

THE US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN: The Final Four Or More?

By [Danny Schechter](#)

Global Research, March 27, 2012

27 March 2012

Region: [USA](#)

March seems to be leaving us like a lamb, although "March Madness" is still in effect, as college basketball marched into "The Final Four"

It is safe to predict that more Americans are paying attention to the action on the courts than the tired rhetoric and electoral mash-up where another final four bid for our attention, over-hyped in confrontational terms by political commentators who, like their sports counterparts, are just there to keep score:

They are in the endless update business focused on who is up, who's down, and who is out-in the cold.

The sports analysts tend to be better dressed and more adept at "color" coverage while the pundits become more and more knee jerk and predictable which is why networks like CNN seem to invent new gadgets and graphic displays by the day. Have you seen their "cube?"

Let's see: in the elephant camp, we have Mitt on first, Rick on second and Newt a distant third. Ron Paul has already been sent to the showers by the media who long ago downrezed his campaign, probably, because, from time to time, he was making sense in his criticisms of the Fed and the wars,

Over in Donkey land, the final member of the boresome, Barack Obama, is racing around the country and the world to position himself as the only adult in the room.

Last week, he was in South Ohio taking energy; this week, he's in South Korea talking nukes, adding his fingerprinting to the global chorus of condemnation of the nasty North, insisting that "we" can't "reward their bad behavior."

I am not sure how many votes our Soul Brother #1 expects from the people of Seoul.

I would hope he would rather be dunking baskets in the Final Four than signing new laws and executive orders dunking the Constitution. He has clearly calculated that his hopes for re-election depend in the public perceiving him as a hard-line commander in chief steering us smoothly through a dangerous world.

While his opponents babble, he seeks to be, ready for battle.

That's why the President has been playing footsie with Netanyahu, pledging that Israel has his "back" while, at the same time, trying to stop the lunatics of Likud from doing anything stupid and unilateral that he and his national security apparatchiks can't control.

As they say, timing is everything.

The Pentagon's Panetta, a pol to his core, is making his own contingency plans for a military conflict that will likely do more good for the POTUS politically in October than in the Spring or Summer.

Anyone remember that phrase, "October Surprise? " Don't rule one out this year.

Notice, how in recent months, the White House has been escalating the hostility and sanctions against Tehran, Bear in mind that Tehran and Tel Aviv have elections of their own underway that relish the presence of an external enemy.

Our craven media is quite willing to play the fear card too because it will drive up ratings and revenues. Remember their mantra; "when it bleeds, it leads."

Obama is clearly trying to keep the Afghan War going as he expands the drone wars in places like Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia.

At the same time, the public is increasingly unimpressed .A New York Times/CBS News poll finding that 69 percent of Americans surveyed think that the United States should not be at war in Afghanistan. 69 is a number that people remember!

Our jihad against the Taliban has blown back against us, with Afghans protesting our outrages and some shooting NATO soldiers. The peace talks went nowhere and the only question is: can the Pentagon hold on past the election.

Obama can't really run on an economy not in real recovery. Even as he 'tsk, tsk's' the growth in economic inequality, his onetime "Car Czar," Steven Ratner, a financier and journalist, is writing in the New York Times about how the rich got richer under his watch:

"New statistics show an ever-more-startling divergence between the fortunes of the wealthy and everybody else — and the desperate need to address this wrenching problem. Even in a country that sometimes seems inured to income inequality, these takeaways are truly stunning.

In 2010, as the nation continued to recover from the recession, a dizzying 93 percent of the additional income created in the country that year, compared to 2009 — \$288 billion — went to the top 1 percent of taxpayers, those with at least \$352,000 in income. That delivered an average single-year pay increase of 11.6 percent to each of these households."

It wasn't surprising when Occupy Wall Street plastered his article on their own website. It is a point they have been making repeatedly.

And speaking of money, the Obama campaign was forced to backtrack on its opposition to SuperPACs as the grassroots support that it mesmerized in 2008 dried up because of disenchantment, if not fury, at the President's centrist neo-liberalism that long ago morphed into neo-conservatism.

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The Democrats are now trying to compete with a GOP juggernaut of almost unlimited

resources thanks to brigades of billionaires that see Obama as the anti-Christ and worse.

They are literally shoveling cash into their crusade as the election gets crasser and more about money than any sense of political mission.

With his base dispirited, Obama's only real assets for now, in the absence of global state of emergency, are the cartoon-like Republicans who shrilly denounce him and each other. They all have their "Etch A Sketch" toys at the ready.

The Supreme Court, best known for its infamous Citizens United decision is likely to can Obama's troubled health care reform.

The Daily Beast fears it is "setting up a high-stakes ruling that could set the agenda for fall's election." They ask, " Was it a political misstep for Obama to spend so much political capital."

- Should we anticipate another step backward even if many real health care advocates believe this law was never a real step forward?
- Can those of us disgusted with this whole process of rapid devolution build a meaningful alternative that goes beyond protest?
- Will the soldiers of Occupy unite on a program (or somethin'), or mic-check their way to marginality?

Jeff Smith writes on Daily Beast, "It comes down to something more than a standoff with the local police, a sense that larger issues of economic fairness and citizen enfranchisement are at play, that we can reclaim our government and our commons from the moneyed interests that have co-opted both, and that what had seemed like pipe dreams are moving into reach as the movement's message spreads and its numbers grow.

Those moments alternate with deflating ones, when Occupy feels like a depressing reminder of the world we're stuck with now: tepid protests where unions and the street team of the Democratic Party try to assume the mantle of the occupation.."

At a minimum, can we ask the powers that be to craft a release form for the rest of us—a document like the one iTunes keeps asking us to read and approve in a country dominated by an unresponsive and increasingly brutal oligarchy in which power and privilege is concentrated at the very top of the pyramid?

Are we ready to just read about the demise of democracy and click "Agree? Or can we decide its time to resist while we still have some time?

There's more to do than cheer the final four!

News Dissector Danny Schechter writes the NewsDissector.net blog. His new book is Occupy: Dissecting Occupy Wall Street (Cosmo). His film Plunder is available from plunderthecrimeofourtime.com. Comments to dissector@mediachannel.org

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Articles by: [Danny Schechter](#)

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