

Slouching Towards Munich

The best lack all conviction, while the worst/ Are full of passionate intensity wrote Yeats a few years after the close of what was then called the Great War. The war we are now engaged in has yet to be given a name and is more Hobbesian all-against-all than Yeatsian good-against-evil, but otherwise circumstances are much the same.

Obama is among the best, of that there is no doubt. He is reason incarnate, silver-tongued, and unquestionably well-meaning. But there is a lack of conviction. Abroad our enemies and ostensible allies pay us little heed. North Korea and Iran are building nuclear arsenals. Russia's reply to our reasonable demands is "not yet" when it's not simply "nyet". At home extremists on both sides - birthers and truthers, tea partiers and foul-mouthed, vituperative bloggers, Keith Olbermann and Glenn Beck - dominate the discourse as never before. In Congress, unions and insurance companies control the fate of health care legislation, while the administration is silent and the fiscally prudent are silenced. Shocks jocks, the internet, and the 24-hour news cycle have vanquished comity as surely as Reagan vanquished communism.

Appeasement goes by many names and by any, it tastes as bitter. But appeasement is appeasement is appeasement. When we put more effort into apprehending Roman Polanski than into capturing Osama Bin Laden, that is appeasement. When we allow Rush Limbaugh and George Soros to tear bipartisan plans asunder, that is appeasement. And when we prosecute our finest interrogators merely to assure Bin Laden that the playing field is level, that most assuredly is appeasement.

It was Burke who said that if the road to hell is paved with good intentions then the path to heaven is built on hard choices. My grandparents made a difficult choice when they left the mills of Massachusetts for the fields of Minnesota. But they never equivocated, never apologized (as our president is so wont to do), and they certainly didn't need a TelePrompter to explain their decision. If these proud, hard-scrabble weavers could face down the cold of a harsh Midwestern winter, then surely Obama can face down special interests to enact a health care bill that moves away from a fee-for-service model.

This presidency is in the first quarter, yet it is already using the so-called prevent defense. The self-same strategy that has prevented nothing but success from Munich to the Meadowlands.