

The irony of our deeply troubled, financially strapped nation presuming to arrange the affairs of everybody else on the planet escapes him - and the rest of our political class.

What exactly can we expect in the way of consequences for America's engagements and interests in the world? God only knows - and He may not be a confidant of Obama's team of six hand-picked spiritual advisers.

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## The Triumph of Trivia

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We live in ironic times. The Obama national security strategy is basically a kinder, gentler version of the Bush strategy, while the Republicans are torn between those often mislabeled "neoconservatives" who favor global activism with a strong military emphasis and a nascent group represented by people like Andrew Bacevich and Christopher Preble who advocate a more narrow focus on tangible American national interests and security.

Other than this still-minor rumbling, though, neither Republicans nor Democrats have yet asked fundamental questions about the Obama version of the Bush strategy: Can or should the United States manage the global security system? Even if the current strategy in Afghanistan is successful, is it worth the strategic cost in terms of making America safer? Can the United States afford the massive defense establishment required to manage the global security system in a time of huge budget deficits, an aging population, and a decaying national infrastructure? Can the United States sustain a global strategy based on building partnerships with Islamic states and mobilizing support from Islamic populations at the same time that hostility toward Islam is spreading in America and being embraced by popular politicians and pundits? Can the United States expand or even maintain its support in the Islamic world while sustaining its relationship with Israel?

It is difficult to figure out the Tea Party movement's position on all this. As P.J. O'Rourke put it in the September/October issue of *World Affairs*, "The Tea Party has a political attitude rather than a political ideology." On national security policy (as on most other things), it angrily knows what it is against but not so much what it is for, at least in terms of practical policies.

With no clear Republican alternative to the Obama strategy, it is hard to imagine what will happen if the GOP regains control of Congress. The fiercest fights are likely to be over symbolism rather than content. No more bowing to Saudi royalty (at least with cameras present)!

So this is where we are. The United States faces a fork in the road in its global strategy. Yet we are following Yogi Berra's advice: "When you come to a fork in the road, take it." We steadfastly avoid debate on the really big (and really difficult) issues while obsessing on trivia. This cannot last. Eventually we will be forced to grapple with the issues in some serious way.

The Tea Party movement can contribute little to this. But whether it will defer to political leaders more versed in the complexities of statecraft and strategy remains to be seen. After all, deference is not a big part of its attitude.

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