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Commentary: Obama finds a world that blames U.S.

By: Edward Rollins

Editor's note: Ed Rollins, a senior political contributor for CNN, was political director for President Ronald Reagan and chairman of the National Republican Congressional Committee.

(CNN) -- After firing the CEO of General Motors and putting Chrysler on a path that could lead to bankruptcy, the still-popular President Obama moved from the domestic battlefield to the international one. But the subject is the same, with no relief in sight: the woeful world economy.

The president and a staff of hundreds took off this week on Air Force One and backup planes to attend his first international summit, the G-20 meeting in London, England.

The eyes of a nervous world are looking to the new American president, as well as the leaders of 18 other countries and the European Union, with some hope that they can get us out of this world financial crisis. These countries all have diverse populations and different roles in the world, but all share a concern for a world economy that is teetering on the brink of disaster.

In a meeting that will last only a little more than eight hours, including meals, little will be accomplished, but impressions will be made that will be long-lasting and important. Historically in international meetings, the United States presidents set the agenda and often the tone for the meeting. This one will be different.

The United States' role is being challenged by China, which is funding our past and hopefully future debt, and by France, which also has a new charismatic leader with very strong opinions. Germany and others reject the president's stimulus plan and most, if not all these countries, blame the world economic crisis on the good old US of A.

They think that two expensive, unending wars, our greedy bankers and the irresponsible runaway spending by our government and citizens have laid the foundation for the collapse of the worlds' economy.

Fortunately for President Obama, most of the blame falls on the shoulders of his predecessor, the Texan who just packed his boxes and returned to Crawford, Texas.

But they are measuring the president to see if he is more than a big personality and if he is willing to be a team player and a listener. Is the United States going to be part of the solution or a continued source of the problem? goes the unanswered question that most other world leaders are asking. Does the United States



have solutions that they can buy into or does this become a go-it-alone situation and every country has to do its own thing for survival?

The more important purpose of the president's international trip may be the sidebar meetings with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and Chinese President Hu Jintao. The Russian meeting held Wednesday was a preliminary session for a future summit to deal with the expiration of the landmark 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty.

Both sides want to continue to reduce nuclear weapons, but like President Obama's budget, the devil is in the details. The Russians of course want us to include the future of missile defense plans in any discussions -- which we should resist at all costs, as well as any reduction in our missiles, bombers or submarines. We must remember the Russians are back in a mode of rebuilding their military.

And we must always remember when former President George W. Bush looked in former president and now Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's eyes and stated, "I looked the man in the eye. I found him to be very straightforward and trustworthy and we had a very good dialogue. I was able to get a sense of his soul." No American leader was ever so mistaken!

As far as the Chinese meeting, President Hu Jintao is concerned about the strength of the U.S. dollar and wants a new world reserve currency. Since he has a lot of our dollars and President Obama's future deficit spending programs will depend on China's lending a lot more of them, that meeting is most important for the long term. Developing a good rapport with the leader of China -- the most significant long-term challenger to the United States' place as the world's economic and military superpower -- is critical for the new president and the country he leads.

Meanwhile back on the home front, the congressional Democrats, after a little pushing and shoving among themselves, will pass the president's budget resolution and keep the blueprint intact. The details will be battled over for several months without any help from the Republicans.

Unfortunately, my party continues to be distracted by internal squabbles among the House Republican leadership and the near-daily missteps of the new Republican National Chairman, Michael Steele.

Steele, who I think is a nice man, is becoming an embarrassment to himself and the party he leads.

Comparing his job to that of President Obama and stating that his attacks on Rush Limbaugh, a conservative icon, were strategic made many Republicans shake their head in dismay. Also, his now repeated talk about running for president reminds people who know him how badly he was defeated when he ran for the U.S. Senate two years ago.



And even though the cries for his resignation are getting louder by the blunder, he will probably survive. But his suggestion to a Republican fundraiser in Maryland Tuesday evening that the party faithful -- some of whom have criticized his erratic statements -- need to be more like him: "unconventional, unpredictable ... to do from time to time the unexpected" was pretty stupid, to say the least. Unfortunately, that is all we expect of him now.

His mantra of "Drill, baby, drill" is now being paraphrased by many party activists: "Quit, baby, quit!"

It is very unfortunate.