

## Obama's ideological holiday in Havana



By **Charles Krauthammer** Opinion writer March 24

The split screen told the story: on one side, images of the terror bombing in Brussels; on the other, Barack Obama doing the wave with Raúl Castro at a baseball game in Havana.

[On one side](#), the real world of rising global terrorism. On the other, the Obama fantasy world in which romancing a geopolitically insignificant Cuba — [without an ounce](#) of democracy or human rights yielded in return — is considered a seminal achievement of American diplomacy.

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Cuba wasn't so much a legacy trip as a vanity trip, vindicating the dorm-room enthusiasms of one's student days when the Sandinistas were cool, revolution was king and every other friend had a dog named Che.

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When [Brussels intervened](#), some argued that Obama should have cut short his trip and come back home. I disagree. You don't let three suicide bombers control the itinerary of the American president. Moreover, [Obama's next stop](#), Argentina, is actually important and had just elected a friendly government that broke from its long and corrupt Peronist past.

Nonetheless, Obama could have done without the baseball. What kind of message does it send to be yukking it up with Raúl even as Belgian authorities are picking body parts off the floor of the Brussels airport?

Obama came into office believing that we had vastly exaggerated the threat of terrorism and allowed it to pervert both our values and our foreign policy. He declared a unilateral end to the global war on terror and has downplayed the threat ever since. He frequently reminds aides, [reports Jeffrey Goldberg](#) of the Atlantic, that more Americans die annually of bathtub accidents.

It's now been seven years. The real world has stubbornly refused to accommodate Obama's pacific dreams. The Islamic State has grown from JV team to worldwide threat, operating from Libya to Afghanistan, Sinai to Belgium. It is well into the infiltration phase of its European campaign, with [500 trained and hardened](#) cadres in place among the [estimated 5,000 jihadists](#) returned from the Middle East. The increasing tempo and sophistication of its operations suggest that it may be

poised for a continent-wide guerrilla campaign.

In the face of this, Obama remains inert, unmoved, displaying a neglect and insouciance that borders on denial. His nonreaction to the Belgian massacre — his [34-minute speech in Havana](#) devoted 51 seconds to Brussels — left the world as stunned as it was after the Paris massacre, when Obama did nothing. Worse, at his now notorious November [news conference in Turkey](#), his only show of passion regarding Paris was to berate Islamophobes.

David Axelrod [called Obama's response](#) “tone-deaf.” But that misses the point. This is more than a mere mistake of presentation. Remember his reaction to the beheading of the American journalist James Foley? Obama made a statement expressing his sympathies — and then jumped onto his golf cart for a round of 18.

He [later told](#) Chuck Todd that this was a mistake. “Part of this job is also the theater of it,” he explained, “It’s not something that always comes naturally to me.” As if postponing a bucolic recreation was a required piece of political playacting rather than a president’s natural reaction — a mixture of shock and sorrow — to the terrible death of a citizen he could not save.

It’s not as if Obama is so super cool that he never shows emotion. Just a few months ago, [he teared up](#) when speaking about the Sandy Hook school shooting. That was the work of a psychotic. But when speaking about the work of Islamist terrorists, he offers flat perfunctory words.

I cannot fathom why. Perhaps having long seen himself uniquely qualified by background and history to make peace between Islam and the West, to now recognize how badly things have gone on his watch is to admit both failure and the impossible grandiosity of his original pretensions.

Whatever the reason, he seems genuinely unmoved by a menace the rest of the world views, correctly, with horror and increasing apprehension. He’s been in office seven years, yet seems utterly fixed on his campaign promises and pre-presidential obsessions: shutting down Gitmo, rapprochement with Iran, engagement with tyrants (hence Havana), making the oceans recede (hence the Paris climate trip). Next we’ll see yet another useless Washington “summit” on yet another Obama *idée fixe* : eliminating nuclear materials.

With the world on fire, the American president goes on ideological holiday. As was said of the Bourbons: “They have learned nothing and have forgotten nothing.”

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