



Obama's First 100 Days

by Herbert I. London
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Every new administration -- propelled by election success -- is in the political driver's seat for only so long. It is compelled by the calendar to attempt to put its agenda into effect in the first one hundred days. This was true of every president from FDR to George W. Bush and it is certainly the case with Barack Obama.

Today is the one hundred day mark for this Democratic term and in most respects the agenda and its contours have been outlined. While the full effect of the Obama program cannot yet be assessed, there is enough that has been done to engage in at least a partial evaluation.

The transfer of capital and influence from the private to the public sector has been profound and unprecedented. Americans will be saddled with debt for as long as one can imagine. And, unless I am sadly misguided, governments, including this government, tend to monetize unfunded liability thereby ushering in an inflationary tsunami, notwithstanding elitist arguments that this vicissitude can be managed.

It is also clear that the president has arrogated powers to himself not vouchsafed in the Constitution. For example, he asked for the resignation of the CEO of General Motors, a power in clear violation of Article I Section 8. Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner is talking about firing bank executives, and the administration is talking openly about taking an ownership interest in GM.

As significant as the assumption of government authority over the economy, is President Obama's stance on foreign policy. Without any fanfare and almost no news coverage, the president signed a G-20 contract with world leaders for a new world banking system.

This act, The Financial Stability Board (FSB), establishes an economic union with uniform trade regulations and bylaws. It includes the extension of "oversight to all...important financial institutions, instruments and markers..." (my emphasis). The head of FSB, Mario Draghi of Italy said, "every financial institution capable of creating financial risk will be the subject of supervision." This means that the United States has been inserted into an entangling alliance with Europeans and Asians that compromises national economic independence.

In the first one hundred days President Obama has attempted to chart a foreign policy course that tilts in the direction of multilateralism. He told the G-20 representatives that past

American policies "wrecked" cross Atlantic ties. He apologized for "national arrogance." He genuflected before the king of Saudi Arabia. He made a personal appeal to the Iranian mullahs indicating mistakes made by the U.S. in its policy approaches.

The president announced that he was prepared to slash the nuclear arsenal, cut back the missile defense program and reduce the power projection capability of the air force and the navy. He made it clear that a quid pro quo with Russia was possible. If Russia applied pressure on Iran to forego a nuclear weapons program, the U.S. would not deploy an anti-missile system in the Czech Republic and Poland. He prepared the newly-created Israeli government for a confrontation over the Palestinian territory. Most significantly, he toned down the rhetoric of the Bush years noting that we are not at war with radical Islam, but are engaged in "overseas contingency operations."

Whether this means the United States is no longer a superpower or -- under President Obama will -- refuse to act as a superpower, remains to be seen. After all, the president personally gave the go-ahead for military action in the stand-off with the Somali pirates and he "resolved to halt the rise of piracy in this region." He did approve the deployment of four thousand additional troops in Afghanistan, albeit conspicuously avoiding the use of the word "surge" or calling for victory.

While in Prague the president gave a speech outlining his tough posture on foreign policy. "Rules must be binding. Violations must be punished. Words must mean something. The world must stand together to prevent the spread of weapons. Now is the time for a strong international response." But when the North Koreans fired a missile over the Japanese archipelago two days after the speech, the U.S. appealed to the nations in the Security Council and couldn't even get them to agree on a nonbinding statement condemning the action. So much for punishment, rules and words with meaning.

As I see it the formidable shifts in policy will ultimately be judged by two standards: an evident improvement in the economy and forcing or encouraging Iran to forego development of nuclear weapons. On these matters, it is still too early to make hard judgments.

Americans are a forgiving people and despite Constitutional violations and an assault on the free market, are likely to give the president the benefit of the doubt if conditions in these two areas improve. If they do not, Barack Obama will be perceived as a failed president who altered the basic principles in the economy and diminished America's standing on the world stage.

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