

Republican Perspective

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Those Clairvoyant Republicans

In a presidential campaign debate on October 22, 2012, President Barack Obama ridiculed his challenger: “Governor Romney, I’m glad that you recognize that al-Qaeda is a threat, because a few months ago when you were asked what’s the biggest geopolitical threat facing America, you said Russia, not al-Qaeda....The 1980s are now calling to ask for their foreign policy back because the Cold War’s been over for 20 years.”

Seven months earlier, Romney had in fact said “....in terms of a geopolitical opponent, the nation that lines up with the world’s worst actors---of course the greatest threat that the world faces is a nuclear Iran, and nuclear North Korea---but when....we go to the U.N. looking for ways to stop them....who is it that always stands up for the world’s worst actors? It’s always Russia, typically with China alongside, and so....Russia is the geopolitical foe.”

Even earlier, during her vice presidential bid in 2008, the much-maligned Sarah Palin wrote “After the Russian Army invaded....Georgia, Senator Obama’s reaction was one of indecision and moral equivalence, the kind of response that would encourage Russia’s Putin to invade Ukraine next.”

But President Obama had famously introduced a “reset”---a new beginning---with Russia. That initiative was rewarded with Putin’s 2014 invasion of Ukraine, seizure of Crimea, and shooting down a Malaysian airliner over Ukraine.

Now fast-forward to Putin and Obama’s private meeting at the U.N. September 28, 2015. To date, no one knows what was said, but when they emerged for a handshake photo our President looked badly shaken. Two days later---surprise!---the Russian military showed up in Syria. Putin claimed they were there to take on ISIS, but in fact they attacked the anti-Assad rebels backed by the U.S. Administration objections have of course been ineffectual.

Maybe Palin just got lucky with the Ukraine prediction. After all, no one predicted Russia would enter the Syrian civil war, did they? Well....

Here’s part of what Senator Marco Rubio said in the Republican primary debate September 16---14 days *before* Russia intervened in Syria: “...I have an understanding of exactly what it is Russia and Putin are doing, and it’s pretty straightforward. He wants to reposition Russia, once again, as a geopolitical force....He’s trying to destroy NATO, and this is what this is part of. He is exploiting a vacuum that this Administration has left in the Middle East.”

Rubio continued: “Here’s what you’re gonna see in the next few weeks: the Russians will begin to fly...combat missions in that region, not just targeting ISIS, but in order to prop up Assad. He will also, then, turn to other countries in the region and say, ‘America is no longer a reliable ally, Egypt; America is no longer a reliable ally, Saudi Arabia; begin to rely on us’.”

How is it that President Obama could fail to see that Russia is our geopolitical foe, while it was so obvious to Mitt Romney? And how is it that President Obama and his Administration could be caught so flat-footed on Ukraine and Syria, when these events were foreseen by Sarah Palin and Marco Rubio? Are Palin and Rubio clairvoyant or just a heck of a lot more savvy than our current President and his foreign policy team? I’ll let the reader cogitate on those questions---but I’ll suggest that Romney, Palin, and Rubio are obviously *not* clairvoyant. They just have common sense.

And I will opine that President Obama’s failure to foresee any of this derives at least in part from his own world view---which he himself generously documented in his book “Dreams from My Father.” That world view, and especially his view of America’s proper role in the world, has led him to take the U.S. on a course of retreat from leadership. Further, it is that same world view which encourages President Obama to offer his hand in friendship and reconciliation to the likes of Putin, Khamenei, Castro, and the Muslim Brotherhood---where his overture is disdainfully viewed as weakness.

During his 1980 presidential campaign, Ronald Reagan used the term “peace through strength” to describe his foreign policy compared to that of incumbent President Jimmy Carter. Reagan said “Here’s my strategy for the Cold War: we win, they lose.” And so it happened: we won, they lost. Reagan’s concepts were straightforward, unambiguous.

What a pity that our current President cannot see that he has it all wrong, while Reagan, and the soothsayers Romney, Palin, and Rubio all had it right.