23%](#)) are satisfied with the way things are going in their country.

But that didn't stop President Obama from pronouncing 2014 a really good year overall in his year-end news conference. "My presidency is entering the fourth quarter," said president No. 44. "Interesting stuff happens in the fourth quarter."

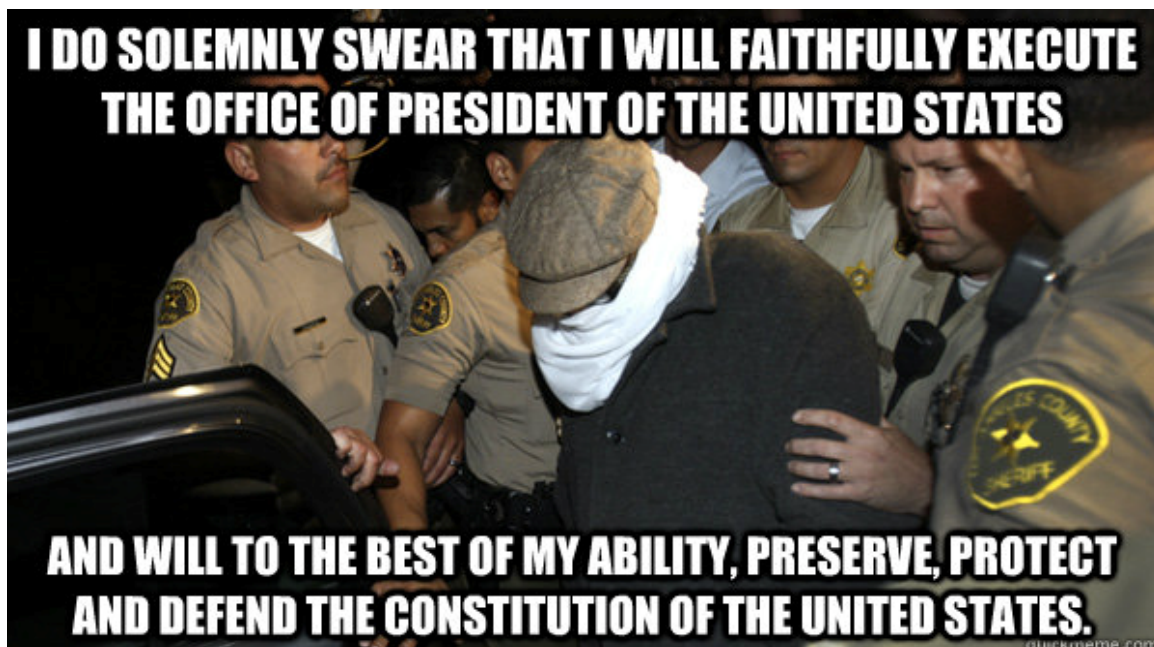
** The country has 759 days left of Obama in the Oval Office. Forget Gallup. "There is no doubt that we can enter into the New Year with renewed confidence that America is making significant strides where it counts," Obama claimed. .And according to the lame duck chief executive, he's pumped about what he can still do:

"In terms of my own job, I'm energized, I'm excited about the prospects for the next couple of years, and I'm certainly not going to be stopping for a minute in the effort to make life better for ordinary Americans."

** "I'm being absolutely sincere when I say I want to work with this new (Republican) Congress to get things done." ROTFL (**Rolling on the floor laughing**) Beware of politicians who say "Frankly," "To be perfectly honest" and "I'm being absolutely sincere." They aren't.

** "Like the rest of America, black America in the aggregate is better off now than it was when I came into office." That's breaking news for all the unemployed African Americans. November unemployment nationally was 5.8%. For blacks, it was more than twice that, 11.9%.

** "We cannot have a society in which some dictator someplace can start imposing censorship here in the United States. Because if somebody is able to intimidate folks out of releasing a satirical movie, imagine what they start doing when they see a documentary that they don't like, or news reports that they don't like."



Wait, wasn't it Obama and then-Secy. of State Hillary Clinton who had the maker of that obscure YouTube anti-Islam video arrested and jailed as the phony fall guy for the Benghazi massacre in 2012? And sought to have the video taken down?

** "I'm sympathetic that Sony as a private company was worried about liabilities, and this and that and the other. I wish they had spoken to me first" before cancelling the silly movie 'The Interview.' According to Sony executives, they were in touch with the White House. Maybe the president wasn't.

** "It says something interesting about North Korea that they decided to have the state mount an all-out assault on a movie studio because of a satirical movie starring Seth Rogen and James Flacco." (He likely meant [James Franco, the actor](#), not [Joe Flacco, the NFL quarterback](#).)

Right Turn

[Obama and Democrats are in more trouble than you think](#)

by Jennifer Rubin

[The Post-ABC poll](#) contains little good news for the president. His approval rating among all respondents is 41 percent, while disapproval stands at 54 percent. He is upside down on his handling of most major policy issues (38/55 on immigration, 44/52 on the economy, 39/54 on international relations, etc.). But when you look at registered voters, the numbers are even worse, and they have gotten worse over time.

Among [registered voters](#), his approval is near an all-time low (39 percent), while his handling of issue like the economy (42/55), immigration (35/58 percent) and international affairs (36/58) score miserably with voters. The Post's pollsters provided me with a look at how those numbers for registered voters look over time. Graphically, his presidency looks like a lesser-than symbol (<) with his handling of issues, the gap between disapproval and approval, rising over time and disapproval increasing, particularly in the second term. The last time Obama was in positive territory on the economy, for example, was the tail end of 2012. In short, the longer voters know him, the less they like what he is doing. It seems hard to imagine he could get into positive territory on these top issues with registered voters.

That is not only bad news for Democrats who have tied themselves to his mast but for the next Democratic presidential nominee. Looking over at the [NBC/Wall Street Journal poll](#), we find, "A whopping 71 percent of American voters want the next president to take a different approach than President Barack Obama's; [Hillary] Clinton served as his first-term secretary of state. And by 40 percent to 38 percent, voters prefer a Republican to win the White House in 2016 instead of a Democrat."

"Not Obama" seems, for now, to be the key to winning voters' affection. "Not Obama" could mean conservative, or it could mean genial, or it could mean competent. The challenge for each voter then is to identify how each candidate is the antidote to Obama. For Republicans, that's a whole lot easier. For Clinton, with Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) breathing down her neck, she will have to go left on domestic policies, but on foreign policy, how exactly does she get away from a president whose handling of foreign affairs gets only 39 percent support? (Blame John Kerry?) It will be interesting to see not only how candidates differentiate themselves from one another but how they make the case that they are the key to cleaning up the mess Obama will leave behind.

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