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May 12, 2013: Is Obama Nixon?

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Title: Is Obama Nixon?

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5/12/2013 – – I was disappointed when Obama's foreign policy turned out to reflect the foreign policy of George Bush. But I am really outraged if Obama's domestic policy turns out to reflect the policies of Richard Nixon. It was Nixon, you might remember, who sought to use the IRS to intimidate and harass political opponents. Nixon was not impeached and removed from office for doing this. But it was of a piece with his other activities that ultimately led to Watergate. He resigned in the face of almost certain impeachment and removal. I did not see a story in the New York Times today about The IRS targeting Tea Party groups. This omission itself is troubling. You can only imagine that the story would have had legs if liberal groups were targeted by a conservative administration in the same way. In any event, I don't really know what happened. There was a column by Ross Douthat in today's New York Times that suggested that a "low-level" employee at the IRS was involved. If that is the case, then that person and that person's supervisors should be fired. But if the White House was in any way involved, then Obama should face impeachment and removal. I would like to see some assurance that the White House knew nothing about this. But the truth is that the Obama administration is so politically savvy that I have a hard time believing that they White House was not involved. It would be nice if for once people could approach an issue like this without regard to partisan politics. There is nothing more dangerous than an administration that uses the government bureaucracy that should be strictly nonpartisan for partisan ends. The idea that the IRS might treat a political opponent of the President at all differently from everybody else is a short route to dictatorship. And I don't know why the President's supporters, of which I count myself, are not much more enraged by this story. It is possible that what happened here was a sincere belief by low-level officials that Tea Party organizations were misusing 501c(3) designations. In other words, these conservative organizations generally did not deserve tax exempt status under the law. But it is a genuine threat to democracy when political opponents of the party in power are treated differently from everyone else. Even if this suspicion was the motivating factor behind these actions, the actions are still corrupt in a political sense. In other words, it is easy for a politician to believe quite sincerely that her opponents generally act unlawfully. Because it is so easy to believe that, it is extremely dangerous when politicians act on such suspicions.