

Can the United States help lead the way?

This article is from the "Among Friends" section of the Church of God Big Sandy's Web site, churchofgodbigandy.com. It was posted for the weekend of June 26-27.

By Dave Havir

BIG SANDY, Texas—As I was reading various news reports this week, I went to usnews.com (*U.S. News & World Report*) and saw an editorial that Mortimer B. Zuckerman, posted on June 18, 2010. Mr. Zuckerman is chairman and editor in chief of *U.S. News & World Report* and chairman and publisher of the *New York Daily News*,

Since Mr. Zuckerman has periodically offered constructive criticism of Barack Obama, I was curious about his political-party affiliation. According to the Feb. 12, 2010, edition of *The New York Times*, although he is not currently enrolled in a party he is known as a Democrat. In fact, the *Times* said back when he was considering running for the Senate that he "would very likely [run] as a Republican or independent so he could avoid a costly primary."

The *Times* likened his potential candidacy to following the path of his close friend and fellow media executive Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, who switched his party affiliation from Democratic to Republican to run for office.

You might find it profitable to read his evaluation of how people holding leadership positions in the United States may be "well intentioned" and still not be able to fulfill their responsibilities effectively.

I would highly recommend that you take the time to read his article in its entirety. At this time, I want to share some excerpts from his interesting editorial.

Inherited the legacy

He began: "President Obama came into office as the heir to a great foreign policy legacy enjoyed by every recent U.S. president. Why? Because the United States stands on top of the power ladder, not necessarily as the dominant power, but certainly as the leading one."

Speaking ill of own tribe

He later wrote: "The reviews of Obama's performance have been disappointing. He has seemed uncomfortable in the role of leading other nations, and often seems to suggest there is nothing special about America's role in the world."

"The global community was puzzled over the pictures of Obama bowing to some of the world's leaders and surprised by his gratuitous criticisms of and apologies for America's foreign policy under the previous administration of George W. Bush. One Middle East authority, Fouad Ajami, pointed out that Obama seems unaware that it is bad form and even a great moral lapse to speak ill of one's own tribe while in the lands of others.

Undesirable relationships

"Even in Britain, for decades our closest ally, the talk in the press—supported by polls—is about the end of the 'special relationship' with America. French President Nicolas Sarkozy openly criticized Obama for months, including a direct attack on his policies at the United Nations. Sarkozy cited the need to recognize the real world, not the virtual world, a clear reference to Obama's speech on nuclear weapons. When the French president is seen as tougher than the American president, you have to know that something is awry.

"Vladimir Putin of Russia has publicly scorned a number of Obama's visions. Relations with the Chinese leadership got off to a bad start with the president's poorly organized visit to China, where his hosts treated him disdainfully and prevented him from speaking to a national television audience of the Chinese people. The Chinese behavior was unprecedented when compared to visits by other U.S. presidents."

More than rhetoric

He later said: "Obama clearly wishes to do good and means well. But he is one of those people who believe that the world was born with the word and exists by means of persuasion, such that there is no person or country that you cannot, by means of logical and moral argument, bring around to your side.

"He speaks as a teacher, as someone imparting values and generalities appropriate for a Sunday morning sermon, not as a tough-minded leader. He urges that things 'must be done' and 'should be done' and that 'it is time' to do them.

"As the former president of the Council of Foreign Relations, Les Gelb, put it, there is 'the impression that Obama might confuse speeches with policy.' Another journalist put it differently when he described Obama as an 'NPR [National Public Radio] president who gives wonderful speeches.' In other words, he talks the talk but doesn't know how to walk the walk.

"The Obama presidency has so far been characterized by a well-intentioned but excessive belief in the power of rhetoric with too little appreciation for reality and loyalty."

More than personality

He later said: "The end result is that a critical mass of influential people in world affairs who once held high hopes for the president have begun to wonder whether they misjudged the man. They are no longer dazzled by his rock star personality and there is a sense that there is something amateurish and even incompetent about how Obama is managing U.S. power.

"For example, Obama has asserted that America is not at war with the Muslim world. The problem is that parts of the Muslim world are at war with America and the West. Obama feels, fairly enough, that America must be contrite in its dealings with the Muslim world. But he has failed to address the religious intolerance, failing economies, tribalism, and gender apartheid that together contribute to jihadist extremism.

"This was startling and clear when he chose not to publicly support the Iranians who went to the streets in opposition to their oppressive government, based on a judgment that our support might be counterproductive.

"Yet, he reaches out instead to the likes of Bashar Assad of Syria, Iran's agent in the Arab world, sending our ambassador back to Syria even as it continues to rearm Hezbollah in Lebanon and expands its role in the Iran-Hezbollah-Hamas alliance.

Not recognizing their worldview

"The underlying issue is that the Arab world has different estimates on how to deal with an aggressive, expansionist Iran. The Arabs believe you do not deal with Iran with the open hand of a handshake but with the clenched fist of power.

"Arab leaders fear an Iran proceeding full steam with its nuclear weapons program on top of its program to develop intermediate-range ballistic missiles. All the while centrifuges keep spinning in Iran, and Arab leaders ask whether Iran will be emboldened by what they interpret as American weakness and faltering willpower.

"They did not see Obama or his administration as understanding the region, where naivete is interpreted as a weakness of character, as amateurism, and as proof of the absence of the tough stuff of which leaders are made. (That's why many Arab leaders were appalled at the decision to have a civilian trial of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed in New York. After 9/11, many of them had engaged in secret counterterrorism activities under the umbrella of an American promise that these activities would never be made public; now they feared that this would be the exact consequence of an open trial.)

Looking for loyalty

"America right now appears to be unreliable to traditional friends, compliant to rivals, and weak to enemies. One renowned Asian leader stated recently at a private dinner in the United States, 'We in Asia are convinced that Obama is not strong enough to confront his opponents, but we fear that he is not strong enough to support his friends.' "

In Mr. Zuckerman's conclusion, he wrote: "The world needs the vision, idealism, and strong leadership that America brings to international affairs."

Successful ideas and approaches

We all realize that the world continues to have very dangerous situations and that the solutions to the challenges are not easily implemented.

All of us want our nation to succeed in co-existing with as much peace as possible with the nations of this world. In that sense, we want our leaders to succeed. However, when many of us view some of the ideas and approaches of our leaders as flawed, we do not want those flawed ideas and approaches to succeed.

It is my hope and prayer that our leaders will hear the words of people like Mortimer B. Zuckerman.