

Obama Drama: Can Democrats Survive His Presidency?

by Debra Hanania-Freeman

June 9—Conflicts and strained relations between a sitting President and Congressional members of his own party during a second term are certainly not unheard of. After all, their political situations differ. Lawmakers are trying to survive in what is traditionally a difficult political environment. The occupant of the White House will not have to be on a ballot again, and tends to become completely caught up with his/her Presidential legacy. It's usually written off as "business as usual" inside the Capital Beltway. But, the level of discontent, desperation, and in some cases, sheer hysteria among Democrats these past two weeks is most definitely not business as usual.

Democrats have been decidedly uneasy for the last six months, ever since Barack Obama used his State of the Union speech to declare that, if he felt it necessary, he would bypass Congress and use his Executive authority to act alone. That declaration came after a first term, when he had already done a lot of

bypassing of Congress (more than any other sitting President) and especially bypassing Congressional Democrats, most often choosing to keep them "out of the loop" while he engaged in wheeling and dealing with the GOP. Many still hadn't recovered from a series of debacles that included Obama's reckless disregard

for the law in the implementation of Obamacare, U.S. complicity in the assassination of Qaddafi, his (and Susan Rice's) lying in the wake of the attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, and a list of offenses, both large and small, that is simply too long to document here.

Through all of it, numerous Democrats have complained, sometimes very loudly, but more often in private. For the most part, the grumbling didn't stop them from marching in lockstep with the President, each time offering excuses. For the Congressional Black Caucus, it was that they were not going to attack the first African-American President. Others contended that while



White House/Lawrence Jackson

Obama's escape to Europe in late May-early June failed to tamp down the increasingly voluble discontent among Democrats over the numerous scandals plaguing his administration. He is shown here trying to "change the subject" in Poland, May 28.



YouTube

Sen. Dianne Feinstein, chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, a former Obama loyalist, is furious over the CIA's attempts to obstruct her committee; she has accused the President of violating the law by releasing Taliban prisoners without consulting Congress.

Obama might be bad, the Republicans were simply despicable. What went unspoken was the fact that the Administration was known to be brutal in meteing out punishment to any Democrat who broke ranks and, perhaps most importantly, especially among House Democrats who must stand for reelection every two years, was the issue of *money*. The bottom line was that nothing Obama did was so bad that it was worth risking the flow of money into their coffers that came from Wall Street and related quarters.

However, the last few weeks have seen a very decided shift. Over the course of little more than ten days, a manic and emboldened Obama—clearly feeling the sting of being completely outflanked by Russian President Vladimir Putin during the Ukraine crisis—put forward a new foreign policy doctrine during an address at West Point; fired an embattled Secretary of Veteran Affairs; secured the release of Bowe Bergdahl, an American soldier in Taliban captivity whom he swapped for five high-level Taliban leaders who were Guantanamo detainees; and unveiled historic new rules on power plant emissions that virtually guarantee that the Democrats will lose control of the Senate in 2016. And then, of course, there was the suicidal spectacle of the behavior of the Texas Democratic Party during the recent runoff election between LaRouche Democrat Kesha Rogers and David Alameel, who, before he became a

Democrat, was best known as a money launderer for the GOP, and a negotiator with the Taliban.

It isn't that Congressional Democrats have suddenly found their morality, although there is no question that for some, they are only willing to go so far in selling out their fundamental principles in the name of party loyalty. The bottom line is that for others, the old adage that there are some things that money just can't buy, is asserting itself. The question is existential. Stick with Obama and reelection is almost impossible.

The Case of Senator Feinstein

Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), as chairwoman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, has been one of the CIA's staunchest defenders. In recent years, she publicly defended the National Security Agency (NSA)'s telephone and Internet surveillance activities, the CIA's authority over drone strikes, and the FBI's actions under the Patriot Act, even against a growing bipartisan chorus of critics.

But, on March 11, a festering conflict between Obama's CIA and her committee, which is charged with Congressional oversight, broke into the open when the Senator took to the floor and delivered a bombshell 45-minute denunciation of the Agency, accusing it of withholding information about its treatment of prisoners, and trying to intimidate committee staff members investigating the detention program, violating the U.S. Constitution, and committing criminal acts in an attempt to obstruct her committee's investigations into the use of torture.

Describing what she called "a defining moment" for Congressional oversight, Feinstein said the CIA had removed documents from computers used by Senate Intelligence Committee staff members working on a report about the Agency's detention program, searched the computers after the committee completed its report, and referred a criminal case to the Justice Department in an attempt to thwart the investigation.

She specifically mentioned the destruction of tapes and the removal of hundreds of documents from the computer server used by her staff. She said that when investigators confronted the CIA, they received a

number of answers. First the CIA denied that the documents had been removed. Then, they said the documents had been removed by private contractors working at the facility. Finally, they admitted that *the removal of documents was ordered by the White House!* When Feinstein approached the White House, she said, it denied giving the order.

Feinstein's broadside rallied Senate Democrats. Everyone was well aware that the heart of the conflict was not between the committee and the CIA, but was a fundamental challenge to a lawless administration. On the Senate floor, Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee and the longest serving U.S. Senator, described Feinstein's speech as the most important he had witnessed in his time in Congress. "I cannot think of any speech by any member of any party as important as the one the Senator from California just gave," Leahy said.

Later, Leahy, a primary protector of the Constitution, released a statement which read in part: "This is not just about getting to the truth of the shameful use of torture. This is ultimately about the core founding principle of the separation of powers, and the future of this institution and its oversight role vis-à-vis the Executive branch of government. The members of the Senate must stand up in defense of this institution, the Constitution, and the values upon which this nation was founded."

Sen. Mark Udall of Colorado, an Intelligence Committee member, also issued a strong statement applauding Feinstein's actions.

Even Harry Reid, the Democratic majority leader, said that he supported Feinstein "unequivocally." When Reid brought up the speech at a closed door luncheon of Senate Democrats, Feinstein received an extended standing ovation.

Feinstein's unprecedented action was intended, and



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Even leading members of the Black Congressional Caucus, until now a reliable base of support for the President, led by veteran Rep. Maxine Waters of California, are breaking ranks with Obama, and challenging other CBC members over their ties to Wall Street.

taken as, a sharp warning to the Administration that they had gone too far.

The Case of the Congressional Black Caucus

Since its founding in 1971, the Congressional Black Caucus has not been an organization known for airing its dirty laundry in public. Over the last five years, Caucus members, who had long been considered "the conscience of the Congress," repeatedly found themselves in very uncomfortable circumstances. It was months before they were invited to the White House. The President, despite his brief membership in the CBC, repeatedly skipped the traditional Presidential address to annual CBC meetings.

But, most importantly, they were faced with an Administration that repeatedly champi-

oned the interests of Wall Street and too-big-to-fail banks over those of their constituents, whose suffering under conditions of budget cuts, sequestration of funds for vital services, and general economic collapse only intensified with Obama in the White House. Still, they refrained from public confrontation with the nation's first black President.

But, over the last year, the tawdriness of the pro-Wall Street votes by Caucus members has become so blatant that several members have started to push back, led by Rep. Maxine Waters, the veteran Los Angeles legislator who serves as the top Democrat on the House Financial Services panel. A series of bombshell reports, first in the *Huffington Post*, then later, in *Ebony* magazine, detail the sheer cravenness and hypocrisy of many CBC members. The reports thoroughly lay out, that even though Wall Street systematically targets African-Americans with its mortgage fraud schemes, some members of the CBC have been actively doing Wall Street's bidding, even working to upend even the weakest legislation (like Dodd-Frank) to rein in the worst offenses of the greediest banks.

Thanks to Waters and a handful of her allies, the fight over CBC's pro-Wall Street votes has broken into public view and promises serious consequences for Democratic Black Caucus members like Gwen Moore (Wisc.), Gregory Meeks (N.Y.), Lacey Clay (Mo.), David Scott (Ga.), and Terri Sewell (Ala.), who have been most prominent in pushing Wall Street's agenda. (Gwen Moore has received close to a million dollars in campaign contributions from them.) But, while their actions may have angered other members in addition to Waters, some of whom have gone so far as publicly chastising their colleagues for abandoning their core constituents, they still have stopped short of naming what really is at the heart of the dispute.

Challenging Wall Street means risking an awful lot of money. The banking industry has hundreds of lobbyists, whose sole purpose is to influence lawmakers to vote favorably for their cause. These lobbyists throw truckloads of money at members of Congress, either legally, through generous campaign contributions or more clandestine means like the proverbial brown envelope stuffed with cash. And, it is no secret that campaign contributions are hard to come by in the black community. But even that excuse doesn't hold water when the issue is taking money to vote against the interests of the people who voted you into office.

What the so-called "bombshell" reports don't identify is that for Maxine Waters and her allies, the seeming war with Wall Street and the CBC members who do its bidding, is, in reality, a war with the Obama Administration. And, although Caucus members like Waters and Charlie Rangel (D-N.Y.) have paid dearly for their insistence on standing for their constituents, facing repeated, hyped ethics charges that are reminiscent of the FBI's racist Operation Frühhmenschen, as well as in Rangel's case, electoral challenges, they show no signs of backing down. Indeed, the recent press coverage more likely signals that they are preparing to escalate.

The Case of Bowe Bergdahl and the Taliban

After days of bungling a searing scandal at the Department of Veterans Affairs, the White House was desperate to deflect. The resulting press conference in which the President offered the head of his Secretary for Veterans Affairs, Gen. Eric Shinseki (ret.), and also announced the impending departure of his very unpopular press secretary Jay Carney, did little to put out the fire.

Although there had been a clamor for Shinseki's

resignation (116 members of Congress, including 35 Democrats, demanded it), all inquiries indicated that the problem went far beyond the Secretary, and concluded that what began as a story about a VA hospital in Phoenix, Ariz. massaging its figures to conceal the length of waiting lists, and claims that as many as 40 veterans may have died while waiting for care, was in fact systemic, and affected VA hospitals across the country, all under the stewardship of a President who famously promised to "rebuild people's faith in the institution of government."

Obama fled the country, making a surprise weekend visit to Afghanistan where he was photographed hugging U.S. troops. None of it was working. The Administration needed something that was up there with the death of Osama bin Laden to boost the President's standing, and to do it quickly before his trip to Europe for the D-Day celebrations, where he was to continue his attempt to sell the Europeans a suicide pact regarding Russia and Ukraine.

It came with a Rose Garden announcement that Obama had brokered a deal to gain the release of Bowe Bergdahl, the only American known to be held by the Taliban. In exchange for Bergdahl, the President released five Taliban fighters from Guantanamo Bay. The next day on the Sunday talk shows, the Administration trotted out National Security Advisor Susan Rice, best known for the lies she told immediately following the Benghazi attack in 2012, who claimed that it was a "joyous" day and that an American who had served with "honor and distinction" was now free.

The furor that ensued was deafening. As it turned out, the Taliban fighters that were released in exchange for Bergdahl sounded pretty dangerous. Bergdahl himself, it seemed, rather than having served with honor and distinction, was apparently captured by the Taliban after he walked off his post; he was being denounced by members of his platoon as a deserter. Ultimately, though, the issue was far more profound.

Obama had, once again, bypassed Congress to authorize the trade. As it turned out, according to the National Defense Authorization Act (which Obama had signed into law), he was required to notify Congress 30 days prior to the release of prisoners from Guantanamo. The White House countered that there was a risk to Bergdahl's life that justified side-stepping the law.

The controversy dogged Obama during his European tour, but he seemed unperturbed. "We saw an opportunity and we seized it," Obama said. "And I make

no apologies for that.”

But, as it turned out, the “opportunity” had been around for years. The Administration had gone to the national security committees in January 2011 and presented the exact same deal. Congressional leaders determined that the price was too high. There were a large number of Guantanamo detainees who were being held on very questionable motives, but the five Taliban leaders in question were deemed to be truly dangerous. The issue was raised again earlier this year. According to a White House official, “in January and February, the national security interagency staff reached out to staff of the national security committees about Bergdahl, a proof-of-life video, and reports in February of U.S. actions to pursue Bergdahl’s release through intermediary talks with Taliban on a possible prisoner swap.” Again, the terms of the deal were rejected.

On Tuesday, June 3, White House Chief of Staff Denis McDonough made an appearance at a private weekly Democratic Party luncheon and told lawmakers the Administration had indeed been in touch with officials on Capitol Hill before the prisoner exchange. But, *nobody* at the luncheon, including Senator Feinstein, had been consulted!

On Wednesday evening, the Administration provided a classified briefing to members of the Senate of both parties to try to answer mounting demands for information. The briefing did little to placate Democrats.

On Friday, Obama came up with yet another excuse, saying he had decided to keep Congress in the dark because pulling off the deal “required no publicity.” The comments followed reports that Administration officials told Senators that the White House hadn’t briefed them ahead of time because the Taliban had threatened to kill Bergdahl if the pending deal got out. It was a claim that clearly infuriated Feinstein. In an interview with Bloomberg TV that aired that evening, Feinstein said there was no evidence of a credible threat and accused the President of violating the law.

Obama Creates More Drama

Over the weekend, the furor over yet another violation of law by the President dominated the Sunday talk shows. But there was yet more drama to come.

On June 8, Obama unveiled an aggressive new proposal to supposedly reduce carbon pollution by power plants by 30% by 2030. The policy, is being denounced as a “war on coal,” which will cost \$50 billion, eliminate 225,000 jobs, and cause steep hikes in electricity

bills. The regulations will have their most dramatic impact on states dependent on the coal industry. Those states also happen to be those where Democrats have some of their toughest fights this Fall.

Kentucky produces the third-most coal in the country but has seen a reduction in coal jobs and production already. Democrat Alison Lundergan Grimes, who is running to unseat Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell, immediately denounced the move. But, although her opposition to the measure is aggressive, it hasn’t stopped McConnell from connecting her to the President, resulting in a significant decline in her poll numbers.

In West Virginia, which produces the second-most coal, Democratic candidate for Senate Natalie Tennant has offered strong opposition to the Obama plan, as has Rep. Nick Rahall, who is in a tough race to retain his seat. Rahall put out a statement announcing that he is introducing legislation to block Obama’s proposal.

Obama’s proposal also promises to play out in Louisiana, North Carolina, Montana, Arkansas, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Colorado, and Alaska, where the Republican Party is beginning robo-calls connecting Democratic candidates to Obama’s “radical energy plan.”

And, despite the fact that Obama has said that a GOP majority in the Senate “would be a disaster for the nation,” Administration spokesmen have shrugged off the fact that the plan is likely to cripple Democrats in key Senate races.

The Texas Lesson

Whether or not Democrats will deepen their break with Obama, and hold him accountable for his repeated violations of law, all of which constitute impeachable offenses, is yet to be seen. Perhaps the specter of the Texas Democratic Party’s suicidal drive to stop LaRouche Democrat Kesha Rogers from becoming the Democratic Senate nominee will serve as a lesson. As *EIR* has pointed out elsewhere, the Texas case makes the incontrovertible point that there is little hope for the Democratic Party unless it breaks with Obama.

But the issue goes way beyond the survival of the Democratic Party. The issue at stake is the very survival of the United States and its people. The fact that more Democrats are being forced to buck the Administration, either for reasons of principle or simple self-preservation, is important, but nothing short of a commitment to remove Obama is going to insure the nation’s well-being.