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## Obama's Report Card

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Ojai, California – Here in normally arid southern California, we've just endured a week of torrential rains, tornados, flash floods, and mud slides. Some roads have even turned to rivers in the great western monsoon.

But these tempests are nothing compared to last week's electoral storm that greeted President Barack Obama's first anniversary in office.

Conservative Republican Scott Brown's dramatic upset victory in the Massachusetts race for the late Senator Teddy Kennedy's seat has left Democrats shaken and frightened. Massachusetts is the most Democratic of all states; if Republicans won there, no place is safe for the Democrats.

The loss of Kennedy's feudal seat was as stunning as if a Protestant had become pope.

Republicans are cock-a-hoop, crowing that an anti-Obama revolution has begun. They hope American voters will forget the nation's economic melt-down and wars overseas occurred when Republicans held power. Voters do have notoriously short memories.

The upset was due to voter's fear and anger over America's persistent high unemployment, the Wall Street rescue, gargantuan deficits, and Obama's unpopular health plan.

Instead of focusing on the economy, the president wasted a year trying to implement his awkward health plan. Many Americans just don't want to pay health costs for the poor.

Obama's disappointing, lackluster first-year record is also mirrored in his foreign policies.

The new leader who promised to bring change has largely failed to do so, and has continued or expanded many of the most pernicious policies of the Bush years. Liberals who had hoped for glasnost and perestroika instead got Bush's third term with a kinder, smiling, intelligent face.

The Mideast continues to be America's most trying foreign problem. What the west calls terrorism stems from the Muslim world's fury over the endless agony of Palestine, the US-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and mounting raids against Somalia and Yemen. It has next to nothing to do with Islam or cultural hatred, as George W. Bush so dishonestly claimed.

Osama bin Laden warned, "there will be no peace in America until there is peace in Palestine."

Unfortunately, he may be right. The Christmas airline hysteria caused by a young Nigerian with incendiary underpants was a graphic example.

Barack Obama's vow to halt Israeli annexation of the West Bank and engineer a fair Arab-Israeli peace has turned into a humiliating fiasco for the president.

The White House's demand that Israel cease building settlements – and particularly so in illegally occupied East Jerusalem – was rejected with contempt by Israel's hardline Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu.

Hillary Clinton even stabbed boss Obama in the back by lauding Israel's "restrained" settlement policies, a clear sign of her future political ambitions if Obama falters.

Dismaying his liberal supporters, Europeans and the entire Muslim world, which had high hopes for the new "peace president," Obama is expanding the pointless war in Afghanistan, entrenching a permanent US presence in Iraq, and intensifying US military operations in Somalia, and Yemen, as well as North and West Africa.

Obama is under mounting pressure to launch an air war against Iran. So far, Obama has sensibly resisted. But as Obama's presidency weakens, and mid-term elections grow closer, he may be forced into a major military confrontation with Iran, which shows no signs of giving in to American threats over its nuclear program.

The president just asked Congress for an additional \$33 billion this year to fund the trillion-dollar Afghan and Iraq wars. The costs of these inherited conflicts – that now belong to Obama – are being financed by emergency loans, not taxes, as they should be.

Future generations will pay for these colonial misadventures that have so far cost \$1 trillion.

If Americans' taxes were to go up to properly finance these colonial wars, popular outrage would swiftly end them.

By contrast, Obama has improved frayed US relations with Europe, in large part due to his personal popularity on the continent. Relations with Russia, however, remain jagged. On the plus side, Obama has apparently dropped Bush's dangerously provocative plan to bring Ukraine and Georgia into NATO and to build a major anti-ballistic radar near Russia's border in favor of a smaller, less capable system.

The US-India entente, begun by Bush, is moving ahead apace. America's arms industry is drooling at the thought of huge contracts with India.

But every American step closer to India increases tensions with India's rival, China, which sees the new US-Indian axis as a blatant attempt to surround it.

Meanwhile, the Obama administration is getting sucked ever deeper into the growing, increasingly dangerous mess in volatile Pakistan where anti-American hatred has reached alarming intensity.

The president disappointingly failed to normalize relations with Cuba while cozying up to other Communist regimes. Nor has he managed to yet close America's gulags at Guantanamo, Cuba, and Bagram, Afghanistan, or end many of the Bush administration's anti-democratic security measures.

Obama backed away from pursuing government officials who conducted torture, kidnapping and illegal surveillance of American citizens.

sum, a very disappointing year from a man who inspired so many.

Thanks to Washington's financial "rescue," America's big five banks now control 40% of all deposits nationally. In spite of a proposed new bank tax and some tepid restrictions of gambling with depositor money, big finance seems too often to be giving the Obama administration its marching orders.

Goldman Sachs rules while Washington floods the world with depreciating US dollars.

Obama failed to grasp the levers of power and wasted time. He took on four of Washington's most powerful lobbies – Wall Street, the Israel lobby, the military-industrial complex, and medical insurance – and lost all these battles. Many Americans are left with the unhappy conviction that Obama has become a prisoner of these special interests.

Meanwhile, the Republicans seem to be rising from the dead, revived by Scott Brown's upset victory in Massachusetts. Watch for Brown to be shortly hailed as the party's next standard-bearer.