THE SKEPTIC ARENA

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THE VACANT PRESIDENCY

by Charles Krauthammer

*The president’s demeanor is worrying a lot of people. From the immigration crisis on the Mexican border to the Islamic State rising in Mesopotamia, Barack Obama seems totally detached.*

Charles, define "seems." And "seems" to whom?

And while you have the dictionary open, maybe you could explain how it is possible for someone, who gives press briefings explaining America's response to those disasters, can be described as "totally detached." Perhaps you have a different understanding of the words "totally" and "detached?"

Also Charles, why do you think that asking congress to provide funds for the border crisis is detached? Detached would better describe congressional conservatives inability or unwillingness to act.

And please explain how sending air support to prevent genocide in Iraq is detached?

*When he does interrupt his endless rounds of golf, fundraising and photo ops, it’s for some affectless, mechanical, almost forced public statement.*

Charles, that was a serious blunder. You had no complaints when Bush spent the better part of his presidency on vacation. The comparison between the two presidents and their use of vacation time is easily researchable, Charles ... and it won't turn out well for your side.

<http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/article/2013/aug/13/who-vacationed-more-bush-or-obama/>

You also contradicted your earlier claim of total detachment when you just admitted to his public statements; even though you tried to demean them with biased adjectives like affectless, mechanical, and forced.

*Regarding Ukraine, his detachment—the rote, impassive voice—borders on dissociation.*

Charles, so your problem is with Obama's speaking voice? Because he doesn't come across with the gusto and intelligence of say, George Bush? Seriously Charles?

*His U.N. ambassador, Samantha Power, delivers an impassioned denunciation of Russia. Obama cautions that we not “get out ahead of the facts,” as if the facts of this case—Vladimir Putin’s proxies shooting down a civilian airliner—are in doubt.*

Charles, shoot first and investigate later huh? Great strategy Charles. That worked out so well for us ... in Iraq.

*The preferred explanation for the president’s detachment is psychological. He’s checked out. Given up. Let down and disappointed by the world, he is in withdrawal.*

Charles, the explanation preferred by whom? The only people whom I've heard talk like that, are the butt-hurt conservatives who are still burnin over their inability to beat him in an election.

"We're going to make him a one term president."

Remember that one Charles? How well did that one work out for you guys? Maybe that's why you are writing this whiny, blubbering ad hominem?

*Perhaps. But I’d propose an alternate theory that gives him more credit: Obama’s passivity stems from an idea. When Obama says Putin has placed himself on the wrong side of history in Ukraine, he actually believes it.*

Well Charles, if he didn't believe it, then Obama would be lying, wouldn't he? So the credit you are giving Obama is that he isn't a liar?

*He disdains realpolitik because he believes that, in the end, such primitive 19th-century notions as conquest are self-defeating. History sees to their defeat.*

Charles, if you consider conquest to be a 19th century notion, then you must have skipped out on your modern history courses.

*one of Obama’s favorite sayings is “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” Ultimately, injustice and aggression don’t pay. The Soviets saw their 20th-century empire dissolve. More proximally, US gains in Iraq and Afghanistan were, in time, liquidated. Ozymandias lies forever buried and forgotten in desert sands.*

Charles, that sounds like an argument people make to support doing nothing. It's obvious that you are trying to pervert Obama's position. Being cautious is not the same thing as doing nothing.

*Remember when, at the beginning of the Ukraine crisis, Obama tried to construct for Putin “an offramp” from Crimea? Absurd as this idea was, I think Obama was sincere. He actually imagined that he’d be saving Putin from himself, that Crimea could only redound against Russia in the long run.*

So Charles, when did you first discover that you had these mind-reading gifts?

*If you really believe this, then there is no need for forceful, potentially risky US counteractions.*

Charles, so that's what you're getting at: more risky, reckless, shoot first - ask questions later action.

Some people just never learn ... do they, Charles?

*Which explains everything since: Obama’s pinprick sanctions;*

Charles, apparently those pinprick sanctions hurt more than you give them credit for. Putin's army was massed on the border for invasion, yet they still haven't crossed.

*his failure to rally a craven Europe;*

Charles, a "craven Europe?" So you think childish name-calling is an effective way to present your argument?

Well - obviously so.

Your writing is full of gung-ho, patriotic fervor so typical of those too old to actually have to go war themselves.

*his refusal to supply Ukraine with the weapons it has been begging for.*

Charles, what makes you think we should supply every country that begs for them, with weapons?

*The shooting down of a civilian airliner seemed to validate Obama’s passivity.*

Charles, have you ever heard of "The Butterfly Effect" - a butterfly flaps its wings in Peru, and is responsible a week later for a tornado in Kansas?

Well, we're going to have to rename it "The Obama Effect" since, there is nothing bad that happens on this planet that "you people" can't find a way, to link to Obama.

*Obama explained “Violence and conflict inevitably lead to unforeseen consequences.”*

Charles, are you really going to try to dispute that statement?

*See. You play with fire, it will blow up in your face. Just as I warned. Now world opinion will turn against Putin.*

Charles, in case you've been too busy playing golf to notice, world opinion has already turned against Putin. Even his normally staunch allies, the Chinese, have refused to support his incursion.

*To which I say: So what? World opinion, by itself, is useless: malleable, ephemeral and, unless mobilized by leadership, powerless. History doesn’t act autonomously. It needs agency.*

*Germany’s Angela Merkel still doesn’t want to jeopardize trade with Russia. France’s Francois Hollande will proceed with delivery of a Mistral-class attack-helicopter carrier to Russia. And Obama speaks of future “costs” if Russia persists —a broken record since Crimea, carrying zero credibility. Or did Obama think Putin would be shamed into regret and restraint by the blood of 298 innocents?*

Well Charles, you're the mind-reader ... you tell us.

*On the contrary. Putin’s response has been brazen defiance: denying everything and unleashing a massive campaign of lies, fabrications and conspiracy theories blaming Ukraine and the US.*

Charles, that usually is the reaction of someone who has been caught with his hand in the cookie jar.

*Putin doesn’t give a damn about world opinion. He cares about domestic opinion, which has soared to more than 80 percent approval since Crimea.*

Charles, so you can read Putin's mind as well?

I didn't know you spoke Russian, Charles.

*If anything, he’s been emboldened. On Wednesday, his proxies shot down two more jets — a finger to the world and a declaration that his campaign continues.*

Hey Charles, I thought Putin was a hero to you American conservatives? It was only recently when you guys were praising him for how much more manly he was than our president.

*A real US president would give Kiev the weapons it needs,*

Charles, I know it eats your conservative guts out, but ... he IS a real president. You losers tried to beat him twice and got your clocks cleaned both times.

*impose devastating sectoral sanctions on Moscow,*

Charles, so you are no longer a fan of the "Shirtless One?"

*reinstate our Central European missile-defense system*

Charles, you conservatives refuse to fund our own V.A. while veterans die in waiting rooms - but you're okay with reactivating an expensive missile-defense system?

Well, I guess you just said so, didn't you?

*and make a Reaganesque speech explaining why.*

Charles, Reagan? You mean that guy who barely avoided impeachment over the Iran-Contra scandal? That Reagan?

*Obama has done none of these things.*

Charles, that's why we're not tied up in even more expensive, "preemptive" wars.

*Why should he? He’s on the right side of history. Of course, in the long run nothing lasts.*

Charles, wrong again. The cancer of religious fundamentalism gives every indication of being nearly eradicable.

*But history is lived in the here and now. The Soviets had only 70 years, Hitler a mere 12. Yet it was enough to murder millions and rain ruin on entire continents.*

Charles, Christianity has had 2,000 and Islam 1,400. Maybe that's why their death and destruction numbers dwarf those of Hitler and the Soviet Union.

Hey wait a minute Charles. There is something else you left out: how about the millions of western Indians murdered by invading Christian hordes who then stole two entire continents from them?

How about the millions of Africans who were enslaved (and often murdered) by a nation that was nearly 100% Christian?

It's amazing how easy it is for you to point to the evils of other nations, and yet refuse to acknowledge the evil in your own. Didn't Jesus have a verse about that?

I believe He did.

*Bashar al-Assad, too, will one day go. But not before having killed at least 100,000 people.*

Charles, the American Tea Party may surpass him. Their refusal to expand Medicaid will result in many thousands of deaths. They are already killing our veterans and continue to do so. I could go on, but you get the idea.

<http://www.dailykos.com/story/2014/01/31/1270171/-Harvard-Study-States-Medicaid-expansion-refusal-will-kill-nbsp-thousands?detail=email>

*All domination must end. But after how much devastation? And if you leave it to the forces of history to repel aggression and redeem injustice, what’s the point of politics, of leadership, in the first place?*

Charles, I'm glad that paragraph made sense to you.

That makes one.

*The world is aflame and our leader is on the 14th green.*

Charles, you ignorant slut (from the show Saturday Night Live in the 1980's). The world has always been in flames; and as was already pointed out, and supported with records, no one spent more time on vacation ... than your boy Bush.

*The arc of history may indeed bend toward justice, Mr. President. But, as you say, the arc is long. The job of a leader is to shorten it, to intervene on behalf of “the fierce urgency of now.” Otherwise, why do we need a president?*

Charles, when Bush was president, a strong case could be made that we would have been better off without one. Even the 9/11 attacks couldn't pull that alcoholic, pickle-brained frat boy away from his extremely urgent talk with those little kids. But you didn't have a problem with that, did you Charles?

Of course you didn't.

*And why did you seek to become ours?*

Well Charles, if the only reason was to prevent science-denying, reality-challenged Republicans from getting us into more useless wars ... then I would say it was well worth it.

Now, go collect your stipend from the NRA, the Military-industrial complex, and the Koch Brothers for writing this propaganda piece, Charles ... you earned it.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/charles-krauthammer-the-vacant-presidency/2014/07/24/0b110fdc-1363-11e4-9285-4243a40ddc97_story.html>

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THE SCIENCE SEGMENT

So how much does the Earth's gravity deform the Moon?

The lopsided shape of the moon is one result of its gravitational tug-of-war with Earth. The mutual pulling of the two bodies is powerful enough to stretch them both, so they wind up shaped a little like two eggs with their ends pointing toward one another. On Earth, the tension has an especially strong effect on the oceans, because water moves so freely, and is the driving force behind tides.

Earth's distorting effect on the moon, called the lunar body tide, is more difficult to detect, because the moon is solid except for its small core. Even so, there is enough force to raise a bulge about 50 centimeters high on the near side of the moon and a similar one on the far side.

The position of the bulge actually shifts a few inches over time. Although the same side of the moon constantly faces Earth, because of the tilt and shape of the moon's orbit, the side facing Earth appears to wobble. From the moon's viewpoint, Earth doesn't sit motionless but moves around within a small patch of sky. The bulge responds to Earth's movements like a dance partner, following wherever the lead goes.

To search for the tide's signature, the scientists turned to data which mapped the height of features on the moon's surface. The team chose spots that the spacecraft has passed over more than once, each time approaching along a different flight path. More than 350,000 locations were selected, covering areas on the near and far sides of the moon.

The researchers precisely matched measurements taken at the same spot and calculated whether the height had risen or fallen from one satellite pass to the next; a change indicated a shift in the location of the bulge.

The good news for lunar scientists is that the new results are consistent with earlier findings. The estimated size of the tide confirmed the previous measurement of the bulge. Having confirmation of the previous values -- with significantly smaller error ranges than before -- will make the lunar body tide a more useful piece of information for scientists.

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FAMOUS QUOTES

Robin Williams (1951 –2014) 63 years

He was an American actor, comedian, film producer, and screenwriter. He rose to fame with his role as the alien "Mork" in the TV series Mork & Mindy (1978–82). Williams went on to establish a successful career in both stand-up comedy and feature film acting. His film career included such acclaimed films as The World According to Garp (1982), Good Morning, Vietnam (1987), Dead Poets Society (1989), Awakenings (1990), The Fisher King (1991), and Good Will Hunting (1997), as well as financial successes such as Popeye (1980), Hook (1991), Aladdin (1992), Mrs. Doubtfire (1993), Jumanji (1995), The Birdcage (1996), Night at the Museum (2006), and Happy Feet (2006).

Nominated for the Academy Award for Best Actor 3 times, Williams received the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor for his performance in Good Will Hunting. He also received two Emmy Awards, four Golden Globe Awards, two Screen Actors Guild Awards and five Grammy Awards.

"See, the problem is

that God gives men a brain and a penis,

but only enough blood

to run one at a time."