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Smiling at Romney's loss, if not Obama's win

Other than that he's an unprincipled crony capitalist who's been for and against almost everything, Romney would have been great.

By DOUG BANDOW – November 13th, 2012

To listen to some of my friends, the world is about to end. With the re-election of Barack Obama the communization (or was that Islamization?) of America now is inevitable.

I'm not thrilled with President Obama's victory. I am a classical, not a modern, liberal. That means I believe in limited government, civil liberties, peace, and social tolerance.

Still, Mitt Romney's loss left me with at least a half smile on my face. Mostly it's a result of*schadenfreude* (enjoying others' misfortune), one of the baser human emotions. I just can't help it.

•**Leaving neocons out of power, unable to start new wars**. It has been four long years since neoconservatives have been able to start another war. The election returns popped their bubble. Horrors! We really are out of Iraq. The troops really are coming home from Afghanistan. Maybe we won't go to war in Iran. For neocons, America has entered the Night of the Living Dead.

Highlighting the "strange new respect" among conservatives for Romney. The Right long has complained that conservatives come to Washington, where a "strange new respect" sets in as they morph into liberals. During this campaign many conservatives warned that the world would end if Romney was nominated. After all, he had taken just about every position on every issue.

Yet after he won the nomination many of the same people announced that Romney embodied conservative values. The world would end if he was not elected. Now these conservatives have reverted to their original position. Romney never was a conservative and lost because he was not a conservative.

•**Rejecting the symbol of corporate America**. Mitt Romney clearly was the pro-business candidate. He was not so clearly the pro-free-market candidate. Market capitalism is good for society, but not for businessmen who would prefer to make money the old-fashioned way – through government.

Romney attacked the Obama administration for "crony capitalism," but his unprincipled pragmatism and corporate deal-making raised red flags. Some of his investments at Bain Capital benefited from government support. He favored continued subsidies for coal,

ethanol and nuclear power. President Obama may be worse, but he made no pretense of being a market-friendly guy.

•**Dismissing disconnected elitism**. By all accounts the private Romney was a good man. Nevertheless, he demonstrated early and often that he lived in a rarified world into which most of us never enter. Oblivious would be a kind description.

Contrast Ronald Reagan, who lived well but still had a common touch. He appealed to people throughout society in a way that Romney could not. I don't mind if a rich guy with a privileged upbringing is elected president. But he should have some idea what life is like for the rest of us.

•**Defeating an unprincipled pragmatist**. On a straight-up comparison I should prefer the unprincipled pragmatic centrist to the principled liberal activist. The former is likely to, at least occasionally, come close to my views.

Still, I just don't get the unprincipled pragmatic centrist. I understand what makes President Obama act. We mostly disagree on the end-points we desire, but we both want to change the world. As for Romney? He just wanted to, well, do something. He has been for and against most everything, including abortion, Ronald Reagan, and health care mandates. It is easier for me to respect political leaders who believe in something.

•**Preserving balance in the U.S.-Israel relationship**. Israel needs America to be a real friend, which means giving sometimes unpopular but necessary advice. Unfortunately, Romney announced that he would essentially ask Israeli Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu for permission to use the bathroom. Balance is essential in the U.S.-Israel relationship.

•**Punishing hubris**. No doubt there was arrogance on the president's team. Still, President Obama had reason to be confident. Romney came into Election Day objectively looking like the underdog. Yet Romney reportedly was "shell-shocked" by his defeat. His aides didn't bother to prepare draft concession remarks in case he lost. After Romney's succession of blunders and gaffes, someone in the campaign should have realized there was at least a chance he might lose! It makes one wonder in what other areas Romney was blind to reality.

Of course, *schadenfreude* doesn't change the fact that we face a reprise of the first administration: a flood of spending, more needless war-making, little concern for civil liberties and many other disappointments. Even so, when I think of the election result a small smile appears. It could have been worse!