Republican congressional winners put on notice

Jeff Dreibus
OPINION

Guest commentary

Congratulations, Republican candidates. You are no doubt in full gloat over your recent victory in the House.

But let me remind you: This is not a mandate for your policies; it is a mandate against those of the radical Democrats. A certain American demographic threw you out of office two and four years ago just as surely as they threw out the Democrats on Tuesday. You can't win without the self-employed, the working class and the independent vote — so take heed. This time, please DO NOT:

■ Continue to ignore your oath to uphold all aspects of our Constitution, including the mandate to secure our borders against all who would enter illegally.

■ Continue to allow corporate America to run roughshod over us. We know highway robbery vs. free market capitalism when we see it.

■ Continue to allow the health insurance industry to bleed us dry on one hand and refuse us coverage on the other — but neither force us to subsidize the industry as did "Republican" Mitt Romney and Obama & Co.

■ Continue to allow the self-employed to be soaked for double "Socialist Security" taxes.

■ Continue to subsidize the loss of our jobs to enemy nations while making us dependent upon those nations for commodities and finished goods.

■ Continue to fight a "war on terror" when we are actually in the midst of a holy war initiated by fanatics who rule a specific region of the globe with an iron fist (and who will soon rule much of Europe). And when it comes to creating and implementing "national security policy" against innocent Americans, please refer to No. 1 above.

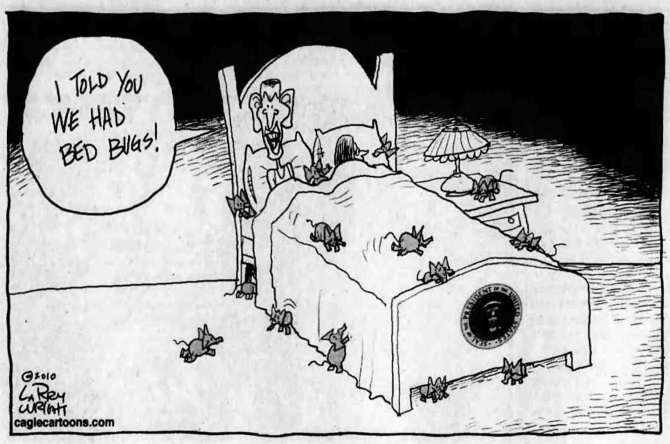
■ Continue to try to convince us that those who earn over a quarter million dollars per year are the "middle class"; we who fix your stuff and clean up your messes fit that definition much better. I would have included "we who make the things which you buy" as well, but you sent those jobs to China et. al. long ago.

■ Continue to decree for yourselves special perks and privileges not shared by your fellow Americans. And, for crying out loud, implement those term limits — and vote in a national "do not call" list for your annoying campaign robo-calls.

Otherwise, you will again get the same treatment you received in '06 and '08. Perhaps a third party might soon arise to consign you to the ash heap of obscurity, much as you once did the Whigs. We vote for you in the hope that we might be allowed to keep those liberties that are guaranteed to us by the Bill of Rights, not so that we can impoverish ourselves by subsidizing the ever-more omnivorous governmental/corporate cartel. Don't disappoint us again.

If you want more input from a low-income, self-employed person, I'm in the book. Of course, I don't expect the phone to ring anytime soon.

Jeff Dreibus lives in Nebo.



Broder's brainstorm didn't have much sense behind it

Pat Buchanan
OPINION

Syndicated columnist

Though Obama "may lose control of Congress," says columnist David Broder, he "can still storm back to win a second term in 2012."

How does Broder suggest Obama go about it?

"Look back at FDR and the Great Depression. What finally resolved that economic crisis? World War II."

Conceding the prospect of a new war is "frightening," Broder goes on to list the rich rewards of Obama's emulating FDR.

"With strong Republican support in Congress for challenging Iran's ambition to become a nuclear power, (Obama) can spend much of 2011 and 2012 orchestrating a showdown with the mullahs. This will help him politically because the opposition party will be urging him on. And as tensions rise and we accelerate preparations for war, the economy will improve. ...

"(T)he nation will rally around Obama because Iran is the greatest threat to the world in the young century. If he can confront this threat and contain Iran's nuclear ambitions, he will have made the world safer and may be regarded as one of the most successful presidents in history."

Where to start?

Cynicism aside, what is wrong with Broder's analysis?

First, how exactly are "preparations for war" on Iran going to improve our economy when two actual wars costing $1 trillion have left us in the deepest recession since the 1930s?

Were those wars just not big enough?

If war is good for the economy, why is this nation, at war for a decade, growing at 2 percent, while China, which invests in rogue regimes rather than bomb them, is booming?

Moreover, any attack on Iran's nuclear facilities would be carried out by air and missile strikes from ships and planes already in the U.S. arsenal. We would not need the tens of thousands of ships, tanks, guns and planes we needed in WWII, or the 12 million men under arms.

The first result of a U.S. strike would be to pull Iran's oil off the world market. If Iran responded by mining the Gulf or sinking a tanker, oil would go to $300 a barrel and gasoline to $10 a gallon. Does Broder think that would give a nice boost to the U.S. and world economy?

Japan's attack at Pearl Harbor united us in rage and resolve. Should we attack Iran's nuclear facilities, when its nuclear program is supported by both sides of that divided country, we would likely unite Iranians in patriotic anger and convince any doubters that Tehran must acquire nuclear weapons to deter us.

We would then have to invade Iran to win the war, as that would be the only sure way to remove a regime that would be hell-bent on revenge through terror and every other means.

Memo to Broder: We don't have the troops to invade Iran, which is three times as large as Iraq.

And as Obama's "preparations for war" are under way, how does Broder propose we defend our diplomats and civilians in Lebanon, who are a cab ride from Hezbollah in south Beirut?

Broder says, "Iran is the greatest threat to the world in the young century."

Threat to whom?

But a threat to whom?

Iran's next-door neighbor Turkey does not see Iran as a threat.

Iraq's leaders make regular treks to Tehran for advice in forming a new government. Our man in Kabul, Hamid Karzai, admits to getting "bags of cash" from Iran.

Syria has excellent relations with Tehran. Lebanon just hosted President Ahmadinejad.

If the neighbors can live with Iran, why are we, with 5,000 nuclear weapons, 6,000 miles away, so fearful?

Israel calls Iran "an existential threat."

But Israel has 200 nukes and the planes, subs and missiles to deliver them, while U.N. inspectors claim Iran has not diverted any of its low-enriched uranium for conversion to weapons grade.

Should it do so, say U.S. officials, we would have a year's notice before Iran could even test a device, let alone build a bomb.

America has deterred Stalin, Mao and Kim Jong-Il, all men with nuclear arsenals and far more frightening than Ahmadinejad, who is well into his second term, unpopular, with an economy in shambles. Moreover, Ahmadinejad does not make the war-or-peace decision for Iran.

If Obama prepares for war and Iran refuses to back down, how many U.S. dead and wounded would Broder consider a fair price to pay for a second term for his "enduringly superior" leader?

To find out more about Patrick Buchanan, and read features by other Creators Syndicate writers and cartoonists, visit the Creators Syndicate Web page at www.creators.com.

Tracing shifts in al-Qaeda strategy

David Ignatius
OPINION

Syndicated columnist

Behind the latest terrorism plots is an al-Qaeda leadership that is getting battered in Pakistan but is determined to strike back wherever it can — using a dispersed network and new tactics that are harder to detect.

The package bombs sent last week from Yemen are one face of al-Qaeda's continuing campaign. The Yemeni operatives are nimble, adaptive and "frustratingly clever," says a U.S. counterterrorism official. "They have one main goal, which is to mess with us."

The Yemen-based operations came as intelligence officials were struggling to disrupt another al-Qaeda plot to launch Mumbai-style attacks in European cities. Officials say that plan involved roughly 25 al-Qaeda terrorists, organized into cells of perhaps three to five members who would stage roving assaults in one or more European cities. Of the 25, about 10 have been captured or killed, according to a second U.S. official.

While these operations are tactically separate, officials say they both reflect a secret mid-2009 directive from an embattled Osama bin Laden to his followers to *demonstrate* that al-Qaeda could still do damage.

Long fight ahead

For U.S. officials, these latest terror plots have been a grim reminder that there's a long fight ahead against al-Qaeda, with no "quick fixes" available. Defense isn't enough: The explosives sent from Yemen can't be detected by conventional X-ray screening or sniffer dogs, so stopping these plots requires good intelligence, as was the case last week when Saudi Arabia tipped the U.S. about the package bombs.

Nobody wants to say so publicly, but the lesson of the last few weeks, for me at least, is that one of these days the terrorists will succeed — and people should be prepared for that likelihood. The greatest damage won't be the attack itself but the public response. The Yemeni plotters saw the frenzy produced by their failed Christmas Day bombing attempt on a flight to Detroit. They must be hoping now, with the package bombs, to disrupt cargo-handling around the world and damage a fragile global economy.

As the CIA has stalked al-Qaeda over the past two years, this has been a story of punch and counterpunch, of escalating U.S. drone attacks over Pakistan's tribal areas and defiant al-Qaeda responses. As the senior U.S. official says, this is a "learning enemy" that adapts its tools and tactics as the West alters its defenses.

To understand the latest news, it helps to scroll back to early 2008. The CIA gathered intelligence that al-Qaeda leaders were regrouping, forming new alliances and planning new operations in the West. At that time, the CIA's attacks from Predator drones were sporadic, and Pakistan was consulted before each attack.

So the Bush administration escalated the drone attacks in mid-2008. Now, Pakistan was given only "concurrent" notification, which in practice meant it was informed after the drone had launched its missile. Moreover, the CIA was authorized to strike targets that had a "signature" of terrorist activity, rather than a precise identification. President Obama has increased the tempo of Predator attacks even more.

The directive

The drone attacks have pounded al-Qaeda and killed key members of its leadership. Bin Laden reacted with his mid-2009 directive, which the U.S. official summarizes this way: "Undertake operations however and wherever you can. We need to prove ourselves again." Specifically, bin Laden directed operatives to plan assaults in Europe similar to the November 2008 attacks that killed about 175 people and terrified Mumbai.

The U.S. and its European allies have been working hard to disrupt the Mumbai copycat operations. Since the third week of August, the CIA has conducted more than 40 drone attacks on the tribal areas, more than in all of 2008. A British national was killed in Pakistan in September, and two Germans in October. Other plotters have been arrested in Europe and Pakistan. Officials say they can't be sure yet whether the terror plans have been shelved.

A similar escalation is likely in Yemen, with soldiers from the U.S. Joint Special Operations Command working with Yemeni government forces. The JSOC sums up its lethal approach with the phrase "find, fix, finish," but a U.S. official says it has been hard to keep track of al-Qaeda targets in Yemen's tribal villages and cities.

The reality is that the adversary that declared war on the United States in 1996 is still active — morphing and mobilizing even as it is hunted by America and its allies. It's a nasty fight, and it's far from over.

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