

RELEASE IN FULL

CONFIDENTIAL

February 6, 2010

For: Hillary
From: Sid
Re: Distant early warning signs

You should read this. This piece is prominently featured today in the Telegraph. It is a Tory paper. But it reflects more or less the current conventional wisdom in the UK. Of course, it's much worse in France. Sarkozy's unleashed id is the barometer. You are still perceived as separate and even increasingly as compensatory. The more coverage of your NI role, the better, if it can be done. (Let me discuss with Shaun on a strategy on how to brief.) The China/Google stand was critical. What can be done in Middle East, esp Syria, push back against Avigdor Lieberman's recent unpleasant noises, with new US ambo going? Just a thought. And: the attitude that the president's cancellation of attendance at US-EU summit is simply a merited position is self-defeating. First, the Europeans learned from the press, not through diplomatic channels beforehand, treated as second class. Second, of course the EU is what it is, esp after the new nonentities named at its head at Merkel and Sarko's behest. But to dismiss the EU because of that is smug and complacent. If the EU has no agenda, it's really up to the US, as it was for 50 years before. It's up to the US to organize around a new agenda on the crisis of global economy, including a common approach to China's mercantilism and climate change, etc, nuclear proliferation, etc. Otherwise, petty trade wars will begin to dominate US-EU relations.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/7174195/Barack-Obama-stumbling-towards-isolationism.html>

Barack Obama: stumbling towards isolationism

One of the ironies of Barack Obama's presidency is that he is increasingly distant from the world he promised to embrace, writes Toby Harnden in Washington

Toby Harnden's American Way
Published: 2:00PM GMT 06 Feb 2010

Europeans cheered Barack Obama every step of the way to the White House.

They swooned when the candidate took his stump skills to Berlin, where he spoke of "the burdens of global citizenship" and promised to "remake the world".

He had lived in Indonesia as a boy, travelled to Pakistan and Africa in his youth and came from a family that looked, as he liked to quip, "like the United Nations". Then, in his first year in office, he made 10 trips abroad to 21 countries, making him the most travelled of all United States presidents in their first 12 months.

So it came as a rude shock to Europeans last week when Obama decided not to bother with the European Union knees up Madrid in May - particularly miffing Prime Minister Jose Luis Zapatero of Spain, who, like the American president, campaigned on his opposition to the Iraq war.

American officials intimated that they were unimpressed by European bickering over who would sit next to the Obamas at the summit dinner and even over who would be the first leader to shake the hand of the person that Oprah Winfrey anointed as "the One" in Iowa back in 2008.

Perhaps Obama himself was a touch irritated by Nicolas Sarkozy's new habit of mocking him. "Obama has been in power for a year, and he has already lost three special elections," the French president said last week. "Me, I have won two legislative elections and the EU election. What can one say I've lost?"

The discomfort of Europe's elites indicates growing a realisation that perhaps he's just not that into them. The fact that Hillary Clinton, Obama's Secretary of State, felt the need to point out that "European security remains an anchor of US foreign and security policy" spoke volumes.

There is little sign that Obama feels the kind of instinctive belief in transatlantic alliances that, for instance, President George W Bush felt. In Washington, the much-ballyhooed "special relationship" - a phrase that Team Obama views as betraying a British inferiority complex and cloying neediness - has never felt less special.

That's partly because Gordon Brown is viewed as so toxic by the Obama administration that dealings with Downing Street are in a state of virtual suspended animation. But there are no indications yet that a Prime Minister David Cameron will have the red carpet rolled out for him.

One of Obama's conceits was that he would be the "Pacific president", looking west from his native Hawaii to China, India and Japan rather than east to America's traditional allies. It's as if Obama has embraced Donald Rumsfeld's much-maligned concept of "old Europe" - and broadened it.

The Czech Republic and Poland were told in late-night phone calls that planned missile defence sites on their territory were being abandoned.

Mid-level American officials often produce plans and papers about Helmand that overlook the fact that British troops have been fighting and dying there since 2006.

Obama's foreign policy sometimes seems like it does not go much further than the concept of "*le monde, c'est moi*". The limits of his transcendental personality in terms of results are becoming as apparent abroad as they are at home.

Relations with China sunk to a new low last week after the Obama decided to sell \$6.4 billion in arms to Taiwan and to meet the Dalai Lama. After kowtowing to China by avoiding discussion of human rights in a humiliatingly ineffectual trip last November and failing to see the Tibetan monk, Obama's decided to get tough - though to what end is unclear.

Having offered an "unclenched fist" to Iran, Obama has been almost casually rebuffed. As Sarkozy put it: "What have these proposals for dialogue produced for the international community? Nothing but more enriched uranium and more centrifuges."

In the Middle East, Obama's popularity is sliding among both Israelis and Arabs and the prospects of meaningful peace talks are dire. Requests to Nato for more troops to train Afghan security forces have fallen largely on deaf ears. Suddenly, the US no longer feels like the indispensable nation.

For all his talk of reaching out to the world and his apologies on behalf of America, there is little that Obama has achieved. He is liked but not respected - and there are growing doubts about whether he has the backbone or the domestic political capital to deliver.

Obama is finding that foreign policy is about more than just talk and turning up to take a bow. For its part, the world is realising that the man it championed as one of its own is stumbling towards isolationism.