

## Barack Obama should stop apologising for America

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It is time for President Obama to recognise that his strategy is weakening his country and making the United States more vulnerable to attack, says Nile Gardiner.

No leader in American history has gone to greater lengths than Barack Obama to make amends for his own country. From condemnation of American "arrogance" in a speech in Strasbourg to acknowledging U.S. "mistakes" before millions of Muslims on Arab television, Obama has rarely missed an opportunity to apologise for the actions of the American people.

President Obama has elevated the art of national self-loathing to new heights, and seems to delight in prostrating the most powerful nation on the face of the earth before its critics and rivals, especially on foreign soil. The Obama worldview revolves around the central premise that the United States must be humble and "engage" and work with its enemies through the application of "smart power". There is nothing smart, however, in appeasing rogue states such as North Korea or Iran.

The Obama doctrine is now lying in tatters after North Korean tyrant Kim Jong-Il and Iranian demagogue Mahmoud Ahmadinejad met Obama's recent overtures with missile tests and even a nuclear blast from Pyongyang. The president's video message in March offering "a new beginning" to "the people and leaders of the Islamic Republic of Iran" was followed by the launch of a surface-to-surface missile with a range of 1,200 miles capable of reaching southern Europe. Incredibly, the U.S. response has been to slash defense spending, with a dramatic scaling down of plans for a global missile defence shield.

The world today is considerably more dangerous than it was in the days of the Bush Administration, and the Obama White House has nothing to show for its weak-kneed efforts. The brutal truth is that the United States is increasingly viewed as a soft touch by its enemies, increasingly jeered rather than feared.

When he travels to the Middle East and Europe this week, the president will have ample opportunity to do what he does best - atone for America's past. After a brief visit to Saudi Arabia he will deliver a major address to the Muslim world in Cairo, before travelling to Germany to visit the Buchenwald Nazi concentration camp and meet with Chancellor Angela Merkel in Dresden. His world tour ends with his participation in ceremonies marking the 65th anniversary of the D-Day landings in Normandy.

It will be hugely tempting for the rock star president to play to his Arab and European audiences by scoring points against his hugely unpopular predecessor. He could easily rail against the Bush Administration's enhanced interrogation

techniques, boast of the impending closure of the Guantanamo detention facility, or revive the ghosts of Abu Ghraib. The president's advisers are no doubt furiously trying to outdo one another with the most original mea culpas.

Obama's supine approach has become a humiliating spectacle for a country that, together with Great Britain, has done more to advance the cause of liberty and freedom across the world than any nation in the world. Every groveling apology by the president undermines America's confidence, standing and power, and strengthens the hand of those who seek her destruction.

It is time for President Obama to recognise that his new strategy is weakening his country and making the United States more vulnerable to attack. The dream of America haters who revel in the vision of the humbling of a superpower, is being realised by an administration that has so far fundamentally rejected the idea of American exceptionalism.

The world needs a president who aggressively projects American power on the world stage, rather than seeks the adoration of traditionally hostile foreign audiences. In Egypt, Obama should not be afraid to offend the sensibilities of Muslim leaders, by calling for religious tolerance, freedom of speech, worship and association, and a rejection of Islamist extremism.

In Germany, the president should call on Europe to learn the lessons of the Holocaust and stand and fight against totalitarianism, whether in the form of the Taliban in Afghanistan or the Mullahs of Tehran in their drive for nuclear domination of the Middle East. He must urge the Germans to end their massive investments in Iran, which shamefully help sustain a regime that threatens to wipe the descendants of the survivors of the Final Solution from the face of the earth.

In Normandy, President Obama should take great pride in America's role in the liberation of Europe and remind his French hosts that Europe is free today because of the huge sacrifice of American, British and Commonwealth forces. This is a moment for the president to recognise American global power and the role it has played as a great force for good, as well as the broader importance of the transatlantic alliance and the Anglo-American Special Relationship.

No one expects Barack Obama to adopt the swagger of a John Wayne or Clint Eastwood when he travels to the Middle East and Western Europe. But he should adopt a more forceful and confident approach to international affairs that marks him as a force to be reckoned with rather than a Jimmy Carter-like pushover. It is not too late for the president to acknowledge that the time for apologies is over, that the world needs robust American leadership that projects strength and power rather than timidity and weakness.

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