

LATE NIGHT SATURDAY: VILLAGE OF OUR DAMNED

For some strange reason, I have the distinct pleasure of getting the Chris Matthews Show, the syndicated half hour one, before most folks, on Saturday afternoon at 5:00 pm local time. What a constant thrill. Today Matthews had on the sage panel of Joe Klein TIME; Norah O'Donnell MSNBC; Anne Kornblut The Washington Post; and David Ignatius The Washington Post.

It did not disappoint – they all predicted Sarah Palin was the force to be reckoned with for the 2012 Republican nomination and that Barack Obama was in trouble.

The village elders are village idiots.

Instead how about both the cognoscenti and citizens of the fine United States of America ponder an ethos more along the lines contemplated by our friend Mary:

To go back to one of the lesser points – the GITMO pics – one of the reasons that everyone knows they are not being released is that they demonstrate several direct lies formerly made by the Executive to the American people. Lies about the extent of abuse, lies about prosecutions of abusers, lies about a few rogue soldiers v. a planned regime of torture, etc. Not only lies, but suppression of evidence of crime leading to obstruction of justice as a) torturers were not brought to justice for their crimes against innocent civilian populations, and b) Abu Ghraib soldiers were scapegoated and railroaded in a sideshow event specifically calculated to use them as a shield against further investigation. So Obama furthers the obstruction, picture frames his “no one is above the law” campaign

promise as being an outright lie, and then uses the Executive office to attack the judiciary. Not content, he permeates the whole of the Democratic majority with his torture support by strongarming (in a rare leadership moment) Democratic legislation to subvert justice. That's not pragmatism, it's how you lose support and votes.

The truth is that Americans do respond to the truth when battered with it as frequently as with the opposition talking points. He's never once utilized his position to do that – to get there – to be truthful about what has happened on torture, what is happening with innocent men being held at GITMO, what the *mission* is in the ME, etc. Let me put it this way – if I can make Indiana red necks blink and flinch with just a few facts, Obama giving a Presidential address, early on, to admit that bc of poor policies, intermingled with some very evil and bad men at GITMO, there are some innocent victims who should never have been sent there – yes, there would have been right wing furor (as always – I think that also happens when he goes out to dinner for that matter) but there would have been a big conscious shifting moment for the country and a seismic change in how the Muslim world sees us.

Instead, he opted to be Bush Jr. Not only is that not pragmatic, it's a slow kill poison. All the people who never wanted him still don't want him; those who thought he would be something are now thoroughly jaded to not just Obama the candidate, but the Democratic "like Bush, but comes in blue" party.

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Obama is continuing to push the "no one leaves innocent" Bush policy for GITMO. Surprise surprise at not being able to

get support when it is abundantly clear to about a billion or so, give or take, Muslims who have been paying attention that this is not the case and when nations around the world have to deal with not only their own Muslim populations but their interactions with Muslim nations. Until we abandon the "no one leaves innocent" policies and fess up that innocent people were kidnapped/sold/disappeared and abused as a part of the Executive policy of the US, it's going to be hard to get other countries to step up to the bat to degrade their own justice systems by taking our victims and refusing to comply with their own CAT responsibilities once they have them, or monitoring the mental and physical states and family situations and issues of our victims.

And those countries have spoken on the "commissions v. civilian trials" issue. Obama's opt in for commissions just makes finding a jointly sponsored and acceptable path worse. Plus, the continued coverups which are being chipped away at in proceedings in Italy, Spain, Germany, Lithuania, Romania etc. denigrates the US status as honest broker on any solution every day.

A lack of truth may have lots of benefits in response to a "does this make me look fat" question, but in context of this country's very public Executive branch crimes, stepping into the successor-in-crime slot rather than assuming a leadership mantle as the policy maker for criminal law enforcement isn't pragmatic and won't further a resolution of any issues – it's just giving gas and spinning tires in the mud.

There is a tremendous lot that Obama

could get by with domestically (with the right PR approach) and internationally if he had: been willing to go after US torturers concurrently with trials of al-Qaeda and other terrorists; been willing to release the August 2002 "we're holding lots of innocent people" CIA memo and proposed that in those instances where we were shipped innocent civilians to GITMO we undertake an independent commission to review and "make right"(including damages and resettlement) the situation [this obviously would not have dealt with the huge brunt of the "real" problems, as with the thousands in Iraq and the Bagram situation etc. but if you are looking for pragmatism it would be a mostly hide the ball but still come out smelling like a rose approach]; and a few other items that involved some minimalist truth and transparency.

The fact is – the more he's retreated to Bush positions, the more he's lost his options going forward. He's shown that he's weak, that he has no solid game plans and plan B-s, that he can be shifted with the political winds, and that he's willing to give up on his strongest arguments for a temporary appeasement, even when that means that he loses those arguments for good by taking those low roads.

There is a better path, and the village idiots are talking about the cookie factor from Alaska as the legitimate front runner for a Presidential election. Amazing.