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For: Hillary, Cheryl
From: Sid
Re: The drift

FYI: This is the first of what will likely soon be other analyses in the same vein as I am led to understand.

http://rothkopf.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/07/08/the_problem_when_the_president_is_the_policy

Foreign Policy

The problem when the president is the policy...

By David J. Rothkopf

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You could tell it wasn't going well. The conversations with Medvedev and Putin were tense, the body language awkward. The speech at the New Economic School laid an egg. The press seemed bored with the visit of America's rock star president. And as for real results, well, there weren't any.

Looking for explanations in an article Clifford Levy and Ellen Barry in today's *New York Times* called "In Russia, Obama's Star Power Does Not Translate," a range of possible answers were rolled out: Russians are jaded, Russians don't go for U.S. political posturing, Obama's speeches don't translate well, and, according to one person who ought to understand politics, a Russian circus designer, "Russians are the smartest people in the world." (A fact they have carefully hidden behind a veil of hundreds of years of economic and political catastrophe.)

Somehow, the formula that has been working for Barack Obama since early in 2007 suddenly seems to have gone cold. It is not enough simply to be him or to roll out Michelle and the girls (all of whom joined him in Moscow...unlike say, his top two State Department officials). What's more, it's not just Russia. Oh sure, the press still swoon in most corners of the world and crowds and political leaders still get all fluttery when first exposed to America's charming, thoughtful, intelligent, young president. But we are now starting to see what happens when being Barack Obama is not enough. We are now starting to see the shortcomings of the new administration's approach wherein the president has actually been the policy.

He has said we had changed and offered himself as evidence. He has been what we have offered to friends in terms of visits, access and calls. He has been the headline grabber, the spokesperson, the new voice of America. He has enabled the administration to take inherited policies and wrap them in Obama-paper with Obama-glitter all over it and all of a sudden, the old was repackaged into appearing new. Where there have been differences, as with the concept of engagement, the

change has been sold as a difference between him and his predecessor, with his speeches describing what was new and the possibility of interacting with him being the potential pay-off.

This played big during his early trips overseas, the novelty value was high and the eagerness to move on from the painful prior era was great. At the G20 meeting, at the Summit of the Americas, in Cairo, the concept of "president as policy" seemed to be working. But now we see where it is not. Not in Russia. Not with the Iranians who are happy to accept engagement and anything else that will be given to them but no strings, please Not with Hugo Chavez, who hammed it up with Obama in Trinidad but led his misfit chorus in reflexively hammering the United States after the coup in Honduras. Certainly not in North Korea.

It seems that having the president as policy works best with the people who are pre-disposed to like us and to some extent with the young and the disenfranchised. But with the hard cases, with our enemies, it falls painfully and dangerously flat.

In these instances, the new president is discovering that something much more than personal diplomacy and smile from the genuinely appealing Obama clan is needed. In these instances, we are going to need to go back to the drawing board and do the grunt work of foreign policy, the tough negotiations, the nuanced position changes, the threats, the cajoling. It's a very different game from American politics and, in fact, is often completely unconnected to it. What works here, very often does not play at all overseas.

There is a problem with this new reality. It requires a coordinated, multi-tiered, high-functioning foreign policy establishment. It needs the State Department to be in a central role. It needs the NSC to work both as a policy development and policy implementation mechanism and the National Security Advisor to be seen and respected...like the Secretary of State...as key advisors. It requires that the foreign policy of the United States is not centered too heavily either the president or the executive office of the president -- although the president will always remain the ultimate key. It is perfectly appropriate for the president to be part of the product, part of the rewards offered, and the mastermind...but he needs to move beyond campaign mode to something new. It is much akin to the entrepreneur of a successful company recognizing that for the company to grow further, to become a mature organization, he is going to need a mature structure that depends less on him and more on delegation of power to effective lieutenants and their teams.

We're not there yet. The secretary of state and the State Department have been visibly marginalized. She has become a kind of behind the scenes player. She's not on the Sunday morning shows. The president or the vice president handles the big media assignments (often not sounding exactly like they were on the same page). The National Security Advisor, for all his personal strengths, is viewed as a bit of a lost cause five months into the presidency. One of his predecessors in the job said to me when asked whether he viewed General Jones as failing in the job, "to me, on that issue, where there is smoke, there is fire." Tom Donilon, Jones's deputy, is seen to be managing the NSC process. Denis McDonough and Mark Lippert, Obama confidantes, are seen to be working closely with him and his inner office team (Rahm Emanuel, the VP, David Axelrod, Greg Craig and others) to play the leading role in shaping policy.

Clearly neither Hillary Clinton nor Jim Jones is a weak person. But all power in the U.S. national security apparatus flows from the president. And there is no denying that, despite the fact that they show up at work every day and go through the motions, that their roles don't measure up to many of their predecessors and the structure that is emerging suggests problems to come.

It's time to move out of campaign mode and into governing mode. It's time recognize that it really does take a big team of empowered leaders to make the complex foreign policy of the U.S. work and evolve in the right directions. It's time to recognize that it does not reflect badly on the president if we all agree he cannot transform the world single handedly, that however different he may be from his predecessors, that alone is not enough.

ALEXEY DRUZHININ/AFP/Getty Images

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