



## **Preserving liberty here at home**

By: Doug Bandow – November 19, 2013

Most Americans didn't notice that the federal government had closed earlier this year. Now, with Obamacare in chaos, most Americans have forgotten that it ever closed.

It was widely suggested that the shutdown undercut America's position as a great power. Some analysts warned that the partisan budget deadlock would ruin America's international reputation. Secretary of State John Kerry also joined the America-bashing. He warned that if the partial shutdown was "prolonged or repeated," people might question America's ability to "stay the course."

President Barack Obama speaks with Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono at the opening plenary session during day two of the 2010 G20 Summit at COEX on Nov. 12, 2010 in Seoul, South Korea.

Such handwringing was silly. For all of the *Sturm und Drang* in Washington, people elsewhere were unaffected. American politicians looked stupid, but that's nothing new. International policies, treaties and alliances remained unchanged.

Even more important, nothing changed outside of government. The U.S. economy remained the world's largest and most productive. U.S. culture continued to hold sway most everywhere people travel and electromagnetic waves reach.

President Barack Obama did cancel plans to participate in two Asian conferences and visit four Asian countries. Aleksius Jemadu of Indonesia's Pelita Harapan University opined that the "Obama administration has to convince again partners in Asia that the United States is really serious about the plan to focus on Asia." Shihoko Goto of the Woodrow Wilson International Center similarly contended that even a friend like Japan is "beginning to regard Washington's political impasse as the beginning of the end of U.S. influence in the region."

These hyperbolic fulminations ignored the fact that nothing in Asia had changed. U.S. military forces continued to provide what amounts to defense welfare to prosperous and populous allies throughout the Asia-Pacific.

Of course, the president missed some meetings. But most of the work at international gatherings is done by high-level staff and none of the president's planned trips were particularly important.

Moreover, political leaders the world over routinely forgo foreign travel in response to domestic political crises. A onetime cancellation does not portend President Obama's refusal to board a foreign-bound plane for the rest of his term.

Still, Secretary Kerry was worried. He contended that America is the “indispensable power.” Indeed, he argued, “the question no longer is whether our politics stops at the water's edge, but whether our politics stops us from providing the leadership that the world needs.”

Yet a world so utterly dependent on the U.S. is not good for the U.S., let alone the rest of the world. In fact, American and foreign leaders alike hype Washington's importance. U.S. officials enjoy their supposed indispensability and bask in lavish attention accorded by other states. Foreign governments enjoy foisting their most difficult problems on America while benefiting from all manner of financial and military subsidies. Massaging the ego of a succession of U.S. presidents and other officials is a small price to pay.

American Security Project's August Cole complained that “America is losing its ability to lead globally on the strength of its actions and ideas, to support a vibrant free-market system, to nurture a responsive democratic political system and to uphold a social contract that honors economic and social progress.” The damage from the last month “will take the better part of the next decade to repair,” he argued.

However, America's reputation is more resilient than he apparently believes – so long as America retains a vibrant free-market system and responsive democratic system. In fact, they are under serious threat, but not from tough political battles. The danger comes from ever-more expansive government.

Like Washington's takeover of American health care. Obamacare is bending the cost curve up. By inflating health insurance expenses government is threatening economic growth and job creation. By raising government costs the Obama program is weakening federal finances. Finally, by imposing unpopular legislation amid a cascade of lies – such as that everyone could keep their own insurance if they wanted – the administration is undercutting American democracy.

Only political vigilance and concerted action can preserve a vibrant market economy and responsive political democracy. That battle must be fought even if other nations look askance at the result. What others think matters far less than preserving liberty at home.