

Opinions

Obama must live up to international expectations



Morgan Little
Columnist

Tear-soaked faces, celebratory shouts, decorated crowds running down streets in the earliest hours of the morning — scenes reminiscent of World Cup championships and World Series celebrations appeared in nearly every major city. The announcement of President-elect Barack Obama's victory prompted an almost religious fervor.

This was not just in America, where 46 percent of the populace is still bitterly simmering. At Britain's Sky News, the news director had to instruct his staff not to cheer while they announced the election results. Kenya declared a national holiday in Obama's honor. Germany's excitement for Obama, evidenced during the summer by a 200,000-strong crowd at his speech in Berlin, has inspired a sentiment that has washed over much of the world. Perhaps America is OK again. Maybe it's not spiraling into the gutter after all.

But then Russian President Dmitry Medvedev ignored Obama's victory during his state address, refusing to interrupt his proposal of longer presidential terms and further militarization of Russia's western borders.

"Obama must know that the change that he

talks about is not simply a superficial changing of colors or tactics," said Ali Larijani, Iran's parliament speaker. "What is expected is a change in strategy."

The massive worldwide support for Obama has led to impossible expectations. A BBC poll found that he was favored by a four-to-one margin against Sen. John McCain across 22 countries.

The celebrity metaphor has been beaten to death, but it's essentially true. Obama has become the lightning rod for the world's political hopes and prayers. Like an overly-hyped summer action flick, no matter what his accomplishments may be, it'll be incredibly difficult to deliver on all of the expectations.

In reality, expectations for Obama's foreign policy must be curtailed. Not as an indictment of his policies or abilities, but as a reflection of the terrible state that American foreign policy is in.

The reason Medvedev drew his line in the sand right after Obama won, challenging the United States' missile defense shield and hinting at Vladimir Putin's return, is that he knows Obama can't do anything to stop him. Larijani later echoed his country's defiance to abandon its nuclear programs. They both know how fragile and thinly stretched America's influence has become, and they'll be exploiting that just as much under Obama's administration as they have with President George W. Bush.

Before Obama can truly begin to solve the

problems of terrorism, international trade and human rights violations, he must jump over the hurdles that Bush has put in his path. The vast majority of American troops have to be pulled out of Iraq. Not only do the Iraqi people and Iraqi government want them out, but the occupation ties one hand behind this country's back. The vast expense only deepens the economic rut we're in, and it prevents the military from taking full advantage of the speed and flexibility on which it likes to pride itself.

Russia can invade Georgia because it knows America lacks the military capacity to prevent it from doing so. Iran and North Korea aren't afraid of American air strikes because the planes are occupied elsewhere. As diplomatic as Obama may be, he has expressed little hesitancy to use the military as a last resort in such matters.

Iraq will probably be the first foreign policy matter Obama tackles, but there's a long line of issues behind it.

Will his efforts to broaden international involvement in Afghanistan be met with cheers or jeers? Can he spearhead the effort to create a successor to the Kyoto Treaty? Will his economic protectionism impede relations with export-reliant Asian countries?

Obama now has four years to show in whose footsteps he'll follow: President Bill Clinton's or President Jimmy Carter's.

Obama must avoid a second cold war Russia already challenging new president-elect



Derek Kiszely
Columnist

Ever since the primaries Barack Obama has tried to portray himself as the next John F. Kennedy. Both men were relatively young, seeking to break a major cultural barrier in reaching the White House, and both possessed unsurpassed eloquence.

But the similarities don't stop there.

Both JFK and Obama struggled with a perceived lack of experience. Obama's own vice president-elect, Joe

Biden, guaranteed that Obama's lack of foreign-policy experience would provoke America's enemies to create an international crisis within the first six months of his presidency, to "test the mettle" of Obama, "just like they did John F. Kennedy."

The historical comparison to Kennedy is appropriate. As Biden noted, Obama is "brilliant," like Kennedy, yet also completely untested on the global stage. Kennedy met face-to-face with America's enemies, and Obama has pledged to do the same.

The question then is: Did Kennedy's approach work?

Kennedy's meeting with Nikita Khrushchev, the premier of the Soviet Union, turned out to be, in his own words, an "unmitigated disaster."

Khrushchev and his aides left the "no preconditions" negotiation with an impression that Kennedy was "too intelligent and too weak" and seemed "very inexperienced, even immature."

The result? An increasingly assertive Soviet foreign policy that led to the construction of the Berlin Wall and the Cuban Missile Crisis. In other words, well-meaning talks, interpreted as weakness by our enemies, resulted in crisis.

Obama is exactly like Kennedy in this regard, and some aspiring latter-day Nikita Khrushchev will no doubt test our new commander in chief by threatening our interests around the globe.

Well, it didn't take six months, as Joe Biden predicted. It didn't even take six days.

In a provocative speech from the Kremlin, Russian President Medvedev threatened to mobilize Russian missiles along the Polish border to "neutralize" the U.S. missile shield in Poland, if it goes ahead according to plan.

The timing of Medvedev's speech was no coincidence. He could have made the speech on any day in November. Instead he chose Nov. 5 — the day after the U.S. presidential election — speaking just hours after Obama's historic victory.

Medvedev is clearly trying to improve Russia's bargaining position in potential talks with the Obama administration on missile defense. His wording suggests Russia would reverse the decision if the United States scraps its missile defense plans.

But why should America give in to Russia's demands?

The U.S. missile defense shield will protect much of Europe against long-range missile attacks from "rogue" nations, such as Iran.

But Moscow, for whatever reasons, sees it as a direct threat.

The Kremlin says the system will upset the regional security balance and could be used against itself.

Interestingly enough, Polish officials see Russia as a bigger threat to their security than Iran, and the Polish government believes only the United States can guarantee its security.

Vladimir Putin, the prime minister of Russia, has tried strong-arming former Soviet republics into falling back into Moscow's satellite system. In August, while most Americans were too busy watching the Olympics to notice, Russia invaded Georgia, a democratic ally of the United States.

Americans should have realized by now the nature of Vladimir Putin and his efforts to create a new Russian Empire.

And so, even though the missile shield is officially intended to only defend against an Iranian attack, it should go ahead as planned, in spite of Russia's resistance — or perhaps because of Russia's resistance — just in case.

Unfortunately, President-elect Barack Obama has made "no commitment" to the missile defense program in Eastern Europe.

Obama said earlier this year that the system would require much more testing to ensure it would work properly. But additional tests could delay the program for years, and by then it could be too late.

During the primaries, Obama said that he would "cut investments in unproven missile defense systems," even though in recent tests in the Pacific and elsewhere the system has shown itself to be a formidable potential shield against enemy attack.

Obama has also pledged to "slow our development of future combat systems" and seek "deep cuts" in our own arsenal of nuclear weapons, unilaterally disabling our nuclear deterrent as Russia is engaging in massive military buildups.

Former U.N. Ambassador John Bolton said that "leaders around the world see Obama as soft, untested and weak" and they will "react accordingly."

Biden knows that our enemies see Barack Obama as a more accommodating, and weaker, foe.

Russia carefully watched as Obama disparaged missile-defense research and deployment during the primaries.

They want to see whether they can intimidate Obama into retreat, even after eastern European nations like Poland have already signed onto a partnership with the United States for these missile-defense stations.

In response to seeing a supposed weakling in the White House, will Russia do something drastic in Eastern Europe, like invade Ukraine or bomb Poland?

Russia wants its empire back. And it isn't going to wait.

Equal rights: Step forward or step back?



Taylor Doe
Columnist

Incredible new feats were accomplished in the continuing fight for equality with this year's election of the first black president. But we were also reminded once again that we still have a way to go in the struggle for equality. In Florida, Arizona and California, initiatives to ban gay marriage were on the ballot and were passed

by those states' respective voters.

The most controversial of these initiatives was California's Proposition 8, which sought to define marriage as a union between one man and one woman. Supporters argue that allowing for gay marriage undermines the value of marriage. Opponents of this proposal challenge that religious groups should not be allowed to impose their definitions of morality on the state.

In simple terms, Proposition 8 seeks to strip homosexuals of the right to marriage that has already been ruled constitutionally protected by the highest court in California.

Proposition 8 passed with only 52.4 percent of the vote. This shows a clear trend towards acceptance of gay marriage when compared to the 61 percent who voted for Proposition 22 in 2000. Laws of this magnitude should not be put into law without a supermajority, such as the Florida gay marriage ban, which was required to pass with a supermajority of at least 60 percent.

The special interest groups who fought for Proposition 8's passage did so with a campaign of lies and smears, relying on tactics of fear to mislead California voters. The "Yes on 8" group ran television ads that showed a young girl coming home from school, telling her mother she had learned she could marry a princess that day. Nowhere in Proposition 8 is education mentioned, and furthermore, California law prohibits children from being taught about health or family issues at school against their parents' will.

Women were denied the right to vote for years. There was a time in this country when the law would have forbidden Barack Obama's white mother to marry his black father. We've come to recognize the irrational prejudice that led to the creation of such discriminatory laws and made efforts to correct these mistakes.

The fight must continue as it has for so many different people in the history of the United States, with faith that, in the end, equality will be the prevailing law of the land.