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Obama's Problems -- and Ours

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We inherited the worst situation since the Great Depression.

That is the reflexive response of President Obama to the troubles from which he has been unable to extract his country.

Even before the inauguration, he says, there were projections of a \$1.2 trillion deficit for 2009. That deficit is not my deficit.

Presidents are usually blamed for deficits run while they are in office. But, in fact, presidents do not write budgets. Congress does. Presidents sign them. And the mammoth deficits of 2008 and 2009 came from budgets approved by a Congress run by Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid. Did Sen. Barack Obama vote against those budgets?

As for the troubles he inherited, the president has a point. From day one, he has had to deal with two wars, a financial crisis and an economy careening into recession.

But Harry Truman inherited two great wars, an atom bomb and an ally, Joseph Stalin, about to dishonor his commitments and enslave half of Europe.

Richard Nixon came to office a minority president in the year of Tet, urban riots, campus uprisings, and the assassinations of Dr. King and Robert Kennedy. He inherited a war in which 500,000 Americans were fighting, and came to a capital city dominated by a media that detested him and a Congress where, for the first time since Zachary Taylor, the opposition controlled both houses.

Ronald Reagan, too, inherited the worst recession since the Depression, a hollowed-out Army, a Soviet Empire that had overrun Vietnam and Southeast Asia and seized Afghanistan, Angola, Mozambique, Grenada and Nicaragua, and a NATO shot through with Eurocommunism and pacifism.

Undaunted, Truman went on to a historic victory in 1948, and Nixon and Reagan went on to 49-state landslides. Presidents have a way of coming back, and America has legendary recuperative powers.

So no one should write this president or country off. But neither should anyone minimize the problems confronting us.

First is the debt crisis. Federal revenues are running at 16 percent of gross domestic product, spending at 27 percent. Wednesday, Fed Chairman Ben Bernanke warned that a Greece-like situation, where creditors refuse to buy U.S. debt unless we raise interest rates to cover the rising risks of a U.S. default, cannot be ruled out.

Economists at the International Monetary Fund have suggested the United States raise the inflation rate to 4 percent or 6 percent to float out of the debt crisis. This is another way of saying the government should clandestinely steal the wealth of the American people to pay off its debts. Bernanke says that will not happen.

U.S. casualties are rising in Afghanistan even as Iraq's elections, which are to lead to a U.S. withdrawal, appear to be moving that country back toward a Sunni-Shia and Arab-Kurd sectarian and civil war.

A third crisis is political: the perception that President Obama is a weak leader who cannot even impose his will on a Congress where Democrats had, until January, a filibuster-proof majority in the Senate and a near 80-vote margin in the House.

While Democrats are despondent, facing almost certain defeat in the fall, Republicans seem united only on what they are against: Obama and Obamacare, cap-and-trade, civil trials for terrorists, socialism.

But in 2012, the party of Sarah Palin, Mitt Romney and Ron Paul will have to tell

the country how it proposes to end these wars without losing them, how to bring manufacturing back and how to cut spending by \$1 trillion a year, if taxes are off the table.

The question raised by the successive failures is whether either party has a cure for the maladies that afflict America. Or are those maladies beyond the power of politics to heal?

Mr. Buchanan is a nationally syndicated columnist and author of [Churchill, Hitler, and "The Unnecessary War": How Britain Lost Its Empire and the West Lost the World](#), ["The Death of the West,"](#) ["The Great Betrayal,"](#) ["A Republic, Not an Empire"](#) and ["Where the Right Went Wrong."](#)

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