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A "New America" Foreign Policy?

The New America is the progressive coalition that brought President Obama to power in 2008 and sustained him in 2012: young people, African-Americans, Latinos, Asian-Americans, working women, single mothers, educated professionals, gays, and the unchurched (the 20% of Americans who have "no religion"). Their formative experiences in foreign policy were in antiwar movements against the wars in Vietnam and Iraq. Obama's early opposition to the war in Iraq was the key issue that gave him victory over Hillary Clinton in the 2008 Democratic primaries. Obama stated clearly in this year's foreign policy debate, "We don't want another Iraq. We don't want another Afghanistan."

The New America repudiates unilateralism and interventionism. But not the use of force. The President has explicitly left all options on the table in dealing with Iran. As Obama put it in the debate, "When I've sent young men and women into harm's way, I always understand that [force] is the last resort, not the first resort."

The New America won a revolution. It overthrew the Old America of government by white men. (President Obama's support among white men dropped from 41% in 2008

to 35% in 2012.) When it came to power, the New America immediately faced a counter revolution by the Tea Party. The Tea Party won the first skirmish in 2010 but was vanquished when the New American coalition came out in surprising force in 2012.

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Like all revolutions, the New America aims to export itself. "America has to stand with democracy," Obama said in the foreign policy debate. Unlike President Bush, however, Obama does not aim to impose democracy by force, as the U.S. tried to do in Vietnam and Iraq and Afghanistan. Obama wants the U.S. to support movements in other countries that promote progress and human rights. The President boasted that "my Administration stood with [the protesters in Tunisia] earlier than just about any other country. In Egypt we stood on the side of democracy. In Libya we stood on the side of the people." And in Syria, "We are mobilizing humanitarian support and support for the opposition."

Libya was a test case. The U.S. does not have significant security interests in Libya. We intervened to support our values of progress and human rights, just as we did in Kosovo in 1998 under President Clinton.

President Obama boasted that, in Libya, the U.S. "took leadership in organizing an

international coalition that made sure that we were able to—without putting troops in the ground, at the cost of less than what we spent in two weeks in Iraq—liberate a country that had been under the yoke of dictatorship for forty years and got rid of a despot who had killed Americans.”

The problem is that Islamic radicals have become embedded in the “democratic” protest movements in Libya as well as in Egypt and Syria. Obama warned that the U.S. must make “absolutely certain that we know who we are helping, that we’re not putting arms into the hands of folks who eventually could turn them against us or our allies.”

Republicans believe that may be the reason why the Obama Administration was slow to acknowledge that the September 11 incident in Benghazi was a terrorist attack by al Qaeda affiliates. “Did they think admitting that it was an al Qaeda attack would destroy the narrative of Libya being a big success story?” Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME) asked.

During the Cold War, the U.S. sometimes sided with sinister forces because they were anti-communist. The danger now is that we will side with radical forces that claim to be on the side of democracy. That danger is apparent in Syria, where we have to distinguish between the moderate democratic forces opposed to the ruthless dictatorial regime of Bashar al-Assad and radical Islamist elements in the opposition.

One thing is clear: human rights is the defining value of the New America’s foreign policy. After all, the coalition came out of the civil rights movement. That movement has already exported itself. The movements that liberated blacks in South Africa and Catholics in Northern Ireland were explicitly modeled on the U.S. civil rights movement.

Women’s rights are part of it, too. First Lady Hillary Clinton annoyed Chinese authorities when she said in China in 1995, “It is no longer acceptable to discuss women’s rights as separate from human rights.” Soon, we can expect gay rights, too, to have a place on the U.S. foreign policy agenda. It’s another New American value, ready for export to the world.

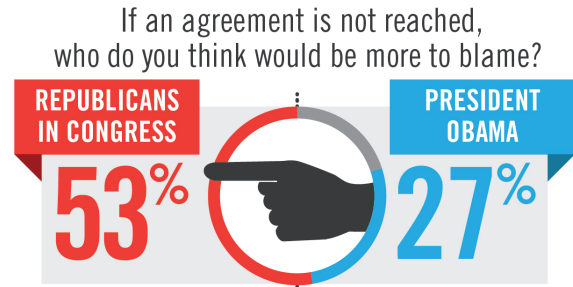
There is one big problem looming on the horizon: Israel. President Obama said in the debate, “Israel is our true friend. It is our greatest ally in the region. And if Israel is attacked, America will stand with Israel.” That is no doubt true, but Israel is not admired by some elements of the New American coalition. They see Israel’s occupation and settlement policies as violations of human rights. That division came very close to erupting during the platform debate at the Democratic National Convention in September. It’s the one issue that could split the New American coalition. ■



Got Leverage?

President Obama and the Democrats have leverage in the fiscal cliff debate. Here's why:

- 1) The public would blame Republicans more than Democrats if the country goes over the fiscal cliff because President Obama is seen as more willing to compromise.
- 2) Democrats can argue that Republicans are willing to allow taxes to go up for everyone rather than raise taxes on the wealthy.
- 3) There is broad support for tax increases on higher income Americans. It holds up even if people are given the Republicans' strongest argument—that low taxes enable wealthy people to invest their money and create jobs. Only 36% support that view in the CNN poll. Most want taxes on the wealthy kept high "so the government can use their money to help lower-income people."
- 4) Democrats are more willing to live with the consequences of going over the cliff. They are less averse to tax hikes than Republicans, and the sequester would cut all government programs, including military spending, instead of being targeted at entitlements.



"Fiscal cliff attitudes," Post-Pew poll, Nov. 29 - Dec. 2, 2012, Q7.

As a result, Republicans in Congress want to pass separate legislation extending tax cuts for lower-income Americans and canceling the sequester. Then they will have more leverage in the next showdown over raising the debt ceiling.

Raising the debt ceiling is always unpopular. It means the country has maxed out its credit card, so it's raising its credit limit. Republicans will do what they did in 2011—demand spending cuts and extended tax cuts for the wealthy as the price.

To cut off their leverage, President Obama is asking Congress to give up its power to raise the debt ceiling, which has been in place since 1917, and allow the President to do it on his own. But that is a closely guarded congressional prerogative with broad public support.

The U.S. is the only country in the world that requires legislative action on a regular basis to raise its debt limit. In other countries, it's routine.

Quick Turnaround

Virginia and New Jersey are the only two states that elect governors in the year following a presidential election. That means both will hold elections for governor in 2013.

Here's how the two states have voted for governor going back to 1977. There's a pattern.

Both states have a tradition of electing governors from the party that just lost the White House. In New Jersey, the tradition goes back to 1989. In Virginia, it goes back to 1977.

That's because the electorate shrinks radically in the off year election. In New Jersey, 3.9 million people voted for President in 2008. In 2009, only 2.4 million voted for governor. In Virginia, the electorate shrank from 3.7 million in 2008 to 2.0 million in 2009. The winning presidential party loses its bonus voters—people who vote once every four years, mostly for the winner.

Will the tradition continue in 2013? Right now, Republican Chris Christie looks like a good bet for re-election in New Jersey. His approval ratings since Hurricane Sandy have been soaring. Virginia will be a tougher test. The Republican candidate is likely to be Attorney General Ken Cuccinelli.

Cuccinelli has taken intensely controversial positions on abortion, gun control, climate change, health care reform, immigration and gay rights. If "Cooch" is nominated and loses, it would provide yet more evidence that Republicans are throwing away elections by going too far to the right.

			Governor Elected	
			VIRGINIA	NEW JERSEY
President Elected				
1976	Carter	1977	Dalton	Byrne
1980	Reagan	1981	Robb	Kean
1984	Reagan	1985	Baliles	Kean
1988	Bush	1989	Wilder	Florio
1992	Clinton	1993	Allen	Whitman
1996	Clinton	1997	Gilmore	Whitman
2000	Bush	2001	Warner	McGreevey
2004	Bush	2005	Kaine	Corzine
2008	Obama	2009	McDonnell	Christie
2012	Obama	2013	?	?

TheUS50.com, December 2012.

WHAT'S ON THE TABLE?

A full à la carte menu of options is available to the parties seated at the *Revenue* bargaining table. Some have a taste for rates, while others prefer a nice deduction cap or expenditure limit. With \$800 billion and \$1.6 trillion proposals already on the table, what do you think the revenue target should be? Help them split the tab and order up a compromise, picking from both sides of the menu...

Revenue

APPETIZERS

CAPITAL GAINS \$80b

Raise capital gains and dividends rate for top earners 5 percentage points (to 20%)

EXEMPTION PHASE-OUT \$40b

Reinstate personal exemption phase-out

RATE ENTRÉES

*Raise rates on personal income over \$200K/\$250K. **Choose one:***

CLINTON RATES \$440b

Top two ordinary income rates return to Clinton-era levels (36% / 39.6%)

or...

THE TWO PERCENT \$180b

Raise top rate by 2 percentage points (to 37%) on the top 2% of taxpayers

ESTATE TAX \$140b

Return estate tax to its 2009 level (45% rate; \$3.5 million exclusion)

Revenue

DEDUCTION ENTRÉES

*Limit itemized deductions. **Choose one:***

DEDUCTION LIMITS \$690b

Revert to Clinton-era deduction limit and limit value of all tax expenditures to 28%

or...

CAP FOR TOP EARNERS \$450b

Cap deductions, except for charitable contributions, at \$25K for high income only

or...

CAP FOR ALL \$750b

Cap all itemized deductions at \$50K for all taxpayers

DESSERT

CHAINED CPI \$80b

Index tax parameters to chained CPI



Revenue estimates from the President's 2013 budget; Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget; the Tax Policy Center; and the White House. Baseline is current policy.

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For more, please visit www.thirdway.org. Infographic by Bill Rapp with David Brown.



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