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When Barack Obama was inaugurated a year ago, supporters made euphoric predictions of sweeping foreign-policy successes. He advocated dialogue with even the most despotic leaders, making the restoration of America's global image his administration's predominant international objective.

The world has proved to be a tougher place than Obama's team expected, and he has made little progress on foreign policy challenges. The "audacity of hope" has been replaced by the "audacity of hope that it works."

Obama's principal foreign policy faults have been an unwillingness to assume the mantle of responsibility for his position and a narcissistic outlook. To paraphrase Joseph Biden, there are only three things that Obama mentions in a sentence: a noun, a verb and blame Bush. Although many presidents have highlighted the problems that they inherited, Obama has raised blaming his predecessor to an art form.

A common refrain from the Obama camp is that he inherited a bigger mess from his predecessor than any other president. Really? Would Ronald Reagan agree, having taken over at a time of national malaise, when the Soviet bear was steadily expanding its influence? Or Gerald Ford, who faced an America destitute from the after-effects of a divisive Vietnam War and a post-Watergate populace distrustful of Washington? Or Richard Nixon, who found himself neck-deep in Johnson's Vietnam War and an America embroiled in domestic strife of racial tensions, crime and urban riots?

Certainly, Barack Obama entered office during a time of unenviable challenges. But, a president's foreign policy should be driven more by what it is, rather than what it isn't. "I'm not Bush" only goes so far. After a year, it's time to move beyond a knee-jerk response of blaming everything on the "previous eight years."

Ironically, despite vitriolic criticism of George W. Bush, President Obama has largely maintained his predecessor's policies. Policy changes have often been more of tone than substance. Although Obama campaigned on a platform of change, his administration has been more an example of "continuity we can believe in." Yet his supporters claim that Obama's continuing of Bush's previously derided "ideological" policies is now somehow "pragmatic."

Obama's other principal shortcoming is seeing himself as more important than his office. Obama has internalized Louis XIV's adage "l'etat c'est moi" ("I am the state") by adopting his biography as foreign policy. Obama does have an inspirational life story, but as president he needs to worry more about representing the country than burnishing his image. He also needs to stop undermining American interests by repeatedly apologizing for historic events while deflecting responsibility by claiming that they occurred before his administration.

Obama's Asia trip last November was a prime example of substituting feel-good objectives for tangible foreign policy goals. Engagement is a tool, not an end in and of itself. The remainder of his term needs to shift from rebranding America to achieving national objectives.

Changing foreign perceptions of the United States didn't persuade opponents to change their behavior, nor have American allies stepped up to provide resources to redress shared security threats.

North Korea and Iran responded to Obama's outreached hand of dialogue by provocatively launching long-range missiles and unabashedly continuing their pursuit of nuclear weapons. Islamic terrorists continue to attack the United States and kill Americans, despite Bush's departure and Obama's much-vaunted speech in Cairo.

Meanwhile, the Obama administration undercut NATO allies by scrapping plans for missile-defense sites in Eastern Europe in an unsuccessful effort to moderate Russian behavior. The Middle East peace process has floundered, China continues its march to be the dominant power in Asia . . . the list goes on and on. Even the failure of the Copenhagen summit showed that national interests continue to trump lofty multilateral visions.

How is success measured? The relevant question is not whether the United States is more popular abroad but whether Washington has achieved national objectives. It hasn't. Unless soft

Obama – The PR President

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power is convertible into political influence, it is merely an oxymoron. Even effective soft power can only augment, not replace, security commitments.

It's time for President Obama to stop substituting public relations for foreign policy. The United States remains the sole nation in the world capable of leadership in addressing global security challenges. Obama must decide to do the right thing, even when it isn't popular overseas. As Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher once admonished, "Consensus is the absence of leadership."

Bruce Klingner is a senior research fellow for Northeast Asia in the Asian Studies Center at The Heritage Foundation