

Graffiti for intellectuals



SIMON SAYS



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By SI FRUMKIN

DEMOCRACY ANALYZED

Winston Churchill's jocular pro-democracy definition is probably one of his better known quotes: *"It has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all the others that have been tried."*

There is, however, a quote that is much less known; it presents a very different point of view: *"The best argument against democracy is a five minute conversation with the average voter."* This sentiment was echoed by George Bernard Shaw: *"Democracy is a device that ensures we shall be governed no better than we deserve."*

Both points of view, as contradictory as they are, are right. Democracy is indeed a better system than all the others – just ask the citizens who live in democracies and compare them to those who do not. But democracy – based on decisions made by a majority of citizens through an open and



honest voting process – doesn't always produce positive results.

The probably most egregious historical example is Hitler's rise to power in

1933, after the 1932 elections, when the Nazi party won 230 seats out of the 608 German parliament seats, making it the largest political party in Germany. On January 30, 1933, German President, Paul von Hindenburg appointed Hitler as the new German chancellor and the rest, as they say, is history.

There are, of course, many contemporary examples. Putin's popularity in Russia is not a result of a military putsch or dishonest elections – he was elected by a majority of voters who believed in him as a strong leader who would restore law and order within, and will once again make Russia an international superpower.

In the Middle East, Hamas in Gaza is one of very few entities that can claim to have been elected in democratic elections. It is overwhelmingly popular even though it has succeeded in destroying Gaza's economy and obliterating the Israeli enterprises that provided tens of thousands of jobs for the Gazans, preferring a policy of terror attacks against innocent Israeli civilians. Still, and in

spite of the current decimation of the civilian population, chances are that if elections were held again, Hamas would be voted into power again.

Closer to home, I have serious misgivings about American democracy. I am puzzled and saddened - by one aspect of the last elections. President Bush is leaving his office with one of the lowest approval ratings in history. There is little doubt that if he had been able to run for reelection he would have lost in a landslide. Yet, he was not unique in not being appreciated by the American electorate; our Congress constantly had lower approval ratings than the despised George W. – between 15% and 18% compared to the 22% for the President!

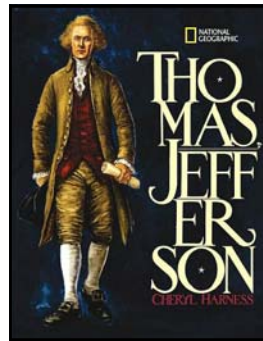
Why is it then that an overwhelming majority of Senate and House incumbents were voted back into office?

Here are the facts: 95% of House incumbents and 93% of Senators won reelection in 2008, at the same time as their approval ratings should have assured their unemployment in Washington for many years to come. It is interesting that the unusually low ratings apparently changed nothing when compared to the previous elections when more Americans approved of what Congress was doing: in the prior 10 years and 5 election cycles, an average of 97% of house members and 86% of Senators won reelection – incumbents ruled!

One of the important factors in this peculiar discrepancy between popularity and election is money; according to the nonpartisan Center for Responsive Policies, almost without exception, the candidates who spent

the most money ended up winning. The most obvious example of this is the Presidential race where Obama declined public financing and went to victory with an almost two-to-one monetary advantage over McCain.

I wish our new President all the best in his attempt to pull the country out of the crisis we are facing. I am, however, more than a little skeptical about his eventual success. I believe with Ronald Reagan that *"Government is not the solution. It is the problem."* But at this time, and after the election euphoria, it certainly seems that President Obama will have a free hand to experiment with untested economic policies without losing public approval, personal adulation, and unlimited praise from the media, and high popular ratings with the electorate that is blaming everything on the discredited George W.



I hope that President Obama will keep in mind the warnings of Thomas Jefferson, the author of our Constitution, who said, *"The democracy will cease to exist when you take away from those who are willing to work and give to those who would not"* and *"I predict future happiness for Americans if they can prevent the government from wasting the labors of the people under the pretense of taking care of them."*

Unfortunately, the major elements of the "Hope" and "Change" slogans of the Obama governing philosophy are exactly what Jefferson was warning us against. I hope that wiser heads in Washington will prevail, but I have my doubts. I will end, therefore, with a funny but appropriate quote by comedian, Dave Barry: *"The Democrats seem to be basically nicer people, but they have demonstrated time and again that they have the management skills of celery."*

IRAN IS THE "MOTHER REGIME" OF HAMAS AND HEZBOLLAH - WILL ISRAEL GO IT ALONE?

Exclusive interview with Bibi Netanyahu, by Bret Stephens, Wall Str. Journal, 1/24/09

Jerusalem -- IT'S SUNDAY MORNING, AND I'VE BEEN TRYING FOR DAYS TO GET AN INTERVIEW WITH FORMER -- AND, IF HIS POLL NUMBERS HOLD up through the Feb. 10 election, soon-to-be -- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. But it's a political season, and there's a war on, and my calls aren't being returned. With nothing better to do, I go downstairs to the hotel gym for a jog.

So who should be on the treadmill next to mine? Benjamin Netanyahu. We chat for a few minutes, mostly about the cease-fire that the government of outgoing Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has just declared, and I ask if he'd be willing to sit for an interview later in the day. His answer is something between a "maybe" and a "yes." As a nod to the customs of the country, I take that as a definite yes, so much the better to press his aides to arrange the meeting.

When the interview finally happens, in the grand reception hall of the old King David Hotel, it's close to one o'clock in the morning on Monday. Mr. Netanyahu has come from a long dinner with visiting European leaders -- French President Nicolas Sarkozy, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown and German Chancellor Angela Merkel among them -- and he is plainly exhausted, joking that he can't be held responsible for anything he might say.

The crack is unnecessary. Rare for a leading Israeli political figure, the 59-year-old Mr. Netanyahu is a phenomenally articulate man -- Obama-esque, one might even say -- not just in his native Hebrew, but also in the unaccented English he acquired at a Philadelphia high school and later as an architecture and management student at MIT. True to form, near-lapidary sentences all but trip from his tongue. Such as:

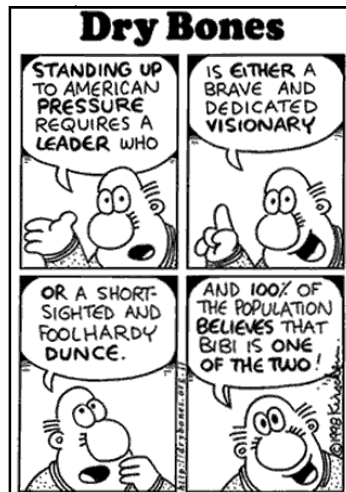
"I don't think Israel can accept an Iranian terror base next to its major cities any more than the United States could accept an al Qaeda base next to New York City."

Or: "If we accept the notion that terrorists will have immunity because as they fire on civilians they hide behind civilians, then this tactic will be legitimized and the terrorists will have their greatest victory."

Or: "We grieve for every child, for every innocent civilian that's killed either on our side or on the Palestinian side. The terrorists celebrate such suffering, on our side because they openly say they want to kill us, all of us, and on the Palestinian side because it helps them foster this false symmetry, which is contrary to common decency and international law."

And so on. The immediate question, of course, is the Israeli government's unilateral cease-fire, followed hours later by Hamas's declaration of a conditional, one-week cease-fire. Was the war a win? A draw? Or did it accomplish nothing at all -- thereby handing Hamas the "victory" it loudly claims for itself?

When Mr. Olmert announced Israel's cease-fire late Saturday night, he could hardly keep a grin off his face. In his estimate, along with that of his senior military brass, Israel had scored a clear win: It had humiliated Hamas militarily; it had caused a political rift within the group; it had taken relatively few casualties of its own; it had focused international attention on the problem of the arms smuggling beneath Gaza's border with Egypt. Most important, in the eyes of the Olmert government, it had avoided the trap of reoccupying Gaza -- the only means, it believed, of finally getting rid of Hamas.



Ordinary Israelis, however, seem less confident in the result, and Mr. Netanyahu gives voice to their caution. He is quick to applaud the "brilliant" performance of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and the "perseverance and strength" of Israeli civilians under Hamas's years-long rocket barrages.

But, he adds, "we have to make sure that the radicals do not perceive this as a victory," and it remains far from clear that they would be wrong to see it as one. "Notwithstanding the blows to the Hamas, it's still in Gaza, it's still ruling Gaza, and the Philadelphia corridor [which runs along Gaza's border with Egypt] is still porous, and . . . Hamas can smuggle new rockets unless it's closed, to fire at Israel in the future."

So is Mr. Netanyahu's preference regime change in Gaza? "Well, that would have been the optimal outcome," he says, adding that "the minimal outcome would have been to seal Gaza" from the missiles and munitions being smuggled into it. So far

it's unclear that Israel has achieved even that: A "Memorandum of Understanding" agreed to last week by Israel, the U.S. and Egypt could be effective in stopping the flow of arms, but that's assuming Cairo lives up to its responsibilities.

"One would hope they would actually do it," says Mr. Netanyahu, sounding less than optimistic. Within days, his doubts are confirmed when the Associated Press produces video footage of masked Palestinian smugglers moving through once-again operational tunnels.

Rather than looking for solutions from Egypt, however, Mr. Netanyahu's gaze is intently fixed on Iran, a subject that consumes at least half of the interview. Iran is the "mother regime" both of Hamas, against which Israel has just fought a war, as well as of Hezbollah, against which it fought its last war in 2006. Together, he says, they are more than simply fingers of Tehran's influence on the shores of the Mediterranean.

"The arming of Iran with nuclear weapons may portend an irreversible process, because these regimes assume a kind of immortality," he says, arguing that the threat of a nuclear Iran poses a much graver danger to the world than the current economic crisis. "[This] will pose an existential threat to Israel directly, but also could give a nuclear umbrella to these terrorist bases."

How to stop that from happening? Mr. Netanyahu mentions that he has met with Barack Obama both in Israel and Washington, and that the question of Iran "loomed large in both conversations." I ask: Did Mr. Obama seem to him appropriately sober-minded about the subject? "Very much so, very much so," Mr. Netanyahu stresses. "He [Mr. Obama] spoke of his plans to engage Iran in order to impress upon them that they have to stop the nuclear program. What I said to him was, what counts is not the method but the goal."

It's easy to believe that Mr. Netanyahu, of all people, must be wishing President Obama well: If diplomacy with Iran fails and the U.S. does not resort to military force, it would almost certainly fall to Mr. Netanyahu to decide whether Israel will go it alone in a strike. (In a separate interview earlier that day, a senior military official

(Please see "NETANYAHU" p.3)

assured me that a successful strike on Iran's nuclear facilities is well within Israel's capabilities.)

On the other hand, a Prime Minister Netanyahu could easily tangle with the Obama administration, particularly if it makes a big push -- as it looks like it might with the appointment of former Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell as the new special envoy to the region -- for the resumption of comprehensive, "final status" peace negotiations. There's already a history here: During his first term as prime minister from 1996 to 1999, Mr. Netanyahu frequently clashed with the administration of the man whose wife is now the secretary of state.



Mr. Netanyahu's own prescriptions for a settlement with the Palestinians -- what he calls a "workable peace" -- differ markedly from the

approaches of the 1990s. He talks about "the development of capable law enforcement and security capabilities" for the Palestinians, adding that the new National Security Adviser Jim Jones had worked on the problem for the Bush administration. He stresses the need for rapid economic development in the West Bank, promising to remove "all sorts of impediments to economic growth" faced by Palestinians.

As for the political front, Mr. Netanyahu promises a gradual, "bottom-up process that will facilitate political solutions, not replace them."

"Most of the approaches to peace between Israel and the Palestinians," he says, "have been directed at trying to resolve the most complex problems, like refugees and Jerusalem, which is akin to building the pyramid from the top down. It's much better to build it layer by layer, in a deliberate, purposeful pattern that changes the reality for both Palestinians and Israelis."

Whether this approach will work remains to be seen: Palestinian economic development was also a priority in the 1990s, until it became clear that billions in foreign aid were being siphoned off by corrupt Palestinian officials, and after various joint economic projects with Israel were violently sabotaged.

But however Mr. Netanyahu's economic and security plans play out, he makes it equally clear that he is prepared to go only so far to reach an accommodation that will meet some of the current demands being made of Israel -- not only by Palestinians, but by the Syrians, the Saudis, and much of the rest of the "international community" as well. "We're not going to re-divide Jerusalem, or get off the Golan Heights, or go back to the 1967 boundaries," he says. "We won't repeat the mistake our [political opponents] made of unilateral retreats to merely vacate territory that is then taken up by Hamas or Iran."

This brings Mr. Netanyahu to the political pitch he's making -- so far successfully -- to Israelis ahead of next month's election. When elections were held three years ago, bringing Mr. Olmert to power, "we [his Likud Party] were mocked" for warning that Gaza would become Hamastan, and that Hamastan would become a staging ground for missiles fired at major Israeli cities such as Ashkelon and Ashdod. ✧

(Editor's Note: Mr. Stephens writes Global View, the Journal's foreign affairs column.)

SIXTIES-RADICAL-TURNED-CONSERVATIVE DAVID HOROWITZ COMMENTS ON PRESIDENT OBAMA
Wall Street Journal and Frontpage magazine—1/23/09

TODAY AMERICA WELCOMES BARACK OBAMA AS THE FIRST BLACK PRESIDENT IN ITS 232-YEAR HISTORY. HOW SHOULD CONSERVATIVES THINK ABOUT THESE EVENTS?

First we have to recognize and then understand that whatever happens in the Obama presidency, this Inauguration Day is a watershed moment in the history of America and a remarkable event in the history of nations, and thus a cause for all of us who love this country, conservative and liberal, Democrat and Republican, to celebrate.

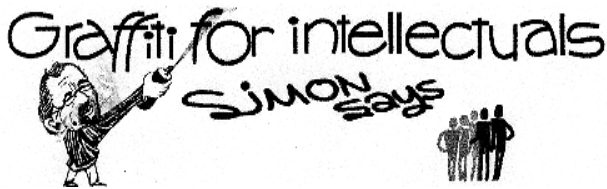
Second, in order to do this as conservatives -- as conservatives who have been through the culture wars -- we need to get past the mixed feelings we will inevitably have as the nation marks its progress in moving away from the racial divisions and divisiveness of the past. These feelings come not from resistance to the change, but from the knowledge that this celebration should have taken place decades ago and that its delay was not least because our opponents saw political advantage in playing the race card against us and making us its slandered targets.

If we celebrate Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday at a time of presidential inaugurations, this is thanks to Ronald Reagan who created the holiday, and not to the Democratic Congress of the Carter years, which rejected it. If Americans now have accepted an African American to lead their country in war and peace that is in part because an hysterically maligned Republican made two African Americans his secretaries of state. And if, after the passage of the Civil Rights Acts, race has continued to be a divisive factor in our politics over the last 40 years that is because the generation of Sharpton and Jackson and their liberal supporters have made it so.

Only time will tell how successfully Obama manages to unite the nation in the face of the crises and enemies which confront it. But today celebrating their new president are millions of Americans who never would have dreamed of celebrating their president before. Millions of Americans -- visible in all their racial and ethnic variety at the Lincoln Memorial on Sunday -- have begun to feel a patriotic stirring because they see in this First Family a reflection of themselves.

The change is still symbolic and may not last. A lot depends on what President Obama will do, which is not a small question given how little is still known about this man and how little tested he remains. Some of this patriotism may be of the sunshine variety -- in for a day or a season, when the costs are not great. Or more cynically: in to show that their hatred for America is really just another form of political "dissent." Yet whatever the nature of these changes they cannot for now be discounted. Consider: When President Obama commits this nation to war against the Islamic terrorists, as he already has in Afghanistan, he will take millions of previously alienated and disaffected Americans with him, and they will support our troops in a way that most of his party has refused to support them until now. When another liberal, Bill Clinton went to war from the air, there was no anti-war movement in the streets or in his party's ranks to oppose him. That is an encouraging fact for us in the dangerous world we confront.

If it seems unfair that Barack Obama should be the source of a new patriotism -- albeit of untested mettle -- well, life is unfair. If the Obama future is uncertain and fraught with unseen perils, conservatives can deal with those perils as they come. What matters today is that many Americans have begun to join their country's cause, and conservatives should celebrate that fact and encourage it. Ω



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CONGRATULATIONS, AMERICA!

Editorial from the London Daily Mail, January 6, 2009

A victory for the hysterical Oprah Winfrey, the mad racist preacher Jeremiah Wright, the mainstream media who abandoned any sense of objectivity long ago, Europeans who despise America largely because they depend on her, comics who claim to be dangerous and fearless, but would not dare attack genuinely powerful special interest groups.

A victory for Obama-worshippers everywhere. A victory for the cult of the cult. A man who has done little with his life but has written about his achievements as if he had found the cure for cancer in between winning a marathon and building a nuclear reactor with his teeth. Victory for style over substance, hyperbole over history, rabble-raising [sic] over reality.



A victory for Hollywood, the most dysfunctional community in the world. Victory for Streisand, Spielberg, Soros and Sarandon.

Victory for those who prefer welfare to will and interference to independence. For those who settle for group-think and herd mentality rather than those who fight for indi-

vidual initiative and the right to be out of step with meager political fashion.

Victory for a man who is no friend of freedom. He and his people have already stated that media have to be controlled so as to be balanced, without realizing the

when the vast bulk of television stations and newspapers are extremely liberal and anti-conservative.

Senior Democrat Chuck Schumer said that just as pornography should be censored, so should talk radio. In other words, one of

the few free and open means of popular expression may well be cornered and beaten by bullies who even in triumph cannot tolerate any criticism and opposition.

A victory for those who believe the state is better qualified to raise children than the family, for those who prefer teachers' unions to teaching and for those who are naively convinced that if the West is sufficiently weak towards its enemies, war and terror will dissolve as quickly as the tears on the face of a leftist celebrity.

A victory for social democracy even after most of Europe has come to the painful conclusion that social democracy leads to mediocrity, failure, unemployment, inflation, higher taxes and economic stagnation. A victory for intrusive lawyers, banal sentimentalists, social extremists and urban snobs.

Congratulations, America!

WORDS OF WISDOM (AND THEY ARE FUNNY TOO!) By P. J. O'ROURKE—Weekly Standard, January 19, 2009

The government is going to take over the automobile industry. I can predict the result—a light-weight, compact, sustainable vehicle using alternative energy. When I was a kid we called it a Schwinn... Bringing the government in to run Wall Street is like saying, "Dad burned dinner, let's get the dog to cook." ...P.T.Barnum had a side-show attraction where a lamb, a wolf, a leopard and a lion wee trained to liver together in a cage. Asked if this was difficult Barnum said, "No, but every now and then we have to get a new lamb.

Think about it when the magic incantations and rhetoric stop working and we wake up to see a naked emperor—but with splendid lats and sculptured muscular legs!