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Obama is just another Republican

Colman McCarthy | Apr. 25, 2013
Column

We all blunder. Some of us get to do in print, as I did in an Oct. 3, 2008, *NCR* column titled "Obama is just another Democrat." How wrong I was. On multiple issues, Barack Obama's policies reveal he is just another Republican. Obama's heart may be on the left but his mind is barnacled on the right.

- *Gun control*. At a March 28 White House gathering of mothers who lost children to gun violence, Obama called on Americans to "raise your voices and make yourselves unmistakably heard." On legislation, don't let Congress "get squishy." He should have added, "As I am." His calls for universal background checks are politically low-risk, considering that, in his words, "90 percent of Americans" support them. He is tepid, at best, when confronting the gun hawks by speaking frankly on the madness of allowing Glocks -- the semi-automatic used in the Tucson, Ariz., massacre in 2011 -- to hold 17 bullets. "What we're proposing is not radical," Obama says apologetically, lest he offend Harry Reid, the NRA-supporting Senate majority leader. How many mass-killings will it take for Obama to actually get radical, sensibly so, and call for a ban on all guns? That's a sure loser, of course, but better to go down in defeat with honor than throw up your hands or throw in the towel as President Squishy.
- *Inclemency*. In early March, Obama pardoned 17 people for nonviolent offenses, ranging from forging a money order to minor food stamp fraud. Most crimes were committed years ago. Only five had served time in prison. The rest had been fined or put on probation. In his first term, Obama pardoned only 22. At this pace, among modern presidents Obama will rank as the stingiest. Bill Clinton granted 396 pardons, George W. Bush 189. What a crowning achievement for Obama: being to the right of Bush. He out-Republicaned a Republican.
- *Guantánamo*. As a candidate in 2008, Obama became all but hoarse vowing to close the Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, prison. He was one with his Republican rival, Arizona Sen. John McCain, who said he "strongly" favored the closing. On Jan. 22, 2009, fresh to the Oval Office, Obama signed an executive order that the prison would be shut within a year. Two years later, with the hellhole still caging people who had no access to lawyers or family visits, Obama signed another order: calling for "a process to review" individual cases. No results have happened, as meaningless as the process was.

At a cost of nearly $177 million in 2013 to contain 186 men, Guantanamo is America's most expensive prison -- a tab of nearly $1 million a year per inmate. In keeping the place running, Obama is one with congressional Republicans who are hot for cost-cutting but not where it could matter.

- *Drones*. It was left to Rand Paul, the filibustering freshman Republican senator and tea party darling from Kentucky, to decry Obama as ruthless in the use of pilotless bomber planes. Earning much less publicity is a damning essay in the current issue of the conservative magazine *The National Interest* by former Sen. Jim Webb (D-Va.) who served four years in Ronald Reagan's Department of Defense. He writes: "President Obama has arguably established the authority of the president to intervene military virtually anywhere without the consent or the approval of Congress. ? It is not hyperbole to say that the president himself can now bomb a country with which we maintain diplomatic relations. ? We know he can because

he has already done it."

- *Military spending*. During Senate hearings on Chuck Hagel, Obama's choice to run the Pentagon, the former Republican senator from Nebraska found himself attacked by angry Republican senators, ones who eat their own. A major Hagel offense? He once stated the easily documented obvious: The military budget is "bloated." When announcing the Hagel nomination, Obama could have said that the bloating days were over for the Pentagon and its buddy contractors. But Obama, sticking with platitudes about Hagel's Vietnam War record, said nothing.

Shortly after, a Harvard University study reported that the bloating was well beyond what had previously been imagined: The total cost of the Iraq and Afghan wars will be close to $6 trillion. Like any patriotic Republican politician, Obama has yet to say what a waste.

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