

Graffiti for intellectuals



SIMON SAYS



By Si Frumkin

ANOTHER CHARITY PUZZLE

About two years ago I wrote "The Charity Puzzle", an article on the way Americans donate. I had just finished a fascinating book, "Who Really Cares?" by professor Arthur Brooks, that analyzed American charity donors by different religions, political views, age and income. It showed that liberals gave much less than conservatives, that the religious were much more generous than the secular, that the elderly gave more than the young and that the rich gave a smaller percentage of their income than those who earned less than \$50,000 a year. (If you are interested in knowing more – contact me and I will send you a copy of the article).



Intrigued, I went international, dug through the Internet and learned that Americans give incomparably more than other nations. We give 1.7% of our GDP, more than twice that of the 2nd place U.K. with 0.73%,

followed by other English-speaking countries with 0.7%, several Europeans with 0.5% and, in last place, France with just 1/10 of 1%.

There were no really impressive reasons for the differences. I ended my article by remarking, snidely, that it looked as if the stingiest person in the world had to be a rich liberal French atheist under 35.

I didn't think very much about this subject in the subsequent two years. I kept on writing my own charity checks, bugged others to support and contribute to worthy causes and felt good about knowing that so many of my fellow Americans were doing the same.

Then, as the current political campaign wound down to a finish and the candidates tried hard to impress the voters, I came across information that sheds a light on the peculiar character of one of the major figures on the political battlefield. This information is easily available, it has been published here and there with little comment, but as far as I know, the candidate in question, prospective vice-president of the United States, Senator Joe Biden, has never been asked a direct question about being so extremely tightfisted in giving to charity. There may well be a good explanation. I would very much like to know what it is.

Here are the facts: the Joe and Jill Biden tax returns for the years 1998 - 2007 show a total income of \$2,450,042 and a total of charity contributions of \$3,690 – about one eighth of 1%.

The Bidens' worst year was 1999 – adjusted income of \$210,797 and a contribution of \$120 - less than one sixteenth of 1%.

Their best year was 2007 with an income of \$319, 853 and donations of \$995 – slightly more than a quarter of 1%.

Syracuse University's professor Arthur Brooks, the author of the book I mentioned in the beginning, says that the average American household gives about two percent of adjusted gross income a year. For the Biden household this would have meant a contribution of \$49,000 for the 10 years. They gave \$3,690 – one fifteenth of what an average American family gives!

By comparison, Al Gore, the 1992 Democratic candidate for vice president, donated \$1,727 out of an income of \$183,558 – about 1%. This too was about half of what an average American gives but compared to Biden, Al Gore was generous – he gave more in one year than Biden did in five years! I should add that Gore was much less generous when he wasn't running for office – in 1997 he gave \$353 from an income of almost \$200,000 – just 1/17th of 1%!

Are all politicians this stingy? Well, some aren't. Tod and Sarah Palin released their tax returns for 2006 - \$166,080 and 2007 - \$127,869 or a total income of \$293,949 for

the two years with charity contributions of \$8105. This works out to about 2.75% and compares to Biden's donation for the same amount earnings of just \$570! There is also Dick Cheney, the current vice-president whose 10-year tax return showed an average yearly donation of "just" 2.14%. At the time he was roundly castigated by the New York Times and other mainstream media for being "meager" and, in the words of recent Weekly Standard editorial, "raked over the coals for his low level of charitable giving."

The coals must have cooled off since then. The current contestant for Democratic vice president does not outrage the New York Times for giving only about 1/15 of the percentages given by the Palins and the Cheneys.



To be fair, the Democratic presidential candidate has far outclassed his appointed vice-president. Barack Obama's charitable contributions for 2006-2007 show a 5.8%-6.1% donation to charity. But to be even fairer, McCain has given 27.3-28.6% during the same time – almost 6 times as much as Obama.

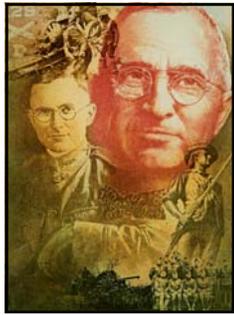
Isn't it puzzling that while the widely trumpeted compassion of one political party is largely concentrated on giving away someone else's money - yours and mine, fellow taxpayers - their cheapskate leaders, with little notice and practically no comment from the major print and TV media that usually glory in scandalous information – or even their political opponents - get away with disgusting miserliness and disregard for personal charity when it affects their own check-books? ●

THE INEXPERIENCED PRESIDENT

By Si Frumkin

I have a confession to make. Just like Sarah Palin I didn't know what the "Bush Doctrine" was. Oh, I knew that Bush (and many other presidents – here and in other countries – Israel before the 1967 6-Day War comes to mind) supported the idea of a pre-emptive strike when an enemy was about to attack. What I didn't know is that this was called a "Bush Doctrine". I am also sure that most history majors wouldn't have known it, but I think that they know it now. The Palin interview by Charles Gibson enlightened them.

On the other hand, I am ready to agree that Sarah is not too knowledgeable about foreign affairs. I am also sure that she will learn very fast – she is a bright and capable person, probably much more so than Charles Gibson. She is also very capable and cool when submitted to an overwhelming attack by prejudiced media. She can handle it. And yes, she is a heartbeat from the presidency and I think she would be able to handle it too. After all, a president



does not reach decisions by meditating and deciding alone in a locked room. He discusses the problem with advisers and experts, looks at possible solutions, weighs them and then makes a decision. This is his (or her) job.

Some of our best presidents reached the White House with much less experience than Sarah Palin, were strong enough to overrule their advisers and face calamitous approval ratings by the public, condemnation and contempt by the media, and vicious criticism by the scholarly elite only to have their greatness recognized decades later.

One of these mavericks was a small time politician, a failed businessman, a man who never went to college and whose only leadership experience was to be a captain of artillery in the Missouri National Guard during World War I – Harry S. Truman.

Truman's family couldn't afford college tuition. After finishing high school he worked as a bank clerk, local postmaster, town road overseer and national guardsman. In 1915 he became a partner in a lead mine and a year later in an oil-prospecting business. Both failed.

His National Guard unit was sent to France in 1917. After the war he opened a

haberdashery store in Kansas City which also went bankrupt.

In 1922 he won a seat as a county judge but was defeated in 1924 when Ku Klux Klan rallied against him. He went on to sell Automobile Club memberships and study, at night, in Kansas City Law School. A state bank where he became a partner went bankrupt soon after but Truman enjoyed his first business success when he organized a Savings and Loan Association in Independence.

In 1926, with the help of the Pendergast political machine that controlled Democratic politics in Missouri, Truman became the presiding judge of the county court. Truman's political career seemed to be at an end after traditional two 4-year terms but, with Pendergast machine's support, in 1935, he ran for the U.S. Senate.

He came to Washington under a cloud as a puppet for a corrupt political boss but built a reputation as a capable and honest legislator. In 1940, Tom Pendergast went to prison in a bribery scandal but Truman was re-elected in a three-man race. The newspapers rated him a distant third.



In 1944, Roosevelt picked Truman for his vice-president. This lasted just 82 days – Roosevelt died on April 12, 1945 – and Truman came to the White House completely un-

aware of the administration's plans and programs, including the development of the atomic bomb.

Vital decisions had to be made and Truman learned in a hurry. He participated in writing the United Nations charter, arranging for Germany's unconditional surrender on May 8, 1945, attended the Potsdam summit meeting, and approved the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He also overrode his State Department in recognizing Israel's independence.

In 1948 he ran for President against the advice of his party leaders – he faced the defection from the Democratic party of Southern Democrats – "Dixiecrats" – and the left-leaning Henry Wallace populists. He won against all odds.

During the next 4 years Truman developed the "containment" policy to counteract Soviet territorial advances: the Truman Doctrine for economic and military help to Turkey and Greece to reduce communist pressure; the Marshall Plan that enabled Europe's economic recovery; the NATO pact of 1949 for collective security; the Berlin airlift in 1948 after Soviets blockaded the city. He established the CIA, created the "Point Four" program to help underdeveloped countries, and decided to construct the hydrogen bomb to ensure superiority over the Soviets. In 1950 he sent U.S. troops to Korea to stop the invading North Korean forces, and eventually, the Chinese who came in to support their ally. In the process he fired the enormously popular General MacArthur who advocated invading China against Truman's orders.

There was also domestic turmoil when Truman faced off striking miners, reluctant businessmen and McCarthy supporters who claimed that the administration was infiltrated by communists.

Truman left his office in 1953. He had few vocal admirers and many influential critics who still felt that he was a man too small for his job. With time this has changed. Harry Truman is seen as one of the greatest American leaders. It is unfortunate indeed that Truman's "inexperience" is seldom mentioned as the attacks on the "inexperienced" Governor Palin continue. Ω



WILL RUSSIA GET AWAY WITH IT?

By William Kristol, August 11, 2008, New York Times

In August 1924, the small nation of Georgia, occupied by Soviet Russia since 1921, rose up against Soviet rule. On Sept. 16, 1924, The Times of London reported on an appeal by the president of the Georgian Republic to the League of Nations. While “sympathetic reference to his country’s efforts was made” in the Assembly, the Times said, “it is realized that the League is incapable of rendering material aid, and that the moral influence which may be a powerful force with civilized countries is unlikely to make any impression upon Soviet Russia.”

“Unlikely” was an understatement. Georgians did not enjoy freedom again until 1991.

Today, the Vladimir Putins and Hu Jintaos and Mahmoud Ahmadinejads of the world — to say nothing of their junior counterparts in places like Sudan, Zimbabwe, Burma and North Korea — are no more likely than were Soviet leaders in 1924 to be swayed by “moral influence.” Dictators aren’t moved by the claims of justice unarmed; aggressors aren’t intimidated by diplomacy absent the credible threat of force; fanatics aren’t deterred by the disapproval of men of moderation or refinement.

The good news is that today we don’t face threats of the magnitude of Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union. Each of those regimes combined ruthless internal control, a

willingness to engage in external aggression, and fervent adherence to an extreme ideology. Today these elements don’t coexist in one place. Russia is aggressive, China despotic and Iran messianic — but none is as dangerous as the 20th-century totalitarian states.

The further good news is that 2008 has been, in one respect, an auspicious year for freedom and democracy. In Iraq, we and our Iraqi allies are on the verge of a strategic victory over the jihadists in what they have called the central front of their struggle. This joint victory has the potential to weaken the jihadist impulse throughout the Middle East.

On the other hand, the ability of Syria, Hezbollah and Hamas to get away with murder (literally), and above all the ability of Iran to pursue its nuclear ambitions effectively unchecked, are setbacks for hopes of peace and progress.

And there is no evidence that China’s hosting of the Olympics has led to moderation of its authoritarianism. Meanwhile, Russia has sent troops and tanks across an international border, and now seems to be



widening its war against Georgia more than its original — and in any case illegitimate — *casus belli* would justify.

For that matter, consider the implications of our turning away from Georgia for other aspiring pro-Western governments in the neighborhood, like Ukraine’s. Shouldn’t we therefore

now insist that normal relations with Russia are impossible as long as the aggression continues, strongly reiterate our commitment to the territorial integrity of Georgia and Ukraine, and offer emergency military aid to Georgia?

Incidentally, has Russia really been helping much on Iran? It has gone along with — while delaying — three United Nations Security Council resolutions that have imposed mild sanctions on Iran. But it has also supplied material for Iran’s nuclear program, and is now selling Iran anti-aircraft systems to protect military and nuclear installations.

It’s striking that dictatorial and aggressive and fanatical regimes — whatever their differ-

ences — seem happy to work together to weaken the influence of the United States and its democratic allies. So Russia helps Iran. Iran and North Korea help Syria. Russia and China block Security Council sanctions against Zimbabwe.

China props up the regimes in Burma and North Korea.

The United States, of course, is not without resources and allies to deal with these problems and threats. But at times we seem oddly timid and uncertain.

When the “civilized world” expostulated with Russia about Georgia in 1924, the Soviet regime was still weak. In Germany, Hitler was in jail. Only 16 years later, Britain stood virtually alone against a Nazi-Soviet axis. Is it not true today, as it was in the 1920s and ’30s, that delay and irresolution on the part of the democracies simply invite future threats and graver dangers? ¥

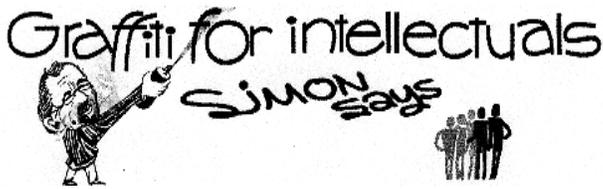


Women in Black Sea Port of Sevastopol greet the first Russian navy ship to return from its operations against Georgia. Bigger celebrations are planned for tomorrow.

Will the United States put real pressure on Russia to stop? In a news analysis on Sunday, the New York Times reporter Helene Cooper accurately captured what I gather is the prevailing view in our State Department: “While America considers Georgia its strongest ally in the bloc of former Soviet countries, Washington needs Russia too much on big issues like Iran to risk it all to defend Georgia.”

But Georgia, a nation of about 4.6 million, has had the third-largest military presence — about 2,000 troops — fighting along with U.S. soldiers and marines in Iraq. For this reason alone, we owe Georgia a serious effort to defend its sovereignty. Surely we cannot simply stand by as an autocratic aggressor gobbles up part of — and perhaps destabilizes all of — a friendly democratic nation that we were sponsoring for NATO membership a few months ago.





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FORGETTING THE EVILS OF COMMUNISM By Jonah Goldberg,

Alexander Solzhenitsyn is dead. Peter Rodman is dead. And memory is dying with them.

Over the weekend, Solzhenitsyn, the 89-year-old literary titan, and Rodman, the American foreign policy intellectual, passed away. I knew Rodman and liked him very much. We were partners in a debate at Oxford University last year. He provided the gravitas. A former protege of Henry Kissinger and high-ranking official in two Republican administrations, Rodman was one of the wisest of the wise men of the conservative foreign policy establishment. Calm, elegant, dryly funny, brilliant, but most of all gentlemanly. He died too young, at 64, of leukemia.

Solzhenitsyn was, of course, a landmark of the 20th century, one of the few authors capable of elevating literature to the stuff of world affairs.

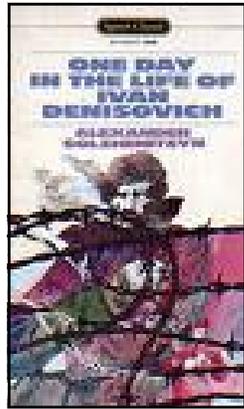
What I admired most in both men was their memory. They remembered important things, specifically the evil of communism. And, perhaps nearly as important, they remembered who recognized that evil and who did not.

Rodman, for example, was an architect of the Reagan Doctrine in places such as Angola and Afghanistan. His book, "More Precious Than Peace: The Cold War and the Struggle for the Third World," was the quintessential defense of thwarting the Soviets in ugly spots of the globe where Americans were understandably reluctant to spend blood or treasure

In Berlin on July 24, Barack Obama's history of the Cold War sounded cheerier. There

was a lot of unity and "standing as one," and we dropped some candy on Berlin, and now we need to be unified like we were then.

But unity was hardly the defining feature of the Cold War. There were supposed allies reluctant to help and official enemies who were eager to do their share. There were Russians -- like Solzhenitsyn -- who bravely told the world about Soviet barbarity. And here at home, there were a great many Americans, including intellectual heirs to the "useful idiots" Lenin relied on, who rolled their eyes at self-styled "cold warriors" such as Rodman. And from Vietnam through the SANE/Freeze movement, liberal resolve and unity were aimed most passionately against America's policies -- not the Soviet Union's.



Having recently published a book on fascism, I think I understand why so many people refused to see the evil in communism. It was well-intentioned. The Soviets were our allies in World War II. Communists spoke of socialism and liberation, and their agents, friends and apologists in the U.S. were comrades in arms with Americans battling racism. But it's worth remembering how evil Communist governments really were. Stalin murdered more people than Hitler. The hammer-and-sickle's stack of bones towers high above the swastika's. "The Black Book of Communism," a scholarly accounting of communism's crimes, counts about 94 million murdered by the supposed champions of the common man (20 million for the Soviets alone), and some argue that that number is too low.

If, after the moral cataclysm that was the Holocaust, you wish to say that the Nazis were more evil than the Soviets, fine. But don't roll your eyes at serious people who consider anti-communism no less honorable and righteous than anti-Nazism. Look to the Holodomor in Ukraine, where 4 million to 6 million people were murdered and a culture largely erased. Terror and the purges, massacres and the assassinations, forced starvation of millions -- these are all horrors that we rightly associate with Nazism but somehow fail to correlate with communism.

In 1974, when the New Yorker reviewed Solzhenitsyn's "The Gulag Archipelago," George Steiner wrote: "To infer that the Soviet Terror is as hideous as Hitlerism is not only a brutal oversimplification but a moral indecency." When Ronald Reagan denounced the "evil empire" -- because it was evil and it was an empire -- he too was accused of absurd oversimplification.

The real brutal oversimplification is the treacle we hear from Obama, that victory in the Cold War was some Hallmark-movie lesson in global hand-holding. The reality is that it was a long slog, and throughout, the champions of "unity" wanted to capitulate to this evil and the champions of freedom were rewarded with ridicule.

"This is the moment," Obama proclaimed, "when every nation in Europe must have the chance to choose its own tomorrow free from the shadows of yesterday." Rodman and Solzhenitsyn understood that such talk was dangerously naive. People free from the "shadow of yesterday" forget things they swore never to forget.