

Obama Electrifies the World: Can We Believe the Hype

The President As Celebrity Conquers Europe As Europe Moves Right

By [Danny Schechter](#)

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You still want to like him, even if it has now been confirmed that the President of the United States travels with an official food taster or so the French news agency reported.

“They have someone who tastes the dishes,” said waiter Gabriel de Carvalho from the “La Fontaine de Mars” restaurant where Obama and his family turned up for dinner on Saturday night. It wasn’t very pleasant for the cooks at first, but the person was very nice and was relaxed, so it all went well,” he said on the Itele news channel.”

Perhaps more brain shattering was the quote attributed to the owner of the Restaurant, who said with all sincerity that he had seen God.

“We all think of him that way,” he added.

Ironically, as the elevated ONE was sightseeing in Paris, Republicans of the Freedom Fries inclination were blasting him for even being there at all, perhaps just jealous because he seemed like he was having fun. More ominously, European voters were moving right in the EU elections. (Turnout was low!)

Reports the New York Times: “Heather Grabbe, director of the Open Society Institute in Brussels, said that two striking features of the elections were the failure of the left to make a breakthrough and the advances threatened by the far-right and other fringe parties.

“At a time of crisis,” she said, “people often lose faith in the established political parties but they will typically move to the left when there is the prospect of higher unemployment, in the hope that the state will look after them.

“The left needs a new narrative,” Ms Grabbe added, “the narrative of the state looking after people has failed to hold even at a time of deep unemployment.”

These paradoxes also speak to the way politics has merged with celebrity reinforced by 24/7 TV news cycles. Some like the President of France marry celebrities. Others like Barack and Michelle become celebrified, sparking adulation and fostering unrealistic expectations. This tendency is fueled by disgust with politicians as usual on the one hand, and the desire to have someone who you can believe will be different on the other. We all want someone to make a difference as the economy and the public’s sense of another possibility crash like that Air France plane.

Obama has that special charisma, and builds a mystique that resonates in a period when so little else does. "It's the smile" one TV producer told me the other day. Another put it down to his youth. No, said a third, it's his skill as an orator especially because his predecessor couldn't put two words together.

Lets not forget, it was like that with JFK and Jackie too. In their time, they represented a new generation, exuded style and the aphrodesiac of power. For some, they walked on water.

And like Obama, JFK was treated more as a personality more than a leader of a party.

You can view Obama as a devious calculating cynic, saying one thing and then doing another. You can see him as a prisoner of larger forces that push all politicians into the embrace of special interests serving the status quo masked as "the politics of the possible."

Or you can still be bullish because he is going over the heads of the dead weights in office worldwide.

"Obama is going over the heads of elites, attempting to establish moral legitimacy as a leader, turning popularity into policy, " writes Robert Marquand in the Christian Science Monitor. "What we are seeing is not spin, but a sincere effort to reach out to hearts and minds, appealing to better instincts, to the reasonable nature of others. It is a revolutionary approach."

Revolution, *smevolution*. Populism can be progressive or reactionary as it has been throughout our history. The Tea Baggers see themselves as "populists" fighting the supposed "tyranny" of the government. " So did the "Yes We Can" crowd who put Mr. O in office and are now mostly cheering or half-cheering from the sidelines.

Words are necessary even if they are not sufficient. AP reports, "There are already some indications [Barack's] words are having the desired effect of undercutting extremists. A militant leader in Egypt called on the Taliban to respond positively to Obama's gestures, and Hamas militants in Gaza say they are ready 'to build on this speech'

"Obama may have managed to 'plant the seed of doubt in some minds' of extremists, said Robert Malley, senior analyst at the International Crisis Group think tank. 'There was enough ... that represented openings for those who wanted openings.'"

Revolutuionaries know how to propriate rhetoric to advance their agendas and audiences. Before Obama conquered Cairo, Napoleon did the same. Writes **Hizb ut-Tahrir**, "he told the peoplee, 'You will be told that I came to destroy your religion; do not believe it ... I have more respect than the Mamelukes for your God, His Prophet, and the Koran' and many more sweet words besides."

Adds **Ahdaf Soueif** "This is hard. It's hard because we so need to believe that Obama is about change, that he's wise, that he's good, that he has the interests of the world - rather than just the interests of the United States - at heart."

That's the key, the words, "We so need to believe." Even as unemployment reaches near depression levels, the Unions and many progressives want to believe. The alternative:

realizing that we live in a system, that Obama can say and do good and will also say and do evil. That's his function. Unfortunately, our media doesn't really explain this but treats politics like sports, generating heat, not light. It is more interested in what he is eating -did you see that NBC White House special featuring his lunch-time hamburger run- than doing.

What is our function as citizens? If you are reading this, presumably, it is to be more critical, more analytical, able to make distinctions, willing to live with and challenge the contradictions, aware that institutions have more impact than individuals.

Love Obama or hate him, he's here, barring the unthinkable, for the next few years. He's not God. He is or should be a public servant and the job of the public is not to serve him but to challenge him and hold him accountable too.

You can't allow your "analysis" to lead to paralysis.

These are dangerous times, when the people who want to wreck the prospects for change are more mobilized than the people who want to secure that change. We live in a noise machine with few mass movements and lots of mass confusion. Instead of telling Twitter what you are doing, tell us all what you are ready to do.

*News Dissector **Danny Schechter** edits www.Mediachannel.org. He directed the DVD "Barack Obama: People's President" (ChoicesVideo.Net) about his campaign and insists he is not a cheerleader. Comments to dissector@mediachannel.org*

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Articles by: **[Danny Schechter](#)**

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