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[While Obama Promotes US Interests Abroad, His Opponents Deny Reality At Home](#)

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Most of Washington is stuck "in what we call the reality-based community ... people who believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality. That's not the way the world really works anymore. ... When we act, we create our own reality." Karl Rove, 2004.

Rove's famous comments came to mind this week as President Obama and his political rivals launched new policy offensives. Hop-scotching across Asia, the President nudged the center of U.S. foreign policy towards international economic interests and concerns. From Delhi and Jakarta to Seoul and Tokyo, he has focused on the predominant economic realities that inform the decision-making of our major allies and competitors. In the process, he has begun to recast our critical relationships around issues that allow the United States to draw on its greatest advantages, a market four times larger than China's, and our capacity to develop the advanced technologies and business methods driving modernization across the world.

Back in Washington, congressional Republicans launched their own offensive, trumpeting their plans to use their majority in the House of Representatives and expanded numbers in the Senate.

But their agenda seems to draw less on the hard realities that drove most of those who went to the polls two weeks ago -- jobs and incomes -- than on the full-throated ranting of the more extreme elements in their political base. As if saying so will make it so, they are uniting around non-negotiable demands to repeal health care reform, cut taxes for high-income people, and slash domestic spending in unspecified ways.

These dueling offensives recall the 1990s even more than the Bush era. Bill Clinton came to office on the heels of the collapse of global communism, and so happily refocused American foreign policy on international economic matters. Barack Obama was less fortunate, with two wars and worldwide economic turmoil dominating his early foreign policies. But less than two years later, the Iraq conflict is winding down, the Afghan war has a new course, and global markets are more stable. So for now, he can concentrate on the economic concerns -- currency

values, trade barriers, debt, and worldwide demand – that once again are central factors in our real relations with other nations. And as in the 1990s, real movement on these international issues can help build a foundation for the progress on jobs and incomes at home that dominates the President’s domestic agenda.

Appropriately, the President chose the world’s most economically-consequential region, Asia, to quietly launch his new foreign-policy offensive. His agenda began with new commercial openings and investment arrangements with India and with Indonesia, two of the world’s fastest-growing and most protected large markets. Next, he turned to the G-20 summit in Seoul, where he fended off Chinese criticism of our monetary stimulus and called for measures to address the global imbalances that set the stage for the 2008 global meltdown. He will wind it up in Japan, the world’s third largest economy, where he will lead discussions on currency, trade and economic growth at the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum. Whatever the outcomes of all of these meetings and agreements, the President is subtly shifting the focus of American influence to the real matters that drive our relationships with most other countries.

Back home, economic reality for many of the President’s opponents – John Boehner is a lonely exception – is being redefined by the likes of Glenn Beck and Rush Limbaugh. Somehow, hundreds of billions of dollars will be cut from the budget without touching the defense programs and entitlement benefits which account for most spending. Next, all of the Bush tax cuts must be extended forever, even in the face of the GOP’s sky-is-falling rhetoric on the deficits. And any compromise on the tax cuts in the lame duck session, before they expire on December 31st, is off-the-table – despite GOP attacks on the President for allegedly fostering “economic uncertainty.” Prominent Republicans this week also attacked the Federal Reserve’s “quantitative easing” program to support growth, as if the prescription for jobs and incomes in a weak economy is to end monetary as well as fiscal stimulus. Ironically, this last offensive echoes China’s position that the new Fed policy will make U.S. exports “unfairly competitive.”

These implacable opponents’ latest gambit involves the debt ceiling, which will come up in the early months of next year. Some Republicans in both the House and Senate now threaten to block this normal procedure on the principal that’s already too high for their comfort, while others propose to let it go through only if the President agrees to \$300 billion in budget savings – again without specifying any real cuts they would support. This one is dangerous even as just a threat, since any serious suggestion that the United States might find itself legally unable to pay the interest on its’ Treasury notes and bonds would sharply drive up interest rates. In the real world, that would cut off the fragile recovery and possibly send the entire world economy into a tailspin.

Politics always involves a good deal of posturing and shenanigans. But these escapades, at this moment, have real consequences, not least of all for millions of struggling Americans who apparently hope that divided government will restore their jobs. By definition, divided government can produce the results that voters want only through reasonable compromise. And much as when Newt Gingrich and his fantasy-fueled followers took power, if the radicals leading the offensive this time continue to deny that fact, they too will find themselves bested by a reality-based president.

Cross posted from the [NDN blog](#).