

## The Limits of Audacity

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The election of Barack Obama—rich in symbols, uplifting in rhetoric, and fraught with expectations—created a magical moment for the indefinable ways the new president appeared to touch, inspire, and seduce people everywhere. Compared to his most illustrious predecessors, Obama assumed his potential for greatness even before he had assumed office, with a Lincoln-like-humility and a Roosevelt-like facility reinforcing a soaring rhetoric designed to restore confidence at home and reintroduce the nation abroad.

Now, one year later, Obama's magic is facing exposure. History did not start anew on election day, and there is more to the nation and the world than his predecessor's ideological failings and policy fiascos. "No man entering this office," noted John F. Kennedy ten days after his inauguration, "could fail to be staggered upon learning . . . the harsh enormity of the trials which [he] must pass in the next 4 years."<sup>1</sup> As Obama too staggers under the weight of the agenda of necessity inherited from the previous administration, but also under the self-inflicted pressures of his audacious calls for a new beginning, the historical dimensions of his presidency are less inspirational, and the memories of failed presidencies frame a growing unease about the current president.

Admittedly, a daunting Bush legacy gave Obama little time to correct the bearings of a nation that had gone off course while its people mostly fell silent. After the pall cast over the U.S. image the previous years, Obama's call for audacity was not a choice; for his administration to just wait and do nothing, or even little, was not an option. There were ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, but even those demands aside, there were also pressing crises—with Iran and in the Middle East, with Russia and in some parts of Europe, with North Korea and elsewhere in Asia, over climate change and other planetary concerns including

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**The Obama presidency has shown strategic inconsistencies to the point of tactical recklessness.**

fears of a global economic depression—that denied the new administration the ability to set priorities of its own. This is the United States’ second chance to regulate a global order for the first half of the twenty-first century, and it is essential to make it work, for there may not be another.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, in his eagerness to seize the moment, a hyperactive Obama presidency has shown strategic inconsistencies to the point of tactical recklessness. Consider the global agenda outlined during its first few months:

“commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons,”<sup>3</sup> engagement with Iran and other adversaries “based on mutual interests and mutual respect,”<sup>4</sup> an end to an indifference to “those that cling to power through corruption and deceit and the silencing of dissent,”<sup>5</sup> renewed “respect [for] the dignity of every human being,”<sup>6</sup> more equal partnerships with traditional allies in Europe and elsewhere because of the fundamental truth that “no one nation can meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century alone,”<sup>7</sup> a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East for the sake of “Israel’s interest, Palestine’s interest, America’s interest, and the world’s interest”<sup>8</sup>—and much more “for everywhere we look there is work to be done”<sup>9</sup> to save the United States from its most recent checkered past, other nations from themselves and each other, and even the planet from its own inhabitants.

In an attempt to heal the scars left by George W. Bush and Iraq, as Jimmy Carter had hoped to close the wounds left by Richard M. Nixon and the war in Vietnam, Obama has shown a dangerous predilection for the desirable over the feasible, and for the juggler over the architect. In his haste, he raises the risks that a foreign policy of aroused expectations might be turned into a foreign policy of self-defeating accommodation, lest it become a foreign policy of unwanted confrontations.

Admittedly, Obama’s popularity abroad shows unsurpassed levels that are the envy of other heads of state and government. Relative to his predecessor, support of the U.S. president during the first few months of his administration jumped an amazing 80 percentage points in Germany and 77 points in France, the two countries that led the anti-Bush coalition of discontent on the eve of the Iraq war. In October 2009, Obama’s Nobel Peace Prize was designed to acknowledge and honor his general intentions rather than to recognize and celebrate specific achievements since his election. Yet, however deeply much of the world seems to like Obama, there remains much ambivalence about the United States: that the president sounds humble to his worldwide listeners is not enough to mute their feeling that the nation still acts imperially. In China, Obama enjoys a 62 percent

favorable rating, but confidence in the United States is as low as 6 percent; and a paltry 9 percent of Pakistanis and 5 percent of Palestinians view Obama's America as a credible partner.<sup>10</sup>

Popularity helps but neither decisively, because it is not a fungible asset, nor for long, because its sustainability depends on efficacy more than on personality. Thus, Obama's 2009 ventures in direct diplomacy—which, as promised, he has pursued actively since his inauguration—showed limited results. Targets of choice like Hugo Chávez, Kim Jong-il, the Castro brothers, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and Bashar al-Assad kept their distances or else, like Chávez at the UN, saluted him with an almost comical appeal “to come over to the socialist side [and] join the axis of evil” to help “build an economy at the service of the people.”<sup>11</sup>

By contrast, Nixon was hardly lovable and he surely was not popular. Yet, no other Cold War president was more effective in engaging the most implacable U.S. adversaries when détente redirected U.S. relations with the Soviet Union, normalization redefined a tense bilateral relationship with the People's Republic of China, and controversial negotiations with Hanoi ended the Vietnam War. As Obama's first year in office closes, the echoes of a forgotten past are heard like unwanted warnings about yesteryear's short-lived heroic figures who became villains after early false starts produced self-defeating dead ends. In short, Obama may be able to move the nation, but the nation may remain unable to move the world. What future, then, lies for Obama?

## **False Starts**

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On the campaign trail, Obama impressed as a man of reflection, a thinking man with an infinite intellectual curiosity that compensated for his admittedly limited experience. “Yes we can,” he pledged, pointing to his tri-continental and multicultural background as the basis for an enticing worldview that made him a citizen of the world. Obama said eloquently what he was prepared to do, and those who heard him believed passionately that he could do what he had said. And so it seemed to be when his election promptly transformed the president-elect into a man of action: quick to make audacious announcements on issues he knew, but also a quick learner for bold decisions on issues he did not know yet.

The emotional bursts created by Obama's ability to achieve instant intimacy with people all over the world created useful opportunities for short-term gains—as was said to be the case, for example, with the unexpected defeat of Hezbollah in the elections held in Lebanon shortly after Obama's eloquent call for “a new beginning” in Cairo in June 2009. If nothing else, Obama and what he reportedly said helped the world forget about Bush and what he allegedly did. Yet, even as the seductive passion of Obama's words still lingers, they gradually unveil a mainstream president who speaks resolutely like a man determined to

change the world, but acts prudently to avoid the risks that change entails—seemingly fearful of a crippling error that might define the balance of his administration, similar to Kennedy at the Bay of Pigs or even Lyndon B. Johnson on the conduct of the war in Vietnam during the first 90 days of their respective presidencies.

Afghanistan, which has presented Obama with perhaps the most intense and arguably most consequential test, is a case in point. “This is not a war of choice. This is a war of necessity . . . that is fundamental to the defense of our people,” initially argued Obama in order to urge and justify a deeper U.S. involvement in Afghanistan.<sup>12</sup> The formula, which was politically expedient during the presidential campaign because it balanced the candidate’s opposition to a discredited war of preemption in Iraq with a robust commitment to waging a legitimate war of retribution in Afghanistan, has become strategically misleading because it exaggerates the distinction between choice and necessity in either

war.<sup>13</sup> Just as Iraq became Bush’s war, notwithstanding the consensus that existed immediately after the September 11 attacks, Afghanistan has now become Obama’s war a few months after his call for a “stronger, smarter, and comprehensive”<sup>14</sup> counterinsurgency strategy was broadly applauded (even though, or because, it appeared to repeat Bush’s controversial decision for a surge in Iraq two years earlier).

T.E. Lawrence, who knew about counterinsurgency, explained the limits of the strategy best in fifty words: “granted mobility, security (in the form of denying targets to the enemy), time, and doctrine (the idea to convert every subject to friendliness), victory will rest with insurgents, for the algebraical factors are in the end decisive, and against them perfections in means and spirit struggle quite in vain.”<sup>15</sup> The ground conditions that are reported by a military and diplomatic leadership specifically picked by the Obama administration to enforce its strategy reflect ominously Lawrence’s preconditions for failure: over there, a fatally flawed government that stays in power fraudulently because of an understandable reluctance to put in place a so-called third force that would demand even more U.S. involvement, and a dispersed tribal people that is losing its confidence in the U.S. resolve to fight and extend the needed protection to its local allies. Over here, a wary populace, increasingly hostile to the war, and weary congressional leaders who insist on benchmarks for timely progress that cannot be met as an alibi for a withdrawal they do not dare order themselves. Both here and over there, a huge psychological and historical distance separating two countries that have nothing

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in common except the tragic realities of 9/11 in the United States and the Afghans' vague memories of failed imperial adventures that have historically come to a bad end.

To reverse such a strategic equation, Obama will need more time and resources than he may be able or even willing to muster under increasingly difficult political conditions at home and with deafening calls for withdrawal among most leading allies. As the pressure to take more decisive and costly steps increases, the internal divide among Obama's most senior advisors increases too, as well as divisions with the president's party and in the nation. Insisting that the U.S. national interest is not determined "for the sake of being in Afghanistan or saving face or . . . sending a message that America is here for the duration" is not at issue.<sup>16</sup> There as elsewhere, interests shape commitments rather than the other way around. But why U.S. forces went there after 9/11, and how they got there, with nearly universal approval and as part of a broad-based military coalition, should not be forgotten either. That is why Afghanistan remains a war of necessity, and even at this late time the prospects for limited success, as well as the consequences of avowed failure, are sufficiently high, on grounds of interests, to resource the war fully with additional military and civilian capabilities.

Whether Obama can deliver the decisive policies his administration would deem strategically desirable, as opposed to intermediate decisions that would be found politically feasible, is doubtful given the sequence of his bureaucratic logic chain: to be open to all options, settle all differences by compromise, and work by consensus. As each senior policymaker leans backward to accommodate everyone else with half-hearted endorsements of half-baked measures, the system works but at the expense of policy. However desirable the ability to blend may be, it is not a benchmark for sound policy—no more than Obama's capacity for bonding is a substitute for sustainable leadership. "The president ended up landing on a spot that was where she [Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton] was," reported Vice President Joseph R. Biden as explanation for the decision to send 21,000 additional troops to Afghanistan in early 2009.<sup>17</sup> Echoes of Johnson in Vietnam, who repeatedly "landed on a spot" that called for doing more and more, but only a bit at a time—too much to pacify the war critics at home, not enough to satisfy the apologists, and more than enough to permit an increasingly intrusive political micromanagement of an ever deeper military quagmire.<sup>18</sup> The Vietnam template is hardly reassuring, especially as unlike Johnson, who was able to talk down the Vietnam War for two years after the war had become his to lose, Obama faces constituencies whose living memories of Iraq make them all too aware of the risks of an escalation in Afghanistan.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, decisions about Afghanistan continue to affect conditions in Iraq, where the war should not be forgotten even if the focus has shifted elsewhere. Iraq, which started as an American war, has become a civil war that could quickly

surge after the scheduled withdrawal of U.S. combat forces. Neither the United States or its allies nor any of Iraq's neighbors could remain indifferent to an inflamed civil war for long. (By comparison, the Vietnam War began as a civil war before the scope of U.S. involvement transformed it into an American war that ended, therefore, when U.S. forces were effectively withdrawn.) In other words, even the U.S. withdrawal of all combat forces from Iraq will not end the war. After 2010, a United States that will have left too soon may be debating the necessity of an urgent return—even in the midst of an escalating war in Afghanistan.

Credibility matters and no foreign policy can achieve much success without it, including that of a presidential discourse used to announce, explain, defend, and enforce the policies of a renewed and rehabilitated nation. Lacking a reliable sense of direction, there is little hope to reach the stated destination. Lacking credibility, new concessions are expected to follow each concession until such time when none can be made any more, and red lines in the sand are desperately drawn to end the unwanted conflict. History is convincing on this point: there have been many more large wars of necessity that started as small wars of choice than the other way around.

## **A New Beginning?**

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Since Truman, discontinuity in foreign and security policy has been more pronounced within every U.S. administration than from the end of one presidency to the next—with each president forced to become what he did not want to be when misunderstood issues and unexpected events forced him to revise his initial instincts, goals, and policies. Most recently, it was on 9/11 when then-President George W. Bush's expectations were dramatically derailed away from the post-Cold War agenda he had initially embraced, including U.S. relations with China and Russia as his two priorities of choice.

That was not all, however. Lost in all the Iraq furor there were subsequent reappraisals that introduced a paradoxical continuity with Obama on foreign policy and security issues.<sup>20</sup> Thus, before Bush left office, alliance relations were mended after the political turnover in Europe (including Germany in September 2005 and France in June 2007), renewing the transatlantic partnership and easing Obama's access to his European interlocutors in 2009. Later, Bush's controversial surge for Iraq in 2007, and the "gut-wrenching, hold-your-balls risks" it entailed,<sup>21</sup> opened the door for a military disengagement by a date that Obama's predecessor negotiated with the Iraqi government. With North Korea, a 2007 denuclearization deal compared well with former president Bill Clinton's several years before; admittedly that deal came late and failed to be implemented but it set the stage for Obama's own campaign to reinforce worldwide pressures

on the aging regime in North Korea. On global warming, the Kyoto treaty died early but a late momentum for new negotiations was restored when Bush, late in his presidency, began to move U.S. attitudes and policies on greenhouse gas emissions and other such issues. Even on Guantánamo (closure), torture (reappraisal), and rendition (suspension), Bush's final take amounted to a new beginning that gave the Obama administration further legitimacy to move ahead—occasionally, and by its own admission, too quickly, but to the satisfaction of, and with broad support from, public opinion at home and abroad.

In Iran, Bush's final legacy also bequeathed a small coalition of the willing—including the three leading European powers as well as China and Russia—that negotiated with the Iranian government while the United States maintained a military option of last resort that the U.S. president alone seemed enough to guarantee. That option has now lost much of its credibility on grounds of will but also because of uncertain capabilities and doubtful efficacy. "The reality," said Secretary of Defense Robert Gates on September 27, 2009, "is that there is no military option that does anything more than to buy time." Without plausible prospects of military action, but also without much hope for effective additional economic sanctions, what is left is a hide-and-seek strategy that enables its proponents to catch the cheater but allows it to cheat again every time it is caught. "He's weak," reportedly said President Nicholas Sarkozy of France about the head of state he most wishes he could resemble.<sup>22</sup> Sarkozy's statement is typically exaggerated and even abusive, but with public evidence of Iran's possible breakout capacity within one to three years it is, nonetheless, ominous.

Obama's mixed responses to the fatally flawed elections in Iran, as well as in Afghanistan, also reinforced such concerns. With regard to Iran especially, Obama's early neglect of many public reports of "irregularities" gave way, but belatedly if not reluctantly, to his more forceful statements of outrage and "concern to me and . . . to the American people."<sup>23</sup> To be sure, playing down declarations on issues of human rights and democracy promotion in order to explore opportunities on other strategic issues is not without precedent. Yet, references to George H.W. Bush's response to Tiananmen Square—a muted response that proved to be correct, notwithstanding the angry criticism it received at the time—are historically tainted. If nothing else, Bush, who knew a lot about China where he had served as ambassador, was also the first Western head of state to order sanctions against Beijing.<sup>24</sup> Memories of Carter's confused response to the 1979 revolution in Iran, or even to Gerald Ford's refusal to meet

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Russian human rights champion Alexander Solzhenitzyn a few years earlier, would be more appropriate, though less virtuous.

In the fall of 2009, the strategic goal of negotiations may have been salvaged, to be sure, but the U.S. position may decisively influence and harden the combativeness of a determined Iranian government, notwithstanding an apparent willingness to accept confidence-building measures designed to keep the diplomatic door opened but the

nuclear clock ticking. No less significantly, such perceptions might also influence the attitude of allies in the region, including an understandably impatient and restless Israel, but also some Arab states predictably concerned about Iran's growing influence. Meantime, while Obama addressed the Israeli–Palestinian conflict earlier during his presidency than any of his predecessors since Carter in 1977, the terms of engagement he set for the major protagonists, including an emphatic insistence on a formal end to further Israeli settlements, have been blurred by the increasingly defiant tone of his main interlocutors who welcomed Obama's premature announcement of a cooperative "new beginning" in June 2009 but have gradually returned to their old confrontational practices ever since.

U.S. policy under Obama toward Russia has also lacked a consistent and firm approach. Fifteen years ago, on Clinton's watch, Russia was a mess. What was feared most was a weak and fragmenting country whose final collapse might resemble the former Yugoslavia, but worse. Conditions have changed since. Now, Russia is back from what Vladimir Putin bitterly described as "the greatest geopolitical disaster of the twentieth century."<sup>25</sup> To accommodate such alleged return to primacy, a reset button has been accordingly activated. *Déjà vu* all over again: if every U.S. president over the past 60 years has found it necessary to seek a new beginning in U.S. relations with Moscow, it is because previous efforts never amounted to anything better than a false start which forced his successor to begin anew as well. Without a doubt, Russia is once again a power in Europe, but it is not a European power: it is too big, too near, and too nuclear to ever qualify as an EU member, which is the true test of being European. Similarly, even if Russia is now a power in the world, it cannot become a lasting world power. Irrespective of its ambitions, it lacks the global reach the Soviet Union sought. The vexing question, then, for the United States but also for its European allies, is how to draw the limits of Russia's self-image and national ambitions that neither the Russian state nor the West's tolerance could sustain now any better than before. As Russia's bid for renewed primacy runs out of

people, resources, and even space, it also runs out of time. It is a *demandeur* state, which leaves Moscow with a respectful right of consultation on issues of mutual interest, but denies it a preemptive right of veto on U.S. policies.<sup>26</sup>

In this context, Obama's decision to scrap his predecessor's proposed anti-ballistic missile shield in Eastern Europe can be questioned even in light of the change in the pace and scope of Iran's missile program since the decision was first announced in 2006. For over the intervening years, Russia's vocal opposition to a modest defense system that raised little risk, if any, for its aging but still sophisticated and plentiful strategic forces gave the planned U.S. deployment in Poland and the Czech Republic a significance that came to transcend Iran, affecting Europe's perception of U.S. solidarity in the alliance. Coming so soon after the war in Georgia, about which Gates had been especially outspoken, but also lacking convincing evidence of Russian support on pressing U.S. issues (including, but not exclusively, Iran), Obama's policy reversal might encourage Moscow's further intransigence to achieve more concessions, in and beyond Europe. "I expect that after this right and brave decision, others will follow," gloated Putin within hours of the U.S. missile defense announcement, as he suggested more active U.S. support for Russia's membership in the World Trade Organization and the removal of all restrictions on the U.S. transfer of high-technology to Russia.<sup>27</sup>

Who needs whom? Quite simply, Russia needs more from its European neighbors and the United States than they need from Russia. Not indulging Russian abusive demands is distinct from provoking Russian residual power.<sup>28</sup> To pretend otherwise is to neglect or deny Russia a history that has been the source of much tragedy in the West and for Russia too, including two World Wars and one Cold War this past century.

## Dead Ends?

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This essay is not a rush to judgment. There is plenty of time ahead, and more time is what is needed before Obama's new beginning can be credibly assessed and, hopefully, his Nobel Peace Prize legitimately earned. Yet, the trends that are emerging are cause for unease even from sympathizers haunted by the memories that might come to rule over Obama's future: Kennedy, whose humiliation in the Bay of Pigs left him determined to never blink again; Johnson, who inherited a bad but small war in Vietnam and promptly made it bigger and worse; Nixon, who went and sought fame and stature in China but lost it all at home; Carter, whose passionate claims for a new foreign policy of "constructive global engagement" designed to serve mankind were buried in Kabul and in Tehran; Reagan, who abandoned his provocative assault on the evil empire when he went to Moscow for a warm embrace of Mikhail Gorbachev's perestroika; or either of the three

post-Cold War presidents who seemed to know what they wanted but did not figure out how they could get there for lack of time (George H. W. Bush), will (Clinton), or legitimacy at home and abroad (George W. Bush).

“But right now, the question is, the first question is, are we doing the right thing? Are we pursuing the right strategy?” Obama asks.<sup>29</sup> This is pragmatic, and there is nothing wrong with pragmatism. Some who believe otherwise equate it with cynicism, but that need not be a mortal sin either. It is, wrote George Santayana, “the chastity of the intellect, and it is shameful to surrender it too soon or to the first comer.”<sup>30</sup> That Obama could be a pragmatist, even without illusions, appears to satisfy neither the academic guardians of what passes for realism nor the persisting mandarins of a discredited neoconservatism.<sup>31</sup> In practice, there is realism—and even morality—in pragmatism because its final

test is not about vision but about efficacy, hardly in evidence in recent years.

While doing the right thing, or working toward foreign policy goals that can be achieved, the task of the pragmatist is also to define and balance priorities compatible with the nation’s interests, capabilities, and purpose. “Man,” Goethe wrote, “is not born to solve all the problems in the world, but to search for the starting point of the problem

and then remain within the limits of what he can comprehend.”<sup>32</sup> Not only what can be comprehended but also what can be accomplished. One year into his administration, Obama’s hopes to “set the context” anew with a new “civil discourse” on “a new era of engagement” based on “mutual interest and respect” because “it is time to move forward” are not being met. No need for big “R” realism here: foreign policy observers and practitioners alike all know and understand full well that “the setting” (meaning, in academic parlance, the structure) forces obligations (iron laws, some say) that no president can escape, however popular he may be, and no great power can ignore, however peerless it might be.

Here we go again, then, as Obama, despite his endearing urge and illusory magical ability to move the world where it ought to be, is about to face the world as it is and even, in some hostile regions, as it wishes to remain. There has been enough audacity thus far for an entire presidential term. Better now to focus on immediate tests of efficacy—in Afghanistan and Pakistan, in Iran with Moscow, and even with Israel and the Palestinians—without which Obama’s vision to resume the U.S. pacification of history might come to some bad dead ends.

**T**here has been  
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## Notes

1. Ivo H. Daalder and I.M. Destler, *In the Shadow of the Oval Office* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009), p. 18. The quote is from John F. Kennedy's first State of the Union message to Congress on January 30, 1961.
2. See Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Second Chance* (New York: Basic Books, 2007), p. 216.
3. Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, "Remarks by President Obama," Prague, Czech Republic, April 5, 2009, [http://www.whitehouse.gov/the\\_press\\_office/Remarks-By-President-Barack-Obama-In-Prague-As-Delivered/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-By-President-Barack-Obama-In-Prague-As-Delivered/)
4. *Ibid.*
5. American Presidency Project, "Barack Obama, Inaugural Address," January 20, 2009, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=44> (hereinafter Obama's Inaugural Speech).
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7. Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, "Remarks by the President at the U.S./China Strategic and Economic Dialogue," Washington, D.C., July 27, 2009, [http://www.whitehouse.gov/the\\_press\\_office/Remarks-by-the-President-at-the-US/China-Strategic-and-Economic-Dialogue/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-at-the-US/China-Strategic-and-Economic-Dialogue/).
8. Obama's Cairo Speech.
9. Obama's Inaugural Speech
10. See Bruce Stokes, "Obama's Not So Popular Where It Counts," *The National Journal*, July 25, 2009, p. 2.
11. Paul Starobin, "When Love Is Not Enough," *The National Journal*, July 25, 2009, p. 25; Hugo Chávez, address to the UN General Assembly, New York, September 24, 2009 (link to full text is unavailable).
12. Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, "Remarks by the President at the Veterans of Foreign Wars Convention," Phoenix, Arizona, August 17, 2009, [http://www.whitehouse.gov/the\\_press\\_office/Remarks-by-the-President-at-the-Veterans-of-Foreign-Wars-convention/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-at-the-Veterans-of-Foreign-Wars-convention/).
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14. Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, "Remarks by the President on a New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan," Washington, D.C., May 27, 2009, [http://www.whitehouse.gov/the\\_press\\_office/Remarks-by-the-President-on-a-New-Strategy-for-Afghanistan-and-Pakistan/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-on-a-New-Strategy-for-Afghanistan-and-Pakistan/).
15. Robert B. Asprey, *War in the Shadows: The Guerilla in History* (New York: William Marrow, 1994), p. 190.
16. "Still Necessary?" *Economist*, September 22, 2009, [http://www.economist.com/world/asia/displaystory.cfm?story\\_id=14489971](http://www.economist.com/world/asia/displaystory.cfm?story_id=14489971).
17. Peter Baker and Elisabeth Bumiller, "Advisors to Obama Divided on Size of Afghan Force," *New York Times*, September 3, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/04/us/politics/04military.html>.
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19. Johnson's first State of Union speech in 1964 included two passing references to Vietnam. Public opinion polls commissioned by the Democratic Party in the 1964 elections showed limited interest in the war in many significant states. Following the election, and six months away from sending the nation to "major combat" in Vietnam, Johnson's second State of the Union speech covered the war in 126 words. See Norman Podhoretz, *Why We Are in Vietnam* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982), pp. 71, 137.
20. See Jonathan Rausch, "Bush's Legacy: Small Ball After All?," *The National Journal*, September 20, 2008, p.6, [http://www.nationaljournal.com/njmagazine/cs\\_20080920\\_4430.php](http://www.nationaljournal.com/njmagazine/cs_20080920_4430.php); David Frum, "Think Again Bush's Legacy," *Foreign Policy* (September/October 2009), pp. 32–38.
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22. Jim Hoagland, "Is He Weak?" *Washington Post*, August 23, 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/08/21/AR2009082102309.html>.
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