

The Harbour League



THE OBAMA DOCTRINE

By Herbert I. London

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An official eminento, Roger Cohen, writing on the pages of the *International Herald Tribune*, has arrived at the conclusion, based on President Obama's recent comment, that "the war on terror is over."

As he notes, "the with-us-or-against us global struggle... in which a freedom-loving West confronts the undifferentiated forces of darkness... has been terminated."

The presumption is that we are not fighting a war – which we refuse to acknowledge – we are merely engaged in "a strategic challenge." Goodbye Bush Doctrine; hello Obama rapprochement with the Muslim world.

Obama argues "the language we use matters." Of course it does, but action speaks louder than words. If the recent language of respect is to be taken seriously, arms will be converted into plowshares and good-will may seize the globe. The only problem with this analysis is al Qaeda doesn't buy into Obama's rhetoric and most in the organization don't read the *Herald Tribune*.

Mr. Cohen, caught up in celebratory notions, tells us Obama understands the need for respect and self-critical analysis, something omitted from Bush speeches, albeit scant evidence is provided for this claim. Now that President Obama says "Americans are not your enemy," there is little to fear from the Muslim world.

Mr. Cohen is convinced President Obama is inclusive as opposed to Bush's supremacist views, clearly a move in a realistic direction.

According to Cohen "Bush had the ideological framework wrong. Obama has transformed it by ending the war on terror." Alas, one side may declare a war over, but that declaration hasn't any bearing on those who choose to continue fighting. Words may influence a policy, but they rarely influence what happens on the ground.

Clearly President Bush made tactical errors, but he did understand there is a global struggle with radical Islam that will test our mettle. His strategic vision included the use of forceful opposition where it will make a difference internationally, the use of democracy as an instrument for stabilization, and preemption in order to avoid the catastrophic loss of life.

When President Obama said he would turn the clock back 20 or 30 years in examining our relationship with the Muslim world, what could he possibly be thinking? Was it the orchestrated violence of Khadafy that we should want to revisit? Or perhaps the kidnapping of American diplomats in Tehran?

Does President Obama actually believe that "soft power," namely his persuasive arguments, will substitute for battleships or fighter jets? Has a new age commenced because he wills it? Will Osama bin Laden or Ahmadinejad accept his well-meaning rhetoric as signs of an accommodating America? And even if we are accommodative, why should our enemies adopt a similar stance? What do they gain in doing so?

President Bush didn't disrespect Iran; he merely recognized the imperial aspirations of the mullahs – a point often made by Arab leaders in the Middle East. Perhaps the new approach President Obama has adopted, and people like Richard Cohen countenance, will work. I certainly hope so.

But common sense suggests the Obama overtures are naïve and troublesome. They foreshadow a United States unwilling to stand by its commitments and foreign interests. As everyone knows, talk is cheap. It is even discounted in diplomatic channels. If negotiation serves as cover for the Iranian pursuit of nuclear weapons, it is also dangerous.

As Vice President Biden indicated during the campaign season, this president will be tested. Well, the tests have begun, Roger Cohen may believe President Obama has started down the track of a new paradigm. But there are others – and I fall into this category – who believe we are on the road to appeasement and accommodation that failed us in the past and led to the dislocation and death of millions in the last century.

Words can soothe and they can harm. If the Obama Doctrine is speak softly and don't carry a stick, I'm afraid it cannot be effective. Evil hasn't disappeared from world affairs because Obama has willed it. If anything, his rhetoric suggests the triumph of belief over reality or the naïve notion that hope and truth are interchangeable.

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