

**THE
'AMERICAN SNIPER'
PHENOMENON**
MARK HEMINGWAY • JOHN PODHORETZ

the weekly

Standard

FEBRUARY 2, 2015

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HARD TIMES FOR HEZBOLLAH

Is Iran's Lebanese client losing its grip?

BY LEE SMITH

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Remembering Churchill

The death of Sir Winston Churchill, 50 years ago last week, reminds THE SCRAPBOOK that, while a half-century is a very long time, Churchill's lifetime is closer to us than we suspect. Indeed, in the words William Faulkner gave to Gavin Stevens in *Requiem for a Nun*, "The past isn't dead. It isn't even past."

Consider, for example, Churchill himself. There must be some irony in the fact that, during this week, he seems to be treated with greater deference in the American media than in the British press. This should not be a surprise. To Americans, Winston Churchill is largely remembered as the gallant wartime hero who led Great Britain as it stood alone, after the fall of France and before the invasion of Russia, against Hitler's Germany. To his fellow Britons, Churchill is a more complicated political figure than we would recognize: A Tory-turned-Liberal-turned-Tory, a stalwart defender of Empire, an early architect of the British welfare state, he combined genius with the usual human weaknesses and contradictions.

But since we're regarding him, this week, from across the Atlantic, THE SCRAPBOOK chooses to honor the

Churchill whose wisdom, bravery, and complex mind made him indispensable, in his lifetime, to the survival of freedom. It was Churchill who, in the aftermath of the Great

the Zionist dream of a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

A decade later, it was Churchill, almost alone among Western statesmen, who clearly saw Fascism and National Socialism for what they were, and warned a battle-weary Britain—indeed, warned anyone who would listen—of the dangers of complacency and wishful thinking in the face of peril.

We are fortunate that, in the long run and at the eleventh hour, Churchill prevailed and Nazi Germany was defeated. It seems improbable, in retrospect, that someone like Adolf Hitler should ever have been regarded as anything other than a menace to civilization. But that was not so obvious when Hitler was alive and in power and Churchill was exhorting his reluctant countrymen to wake up to reality.

In a lifetime of supreme accomplishment, Winston Churchill's greatest achievement was to see what was in front of him, to describe precisely what he saw—and in memorable words and actions, to mobilize humanity against inhumanity. The lesson for us is that, as Churchill knew in his lifetime, that struggle is never finished—and 50 years after his death, it goes on. ♦



The Times, January 25, 1965

War, first grappled with the deadly challenge of a Communist state, as well as the tribal politics of the Arab Middle East, and with militant Islam, while steadily championing

Moyers, Johnson, and King

The film *Selma*, which chronicles the pivotal battle in the civil rights movement, is currently in theaters and has even garnered an Academy Award nomination for Best Picture. The film has an unlikely critic, however—PBS host and former

White House aide to Lyndon Johnson Bill Moyers. Moyers accuses the film of an "egregious and outrageous portrayal [of Lyndon Johnson's conduct] that is the worst kind of creative license." Specifically, Moyers is upset that the film suggests LBJ was behind Coretta Scott King receiving a recording of her husband having sex with another woman.

As an icon of the American left, Bill Moyers is unlikely ever to be held accountable for the sins he committed as Lyndon Johnson's White House hatchet man. Nonetheless, we never fail to be amazed at Moyers's arrogance and willingness to wade into civil rights debates given his own participation in the Johnson administration's persecution of Martin

Luther King Jr. THE WEEKLY STANDARD's own Andrew Ferguson first dragged Moyers's misdeeds back into the light two decades ago in the *New Republic*:

As the campaign against King progressed, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover routinely forwarded to the White House summaries of the King wiretaps, which were placed not only in King's home and office but also in his hotel rooms around the country. The summaries covered not only King's dealings with associates but also his sexual activities. After receiving one such summary, Moyers instructed the FBI to disseminate it widely throughout the executive branch, to Dean Rusk, Robert McNamara, Carl Rowan, and many others. Moyers was also aware at the time of Hoover's efforts to leak the King material to the press.

That wasn't the full extent of it. In 2009, the *Washington Post* reported that Moyers had also made inquiries regarding the sexual preferences of Jack Valenti and others working in the White House. When the *Post* asked about these allegations, it reported: "Moyers said by e-mail yesterday that his memory is unclear after so many years."

Moyers's reputation in the LBJ White House at the time was such that veteran journalist Morley Safer had this to say in his memoir: "I find it hard to believe that Bill Moyers would engage in character assassination. . . . But I confess, I find it harder not to believe it." Safer continued:

His part in Lyndon Johnson and J. Edgar Hoover's bugging of Martin Luther King's private life, the leaks to the press and diplomatic corps, the surveillance of civil rights groups at the 1964 Democratic Convention, and his request for damaging information from Hoover on members of the Goldwater campaign suggest he was not only a good soldier but a gleeful retainer feeding the appetites of Lyndon Johnson.

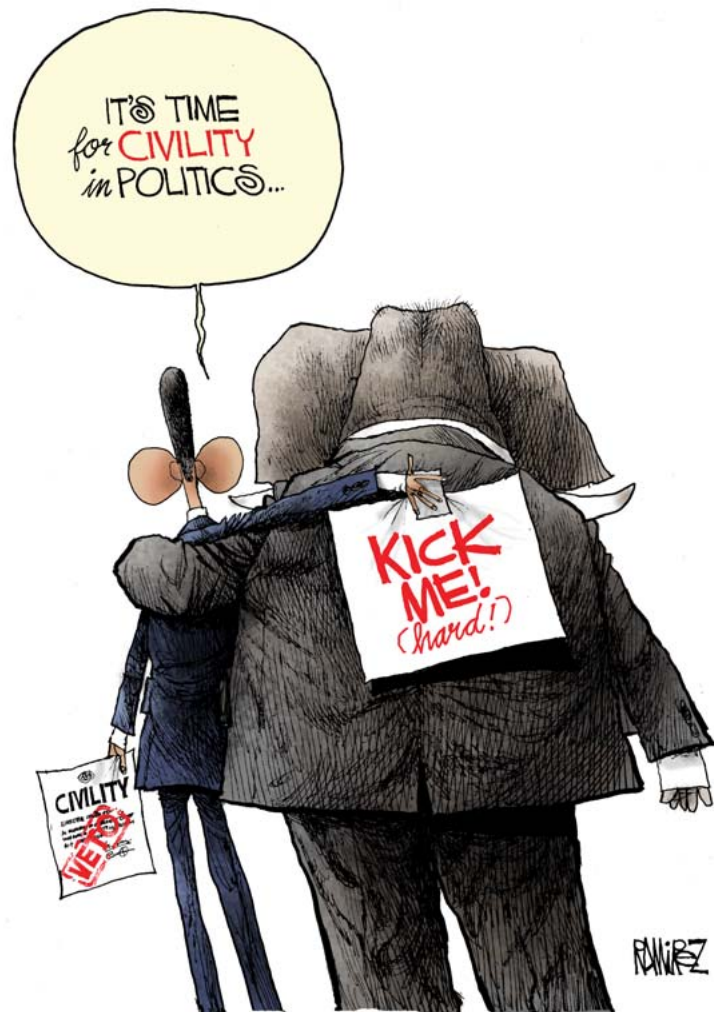
There is no doubt that Johnson and Moyers had zero scruples when it came to spying on people's sex lives and leaking personally damaging in-

formation. Maybe LBJ wasn't behind the leaking of MLK's sex tape to his wife, but Moyers is the last person one should trust to tell the truth about it, and it is by no means the "worst kind of creative license" to speculate Johnson was capable of such a thing. Indeed, this is a case where the use of creative license is more than warranted. Whatever other historical facts *Selma* may have gotten wrong, we'd venture that nothing in the film is quite so outrageous as the fact that a seemingly unrepentant Moyers thinks he has the moral standing to complain about the accurate portrayal of Lyndon Johnson as a president who abused his power. ♦

Profiles in Courage (not really)

North Korea and the Berlin Film Festival have resolved their 'misunderstanding' over 'The Interview.' The North Korean government had issued a statement Wednesday alleging that screening the film at the festival would encourage 'terrorism,' but the festival said no such screening had been planned.

"Dieter Kosslick, the festival's chief, met with the North Korean ambassador in Berlin on Thursday and explained to him that the festival never planned to screen 'The Interview.' The ambassador understands



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this, a spokesperson for the festival told *Variety*. So, everything is fine? ‘I hope so,’ said the spokesperson” (*Variety*, January 22). ♦

Sentences We Didn’t Finish

“I’ve never been a fan of global conferences to solve problems, but . . .” (Thomas L. Friedman, *New York Times*, January 20). ♦

Sentences We Stopped Listening To

“Some have questioned why we preachers have not used our pulpits to condemn terrorism as strongly as we do gun violence or racial profiling in our own land. . . . Why do preachers persist in talking about violence on American streets and cities rather than about ISIS beheadings or the *Charlie Hebdo* killings? We do so because the nature of prophecy has always been about God’s critical judgment of oneself and one’s own community. It is easy to condemn violence done by others. It is harder to look at violence done on one’s own behalf. The killing of innocent people by terrorists is always a moral outrage. But it is not my moral outrage to address. The killing of innocent people in my own country . . .” (from a January 18 sermon by the Very Rev. Gary Hall, Dean, the National Cathedral, Washington, D.C.). ♦

Sentences We Never Believed We’d Read

All these years later, the *New York Times* accepts the Laffer Curve: “But other parts of [Greek opposition leader Alexis Tsipras’s] agenda aim to roll back many cost-cutting measures, gradually restoring salaries and pensions and lowering the tax on heating oil to make it more affordable (*which could actually bring in more revenue, some experts believe*)” [our emphasis] (*New York Times*, January 17). ♦

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Say Yes to the Dress

Reading about an exhibition that's about to open at the Milwaukee Art Museum—"Inspiring Beauty: 50 Years of Ebony Fashion Fair"—took me back to the night long ago in Cincinnati when my teenage daughter and I saw this African-American extravaganza live.

I can't reconstruct how we first learned about it, but the Ebony Fashion Fair was a high-class, traveling fashion show that visited, at its peak, over 150 cities and towns every year. And "high class" barely says it: The show was filled with one-of-a-kind creations from the *grands couturiers* of Europe—interspersed with the work of up-and-coming black designers and showcasing black models. The purpose wasn't to sell clothes—they weren't for sale—but to enjoy them for their artistry and flair, give exposure to young models and designers, raise money for charity (a local sorority in each town sold tickets and channeled the proceeds to favorite causes), promote *Ebony* magazine (a subscription came with every ticket), and give well-heeled African Americans a festive night out. It did all this from 1958 to 2008, outlived by its impresario by just two years.

That was Eunice Walker Johnson, wife of publishing magnate John H. Johnson and cofounder with him of *Ebony*. They intended this *Life* magazine lookalike to celebrate the positive aspects of African-American experience, and it did—though that's not all. *Ebony* debuted in 1945, in time to cover the civil rights movement. It proved its journalistic mettle by publishing the open-casket photograph of Emmett Till.

Eunice Johnson inherited both serious-mindedness and love of beauty from her family. She was born in 1916 in Selma, where her grandfather helped found Selma University. Her

father was a surgeon, and her mother a high school principal who also taught art. Though an executive at Johnson Publishing for decades, she made the fashion fair her special legacy. After she died in 2010, the *Selma Times-Journal* interviewed someone from Alpha Kappa Alpha, local sponsor of the show, who said, "For more than 30 years we've had a packed audience to see the latest in fashion. . . . To me it's like going to Paris or going to Hollywood."

That's how it felt in Cincinnati, too, in the mid-1980s. The Ebony Fashion Fair descended on the city's most elegant venue, Music Hall, all red plush and gilt and crystal chandelier, home of the illustrious choral May Festival and the Cincinnati Opera. The night we went, *le tout* black Cincinnati was there in style. Amid greetings and gaiety, local celebrities were hubs of buzz and glitz. There was "The Big O" Oscar Robertson, with his wife in red ruffles. Politicians abounded—city council member Marian Spencer, and the city's first black mayor, the slim and distinguished Ted Berry, and ubiquitous city councilman and former mayor Ken Blackwell, popular though a black Republican. The only white person I remember besides us was the bald and bearded Jim Tarbell, not yet a politician, who'd turned a Civil War-era bar downtown into Arnold's, source of the most reliably homey soup and cornbread west of the Alleghenies.

It was my daughter Hilary's first fashion show, and when the audience finally settled down, and the house lights dimmed, the music struck up,

and the announcer took command, what a spectacle it was! Sometimes alone, sometimes in twos or threes, the models stepped out, strutting and twirling and striking poses, and each time a new constellation of colors and forms appeared, an astonished "Ahhh!" would issue from the crowd. Dior, Cardin, Saint Laurent, Balmain, Givenchy—the names of the great Parisian houses rang out, interspersed with those, unfamiliar to me, of Henry

Jackson and Patrick Kelly and Stephen Burrows and Eric Gaskins, their aspiring heirs. And by the time the bridal gown that ends a classic fashion show finally appeared, we were sated with glamour as one is sated with sparkle after a long and lingering crescendo of fireworks.

When the lights came up, the socializing resumed, and that's when Hilary and I pulled off a minor coup.

We'd left her brother Tom in a hospital bed, casualty of a friendly neighborhood crab-apple fight. He'd been

hit in the eye, suffer-

ing something called a hyphema that required he lie immobile for four days. Next evening when we appeared at his bedside, we had just the thing to send his spirits soaring: the autograph of one of his favorite Reds players, Dave Parker, scrawled across a program for the Ebony Fashion Fair.

Now, all these years later, I'm paging through the catalogue to "Inspiring Beauty." The dresses are still marvels of craftsmanship and pizzazz, even if static photos of them on headless mannequins can't begin to capture the life of the fair. How could they? Eunice Johnson's brilliant blend of artistry, commerce, and community wouldn't have kept drawing fans for half a century if it hadn't been about more than even these exceptionally pretty clothes.



CLAUDIA ANDERSON

Don't 'Fix' Obamacare

In the official Republican response to President Obama's State of the Union address on Tuesday night, newly elected Iowa senator Joni Ernst stressed the importance of combating liberals' "stale mindset" that has "led to failed policies like Obamacare," while reaffirming Republicans' commitment to "fighting to repeal and replace" that disastrous legislation. To find an opportunity to match their words with actions, Republicans won't have to wait long.

On March 4, the Supreme Court will hear oral arguments in *King v. Burwell*. Obamacare's plain text says that its taxpayer-funded subsidies can only be paid out through state-based exchanges, yet the Obama administration has been paying out through federal exchanges as well. If the Supreme Court rules in *King* that Obama has been distributing subsidies in violation of Obamacare's written text—that he has been paying them out illegally—millions of Americans across the 36 states with federal exchanges will lose their subsidies and, in most cases, their health insurance. The case should be decided shortly before July 4, and the way in which Republicans prepare for the ruling will go a long way toward showing how genuine their commitment to repealing and replacing Obamacare is.

Republicans can respond to a ruling finding the federal-exchange subsidies illegal in two main ways: They can negotiate "fixes" to Obamacare with the administration, or they can propose effectively repealing and replacing Obamacare in 36 states. The first response would help take the wind out of repeal's sails; the second would help set the stage for victory in November 2016 and full repeal in January 2017.

Of late, however, Republicans and their corporate allies seem more focused on "fixing" Obamacare than on repealing and replacing it. Asked about Obamacare last week, Chamber of Commerce president Thomas Donohue Jr. declared, "We are not working for repeal." The new Republican Congress has yet to vote for repeal, but it has voted for a "fix." Changing Obamacare's definition of full-time work from 30 to 40 hours simply tweaked the legislation, needlessly putting GOP fingerprints on it.

If the Court shuts the subsidies off in 36 states, it will be impossible for Republicans to blame Obama and otherwise ignore the issue, for the lost subsidies would be substantial. A 60-year-old married couple in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, making \$20,000 a year, for example, gets a whopping \$16,549 a year in Obamacare subsidies. If the Court rules that Obama has been providing such subsidies lawlessly, that couple will instead get nothing.

In such a scenario, Obama will petulantly tell Congress

to pass a bill to turn the subsidy spigot back on. The weaker-kneed Republican governors and state legislators will angle to set up state-based exchanges to keep subsidies flowing. Congressional Republicans will be pressured to negotiate minor "improvements" to Obama's government takeover of American medicine in exchange for turning the subsidies back on, and the Chamber of Commerce will be ready with a long list of corporate-backed "fixes."

These actions, of course, would clash with Republicans' public pledges to repeal and replace Obamacare. The voters who have generously boosted Republican tallies by 14 seats in the Senate and about 70 seats in the House since the start of the Obamacare debate didn't send the GOP to Washington to have it take partial ownership of the Democrats' 2,700-page overhaul and help cement it as a permanent fixture of American life.

Instead, if the Court rules that Obama has been paying out subsidies illegally, Republicans could propose a conservative alternative that would effectively repeal and replace Obamacare in the affected states—and in any others that would like to jump ship to the GOP's alternative.

Central to a winning conservative alternative is refundable, non-income-tested tax credits. These tax credits need to be refundable—that is, available even to those who don't pay taxes—because most people who stand to lose subsidies pay little or nothing in income tax and therefore would get little or nothing from a tax deduction or a nonrefundable tax credit. For Republicans to have political leverage in a subsequent showdown with the president, they have to help affected citizens. All Obamacare regulations and mandates would need to be waived in the 36 affected states—and in any of the 14 others that choose to abandon their state-based exchanges—so that people could buy insurance of their own choice on the open market, rather than being forced to buy Obamacare-compliant insurance through HealthCare.gov.

In his State of the Union address, Obama repeatedly talked about "middle-class economics," which he explained as "the idea that this country does best when everyone gets their fair shot, everyone does their fair share, and everyone plays by the same set of rules." But that hardly describes Obamacare. It treats everyone differently, bestowing almost all of its lavish benefits on a select few—the near-poor and near-elderly—while sticking the middle class with the tab.

For example, a 39-year-old single woman in Fairfax County, Virginia, who makes \$35,000 a year doesn't get a dime in Obamacare subsidies—she's too young and too middle class. She would need to be at least 40, make less than

\$35,000, or both. Meanwhile, a married 60-year-old couple down the street that makes \$60,000 gets \$8,632 in subsidies. If that same couple makes \$65,000, they get \$0. And sometimes it's not just the middle class that gets a raw deal. If a 45-year-old married couple in that same county has two kids and makes \$25,000, they get \$10,507 in Obamacare premium subsidies, plus additional subsidies for out-of-pocket costs. If they make \$20,000—\$5,000 less—they get nothing, although their kids (only their kids) get to go on Medicaid. If they didn't have kids, they'd get \$7,243 instead of \$0.

The Republican alternative could do away with all this nonsense and offer simple, understandable tax credits that would finally end the longstanding unfairness in the tax code. For 70 years, Americans who have bought insurance on their own haven't generally gotten a tax break like the one enjoyed by their neighbors who have insurance through their employers.

Republicans would do well to make their tax credits very simple, so that everyone knows what they'd be getting—offering, say, \$1,200 for those under 35 years of age, \$2,100

for those between 35 and 49, \$3,000 for those over 50, and \$900 per child. The 39-year-old woman who makes \$35,000 and gets nothing under Obamacare would get a \$2,100 tax credit (which, in most cases, would be entirely a tax cut) to purchase insurance of her—not Obama's—choice. The 45-year-old married couple with two kids that makes \$20,000 and gets nothing under Obamacare would get a \$6,000 tax credit. The Republican tax credits would significantly reduce federal spending compared with Obamacare's subsidies, while benefiting far more people.

The American people want to get rid of Obamacare. They are merely waiting for Republicans to unveil a winning conservative alternative—one that fixes what the federal government had broken before Obamacare was passed and made things so much worse. *King v. Burwell* offers Republicans a welcome opportunity and a time for choosing: Do they want to be the party that “fixes” Obamacare and thereby helps cement its place in American society, or the party that repeals and replaces it with real reform?

—Jeffrey H. Anderson

Obama Turns a Page

Otto von Bismarck may never have said what's often ascribed to him: “There is a special Providence for drunkards, fools, and the United States of America.” But he could have, and it probably sounds even better in German. In any case, one can certainly see, looking back, why the apparently apocryphal quotation became famous. It's true, after all, that America has seemed providentially fortunate at times. It's true that we've managed to survive some near misses, and to flourish despite a fair amount of folly.

For example: If Franklin Roosevelt had died a year earlier, or if he hadn't decided to change running mates in 1944, we would have had his woolly-headed, soft-on-communism vice president, Henry Wallace, as commander in chief. Who knows how World War II would then have ended, how many more countries Stalin would then have gobbled up, and even whether we would ultimately have won the Cold War? The whole second half of the century could have unfolded in a very different and far more ominous way.

Now we have an admirer of Henry Wallace as president. In December 2007, Barack Obama, campaigning in Iowa, was informed he was in Wallace's home county. He responded, “We've got some progressives here in Adair. I'm feeling really good now. That's quite a lineage there. . . . It's a blessing.”

However blessed those Iowans may have been to live in the proximity of so illustrious a predecessor, having a president in the lineage of Henry Wallace has not been a blessing. We (and the world) are now living with the consequences of our having twice chosen Barack Obama as president.

Consider what President Obama told us in his State of the Union address:

We are fifteen years into this new century. Fifteen years that dawned with terror touching our shores; that unfolded with a new generation fighting two long and costly wars. . . .

But tonight, we turn the page.

Tonight, for the first time since 9/11, our combat mission in Afghanistan is over. Six years ago, nearly 180,000 American troops served in Iraq and Afghanistan. Today, fewer than 15,000 remain. . . .

The shadow of crisis has passed.

Really? Is al Qaeda (never mentioned by Obama in the speech) in retreat? Does radical Islam (never mentioned by Obama) look like a weak horse? Has Iran lessened its support (never mentioned by Obama) for terrorism? Have the achievements (never mentioned by Obama) of the American troops who served in Iraq and Afghanistan been secured? Do we have a defense budget (never mentioned in the speech) sufficient to secure our interests and shape a safer world?

No. But not to worry. President Obama has decided to “turn the page.” He's tired of living “in the shadow of crisis.” No doubt it's tiresome to live in such a shadow. That's not what President Obama wanted his presidency to be about. So he's decided we can all move on.

There are still problems, to be sure. Some cartoonists and journalists and Jewish shoppers were recently killed by “violent extremists” in Paris. So the president assures us

that “we stand united with people around the world who’ve been targeted by terrorists—from a school in Pakistan to the streets of Paris.” And sure enough, many members of Congress, mostly of the president’s party, rose to their feet, waving pencils to show support for free speech and express solidarity with the victims of the Paris attacks.

Who are dead. As are victims of Boko Haram (another group not mentioned in the State of the Union). Somehow hashtag diplomacy—even a #BringBackOurGirls placard held by the first lady—hasn’t convinced Boko Haram that it’s time for them to turn the page on “violent extremism.” Nor is pencil-waving going to deter Islamic terrorists.

Barack Obama will be president for two more years. A lot is riding on that “special Providence.” Two years is a long time to be saddled with a president foolish about the world and drunk on self-regard, turning pages with the conceit that he is writing history for the ages, when he’s actually making up a fairy tale, one that’s unlikely to have a happy ending.

—William Kristol

Iran Nonsense

When House speaker John Boehner invited Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu to address Congress in the coming weeks, the reaction from the White House was swift. In background interviews with reporters, top Obama administration officials made clear that they considered the invitation itself an affront and the acceptance of it a breach of protocol.

Please.

This is the same White House that last week had British prime minister David Cameron making calls to Capitol Hill to lobby lawmakers against more sanctions on Iran. It’s the same administration that had to apologize to Senator Marco Rubio and others for violating its pledge to “consult Congress” before making any unilateral changes to U.S. policy on Cuba. This is the same president who has boasted repeatedly of his ability and willingness to ignore the legislative branch and use his “pen and phone” to do what he wants. And this is the same administration that used the cover of anonymity to call Netanyahu “chickenshit” in a recent interview.

So spare us the whining about prerogatives and propriety and protocol. In a functioning capital—with a White House that understands the enemy is Iran and not the Republican Congress—it’d be better for Congress and the White House to coordinate efforts. But that’s not Washington today. Consider the section on Iran in President Obama’s State of the Union. It took up just 172 words of his 6,500-word address. It reads, in its entirety:

Our diplomacy is at work with respect to Iran, where, for

the first time in a decade, we’ve halted the progress of its nuclear program and reduced its stockpile of nuclear material. Between now and this spring, we have a chance to negotiate a comprehensive agreement that prevents a nuclear-armed Iran, secures America and our allies, including Israel, while avoiding yet another Middle East conflict. There are no guarantees that negotiations will succeed, and I keep all options on the table to prevent a nuclear Iran.

But new sanctions passed by this Congress, at this moment in time, will all but guarantee that diplomacy fails—alienating America from its allies; making it harder to maintain sanctions; and ensuring that Iran starts up its nuclear program again. It doesn’t make sense. And that’s why I will veto any new sanctions bill that threatens to undo this progress. [Applause] The American people expect us only to go to war as a last resort, and I intend to stay true to that wisdom.

This is delusional. The United States hasn’t “halted” Iran’s nuclear program. A week before that claim, Iran announced it would build two more reactors. During this diplomacy, it has made progress on its plutonium program and continued enriching. It was supposed to freeze centrifuge activities at the Pilot Fuel Enrichment Plant at Natanz, but the IAEA reported last fall it was feeding uranium hexafluoride gas into the IR-5 centrifuge there.

The fact that the Obama administration still insists Iran hasn’t violated the terms of its interim agreement with the United States and its allies says more about the administration’s eagerness to continue diplomacy than it does about Iran’s behavior.

Even as the Obama administration has demonstrated its determination to give the Iranian regime every benefit of the doubt, the president reflexively questions the motives of anyone who has a different view. In comments at a press briefing with Cameron, Obama implied that Congress—not Iran—would be at fault if military conflict erupted. And at a recent meeting with congressional Democrats, Obama accused Senator Bob Menendez of bowing to the interests of campaign contributors when the New Jersey Democrat expressed concern about never-ending negotiations without consequence.

When Boehner announced his Netanyahu invitation, he accused Obama of downplaying the Iranian threat in the State of the Union. “There is a serious threat that exists in the world,” he said, “and the president last night kind of papered over it.”

Boehner is correct, of course. And he was right to invite Netanyahu to address Congress and the American people.

The State Department lists Iran as the foremost state sponsor of terror in the world. According to a former top U.S. military official, the Iranian regime is responsible for more than a third of American troop deaths in Iraq. The regime talks openly about eliminating Israel.

It’s long past time for a serious discussion of the threat posed by Iran. Let’s have one.

—Stephen F. Hayes

The 'American Sniper' Freakout

Why the left can't tolerate this movie.

BY MARK HEMINGWAY

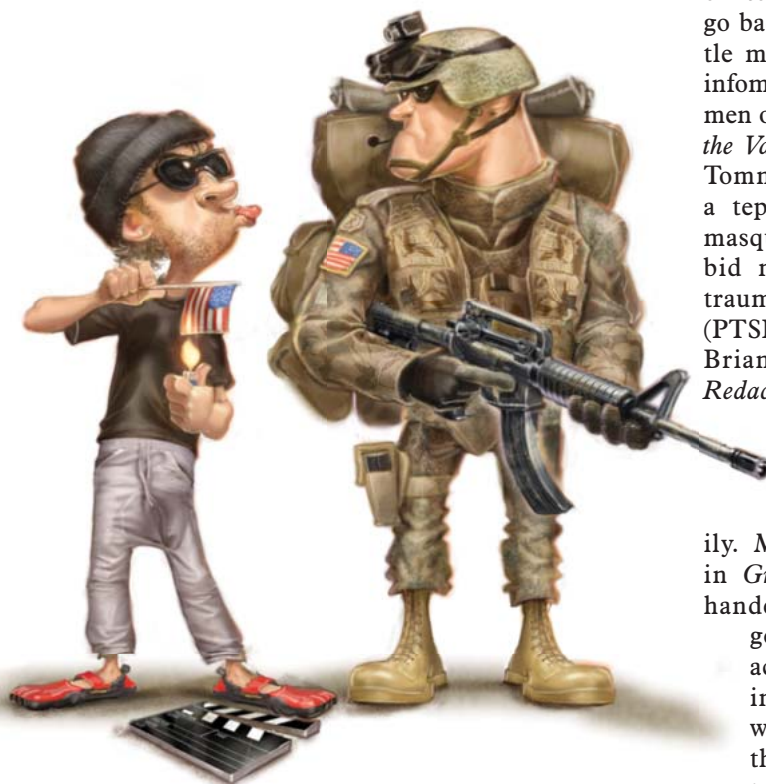
‘So-called ‘sand movies,’ the term Hollywood sometimes uses for films set in Afghanistan and Iraq, have a terrible box office track record,” noted the *New York Times*. Or rather, they *had* a terrible box office track record. The release of *American Sniper*, a biopic about Iraq war veteran and legendary Navy SEAL Chris Kyle, has changed all that.

The film, which opened wide January 16, shattered the record for the largest opening weekend of a film released in January, a month traditionally considered a graveyard for ticket sales. The film pulled in \$105 million its first weekend against its \$60 million budget—and the film that previously held the record for largest January weekend is *Avatar*, the highest-grossing picture in history. Already, *American Sniper* has

the markings of a cultural phenomenon. In exit polls conducted by CinemaScore, moviegoers rated the film A+. Phil Contrino, chief analyst at BoxOffice.com, has attributed the film's success to a massive outpouring of favorable attention on social media.

Naturally, the commercial and artistic success of *American Sniper*—it received six Oscar nominations—has

liberal Hollywood deeply conflicted, and pockets of the left outraged. This success can be largely traced to Clint Eastwood's surefooted direction, as well as Bradley Cooper's understated



and Oscar-worthy performance. But it's been 13 years since 9/11, and the war on terror has been at the forefront of American culture and politics every day since then. Politics probably explains why it has taken Hollywood this long to make a truly great and popular movie about this war.

In content and tone, *American Sniper* is distinctly different from the sand movies that preceded it in that it unambiguously celebrates the heroism of the soldiers fighting in Iraq and

Afghanistan. In this, *American Sniper* is in rarefied company. Last year's *Lone Survivor*—based on a book by Kyle's good friend and fellow SEAL Marcus Luttrell—and the little-seen 2009 HBO film *Taking Chance* are about the only other notable exceptions to Hollywood's seeming obsession with delegitimizing the war on terror and those fighting it.

The list of films that stand in stark thematic contrast to *American Sniper* is long. Just to name a few: MTV Films made *Stop-Loss*, with Ryan Phillippe, Channing Tatum, and Joseph Gordon-Levitt, in which a group of young soldiers nearly run

off to Mexico rather than go back to Iraq. It was little more than a sexed-up infomercial warning young men off military service. *In the Valley of Elah*, starring Tommy Lee Jones, was a tepid murder mystery masquerading as a morbid meditation on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Washed-up auteur Brian De Palma made *Redacted*, a graphic film about American soldiers who rape an Iraqi girl and murder her family.

Matt Damon starred in *Green Zone*, a heavy-handed thriller about a government conspiracy to hide WMDs in Iraq. (*Green Zone* was loosely based on the work of *Washington Post* reporter Rajiv

Chandrasekaran, who was widely rebuked for misrepresenting his need to be evacuated by helicopter from his military embed in Afghanistan. The real reason he wanted out: to attend the film's celebrity-studded premiere.) John Cusack was a twofer. First he starred in *Grace Is Gone*, a film that egregiously wallows in the grief of a man who can't bring himself to tell his kids his wife was killed serving in Iraq. Then he made *War, Inc.*, a painfully unfunny satire about

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GARY LOCKE

corporate profiteers amid a war in the fictional country of Turaqistan.

It should not be surprising that such politicized films had little appeal for the American public. Even some of the better films in the genre, the Academy Award-winning *The Hurt Locker* and *Zero Dark Thirty* (both directed by Kathryn Bigelow), were deeply ambivalent about America's post-9/11 defense. And these films were only mild improvements in that their protagonists, fighting in these wars, were respected for their commitment and professionalism. *The Hurt Locker* was largely ignored in theaters. And it's telling that the Oscar campaign for *Zero Dark Thirty* was stymied by organized opposition to the film's acknowledgment that enhanced interrogation techniques yielded intelligence that helped locate Osama bin Laden. The movie acknowledged this solely as a historical fact, without endorsing, much less glorifying, alleged torture. But this mild concession to reality was too much for Hollywood.

Even *American Sniper* largely sidesteps the big political questions about the war on terror. The film is primarily about the heroism of soldiers who, thrust into battle by larger forces, do their best to protect each other and innocent Iraqis. Clint Eastwood, often described as one of the few prominent right-wingers in Hollywood, opposed the invasion of Iraq and questioned the invasion of Afghanistan.

Even so, the film's lack of left-wing politics has been treated in some quarters as an unpardonable sin. "The mere act of trying to make a typically Hollywoodian one-note fairy tale set in the middle of the insane moral morass that is/was the Iraq occupation is both dumber and more arrogant than anything George Bush or even Dick Cheney ever tried," wrote *Rolling Stone's* Matt Taibbi. In other words, any account of Kyle's personal heroism is somehow invalid unless it is couched in an extraneous political context tarring the war he fought in as immoral.

While this criticism is myopic and unfair, it's at least preferable to direct

attacks on Kyle and service in Iraq. "My uncle [was] killed by [a] sniper in WW2. We were taught snipers were cowards. Will shoot [you] in the back. Snipers aren't heroes. And invaders [are] worse," tweeted left-wing documentary filmmaker Michael Moore.

This characterization of Kyle and the American military as evil invaders is directly at odds with what the film portrays. Early on, there's a scene in which military briefers explain that the enemy the Marines and SEALs are up against is AQI or Al Qaeda in Iraq. The jihadists have come to Iraq from all over the world. And—unlike American soldiers, who operated under strict rules of engagement and

American Sniper asks audiences to consider the motivations of American soldiers on the ground in Iraq, and then asks whether or not these make them heroic. This may be a difficult question for Michael Moore, but the film and its rapturous audiences answer it with a resounding yes.

worked to protect innocent Iraqis—AQI had no compunction about abusing and killing whoever they saw fit, something the film portrays in wrenching detail.

Still, the briefing scene is remarkable in that it was deemed necessary to explain to American audiences who the enemy is. Surely this is proof enough that the left has succeeded in debasing the war on terror as a fundamentally moral cause.

American Sniper doesn't make the opposite mistake, either, of depicting a simplistic tale of good versus evil. It shows Kyle making genuinely difficult moral choices—such as killing a child before the boy can throw a grenade into the midst of Marines on patrol. And no one could accuse the film of failing to acknowledge the

terrible mental and physical toll war takes on our soldiers.

The left has tried to avoid the anti-American stain it acquired in the Vietnam era by making sure to mouth platitudes about supporting the troops while criticizing the war. The reaction to *American Sniper* seems to suggest this pose is insincere. Either you're rooting for Kyle and his fellow soldiers or you're rooting for AQI. There is no middle ground in *American Sniper*. The film simply asks audiences to consider the motivations of American soldiers on the ground in Iraq, and then asks whether or not these motivations make them heroic. This may be a difficult question for Michael Moore, but the film and its rapturous audiences answer it with a resounding yes. In a scene taken straight from his autobiography, when Kyle first meets the woman he will marry, she tells him she doesn't date military men because they are self-centered. "Why would you say I'm self-centered?" Kyle asks, genuinely surprised. "I'd lay down my life for this country."

It is beyond doubt that Kyle was an exceptional soldier, but he was a far from perfect man. Some of the angry reaction to the film hinges on Kyle's real-life reputation. While the movie documents his PTSD and other struggles, it leaves out his flights of braggadocio and dishonesty. Navy SEAL turned Minnesota governor turned professional conspiracy theorist Jesse Ventura won a \$1.8 million lawsuit against Kyle for claiming that he had punched Ventura. And the campaign to deny *American Sniper* an Oscar, already getting lots of coverage in the Hollywood trade publications, supposedly reflects Oscar voters' concern about honoring a man who once described killing as "fun." (While that is technically accurate, Kyle's words in his autobiography are more nuanced than that sounds.)

But Kyle's flaws don't begin to explain the knee-jerk negative reaction to the film on the left, which goes far beyond the predictable political complaints. Academy

voters have been circulating a much-derided *New Republic* article by a Penn State professor of international affairs who denounced the film in spite of his admission that he had seen only the trailer. The *Washington Examiner* also reports that the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence had supporters venting about the film on its Facebook page. If Navy SEALs in combat zones can't legitimately engage in gun violence, who can?

Part of it is simply that the film portrays Kyle as a proud southern, rural, religious, patriotic jock and gun enthusiast who was much more anguished about the people he was unable to save in Iraq than about the 160 confirmed sniper kills that the Navy credits him with. All of these traits are anathema to the left, though nearly all of the great soldiers in American history possessed one or more of them. Leftists simply can't digest the fact that their own safety is predicated on the willingness to fight of courageous men they openly disdain.

Alas, the outspoken Kyle is not around to defend himself from the more spurious charges. He died in pre-production, when he was shot on a firing range by a soldier with PTSD he was trying to help. Even before the film was released, the Texan's reputation was such that his funeral had to be held in Cowboys Stadium to accommodate the mourners. Chris Kyle's nickname in Iraq was "The Legend," and the film only cements what many, many of his fellow soldiers already knew.

In accomplishing this, *American Sniper* marks a small turn away from more than a decade of our cultural elites' witting and unwitting undercutting of the heroism of American soldiers—a turn that may be hard for Hollywood to ignore, given how much money the film is poised to make. The country may still be divided by the politics of the war on terror, but millions of satisfied moviegoers emerging from *American Sniper* suggest that Americans still broadly agree our country is worth fighting for, if for no other reason than that it still produces men like Chris Kyle. ♦

What You Missed If You Didn't Watch

Five insights into Obama, none of them flattering.

BY FRED BARNES

If you skipped President Obama's State of the Union address on TV last week, you missed something. It was long (61 minutes) and uninspiring. Yet as the Obama presidency enters its seventh year, the speech was revealing. Here are a few things we learned about Obama's thinking.

■ Words speak louder than actions. From what the president said, you might have concluded Russia had

Russian president Vladimir Putin. Russia's annexation of Crimea stands, as does its control of much of eastern Ukraine and its ambition for further expansion. The Russian economy is weakened, true, but it's because the price of oil has plummeted, not because Obama has upheld a principle.

Meanwhile, Obama claimed America has "stopped" the Islamic terrorist group ISIL in its tracks. Not in Syria, it hasn't. The next step, he said, is for Congress "to show the world that we are united in this mission by passing a resolution to authorize the use of force against ISIL." But a resolution won't defeat ISIL. Only the actual use of more military force will.

■ Republican ideas are solicited and dropped.

"I commit to every Republican here tonight that I will not only seek out your ideas, I will seek to work with you to make this country stronger," Obama declared. Given his record, eyes must have rolled across the House chamber. He's often promised to consider GOP ideas and followed up by ignoring them.

Three days after his inauguration in January 2009, he met with congressional leaders. Eric Cantor, then the House Republican whip, gave Obama a list of modest proposals to help revive the economy. The president responded by saying "elections have consequences" and "I won." There's



Frankly, I didn't mean a word of it.

retreated inside its borders, its tail between its legs. "We are demonstrating the power of American strength and diplomacy," he said. "We're upholding the principle that bigger nations can't bully the small—by opposing Russian aggression, supporting Ukraine's democracy, and reassuring our NATO allies." The result: Russia is now "isolated, with its economy in tatters."

America led "not with bluster, but with persistent, steady resolve," Obama said. But the nonbluster approach—words—hasn't impressed

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no evidence he gave the ideas a moment's consideration. A week or so later, Obama spoke to House Republicans on Capitol Hill, soliciting their ideas for a bill to stimulate the economy. It turned out the legislation had already been drafted by Democrats, with no Republican input.

A year later, Obama spoke to a House Republican retreat in Baltimore and took questions. The first came from Paul Ryan, a rising Republican star and author of a "road map" on taxes and spending. Obama said he'd read it and liked some of Ryan's ideas. Ryan took this as "an olive branch," he recalled in his book *The Way Forward*. "Unfortunately, within 72 hours, his budget director took that branch and hit me in the face with it," Ryan wrote. That was followed by attacks from House Democrats in a conference call and from Nancy Pelosi in a speech. "They apparently saw my budget plan as a critical weapon in their 2010 midterm campaign strategy," he wrote.

■ Forget compromise. The few compromises between Republicans and the Obama White House were negotiated by Vice President Biden. The president himself is a poor negotiator, according to Republicans. He lectures and is petulant and reluctant to make concessions. Yet he now says he wants to negotiate deals on tax reform, infrastructure, and trade.

After the State of the Union, scratch tax reform. Republicans envision it based on the 1986 bipartisan model in which loopholes and special breaks were killed, the tax base broadened, and tax rates lowered. We learned in Obama's speech that his concept is from another world. Yes, he wants to wipe out loopholes and preferences, but not to cut rates, at least for individuals. He wants to spend the money that's saved, especially to fund infrastructure. And he's also eager to exploit tax reform to raise taxes on the rich and redistribute their wealth. "Let's close the loopholes that lead to inequality by allowing the top one percent to avoid paying taxes on their accumulated wealth," Obama said. His ideas aren't new. They're hardy

perennials of liberals. They've just never been part of tax reform. A bipartisan deal on tax reform was always a long shot in Obama's final two years. Now it's dead, thanks to the president.

■ High-flown sentiments are empty. Let's stipulate that the political class is no stranger to hypocrisy. But Obama's hypocrisy is unique and spectacular. His calling card as a presidential candidate was that he alone knew how to bring Washington together, to end polarization, cure dysfunction, and produce a new era of bipartisanship. It was an appealing pitch. But once in the White House, he emerged as the Great Divider, pulling Americans apart on class, race, gender, and political party.

So when Obama wound up his speech last week by posing as the last, lonely believer in America as "one nation," it was surprising. He must have been aiming those remarks at the television audience, because everyone in the hall knew his record. He called for "a better politics." It's "one where

we debate without demonizing each other," he said. Did he forget what his 2012 campaign did to Mitt Romney? "A better politics is one where we spend less time drowning in dark money for ads that pull us into the gutter," he went on. What about his own campaign?

■ The driver of our national debt goes unmentioned. The phrase "entitlement reform" didn't find its way into the speech. Earlier in his presidency, he had emphasized the threat to the economy and to the solvency of the federal government from uncontrolled entitlement spending. President Clinton paid enormous attention to curbing entitlements until he was sidetracked by impeachment. For now, Obama has left the issue to Republicans. And it's not because the problem has lessened. It's because the Democratic base opposes entitlement reform. Not very presidential on his part, wouldn't you say? ♦

Barack Obama, Corporate Liberal

And secret friend of the one percent.

BY JAY COST

In last week's State of the Union address, President Barack Obama came across as the ultimate class warrior. His domestic agenda consists of more spending on roads and infrastructure, new entitlement programs for community college and preschool, and tax preferences targeted to middle- and low-income earners. All of this he would pay for with new inheritance taxes on the wealthy, a hike in the capital gains tax, and a special levy

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on the biggest financial institutions.

But don't be fooled. Obama may seem like the newest member of Occupy Wall Street—chanting "*We are the 99 percent!*"—but his record shows him to be a corporate liberal, and a closer look at last week's proposals confirms it.

The corporate liberal offers the following deal: In exchange for greater authority—to tax, to regulate, to distribute—government will dispense benefits to the top and bottom of society. The poor will receive more generous social welfare benefits; the wealthy will be granted special provisions, exemptions, and benefits. Often those

at the top get to reap a private profit for distributing benefits on the government's behalf.

Obamacare is a perfect illustration. The government subsidizes health insurance, but it does so through private companies, which are not forced to participate. Instead, insurers agree to get involved because they believe it will make them better off. The government implicitly guarantees that insurers will profit in the individual marketplace.

Far from being a flaw in corporate liberalism, this is its dominant feature: The welfare state is expanded, and powerful corporate interests are drawn into a web of client-patron relationships. The more interests are drawn in, the more our Madisonian system resists reform, and the more enshrined in power corporate liberalism becomes.

This approach is very old and far from exclusive to the Democratic party. Perhaps its earliest large-scale incarnation was the War Industries Board during World War I. Later, corporate liberalism undergirded New Deal labor and agricultural policies. Today, the logroll that links food stamps to corporate-friendly farm subsidies supported by both parties is an instance of corporate liberalism. So is Medicare, another bipartisan program. Medical service providers don't have to participate, but when they do they are barely regulated, and the government is effectively on the hook for provider profits.

Corporate liberalism is generally unpopular. Americans do not like the idea of Uncle Sam guaranteeing the status of private interests. So corporate liberals go to great lengths to distract voters from discerning the actual nature of the regime. Again, consider Obamacare: Its supporters regularly and viciously attacked insurance companies during the debate over the bill in Congress, even as the government was establishing a backstop for insurer profits.

Similarly, corporate liberals, at least the Democratic variety, can sound like down-on-the-farm populists when they talk about the top marginal tax rate for individuals. But for those at the apex of

the economic pyramid, the cost of "paying their fair share" is a pittance compared with the windfalls they can reap from favorable regulations, tax preferences, and redistributive schemes.

This sleight of hand—essential to the corporate liberal's public persona—was on display in the State of the Union. Obama talked like a populist about taxes, but note his timing. He is calling for massive new taxes on top individual earners from the most Republican Congress in generations—



which will reject his proposals. Why not have asked for this in 2009 or 2010, when Democrats were in charge and such measures probably could have been enacted? And his plan to sock it to Wall Street—why now? The perfect vehicle was the Dodd-Frank bill, which Congress passed in July 2010, when Democrats had outsized majorities. Now Obama faces the most Republican Congress in 80 years.

Yet the president's rhetoric was not empty. It served a purpose. By presenting a tax package with no chance of passage, Obama undermines the slim hope that this Congress will enact real tax reform. He may claim that he is committed to fairness, but his publicity stunt last week probably ensured that our deeply unfair corporate tax code will remain intact for at least two years. The sectors of corporate America that spend through the nose on lobbyists to protect their tax benefits must have been delighted.

The president's ceaseless talk about

fairness actually serves to obscure the fact that there are two types of tax fairness—vertical and horizontal. By insisting on greater vertical fairness, he has killed any hope of reforms enhancing horizontal fairness.

Vertical tax fairness is the principle that those who make more money should pay more. A flat tax, which applies the same percentage to all earners, achieves vertical fairness: Those who make more pay more. A progressive tax, which taxes higher earners at higher rates, intensifies this effect: Those who make more pay still more. Our system of taxation is progressive, and last week Obama called for making it more steeply so. The trouble, as we have seen, is that the idea is a dead letter in the new Congress. The only tax increase Republicans have passed in recent years came in late 2012, when they agreed to it only to prevent the entirety of the Bush-era tax cuts from being repealed.

Horizontal fairness is the principle that individuals or businesses with similar incomes or assets should pay similar amounts of tax. Our tax code egregiously violates this principle by playing favorites. The favoritism comes under many names—tax preferences, tax expenditures, targeted tax cuts—but all have the same result: Uncle Sam discriminates based on how we earn and spend our money.

The individual tax code privileges homeowners over renters, parents over nonparents, those with student loan debt over those without, those who get health insurance from their employer over those who get it from the individual market. It does this through all the deductions, exemptions, and credits that make filling out our tax returns so taxing. Many tax breaks are broadly popular. Nevertheless, our elaborate regime of tax preferences is an inefficient and often unfair way to transfer wealth.

On the corporate side of the ledger, the tax code is riddled with similar provisions—the Apple loophole, the GE loophole, the NASCAR loophole, the Hollywood loophole, and on and on. In theory, corporate tax preferences can make sense: The government

should use its taxing power to stimulate broad-based economic growth. In practice, however, our corporate tax code is a labyrinth of cronyism favoring the well-connected for dubious benefits. Everybody wants to fix it.

Well . . . almost everybody. Two groups like the tax code as it is: the interests that lobby to get their favored provisions embedded in law, and professional politicians, who use the taxing power to extract from those interests campaign contributions, donations to favored causes, public statements of support, cooperation in other areas of policy, and lucrative sinecures after they leave office.

Corporate tax reform would promote horizontal fairness, undermining tax preferences based on political connections. It could be accomplished without raising net taxes. Revenue-neutral reform would not make the code more progressive, but it would redistribute the existing tax burden—from those without political connections to those with them. That would be a winner for everybody except the interest groups who “buy” preferences and the politicians who “sell” them. Public-spirited liberals and conservatives would have reason to cheer. And the public would benefit because reform would simplify the tax code, halt this type of political favoritism, and ultimately encourage capital to go to the most socially useful purposes.

Here we get to the heart of the matter. Tax reform makes a lot of sense, but politically it is difficult to enact. It requires vigorous leadership from a committed president to help Congress defy special interests. Republicans in Congress are amenable to reform, but they need that help from the commander in chief—which he did not offer last week. By insisting instead on unrealistic tax hikes, he probably killed any chance of tax reform during his tenure.

Was this a purposeful move on the president’s part? Possibly. Perhaps the plan was to talk like a class warrior, leave it to the Republicans to kill the proposals, and in the process take the wind out of tax reform. As we have seen, the administration did

something similar with the health insurers, and not only them. The president also went after drug manufacturers during the 2008 campaign, blasting them for cutting a deal with the Bush administration in the development of Medicare Part D, only to cut the same sort of deal on Obamacare.

On Dodd-Frank, too, Obama has talked like a populist while behaving like a corporate liberal. He touts Dodd-Frank for bringing Wall Street to heel, but his claims are specious. While Dodd-Frank layered regulations on Wall Street, they were just the wrapping paper that hid the true gift—too-big-to-fail protection for the largest firms, which had contributed lavishly to Obama’s 2008 campaign and had close ties to his top economic advisers when Dodd-Frank was being written. Then there’s Obama’s flip-flop on the Export-Import Bank. Running for office, he blasted it as corporate welfare; last year, when House conservatives sought to kill it, he declared the

program a job creator. Famously, the Department of Energy’s green energy grants were given out in a manner partial to the president’s financial patrons; Solyndra was just the most infamous of many outrages. And the \$787 billion stimulus was a presidentially sanctioned exercise in pork barrel politics for congressional Democrats.

So, too, with tax reform. When push comes to shove, corporate liberals—and corporate conservatives—do not really want tax reform. Horizontal equity may be good for the country, but it is bad for them. To borrow a phrase from Rod Blagojevich, tax preferences are a valuable thing; you don’t just give them away.

The professorial Obama would never put matters so bluntly. But the fact remains that he is a corporate liberal. In the State of the Union, he may have talked a good game about tax fairness, but real reform is dead until 2017 at the earliest. I suspect that is just how Barack Obama wants it. ♦

But Seriously . . .

How the State of the Union address would have sounded if I’d been the president’s speechwriter.

BY P.J. O’ROURKE

Sorry I’m a little late. The National Association of Police Chiefs was being given a tour of the White House just when I was showing Joe Biden my new backswing—*HANDS UP*. They must have fired 600 rounds. The Blue Room—we’re renaming it the “Swiss Cheese Room.” Good thing they all made lousy shots.

Speaking of golf . . . Jeb Bush, Mitt Romney, Chris Christie, and Ted Cruz are on the ninth hole and suddenly there’s a huge bolt of lightning. The next thing they know they’re standing

at the Pearly Gates. And St. Peter says, “Okay, I’ve got your names right here in the book—John Boehner, Mitch McConnell, Kevin McCarthy, and John Cornyn.”

“No, no,” says the foursome, “We’re Jeb Bush, Mitt Romney, Chris Christie, and Ted Cruz.”

“You *are*?” says St. Peter. “There must be some mistake. Let me go get God.”

So God comes to the Pearly Gates and says, “Welcome to Heaven, John Boehner, Mitch McConnell, Kevin McCarthy, and John Cornyn.”

“No, no,” says the foursome, “We’re Jeb Bush, Mitt Romney, Chris Christie, and Ted Cruz.”

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“Gosh,” says God. “I must have thrown the lightning bolt at the wrong golf course. I’m sorry. I’ll tell you what, to make up for it, I’ll let you come back to life as anything you want.”

“Give us a moment to talk it over,” says the foursome.

Bush, Romney, Christie, and Cruz go into a huddle, and after a few minutes they tell God, “We’d like to come back to life as angry, left-wing feminists of color.”

“*What!*” says God. “You want to come back to life as angry, left-wing feminists of color? *Why?*”

“It’d give us a better chance against Hillary,” says the foursome. “*And we can hit from the red tees.*”

You know, a lot of folks think I hate dealing with a Republican Congress. And I do—otherwise I wouldn’t have asked the Reverend Al Sharpton to intervene with God like that.

But what does a lame-duck president with veto power, executive orders, and only an eight-vote opposition majority in the Senate do?

Anything he wants!

How many American citizens does it take to screw in an energy-efficient halogen light bulb?

None. We’ve got plenty of illegal immigrants to do that for us, thanks to my executive orders.

I also signed executive orders to lower the price of gasoline and make the economy grow by 4 percent.

And if you believe that, you must already be taking advantage of my new junior college plan. I’m going to make junior college free—and *worth it.*

When you get done going to junior college for nothing, and you still can’t get a job, you’ll love my new Robin Hood tax plan—take from the rich and give to the poor.

Some of you are saying, “Wait a minute, I’m not poor.” Well, don’t worry, you will be when I get done taxing you.

Anyway, in this White House we don’t call people “poor,” we call them “middle class.” Our policies are all about “middle-class economics.”

Some of the rest of you are saying,

“Wait a minute, I’m *not* middle class, I’m *poor.*”

You’re welcome. Like I said, you’ll love my Robin Hood tax plan.

I’m also going to raise the minimum wage. That way instead of not being able to make a decent living with two jobs, you’ll be able to not make a decent living with just one.

And I’m going to make sure that women are paid the same as a man for doing the same work. I mean, unless it’s Chris Christie pole dancing or something.



So I just flew in from Hawaii—and boy, are my...

Plus I’m going to institute paid sick leave for all workers. This is a bipartisan issue. If my presidency makes you sick, you can stay home and get paid.

Because America is back stronger than ever. Tonight we turn the page. Or, if I were you, change the channel. *Storage Wars* is playing on A&E.

Meanwhile, according to the teleprompter, I’m supposed to be talking about cybersecurity. Well, I was going to, but Malia and Sasha were having one of those teenage sulks—you folks know how *that* goes—so I didn’t have anybody to help me open the PDF from NSA, which wouldn’t download on Microsoft Word because . . . Is this tech stuff just something kids invented to drive everybody over 50 nuts, or what?

Anyway, I think we’re all supposed

to change our passwords. I changed mine to romney3rdtryLOL@whitehouse.gov. Oops, did I just say something? I’d better not see any reference to it in the media. My administration is tough on you people who leak classified material.

Such as what NSA is up to. Which reminds me . . . Low-cost broadband Internet access to every American household—NSA tells me it’s got all of you covered on that.

On a serious note, we all, NSA included, need to work together to confront the threat of global terrorism. We must be willing to put aside partisan divides. For example, I’ve had productive talks with Bill Clinton. He pointed out that, under the *sharia* law imposed by ISIS, al Qaeda, and other Islamic extremists, men have four wives. President Clinton’s position is, “They’ve been punished enough.”

He favors a drone strike strategy dispersing American Express Black Cards to all the wives of every terrorist. *It’ll kill ‘em, when the bills arrive.*

Did I mention I’ve outlawed torture? That is, if you don’t count listening to this speech as sleep deprivation. Ruth Bader Ginsberg, I can see you nodding off. Folks in this room are so drowsy that they’re sleeping on their feet when they’re giving me standing ovations.

And I’m addressing climate change too. Climate change is real. I know from personal experience. There’s been a change in the climate in the Senate and the House, *and it’s making things hot for me.*

Hey, time for those obligatory shout-outs to Michelle’s and my completely random special guests in the gallery! Beats me what this has to do with Article Two, Section Three of the Constitution, that the president “shall from time to time give to the Congress information of the State of the Union.” But, since the Republicans refuse to learn anything and the Democrats think they know everything, we might as well kill time.

We’ve got Alan P. Gross here—spent

five years in a Cuban prison. Alan, you'll be glad to know that my administration realizes what a great nation Cuba is, and we're doing everything we can to show the Cuban government that we respect their executive, legislative, and judicial legitimacy.

We've got the chief executive of CVS, Larry J. Merlo. Larry banned cigarette sales at all CVS drugstores. That showed real courage, Larry. Especially since, at the White House, in the middle of the night, when I'm under a lot of pressure, the nearest place to buy a pack of smokes was the CVS on Connecticut Avenue. But Michelle is with you all the way. And, although your decision cost CVS a lot of money, Larry, you can make it up selling marijuana while my Justice Department turns a blind eye.

We've got a token white police officer, Captain Phillip C. Tingirides of the LAPD. Phil, your boss was so high and to the left in the Blue Room that I'm wondering . . . are you sure pot isn't legal in California?

And we've got astronaut Scott Kelly, who's about to go to the International Space Station for a year. I can think of a number of people I'd like to send with you, Scott. And, Scott, I'm sorry NASA couldn't take you there. They had asteroids. But I'm sure Russia will get you home. Just the other day President Putin was telling me he had a lot of missiles pointed toward America.

Which reminds me of how much folks have in common, not just in America but around the world. How much humanity we all share.

An American and a Russian are talking about how much they hate their presidents.

The American says, "I hate President Obama so much that I pissed on his limousine."

The Russian says, "I hate President Putin so much I *crapped* on his limousine."

"Well, to tell the truth," says the American, "President Obama wasn't in his limousine when I pissed on it."

"Well, to tell the truth," says the Russian, "my pants weren't down."

God bless this country we love. And "Je suis Charlie." ♦

Don't Forget Who Voted You In

The Republican Congress and the middle class.

BY IRWIN M. STELZER

Congressional Republicans can reasonably be accused of prioritizing issues about which middle-class voters care little. The president can reasonably be said to have his priorities perfectly in order, with counterproductive proposals that won't achieve them.

The millions who knocked on doors in 2014, and the few who spent

allowed banks that are still too-big-to-fail to take more risks, secure in the knowledge that if they once again manage themselves to the brink of failure the good old taxpayer will stump up bailout funds. It was a bipartisan effort, with Elizabeth Warren and a few objectors the only ones trying to prevent this silliness, and it's a long way to 2016, so perhaps Main Street voters who did notice that they were once again being readied to be plucked in an emergency will forget.

Republicans then decided, when the new Congress convened, that the most important thing they could do for a middle class that has barely shared in the tepid recovery would be to pass a bill authorizing the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline to bring more crude oil (some already arrives by train, some by other pipelines) to the United States. Nothing to do with any shortage of oil here: We are already hip deep in the stuff, the industry hoping that Congress will find a way to allow its export. Nothing to do with national security or that will o' the wisp, energy independence: That oil will find its way onto international markets whether it comes here or not, further diluting the power of the oil cartel. Nothing to do with a major increase in jobs: Once built, the line can be operated with relatively few twists and turns of some dials and a handful of maintenance men who already have no problem finding work. And certainly nothing to do with the middle classes who are hoping Republicans will find something to do for them. Private sector companies, fracking on private lands, have already given them the gift of cheaper gasoline.



But they loved me in November!

millions backing them, got what they were after: Republican control of both houses of Congress. So how are the Republicans in Congress doing? Not too well, according to NBC/*Wall Street Journal* polling. Only 23 percent of those polled approve of the job they are doing, and the GOP's rating has fallen significantly since the elections. Poor priorities might be one reason.

As a first step on the road to the White House, Republicans agreed in the lame duck session to an omnibus bill that had buried in it a modification of the Dodd-Frank law, the *bête noire* of Wall Street. The provision

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Ah, but the middle classes are interested in tax reform, aren't they? Yes—and Republicans are focused on lowering the corporate tax rate. There will be offsetting business loophole closures, but of the arcane sort that few voters will understand. So Republicans will go to the voters in 2016 as the party that lowered corporate taxes? Why not use the money saved by closing loopholes to cut taxes on low- and middle-income earners? Because, says the GOP leadership, cutting corporate taxes will give corporations more money to invest and create jobs. But these corporations already have \$2 trillion in cash that they don't know what to do with, and some already have effective tax rates close to zero. Guess what most voters would say when asked whether they would like their taxes cut, or prefer to wait for the wonderful effect on their lives of lower corporate taxes. Ask most economists which approach, given the present condition of the economy, is more likely to stimulate growth, and they will say increasing incomes of cash-poor families is likely to do more than increasing the incomes of corporations already awash with cash.

If that's not enough to burnish their friend-of-the-middle-class credentials, the Republican leadership plans to give Obama fast-track authority to negotiate trade agreements with Pacific rim countries and with the EU. Business interests dearly want these deals done so as to ease the movement of their goods and services between countries. Some of those countries will continue to bar or minimize, directly or indirectly, the three A's in which America has a competitive advantage—agricultural products (unsafe genetic modification), audiovisual products (destructive of French culture), and airplanes (too competitive with made-in-Europe planes). Others will insist that their state-owned enterprises buy only domestic-made software. Not for Republicans Adam Smith's interdiction: "Revenge . . . naturally dictates retaliation . . . when some foreign nation restrains . . . importation of some of our manufactures."

The good news is that it is a long

way from here to the polling booths in November 2016. There is still time to dare the president to veto

- a revenue-neutral bill reducing taxes on many families, funded by eliminating capital gains tax treatment for hedge funds' so-called carried interest. Better to get the needed funds by eliminating inefficiency-creating gifts to business than by raising taxes on work, as Obama proposes.

- a bill that mandates tax refunds be sent to taxpayers within 30 days;

- a bill that incorporates long-held conservative preferences for consumption taxes by imposing a carbon tax and simultaneously using the revenue to reduce payroll taxes;

- a bill that lowers the tax rate on, say, the first \$10,000 of wages earned by workers already on Social Security to provide them with an incentive to return to or remain in the labor force, funded perhaps by revenues from a tax holiday for repatriated corporate earnings;

- measures that seriously address the problem that is sapping support for capitalism—rising inequality. Smith again:

No society can surely be flourishing and happy, of which the far greater part of the members are poor and miserable. It is but equity, besides, that they who feed, cloath and lodge the whole body of the people, should have such a share of the produce of their own labour as to be themselves tolerably well fed, cloathed and lodged.

None of this is a suggestion that conservatives rally to the cause of protectionism, or concoct a massive income-redistribution program, or pass legislation that is unsound on the merits. It is a suggestion, first, that conservatives consider reordering their priorities and, second, apply longstanding conservative values to a rethink of policies to increase jobs and wage growth and reduce inequality. These are things that matter.

And addressing them, rather than the wishes of corporate America, is more important than ever now that the president has laid out his proposed solutions. Sure, these proposals

are DOA. And, yes, polls show that the majority of the public does not share the president's priorities. But with Obama's poll numbers improving (approval of his management of the economy is at its highest level since right after the 2008 election), and jobs at the top of the list of concerns of 85 percent of Americans, he will have a potent stick with which to beat Republicans. By trying to redistribute income from the 1 percent to the middle class, Democrats will contend, they are moving cash that would likely be stuffed under mattresses by a sated few into the hands of hard-pressed families who will spend it and create jobs, and to the government, which will use it to finance community college education for underprivileged kids. Never mind that they would be creating a new group of dependents on an ever-growing entitlement state, which is always a goal of big government progressives, if not always stated.

In contrast, they will contend, congressional Republicans used their new majorities to try to enrich businesses by giving them a new pipeline to get oil to their refineries, easing bank regulation, and wasting legislative time passing bills containing heaven knows what provisions that they and lobbyists have long lusted after.

The president has quite cleverly dressed his old redistributionist policies in new tax reform clothes, proving that he is willing to make words mean what he wants them to. Tax reform is supposed to have three features.

The first is revenue neutrality. Tax cutters and tax raisers are not reformers: They have competing views of the proper size of government and the portion of the nation's income that can be commandeered without putting the golden-egg-laying goose into the ICU. Obama's plan is many things, but revenue neutral it is not.

The second is simplification of the tax code. The president's plan is anything but a move toward simplification. Middle-class families, defined as working couples meeting certain income tests, will file forms with an IRS that cannot process the workload it now has, and approved community

colleges—imagine the requirements for approval—will be paid partly by Washington and partly by the states to accept students the government decides, after examining their financial circumstances, are worthy of help. Nothing simple about the thousands of pages of regulations that would be produced to effectuate those policies.

Finally, any tax reform should improve the efficiency of the tax system by eliminating special benefits that distort investment in favor of lower overall rates that leave it to consumers and investors to direct their capital by their individual choices. Special breaks for the oil industry or wind farms, for example, direct investment to those industries that a free capital market would not. Drop them, and those funds will go where individual consumers and investors decide is their most efficient use. Obama does not even nod in that direction, and with reason: Although he might not agree with the special-interest features now in the tax code, he agrees with the idea that markets cannot be trusted to move capital to where it is most needed. His idea of reform is to substitute his special interests for the special interests already represented in the code.

Still, redistribution has its charms for those on the receiving end, and for left-leaning politicians who know that bankers and what Teddy Roosevelt once called malefactors of great wealth are not at the top of the pops right now. Jean-Baptiste Colbert, France's minister of finance under Louis XIV, famously said, "The art of taxation consists in so plucking the goose as to get the most feathers with the least hissing." Obama has selected for plucking those geese, "the rich," whose hisses will not resonate with the mass of voters—an open ticket for "progressives" to tout Obama's grow-the-government program. Which makes it even more urgent that Republicans, who control Congress, be able to explain to the middle class in 2016 that by applying conservative principles to the development of policy, they can do more for most Americans than an already bloated government bureaucracy. ♦

The Ayatollah and the U.S. Embassy

Khomeini's role in the 1979 hostage crisis.

BY RAY TAKEYH

It has long been the conceit of Iran specialists and political commentators that Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini was not informed that militant students intended to take over the U.S. embassy in Iran in 1979. The Western intelligentsia has vouched for the Islamic Republic and claimed that the hostage crisis was a product of an internal power struggle. It was not about America, but rather about a revolution sorting itself out. As such, the hostage drama should not stand in the way of a rapprochement between the two nations.

Now, more than three decades later, evidence has come to light to suggest that this was a fiction of political convenience. The truth is that Khomeini was informed beforehand about the attack on the U.S. embassy, and hoped that it would solidify Iran's antagonism toward the United States.

Iran's Islamic revolution and its inscrutable philosopher-king Khomeini offered a unique challenge to the prevailing norms of the international system. The essence of Khomeini's message was that the vitality of his Islamist mission was contingent on its relentless export. Moreover, because God's vision was not to be confined to a single nation, Iran's foreign policy had to be an extension of its domestic revolutionary vision. For the grand ayatollah, the global order was divided

between states whose priorities were defined by Western conventions and Iran, whose ostensible purpose was to redeem a divine mandate.

Khomeini's internationalist vision had to have an antagonist, a foil to define itself against. A caricatured concept of the West soon became the central pillar of his Islamist imagination. Accordingly, the Americans were rapacious imperialists determined to exploit Iran's wealth for their self-aggrandizement. The Islamist themes were not far behind, as America was also seeking to subjugate Muslims and impose its cultural template in the



The imam was in on it.

name of modernity. The psychological dimension of the crisis cannot be understated, as Khomeini relished the opportunity to humiliate America. By capturing and parading the diplomats for 444 days, Tehran disgraced Washington, and demonstrated that Jimmy Carter's America was a paper tiger.

On November 4, 1979, the scene outside the U.S. embassy did not seem all that different from any other day. Demonstrators denouncing the shah, admitted to the United States for medical treatment, and protesters chanting "Death to America" were not unusual occurrences. However, this time a number of students breached the walls of the embassy. The startled American diplomats were unsure about how to proceed. At first, they hoped that the occupation would be short-lived and the impetuous students would be dispatched

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from the grounds. After all, the regime was seemingly oblivious to the latest provocation of its frenzied constituency and would soon uphold the sanctity of the diplomatic compound. This was not to be the case.

It is often suggested that the revolutionaries meant to undermine the provisional government led by moderate prime minister Mehdi Bazargan, and thus needed to provoke a crisis. The evidence to support this claim is not inconsiderable as many of the students have asserted that, although they had hoped that Khomeini would approve of their action, he did not provide them with an explicit green light. In recent years, however, evidence has gradually come forth to make a cogent case that Khomeini did approve the plot in advance.

In his published memoirs, the late Ayatollah Mohammad-Reza Mahdavi Kani, a member of the Revolutionary Council and the head of the Revolutionary Committees, offers an intriguing insight into the events surrounding the hostage crisis. Soon after the occupation of the embassy, in his role as the head of the Revolutionary Committees, which were largely responsible for internal security, he contacted Khomeini's son, Ahmad, who acted as his father's chief of staff and intermediary between Khomeini and his advisers, to inquire about the developments surrounding the embassy.

"The night of the embassy's occupation I contacted Ahmad and asked him what is happening?" wrote Mahdavi Kani. "Initially, he just laughed and would not answer. I asked him did you know about this? He laughed. Finally, after I insisted, he said the Imam [Khomeini] is satisfied with this and you should not get involved." Mahdavi Kani's pointed questions to Ahmad about his knowledge of the events only elicited bemused laughter, suggesting a prior understanding.

And then there is the students' spiritual leader, Ayatollah Mohammad Mousavi-Khuiniha. The ayatollah was Khomeini's former student and disciple, and was also known to be in close touch with Ahmad Khomeini.

His pivotal role in securing Ayatollah Khomeini's consent is asserted by Habib Allah Bitara, a former hostage taker who went on to serve as minister of energy. Bitara confessed last year that "for us, particularly the students of University of Tehran, Imam's opinion on this issue was important and many of our friends said that if Imam is against this we will not participate in this affair. The opinion of the students was transmitted to Mousavi-Khuiniha who agreed to take the issue to Imam. If Imam was against it, his views would be given to us immediately or in two days. Two days passed, Khomeini did not respond but he issued a statement encouraging attack on America. We, the students, accepted this statement as a positive response."

Indeed, just prior to the attack on the embassy, Khomeini's office did issue a statement stressing, "It is incumbent upon students in the secondary schools and universities and the theology schools to expand their attack against America and Israel. Thus America will be forced to return the criminal, deposed shah."

This must have been the signal that the students were waiting for. Indeed, shortly after the embassy takeover, Ahmad arrived at the compound and acknowledged the students' contribution to the cause of the revolution.

Last month another hostage taker, Mohammad Hashemi-Esfehani, stepped forth with his own confession of Khomeini's complicity. In an interview, he claimed that "prior to attacking the U.S. embassy, Ahmad Khomeini, the son of Ruhollah Khomeini, was involved in our operations and he also informed Imam Khomeini." As with many of his collaborators, Hashemi-Esfehani seems proud of the role he played in ensuring the vitality of the revolution.

Scholars and journalists have long presented Iran's domestic political rivalries and fears of a potential U.S.-sponsored coup as the most likely culprits for the hostage crisis. In retrospect, however, the hostage crisis was designed to ensure that the foundations of Iran's foreign policy would be radical ones. Through a symbolic attack on the U.S. embassy, the new revolutionaries demonstrated not only their antagonism toward America but also their contempt for prevailing international norms. Iran would now inveigh against the United States, assist belligerent actors throughout the Middle East, and plot against Israel. More than three decades after the hostage crisis, the legacy of that act continues to obstruct normal relations between Iran and the United States—just as Khomeini intended. ♦

Corker in Charge

The Senate Committee on Foreign Relations has a new chairman. **BY DAVID ALLEN MARTIN**

The almost numberless foreign policy fires raging worldwide that affect the United States are the purview of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations and its new chairman, Bob Corker, Republican of Tennessee. The Islamic State continues

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its violent attempts to enlarge its self-proclaimed caliphate in the Middle East, Vladimir Putin is likely plotting Moscow's next muscle-flexing session, and the extended nuclear talks with Iran are far from reaching an acceptable conclusion. And those are only the lead-headline items that awaited the committee when it recently reconvened.

Two weeks ago, I asked Senator

Corker how he and the committee plan to prioritize. Corker—the first Republican to hold the chairmanship in eight years—was quick to draw on his experience in the private sector, in construction and real estate. “There are things that are urgent, and there are things that are important,” he said. Like a company manager, he’ll have to appropriately allocate time between daily duties, unexpected emergencies, and long-term planning.

In that last category, unresolved procedural items were on his mind. Before talking about Cuba policy, Chinese territorial disputes, or the possible effects of the recent Paris shootings, Corker brought up the fact that the last authorization of the State Department was issued 13 years ago and that a list of USAID programs have been operating since 1985 without a congressional re-up—simply because the committee and Congress spend so much of their time running with a fire hose from one foreign policy blaze to the next. When smoke is billowing from red-hot situations across the globe, it proves difficult to focus on bureaucratic matters.

What seems to frustrate Corker is that some of the supposedly urgent international situations America is embroiled in have been either created or greatly inflated by the White House.

President Obama’s announcement in December that the United States would recalibrate its policy toward Cuba, for instance, strikes Corker as a piece of manufactured urgency. Our relations with Cuba “hadn’t been on the front burner in a while,” he told me. Thanks to the administration’s decision to hold secret negotiations, Congress and its committees got only a brief heads-up about the change. With no time to plan and few policy specifics, members of the Foreign Relations Committee realized they would be overseeing one of the biggest policy overhauls in half a century—a total blindside.

According to Corker, the usual catalogue of international crises has been lengthened by an administration

hesitant to act. When talking about Ukraine, Corker breathed a little sigh of relief, acknowledging that the diplomatic climate there is starting to improve, thanks in part to sanctions placed on Russia. (Sanctions, he noted, are handled by the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs, on which he also sits.) But “we waited too long for those sanctions,” he said. While the White House wrung its hands about how to counter aggressive Russian maneuvering, Putin com-



Corker at his first meeting as chairman, January 21

pleted the annexation of Crimea and dispersed pro-Russian thugs to wreak havoc across eastern Ukraine. With no resolute response from Washington, Corker argued, “we let that [situation] get more out of control.”

The Syria debacle, in his view, is another result of inaction. “Had we taken different steps, being more forward with the Syrian opposition, we’d be in a different place” today, he said. We might have helped land a decisive blow to the brutal Assad regime. Instead, the Syrian civil war has droned on, claiming the lives of roughly 200,000 belligerents and innocents. The ensuing regional instability has created the perfect environment for the newest international menace to gather momentum: the Islamic State.

Last year witnessed the Islamic State mature from a mere ragtag group of “jayvees,” as Obama once put it, to a global threat. Corker feels that, along with President Obama’s foot-dragging in Syria, a second administration blunder aided ISIS: the United States’s hurried departure from Iraq, leaving the inefficient and sectarian

Maliki government to run the show. When asked if the administration’s hasty exit from Iraq was influenced by post-Bush exhaustion with the outside world, Corker agreed: “The president embraced that sentiment,” and the United States “precipitously left.”

Though Corker insists “Iraq can be successful,” he believes the Islamic State cannot be defeated without a strategy for America’s relationship with Syria. So far, no such strategy has been produced, and its absence highlights a recurring criticism Corker has of the White House: It rarely informs Congress of the steps it wants to take to reach, as Corker puts it, President Obama’s “rhetorical outcomes.” True to form, in his State of the Union address last week, the president asked Congress to pass a new Authorization for Use of Military Force—without stating what it should contain or outlining a strategy for defeating the Islamic State.

It’s easy to say the United States is going to “downgrade and destroy” the Islamic State. It also sounds nice that, closer to home, “America chooses to cut loose the shackles of the past so as to reach for a better future—for the Cuban people, for the American people, for our entire hemisphere, and for the world.” But how, Corker wanted to know, does the president propose to achieve these ends?

“The best way to push the White House [for policy specifics],” he said, “is to have the principal members of the administration up here to testify.” Hearings may improve coordination between the executive and legislative branches and between the parties. In Corker’s view, “foreign policy through partisanship doesn’t make sense”—a fine sentiment, but one difficult to live by in an era of divided government with, in the background, the 2016 presidential campaigns gearing up.

Corker—who came to the Senate and the Foreign Relations Committee in 2007 with almost no experience in foreign policy, but has since visited 63 countries—is about to put his ideas to the test. ♦

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Hard Times for Hezbollah

Is Iran's Lebanese client losing its grip?

BY LEE SMITH

Last week Hezbollah buried one of its princes, Jihad Mughniyeh, the 22-year-old son of the late Imad Mughniyeh, a legendary Hezbollah commander implicated in such infamous operations as the 1983 bombing of the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut. The assassination of the elder Mughniyeh in Damascus in 2008, typically attributed to Israel, is regarded as one of the organization's most traumatic blows. However, some in the Shiite community here say that Israel's January 18 strike on a three-car convoy in the Golan Heights near the Syrian town of Quneitra—which killed the younger Mughniyeh and five other Hezbollah operatives, along with as many as six Iranians—is evidence of a dangerous crisis for Hezbollah.

The throngs attending the younger Mughniyeh's funeral on January 19 yelled "Death to America" only once. "I counted," says Lokman Slim, an anti-Hezbollah Shiite activist. "And they said 'Death to Israel' only a few times. Then they went to more religious slogans."

According to Slim, the scaled-down rhetoric and modest size of the funeral are evidence that Hezbollah is caught in a bind. "The [Lebanese Shiites] don't want another war with Israel," says Slim, "but they also want to know Hezbollah can protect them like it says."

Hezbollah's general secretary Hassan Nasrallah can threaten to open the gates of hell on Israel's northern border, but if he doesn't take action he's only underscoring his

Beirut



A Hezbollah youth in Lebanon

weakness and that of the Shiites in general. If he does take action, he risks escalation with a powerful neighbor at a time when Hezbollah is already stretched. Its campaign in Syria to defend Bashar al-Assad is absorbing the bulk of the group's manpower, Syria and Assad being hugely important assets to their Iranian patrons. Moreover, if Hezbollah's retaliation brings a crushing Israeli response, Nasrallah will have opened not only a fight with Israel, but a third confrontation as well, inside Lebanon, with the country's Sunni community. "It would mean the Sunni-Shia conflict has come to Lebanon in earnest," says Slim.

The political situation in Lebanon is therefore as freighted with danger as the actual war Hezbollah is fighting across the border in Syria. The organization portrays its combat there as a defensive war to prevent the Sunni extremist groups like Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS that are battling Assad from entering Lebanon and targeting the Shiites. Suicide bombings in Beirut's southern suburbs, a Hezbollah stronghold, and the pitched battles between Hezbollah and Sunni fighters on the Syrian border in Lebanon's Bekaa valley are proof that the threat of Sunni violence is genuine. But the fact that Jihad Mughniyeh and his cohorts were killed in the Golan Heights—where they would pose a threat to Israel and less so to the Sunni extremists whose strongholds are elsewhere in Syria—is an embarrassment for Hezbollah in general and Nasrallah in particular.

In a long interview with a pro-Hezbollah TV station just two days before the Israeli strike, Nasrallah claimed that Hezbollah was not active on the Golan. As it turns out, Mughniyeh and the others, including Iranian Revolutionary Guards Brigadier General Mohamed Ali Allahdadi, a confidant of Iran's Quds Force commander Qassem

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MAHMOUD ZAYYAT / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

Suleimani, were reportedly preparing the groundwork for an Iranian missile base. In other words, Hezbollah's ostensibly defensive fight in Syria, to protect the Lebanese Shiites, has a significant offensive component as well—to open a second front against Israel, in addition to the group's South Lebanon stronghold, on behalf of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The Shiites, says Slim, have come a long way from their self-proclaimed "Divine Victory" over Israel in 2006. By its own telling, Hezbollah proved its bona fides as a resistance movement by standing toe-to-toe with an Israeli enemy that had repeatedly walked over Sunni powers like Egypt, Syria, and Jordan. The Shiites wanted to enjoy the spoils of their victory—money, prestige, and perhaps above all peace. But now they're being dragged back to war, not with a regional superpower like Israel, but rather as an accomplice in a conflict in Syria that contradicts the values of their community.

"The Shia are supposed to side with justice against injustice," says Slim. "Shia stand with the underdog. And now Hezbollah is fighting alongside a dictatorial regime." Moreover, Hezbollah has also staked the Shiites to a position against the regional Sunni majority in a war whose best outcome, says Slim, can only be a political settlement. "Hezbollah will have fought this war, and at the end the Shia will ask to what purpose did we sacrifice so much?" The worst outcome, says Slim, is a war that won't end.

"Maybe trauma," says Slim, "is the only way back from divinity." Maybe. We're on the road heading south to the Shiite heartland to see.

Traffic is thick getting out of Beirut's southern suburbs. There's a joint checkpoint ahead, Hezbollah on the right and Lebanese Army on the left. Hezbollah checks license plates in a database, and if you're okay, he pings the soldier on the left who waves you through. If you're not, you get waved over to the right, and they check your car for explosives. Slim bristles: "I pay taxes to have Hezbollah give orders to the army."

Checkpoints, traffic—everything is worse than when I was last here nearly three years ago. There's less electricity and more blackouts, the water shortages are worse, and so is the sewage. There's no president, no elections on the horizon to elect a new parliament, the economy is moribund with little investment from the traditional big spenders of the Gulf states, and parents are urging their children to formulate a Plan B—how to get out of Lebanon and start a career and family elsewhere. Europe, Australia, the

Gulf, Canada, America . . . all are lands of opportunity. In Lebanon everything is getting worse. Except for one thing, says Slim, the one thing that matters to him as much as anything in the world—Hezbollah is falling and a new chapter is beginning for the Shiites.

"I told you that I saw Hezbollah's beginnings," he reminds me. "And I told you I'd see its end as well. We're getting closer. These things like the Israeli strike in the Golan are simply facts, markers. There's a larger underlying reality that's shifting. It's happening slowly, but it's detectable."

Finally we're waved through the checkpoint and on our way. Hezbollah flags fly from lampposts all the way south. Placards and pictures commemorate the latest crop of martyrs—"the *cuvée* of Syria," says Slim.

Outside of Lebanon's Shiite regions, it is very difficult to get a sense of how profoundly the war in Syria has injured the community. Exactly how many Lebanese Shiites have been killed there is unknown—high-end estimates are more than a thousand in the last two years—or even how many are fighting. Slim says the numbers miss the point. "Let's say there are 3,000 Hezbollah combatants in Syria, but then

take into account all the other things you need, everything from intelligence to logistics, and there are perhaps 20,000 committed to the war. For instance, a father and his two sons have a bulldozer, and Hezbollah needs them and their machine in Syria, so they pay them double to be there."

Hezbollah is unaccustomed to waging a long war of attrition like this, far from the Lebanese villages where it fought guerrilla wars against Israel. To be sure, its fighters are becoming a battle-hardened expeditionary force, but the nature of the war is reconfiguring Shiite society. "Boys are dropping out of school to join the fight," says Slim. "They enjoy the benefits of manhood earlier than before, but it's becoming a community without men, or men who are simply on leave from Syria and waiting to return. The result," he says smiling, "is that the women will become more powerful."

Black humor underlines how far Hezbollah has fallen from its divine status. "We have the phenomenon of the widows of the fighters killed in Syria," says Slim, "beautiful young girls being courted by the organization's senior officials. 'Hey, if you need anything, just text me. And if it's evening, you can reach me on Whatsapp, too.'"

The fact that Israel presumably weighed Hezbollah's predicament before striking the Mughniyeh/Allahdadi

'Boys are dropping out of school to join the fight,' says Slim. 'They enjoy the benefits of manhood earlier than before, but it's becoming a community without men.'

convoy—how the scope of its deployment in Syria limited its ability to avenge its fallen—is one of several indignities Nasrallah has to swallow. There’s also the ongoing issue of treason. Not long before the strike in the Golan, Hezbollah disclosed that it had found a spy in its ranks, Mohamed Shawarba, a high-ranking official who allegedly worked for the Mossad. If Hezbollah was eager to boast of its ability to root out traitors, Israel’s operation—netting major Hezbollah and Iranian figures—suggests that its counter-intelligence wing has plenty of work left to do, because the organization is still riddled with spies.

Our first visit in the south is with a dissident Shiite cleric who paid heavily—imprisonment and torture—for his stance against Hezbollah. The sheikh is a well-built man in his mid-50s wearing a long-sleeved T-shirt and sweatpants and chain-smoking. He is watched closely by Hezbollah and sometimes, suspecting his apartment may be bugged, leans in to whisper. At other times his emotions take over and he throws caution to the wind, no matter how sensitive the subject. His gestures are expansive, and he moves like an actor or storyteller, like a man accustomed to being in front of a congregation of the faithful, to make his case about the mercy of God—or against the depredations of Hezbollah. He drops a dozen notebooks filled with his writings in my lap. “These are all anti-Hezbollah,” he says, beaming with pride.

The sheikh’s political and theological mission is taking on *wilayet al-faqih*, the theological concept developed by the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, that gives supreme political power to the supreme religious figure. “It’s different from the theory of European kingship that saw the monarch as God’s regent on earth,” says the sheikh. “The church was a mediating authority. But with *wilayet al-faqih*, the supreme leader is effectively able to bypass Muhammad the prophet as well as the Koran. There’s no mediation, just the supreme leader and God.”

If it’s such an obviously bad, and un-Islamic, idea, I ask the sheikh, why did the Iranian people buy it? “Ignorance,” he says. “Also, Khomeini was charismatic.” I ask if the Lebanese Shiites understand the errors of *wilayet al-faqih*.

“Ignorance is a problem with many of the Lebanese, too. And there’s also the fact that Hezbollah takes care of people. If a sheikh goes to Hezbollah and asks for \$100, they’ll give him \$500. And then there are the ideologues, a small but powerful minority. For them, fighting for Iran isn’t fighting for just another country, it’s God’s country.”

And yet according to the sheikh, the majority of the Shiite community is anything but ideological. “Sure, when a Hezbollah fighter is killed in Syria, we go to the funeral and fill the streets. That’s a social obligation. We do the same when someone is killed in a car accident. Just because we attend a fighter’s funeral doesn’t mean we are behind the cause.”

That’s true even of some senior Hezbollah officials, says the sheikh. He recounts speaking recently with a senior military commander who told him that for the first time in his life he questioned Hezbollah’s mission. “He said,” the sheikh recalled, “‘Are we fighting to defend the shrine of Sayyida Zeinab [a Shiite holy site in Damascus] or the palace of Asma al-Assad [the dictator’s wife]?’”

Hezbollah’s war in Syria is a good thing, as the sheikh sees it, because it will destroy the organization and turn the Shiites against it. And yet it will cost so many more martyrs.

Slim and I are on the road again, and all the roads in the south are festooned with the pictures of dead kids, largely Hezbollah’s second generation,

like Jihad Mughniyeh. The initial news reports about the Israeli strike suggested that Mughniyeh was a major figure in the organization, nearly filling his father’s very large shoes. However, the Beirut rumor mill contends that he was more like a playboy, hanging out in trendy nightlife areas, picking up girls, and drinking too much, until Hezbollah shipped its prodigal son off to Iran, where the IRGC, the Revolutionary Guards, took him under their wing and eventually sent him to his death on the Golan.

Much of Hezbollah’s young cadre comes from the tech schools the organization has opened throughout the south, says Slim. “They’re able to identify the best kids who they then recruit into the organization. Also, education is a good business investment for Hezbollah, and they’ve made lots of good investments.”



A poster of Jihad Mughniyeh with the Arabic words ‘on the road to Jerusalem’ is hung in a southern Beirut suburb on the day of his funeral.

Slim cautions against believing Western media reports that Hezbollah is going broke. “In addition to their own investments, they have money from the Lebanese state,” says Slim. “They also still get what they need from Iran, and they’re also still making money from criminal enterprises.”

Indeed, even as we pass through dusty villages, the signs of economic success are everywhere. We drive by dozens of enormous, gaudy mansions built by Shiites largely living abroad, typically in Africa. “They might come here for only one week a year,” says Slim. “But they want a bigger house than their cousin’s across the road. You think these people want another war with Israel? They want to enjoy what they have, luxury, comfort, well being. Think of mansions as the counterpoint to martyrs.”

The highway to the south ends some 6 to 10 miles before it hits the Israeli border. “All they need to do is pave it,” says Slim. He’s certain it will happen someday. The way he sees it, the future of Lebanon’s Shiite community has to do with Israel, partly because the community in the south had decent relations with Israel before Hezbollah, and partly just because the Jewish state is the immediate neighbor. With the Syrian border closed for the foreseeable future, Israel and the Mediterranean are the only two avenues through which the Shiites can engage the rest of the world. In time, says Slim, the Shiites should at the very least forge a cold peace with Israel. “The Shia got stronger in Lebanon because they fought Israel,” he explains. “And now to stay strong, they have to avoid war with Israel.”

For now, though, the Shiite community’s foreign policy is largely made in Tehran. There’s skepticism throughout Lebanon that an agreement between the Obama administration and Iran will compel Tehran to put a leash on its Lebanese client. Further, Israel’s strike on the convoy in the Golan is evidence that Jerusalem is highly doubtful about the White House’s arrangements with Iran. In effect, the message last week was that the Obama administration may want a condominium with Iran, may want to work with the IRGC to stop ISIS in Iraq, and may turn a blind eye to Qassem Suleimani’s machinations in Syria and Lebanon; Israel, on the other hand, will continue to kill IRGC commanders operating on its borders.

Slim and I are about as close to the Israeli border as we’re going to get, visiting an old friend of his at a large family compound containing two mansions high in the mountains. It’s the first time I’ve been in this part of Lebanon, and its extraordinary beauty and peacefulness surprise me. In the

late afternoon light, we can see far into the valley below, with the Israeli border only a few miles away.

“In 2006,” Slim says, “Hezbollah put a rocket launcher right here on the roof.” When the Israelis returned fire, says his friend with a broad smile, “they hit a spot in front and behind, but not here.”

We discuss whether Nasrallah will retaliate for last week’s attack and, if so, when and how. Will there be rocket fire from Lebanon, terrorist operations abroad, an IED on the border targeting Israeli troops, or an operation from the Golan? The last, which would come from Syrian territory, seems safest to most of the Lebanese I’ve spoken with. However, it’s worth considering that Israel may have struck not because of an urgent threat near Quneitra, but rather to prevent Iran and Hezbollah from opening another front from which to attack Israel.

The Israelis have been watching the Syrian border with concern. Given Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s reputation for being risk averse, it’s notable that he chose to risk the possibility of war with elections only two months away. Clearly, the Israeli government will not allow Iran to use the Golan as a launching pad, and firing on Israel from there in retaliation would effectively make it a second front. Accordingly, chances are that an Israeli response, in any escalation, would target Hezbollah

in Lebanon, with the south again bearing the brunt of the conflict, likely including, according to Israeli strategists, a large ground operation.

Slim’s friend ushers us inside his stone mansion. A big man with a warm smile, he’s a poet and also a *sayyid*, a direct descendant of the prophet Muhammad. On the left side of his large bookcase is his extensive collection of Arabic poetry, and on the right books about religion, including a multivolume set on the history of the Shiites written by a relative. Slim asks him to show me his own collection of verse and he reads a poem that begins, “Lokman was also drunk.”

There’s whiskey, wine, arak, and an enormous lunch on his living room table consisting largely of local produce—tomatoes, avocados, watercress. As the sun sets, the poet takes some meat from the refrigerator and puts it on the grill. He asks, “Do you think those guys on the other side of the border imagine that we live like this—art, poetry, food, drink?” I’m sure of it, I say, hopeful we are all seeing the beginning of the end of Hezbollah. ♦

‘Sure, when a Hezbollah fighter is killed in Syria, we go to the funeral and fill the streets,’ said the sheikh. ‘That’s a social obligation. We do the same when someone is killed in a car accident. Just because we attend a fighter’s funeral doesn’t mean we are behind the cause.’

Diplomatic Malpractice

Cultural preservation grants to culture-destroying regimes

BY STEPHEN SCHWARTZ

The Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation (AFCP) is a federal program that, since its establishment by Congress in 2001, has granted millions of dollars—\$47,750,971 through 2013—to about 800 projects of foreign governments seeking to preserve historic structures and institutions. Administered by the Cultural Heritage Center at the State Department’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, AFCP is little known to the American public. Grants are made on the basis of recommendations by U.S. ambassadors for purposes including “the restoration of ancient and historic buildings, assessment and conservation of rare manuscripts and museum collections, preservation and protection of important archaeological sites, and the documentation of vanishing traditional craft techniques and indigenous languages.”

Through the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, the fund has issued public reports on its awards since 2001. Dismayingly, they show that AFCP has given money to two states classified as funders of terrorism by the State Department: Syria under the dictatorship of Bashar al-Assad and Sudan under the tyranny of Omar al-Bashir.

In Syria in 2001, AFCP donated \$15,372 to train Syrian museum curators to serve at an exhibit hosted by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. The show featured Syrian archaeological artifacts from the 3rd century B.C. Then, in 2004-05, Syria was granted \$26,000 for creation of a Cultural Heritage Documentation Unit. (Biennial reports enumerate grants awarded in the first year and carried out in the second.)

In 2005-06, Syria was paid \$20,300 by AFCP for restoration of St. George Christian Church in the town of Izra’, dating from the 6th century.

Syria received more AFCP money in 2006-07: \$26,813 for restoration of mosaics in its northern “forgotten cities.” The AFCP report for 2006-07 includes a photograph of the forgotten cities with a wall decorated by a poster of dictator Hafez al-Assad, who died in 2000.

For 2007-08, the AFCP allocated \$31,529 for “preservation and management” of the archaeological remnants of the city of Busra, in southern Syria, near the border with Jordan. The funds were intended, according to the report, to encourage interpretation of “Busra’s complicated Roman, Christian, and Islamic history to a multicultural audience . . . [with] multilingual signage to improve the visitor experience in this culturally rich yet otherwise underdeveloped area of Syria and to enable tourism planners to incorporate this World Heritage Site into regional tour packages.”

Syria was granted more money by AFCP in 2008-09: \$63,078 for conservation of pre-Islamic artifacts and for another Christian church, the Chapel of St. Hanania in Damascus, in two grants.

Throughout this period, Syria was sponsoring terrorism. A State Department Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs Fact Sheet dated March 20, 2014, states: “Syria has been on the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism since the list’s inception in 1979. Because of its continuing support and safe haven for terrorist organizations, Syria is subject to legislatively mandated penalties, including export sanctions under the Syrian Accountability Act and ineligibility to receive most forms of U.S. aid.”

With Syria ineligible for “most forms of U.S. aid,” why was an exception made for historic preservation? Syria under Assad is sharply at variance with American political principles. Its policy of ostentatiously protecting Christian sites is a dishonest one, aimed at persuading religious minorities to support Assad against the Sunni Muslim majority. Exceptions to U.S. sanctions have long been established for family-related and cultural visits to Iran and Cuba. But neither of those countries qualifies for AFCP support.

Furthermore, since the spring of 2011, Syria has been embroiled in unrest or full-scale civil war, a situation not conducive to the development of tourism. In September 2013, the State Department was finally compelled to recognize this. According to department spokesperson Jen Psaki, U.S. authorities cooperated with international museum experts to launch an “Emergency Red List of Syrian Cultural Objects of Risk.” The list consists almost exclusively of movable artifacts such as inscriptions, manuscripts, books, vessels, seals, and similar items that could be looted and sold. It is a feature of a U.S.-endorsed “Syria

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Cultural Heritage Initiative,” for which no U.S. financing has been disclosed.

In Geneva, however, on December 22, 2014, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, together with the U.N. Operational Satellite Applications Program, issued a report on “Satellite-Based Damage Assessment to Cultural Heritage Sites in Syria.” The U.N. body determined that in the Syrian city of Aleppo, after extended combat between Assad forces and rebels in mid-2012, the highest rate of cultural destruction had been observed. Damage was inflicted at 135 locations, 22 of which were deemed destroyed and the rest described as possibly, moderately, or severely damaged. The world body identified Aleppo as “one of the (if not the) oldest continuously occupied cities in the world with some 7,000 years of known settlement history.”

Of Syrian sites for which AFCP designated grants in the past, according to the U.N., the northern forgotten cities have undergone an indeterminate level of destruction. The U.N. report states: “These Dead Cities have become home to thousands of refugees who have fled from the civil war and now live in the caves beneath the ruins. . . . Some have even dug up the ancient stone graves and are using them as makeshift homes. . . . There is little or no access to places like this while war rages, so the true nature of the devastation will not be known for some time. . . . In some cases, particularly where a Dead City has been resettled, there is the potential for looting.”

In Busra, the legacy of history has been diminished. The U.N. notes that Busra “survived about 2,500 years inhabited and almost intact,” but recent “shelling damage appears to be concentrated in the area of the historic residences, some of which are still occupied today.”

For the grants made by AFCP to Syrian cultural professionals over the past 13 years to prove a useful investment, those curators and preservationists—if they are alive—will need to be assigned to the damaged sites. But first Assad must leave power and his Iranian and Hezbollah cohorts and the diverse gangs of jihadists acting allegedly in defense of Sunni Muslims will have to leave the country.

The U.S. government’s expenditures to advance Syrian tourism—almost \$200,000 over a decade—may seem trivial. But they are indicative of a capricious policy pursued despite what is known about the nature of the beneficiaries.

Thus, in 2008-09, Sudan, though listed as a terrorfunder, and long after it had become a global pariah for its massacres in Darfur and South Sudan, received an AFCP grant of \$33,455 for restoration of the Old Dongola Mosque in the north of the country. The fund report noted insouciantly that the mosque was constructed beginning in the 9th century as a Christian church—as if Sudan, a rogue, Islamist state that oppresses Christians, were being rewarded for that feature of its cultural profile.

According to the report for 2011-12, AFCP has spent money in “120 developing countries around the world.” Countries eligible to apply for AFCP assistance stood at 136 in 2011. The report states that “the Cultural Heritage Center uses the U.N. Human Development Index as a guide for determining eligibility.”

The countries qualifying for AFCP money include some that are not “developing,” and are not so defined by the U.N. Human Development Index. These comprise Saudi Arabia, with “very high human development,” and Russia, China, and Turkey, with “high human development.” The Saudi kingdom has not asked for AFCP assistance, but Russia, China, and Turkey have done so successfully. In Russia, however, the Gulag museum at the former Perm-36 labor camp, which was given \$28,060 by AFCP in 2005-06, was recently closed, its future unclear (see “Putin and the Perm-36 Gulag Monument,” *WeeklyStandard.com*, August 26, 2014).

In addition, AFCP money has been granted in the West Bank although neither Israel nor the Palestinian Authority is listed as eligible. In 2009-10, a grant of \$55,700 is listed for cultural heritage protection in three unnamed Christian and Muslim villages in the West Bank. In 2010-11, AFCP provided \$80,550 for conservation efforts at Jericho, in the eastern West Bank. Who received these grants—Israel, which controls the West Bank, or the Palestinian Authority, which administers it? Neither of the relevant AFCP reports names the recipients.

AFCP, with its benign goals and relativist approach to regimes like those in Syria and Sudan, operates in Africa, the Americas, South and Central Asia, East Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Eurasia, and the Middle East. A considerable amount of AFCP money is given for preservation of religious structures—premodern, Hindu, Buddhist, and animist as well as Christian, Jewish, and Muslim.

The AFCP budget also supports cultural restoration in several Muslim countries where the grants seem obviously linked to U.S. foreign policy and military aims. These include Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan. In Afghanistan, AFCP money has gone almost entirely to mosques and fortifications. In 2001-13, Afghanistan received eight grants, totaling \$1,818,110. These were awarded for a shrine to the Muslim ruler Babur, the Mullah Mahmud Mosque, and the Goldasta Mosque in Kabul, plus the Khoja Rokhband mosque complex, the Sussi Herat Citadel, and the Shahzada Abdullah shrine in Herat. More went to the Noh Gonbad Mosque in Balkh, in the north.

Neighboring Pakistan, bloodied by terrorism, received \$1,187,862 from AFCP in 2001-13. Grants were allotted for the Mahabat Khan Mosque in Peshawar, plus an Indian Muslim official residence, the Man Singh Haveli at Rohtas Fort, and the Sakhi Sarwar shrine in Punjab. In addition, AFCP distributed financial support for the Wazir Khan

mosque and bazaar, the Sunehri or Golden Mosque and the Sheikhpura Fort in Lahore, the Jalal-ud-Din Bukhari shrine at Uch Sharif, and two Sufi shrines, one dedicated to Shams Tabraiz in Multan and the other to Muhammad Hayrat in Gujrat. AFCP grants apparently have contributed little to the stability of Afghanistan or Pakistan.

U.S. funding for Sufi facilities may have been motivated by a belief that metaphysical Muslims will serve as reliable allies for the West against radical Islam, but this expectation is flawed. Some Sufis (including in Iraq) are jihadist while some are pro-Iranian, but most Sufis avoid backing states beyond what is necessary to protect their property from fundamentalist usurpation in Muslim countries, like Pakistan, and those with large Muslim minorities, like India.

AFCP spending in Iraq has focused on preservation of pre-Islamic Babylon, with additional activities at the Iraq Museum in Baghdad as well as in Iraqi Kurdistan. Other Muslim-majority countries receiving AFCP assistance include several that are dictatorships, including the Central Asian ex-Communist states of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, and the African countries of Algeria, Burkina Faso, and Djibouti, along with Mali, which became a dictatorship in 2012. Tunisia received generous AFCP grants in 2003-04 and 2004-05, when it was still ruled

by the despotic Zine Abedine Ben Ali, overthrown in 2011. Yemen was awarded AFCP money in 2011-12, under military autocrat Ali Abdullah Saleh, who fell in 2012.

What is the point of this U.S. largesse? Although it began in 2001, it was not a response to the atrocities of September 11; the first grants were announced by Secretary of State Colin Powell on June 27. Is it merely another fruitless exercise in “soft power” by the innovative functionaries at the State Department?

When Hafez al-Assad died in 2000 and Bashar al-Assad replaced him, there was considerable hope that the Syrian regime would moderate its repressive and terroristic characteristics. Perhaps the AFCP grants to Syria reflected a belief that subtle incentives would bring change to such dictatorships. But Bashar al-Assad and many others have proved such hopes wrong.

Since it began in 2001, AFCP has operated without significant public scrutiny. A new Congress is now seated, and the time may have come to open AFCP’s books for review. If not, AFCP may soon be handing U.S. taxpayer dollars to Cuba for the refurbishment of its cultural legacy, ruined by the Communist era. And with Syria benefiting, why not Iran? ♦

Trade Should Be Everyone’s Priority

By Thomas J. Donohue
President and CEO
U.S. Chamber of Commerce

In a recent *New York Times* blog post, columnist Paul Krugman took issue with the fact that boosting America’s economy through stronger, fairer trade relationships is one of the U.S. Chamber’s highest priorities. The issue is sure to spark a lively discussion as it heats up in Washington, but playing loose with facts won’t advance the debate. Here are some facts to keep in mind.

Ninety-five percent of the world’s consumers live outside of the United States. If American businesses large and small can fill their order books with sales to new customers, they will need to hire more workers, increase working hours, and expand their businesses to fill those orders. The purpose of trade deals is to make it easier for U.S. businesses to reach the world’s customers. The two biggest agreements currently under negotiation—

the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP) with Asia and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) with Europe—would open up vast new markets and enormous growth opportunities.

The United States is at a competitive disadvantage, and trade agreements can help even the playing field. While U.S. markets are largely open to trade, U.S. goods and services are often shut out of foreign markets because of significant barriers. In fact, American exporters face higher tariffs abroad than nearly all of our trade competitors. Fairness and accountability are at the heart of today’s major trade agreements.

Our economy needs trade in both directions. Exports already support more than 38 million American jobs and account for 13.5% of GDP. Economic studies indicate the TPP would boost U.S. GDP by \$78 billion annually and create approximately 700,000 new American jobs. The TTIP would add \$125 billion to U.S. GDP per year while supporting approximately 740,000 new

U.S. jobs. Cutting the cost of imports is vital too. Imports help lower prices for both American families as they try to stretch their budgets and domestic manufacturers that use foreign components to build products.

Congress and the White House must work together to get the best deal for U.S. businesses and workers. We need to renew Trade Promotion Authority (TPA), which allows Congress to set negotiating objectives for trade agreements and requires the executive branch to engage in close consultations with legislators throughout the course of trade talks.

When you look at the facts, we’d be crazy *not* to make trade a priority for our country. And if Paul Krugman doesn’t want to take our word for it, that’s fine. Maybe he’ll listen to President Obama, who made a strong appeal for expanding U.S. trade in his State of the Union Address last week.



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Rep. Mia Love (R-Utah) at the Utah Republican party convention, April 2014

Minority Report

How can Republicans reclaim black voters? BY ARTUR DAVIS

A number of Republicans will pick an immediate fight with this book. First, one of its premises is that from the New Deal to the advent of Reagan conservatism, black Republicans lost an internal fight for the heart and soul of Lincoln's house—and with that loss, the party founded on the ideal of equality has morphed into an institution its founders would not recognize. Conservatives who view that same period as the steady triumph of

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The Loneliness of the Black Republican
Pragmatic Politics and the Pursuit of Power
 by Leah Wright Rigueur
 Princeton, 432 pp., \$35

principle will bristle at this suggestion.

Then there is the dust jacket cover, a 1960 photo of a beautiful but nationally unknown African-American woman. (She happens to be Jewel LaFontant, the first female deputy solicitor general and mother of Barack Obama confidant John Rogers.) Why, conservatives may ask, such an anonymous image instead of one of the GOP's black stars? Flip

through the index and there is no reference to any of the high-profile contemporary black Republicans who belie the author's suggestion of loneliness: Rep. Mia Love, for example, one of the most heralded freshmen in the 114th Congress, or Dr. Ben Carson, arguably the hottest name in grassroots conservative politics. There is a scant one-line reference to Sen. Tim Scott, the only black person ever elected to a Senate seat from the old Confederacy, and a brief mention of Condoleezza Rice, who requires no further description.

Dismissal, though, would do a disservice to Leah Wright Rigueur's interpretation of a political evolution that conservatives ignore at their peril.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Republican party she depicts, for much of the last century, had its share of black voters, and could claim to be an influential voice within the African-American community. But today it is a brutal fact of life that the Republican party is simply loathed by an overwhelming number of black Americans. To most, the source of that loathing is deeper even than their affinity for a black Democratic president, and it rests on a gut suspicion that the modern GOP is a comfortable enabler of white racial resentment. Rigueur's implication is hard to refute. There are no sensible Republicans who view this as a good space, morally or politically, for a national party to occupy, and it is worthwhile to take a close look at how generations of Republicans tried, in vain, to avoid this moment.

To be sure, Rigueur lacks the pure storytelling skill that has allowed other authors to spin bestsellers out of some of the same material, and there is a denseness of detail that sometimes buries her larger points. But *The Loneliness of the Black Republican* is meticulous, well-crafted, and consistently astute about the fractious recent history of the Grand Old Party. If the Republican party in the Reagan through Obama era seems to divide over tactics but rarely over policy objectives, and almost all of its politicians operate within a relatively strict consensus, it has not always been that way—and a reader understands better what a divided GOP really did look like.

Republicans should also appreciate how thoroughly Rigueur shreds some of the left's demeaning tropes about black Republicans. Skeptical media invariably brand them as either cast-offs striving for a shorter line of advancement or empty vessels that shortchange their own history out of some misguided illusion of "color-blindness." If they are granted the credit of sincerity, black Republicans are often depicted as sincere right-wing freaks. But as Rigueur describes it, the overwhelming majority of these men and women have been principled people who, in the language of insurgency, regularly spoke truth to power—often at the cost of

reduced influence and access. They understood racism's full force.

Moreover, rather than being monolithic, they run the full political wingspan of the last three generations: liberals who distrusted the New Deal's hypocrisies on integration; centrists trying to fend off both a Southern strategy in their own party and militancy rising in their own neighborhoods; economic nationalists who envisioned the black consumer class and its reshaping of the American marketplace; neoconservatives who made trenchant critiques about the risks of government dependency.

What has bound these streams together is not opportunism but a coherent idea about equality of opportunity and the central place that principle must hold in the conservative (as well as the liberal) imagination. As Rigueur observes, the theme of individual dignity and empowerment that came to define black conservatives has been absorbed, at least partly, into mainstream thinking on poverty in both parties.

But let's be honest: The homage Rigueur pays black Republicans is not why this volume has a chance to exert influence on the national dialogue. Its relevance lies in the constant question she poses: Can the ideology of the Republican party be reconciled with the goal of broadening its appeal across racial lines? To paraphrase Reihan Salam, a conservative party is—well, conservative; is there a vision that is authentically conservative, in the way most Republicans prefer, and also open to the aspirations of black Americans, a people still wrapped in struggle?

It would have helped if Rigueur had spent time answering this question in the context of current debates. In my experience, very few top-drawer Republicans assume a rigid tradeoff between outreach to blacks and securing the loyalties of other camps in the coalition. At least five potential presidential candidates are attempting to broaden their philosophical appeal to blacks. For example, Marco Rubio is taking the policy reform route by offering proposals to restore accountability to the antipoverty bureaucracy.

Rand Paul is channeling distrust in the black community over police overreach and punitive sentencing for drug offenses. Mike Huckabee, Rick Santorum, and Ben Carson are courting the lingering traditionalism in the black community around the definition of marriage and angst over abortion on demand.

But candor requires acknowledging the limits of these strategies. None of these contenders has fashioned anything resembling a comprehensive vision for how to attack the racial disparities that continue to undermine the ideal of E Pluribus Unum. Not one likely candidate has offered an initiative for the stunning levels of unemployment among black men under 30. None has separated himself from the dramatic reductions in food stamps that congressional Republicans have sought. None has outlined an alternative to the Affordable Care Act for insuring the working poor, a large number of whom are black.

So the right struggles with a reality that will persist well after Barack Obama has left the White House. Rigueur correctly describes a tension—and the GOP needs to acknowledge it in order to address it—between the predominant African-American experience and the fiercely individualist roots of modern conservatism. A worldview that identifies personal drive as the hinge point for achievement wrestles with the conviction of most African Americans that discrimination is still entrenched and subversive.

These dueling themes of responsibility are spilling into the streets: They animate the fault lines between black millennials, who are demonstrating against police shootings, and white conservatives, who are perplexed that such protests so infrequently arise in the context of black-on-black killings, and they drive the ferocity of the fight over Medicaid expansion. Yes, Obama liberalism has failed to transcend these chasms, but it has the advantage of shifting demographics. To win more black votes, and to govern without further splitting the country, Republicans will have to reconcile conservatism with the needs of distressed black Americans.

In the short term, that challenge will only deepen. America is currently observing the 50th anniversary of the Selma-to-Montgomery march that helped produce a voting rights statute made possible by both Republican and (northern) Democratic votes. This is a noble legacy that, for many black Americans, is now engulfed in partisan politics. The charge will be made that Republicans are obsessed with restricting voting through ID requirements

and that a conservative Supreme Court is unraveling some of the foundations of the Voting Rights Act. Any Republican, black or white, is a lonely character in a narrative that portrays today's GOP as the inheritor of George Wallace's jargon about federal tyranny and states' rights.

Shaking off that image, and refashioning a conservatism that is responsive to every American, is a project the Republican party would do well to embrace. ♦



Fear Itself

The moral implications of being scared.

BY SYDNEY LEACH

In ancient warfare, the phalanx was a specific kind of troop formation in which armed soldiers were arrayed closely together in multiple rows and then advanced as one in battle. As Chris Walsh describes it here:

In the classic image of the phalanx, men are closely ranked in row upon row, forming a mobile armored wall. . . . Among Greeks and Romans it was common practice to do what Homer depicts Nestor doing in the *Iliad*: placing brave men on the outsides of the phalanx and putting the cowardly in the middle, "so that willing or not they would be forced to fight."

When considering the concept and history of cowardice, the phalanx is an instructive image in its suggestion of coercion and courage, force and free will, in the face of danger. These dichotomies raise a number of questions: If a coward is forced to fight, is he still a coward? Is cowardice a matter of will, or is it constitutional? Is refusing to fight in the face of coercion cowardly or brave? Or both? Which is more compelling, moral or physical coercion?

These are the kinds of nuances Walsh explores in this thoughtful book,

Sydney Leach is a writer in Virginia.

Cowardice
A Brief History
by Chris Walsh
Princeton, 304 pp., \$27.95

in which he claims that "cowards and cowardice have something to teach us." Walsh believes that cowardice is a subject worthy of our attention because it illuminates our moral vision: "What we think about cowardice," he writes, "reveals a great deal about our conception of human nature and responsibility, about what we think an individual person can and should take, and how much one owes to others, to community or cause."

Walsh's discussion relies heavily, although not exclusively, on military references—both historical and literary—because it is the military ethos and experience that has largely crystallized and defined our concept of cowardice. But even within the military model, the designation of cowardice (as portrayed here) is often unexpectedly fluid.

Consider, for example, the story of John Callender, an officer in the Continental Army who was court-martialed by General Washington and found

guilty of cowardice for retreating from the battle at Bunker Hill. According to Walsh, despite the court-martial, Callender chose to stay with his unit and went on to conduct himself admirably in subsequent battles. As Walsh notes, "At the Battle of Long Island in 1776, he fought so fiercely that he won the admiration of a British officer who kept his men from killing him." Walsh concludes that the shame of Callender's court-martial motivated him to his redemptive bravery. His behavior was, apparently, a result of both individual choice and a kind of moral coercion—not the actual, physical phalanx of Walsh's description, but an abstract one.

Perhaps one of the most idiosyncratic examples offered to evoke "the tension between autonomy and obedience" in the context of combat and fear is that of Hooker DeLand, in some respects the negative image of John Callender. DeLand was a Civil War soldier who had volunteered to fight for the Union—and fought well enough to earn steady promotions from private to captain.

Then, suddenly and simply, he refused to fight. As Walsh notes, he told a fellow soldier that "he thought it was too warm for him, that he did not want to get killed just then." While DeLand was convicted of cowardice and imprisoned until war's end, his story suggests how elusive the designations of cowardice and courage can be. DeLand had already displayed courage; was he cowardly or brave when he asserted his will and refused to go back into combat? Walsh notes that DeLand was judged more harshly precisely because he had already displayed a capacity for battle.

These examples are only two in a volume packed with highly detailed, exhaustively researched material, largely about men and the conduct of war. The nuance and subtlety Walsh offers in his discussion of wartime experience contrasts with what he portrays as the common, and rather rigid, past belief that cowardice was a singular and defining trait. Public shaming of cowardly behavior in the military has often been seen as part of the discipline required to compel men to risk their lives. But Walsh argues that some of the cruel punishments meted out

for cowardice—among them branding and execution—suggest that cowardice has been considered a matter of constitution that could not be “mitigated.”

In his final section, Walsh discusses more recent considerations of fear, duty, and consequences. With “a growing willingness to treat human behavior medically rather than judge it morally,” assessments of battlefield behavior have been transformed. Walsh notes that, beginning with the diagnosis of shell shock and battle fatigue in World War I, “the label *cowardly* was not applied as widely as it might have been, nor perhaps with the same certainty or ethical weight.”

While the movement toward a more diagnostic approach to the manifestations of fear might displease some, such an approach does not obscure the notion of cowardice but casts it in relief: “[D]iagnosis can serve the warrior spirit by confirming the suspicion of cowardice by ruling out medical explanations.” While not addressed by Walsh, it is further possible that the transition from the moral to the diagnostic increases the likelihood that the medicalization of fear (and its manifestations) could bring us full circle to the earlier, more determinative views of cowardice as part of a man’s “essence.”

Just as the contours of cowardice have changed with the mutation of the moral into the therapeutic, they have also adapted, Walsh argues, to the modern emphasis on individualism and the interiority it allows. He cites Mark Twain’s observation that a coward is a person who fails to do something he “set out to do.” Walsh notes that the “rise in individualism” has concentrated our attention “more and more about this individual sort of cowardice.”

This final discussion of individualism, existential timidity, and risk is somewhat discordant. Having given us a harrowing and detailed history of battlefield cowardice—and by implication, battlefield courage—readers may be disappointed that Walsh does not cast a more critical eye on the modern assumption of a moral equivalency between the fortitude required for self-realization and the fortitude required in the face of physical danger. ♦

BCA

Notes and Music

The words of Virgil Thomson, composer and critic.

BY ALGIS VALIUNAS

There are four 20th-century writers who are widely considered to be the gold standard in American journalistic criticism of the arts and intellectual life: H.L. Mencken, Edmund Wilson, James Agee, and Virgil Thomson. Now Thomson (1896-1989) joins the other three in the Library of America, with a collection of his reviews and essays from the *New York Herald Tribune*, as well as some pieces that appeared elsewhere.

Thomson was not only the finest music critic America has produced—although Paul Rosenfeld has a rightful claim to comparable eminence—he was one of the notable American composers of his time. His *Symphony on a Hymn Tune* (1928) stands worthily beside the far more famous orchestral music of Aaron Copland. His *Portraits*, over 100 of them, most no longer than a minute or two, were composed while his subjects were sitting in front of him, as though posing for a painter. These were sufficiently well-known that a prehistoric *Peanuts* strip featured Charlie Brown sitting for his musical portrait by his pianist-friend, Schroeder, who cited Virgil Thomson as his inspiration. (Sadly, Charlie Brown was such a hapless nullity that Schroeder could not produce a single note.) Thomson also set to music poems by William Shakespeare, Thomas Campion, John Donne, William Blake, Marianne Moore, Max Jacob, Gertrude Stein, and Kenneth Koch, as well as a funeral oration by Bishop Bossuet.

He labored as a journeyman for stage and screen, turning out the only-in-America ballet *Filling Station*

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Music Chronicles 1940-1954

by Virgil Thomson

edited by Tim Page

Library of America, 1,200 pp., \$45



Virgil Thomson (1947)

(1938) and writing incidental music for various plays, including Orson Welles’s 1936 voodoo *Macbeth* with the Negro Theater Project and Peter Brook’s televised *King Lear* (1953). He scored several documentary and feature films, among them *Louisiana Story* (1948), for which he received the Pulitzer Prize, the only time a film score was so honored. His most impressive writing for film, however, comes in the final movement of the suite from *The Plow That Broke the Plains* (1936), in which a simple fugue evokes the relentless scouring winds that devastated the heartland and created the Dust Bowl.

But it is chiefly for his operas—*Four Saints in Three Acts* (1934), *The Mother of Us All* (1947), and *Lord Byron* (1972)—

W. EUGENE SMITH / THE LIFE PICTURE COLLECTION / GETTY IMAGES

that Thomson the composer is known today, insofar as he is known at all, for even these works tend to be put on only in smaller opera houses or in student productions, and recordings are few and far between. And yet *Four Saints in Three Acts*, which actually presents some 30 saints in four acts, made Thomson, by his own description, the most famous composer in the world, if only for a season.

Gertrude Stein wrote the libretto, which hovers in that neverland of affectation due south of the unintelligible. Frederick Ashton provided elegantly swooping and sensually shimmying choreography, the singers' every movement "regulated to the music, measure by measure," in Thomson's words. The set was designed by Florine Stettheimer, a reclusive exquisite whose winning credential was the Mad King Ludwig of Bavaria décor of her own bedroom, charmed with such touches as "a baldachino of black chiffon and bunches of black ostrich plumes just like a Spanish funeral," Thomson gushed. John Houseman enjoyed his first directing gig, though he sweated buckets. An all-black cast sang and danced and gave the show the cachet of the inconceivable and, therefore, the ever so necessary.

A formidable publicity machine—Thomson was as impressively connected as a Mafia chieftain—compelled everyone, distinguished or pretentious or both, to show up at the event. Then, of course, there was Thomson's music: decorous, decorative, understated, somehow almost making sense of Stein's gibbering, and, as seen from the distance of 80 years, pretty much an afterthought to the whole affair. The music impressed the intellectuals but not the musicians in the audience, who reserved their admiration for the spectacular spectacle.

The opera traveled from Hartford's Wadsworth Atheneum to Broadway, which is as unlikely a spot as one can think of for a production such as this to turn up, and then it took off for points west. *Four Saints* was a smash hit, but Thomson's celebrity soon fizzled out, and he would never be lionized like this again.

When writing prose, however, he could roar like a lion. With his very first *Herald Tribune* review, he disposed of Jean Sibelius's Second Symphony and the ninnies of the Philharmonic-Symphony Society of New York, who had convinced themselves and the public that Sibelius's symphonies were serious music, when, in fact, they were "vulgar, self-indulgent, and provincial beyond all description." It is hard to resist the retort that Thomson is the one indulging himself here and that his opinion represents the provincialism of musical Paris, where he lived for some 15 years in the 1920s and '30s. While Sibelius wrote under the influence of Tchaikovsky, another popular hero undeserving of such esteem, Thomson adored Erik Satie, who represented the pinnacle of 20th-century musical achievement precisely because he demonstrated no interest in scaling the heights and, instead, modestly showed "us all a way of admitting humor to musical expression on a basis of equality with sadness."

The Central European "immortality machine"—whose sinister reach extended into Russia and Scandinavia and the depths of Manhattan—with its hammed-up *Weltschmerz*, and even more repugnant ecstatic transports, illustrated how far wrong Romantic music and the cult of the anguished but astonishing genius had gone. Small was beautiful for Virgil Thomson. Ambition was to be respected only if it served sincere feeling; hell-bent despondency or stellar magnificence was almost invariably found guilty of insincerity and the craving for applause.

As damning evidence of this widespread corruption, Thomson adduces no less a figure than Ludwig van Beethoven, whose greatness (in Thomson's view) inclines toward grandiosity. The inventor of "the editorial symphony"—witness, most egregiously, the final movement of his Fifth, says Thomson—Beethoven infected subsequent generations of composers with ready-made extravagance of sentiment, often in the name of unexceptionable and thus uninteresting political ideas

that serviced these self-proclaimed titans' need for mass adulation.

Superstar conductors in the thrall of the magnificos and their own colossal importunity perpetuate all the wrong values. In "The Toscanini Case," Thomson likens the celebrity conductor to the shameless Felix Mendelssohn "just making the music, like his baton, go round and round, if he finds his audience's attention tending to waver. No piece has to mean anything specific; every piece has to provoke from its hearers a spontaneous vote of acceptance. This is what I call the 'wow technique.'" The crowd goggles and gasps, and Thomson cries, "Please stop the monkeyshines."

For his own part, Thomson wrote music in a defiantly plainspoken and casual vein, and he often wrote music criticism in a defensively pugnacious one. Although his *parti pris* is too frequently flagrant and his animus misconceived, Thomson at his best is nevertheless as good as they come. Here is a passage from a 1949 memorial essay, for instance, that justly honors Bela Bartok's "nobility of soul."

The despair in [Bartok's] quartets is no personal maladjustment. It is a realistic facing, through the medium of pure feeling, of the human condition, the state of man as a moral animal, as this was perceptible to a musician of high moral sentiment living in Hungary. No other musician of our century has faced its horrors quite so frankly.

This is just one of hundreds of observations and judgments that possess the authority of high intelligence joined to deep feeling. This collection ought to be read straight through—all thousand pages or so—if one is to appreciate Thomson's fine detail-work and potent moral force. One feels obliged to note his critical missteps, in his unspoken but obvious campaign to justify the sort of music he himself wrote and to topple the monuments that obscured his own comparatively minor talent and achievement. But one willingly forgives Thomson his opinions on Beethoven, Sibelius, and Satie when he wrote so much so well. ♦

A Bigger Bang

The ebb and flow of American influence in the world.

BY ELIOT A. COHEN

The first laser-guided bombs operated on what was known as a “bang bang” guidance system. After the bomb’s sensor detected a laser designator’s reflection off a target, its fins would all flip in one direction, and then all in another. After zigging and zagging back and forth, the bomb would, in theory, hit the illuminated point. Yet as the Wikipedia entry notes, “This type of guidance may be less efficient at times.”

The thesis of *Maximalist* is that American foreign policy works on bang bang guidance. In Stephen Sestanovich’s recounting of the big foreign policy decisions from 1947 to the present, American presidents have either been “maximalists,” seeking to exert American power and influence on an unruly and turbulent world, or “retrenchers,” seeking to pull back and build policies for the long haul. In the former camp are Harry Truman, John F. Kennedy, Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush; in the latter are Dwight D. Eisenhower, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, and Barack Obama. Jimmy Carter, Lyndon Johnson, and George H.W. Bush occupy the uneasy middle, which is not unrelated (in the author’s view) to their inability to gain two full terms in office.

Sestanovich tells the story of the big choices—the Marshall Plan, Korea, Vietnam, the Reagan revival, and Iraq prominent among them—with verve. This is not, and does not avow itself to be, a work of archival research,

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Maximalist
America in the World
from Truman to Obama
by Stephen Sestanovich
Knopf, 416 pp., \$28.95

although Sestanovich draws heavily on the magnificent *Foreign Relations of the United States*, the massive compilation of documents pertaining to the making of foreign policy that is probably the best official historical work done by the United States government. But he tells the tales with the sensitivity and insight of one who has seen government up close, in both the Reagan and Clinton administrations. He does not mention his own experiences, but they clearly shape his feeling for the chaos of policy-making and his empathy with those who engage in it.

If the author has a case to make, he also has one to tear down—namely, the idea of a harmonious foreign policy consensus in the heyday of the Cold War, in which clear-sighted statesmen all agreed on a path. Not so. George Kennan thought it possible to cut a deal with Moscow that would leave Germany and Japan, among other countries, “uncommitted as between the two worlds,” and went so far as to think that American withdrawal from Europe would “stimulate a disposition on the Soviet side to do likewise.” John Foster Dulles inadvertently triggered the Suez crisis through his relentless advocacy of a scheme for the United States to finance the Aswan High Dam for Egypt’s dictator, Gamal Abdel Nasser. John F. Kennedy threw away his victory in the Cuban missile crisis by promising to withdraw American mis-

siles from Turkey and then running a cover-up to prevent word from leaking out. And far from having conducted the crisis to avoid force, Kennedy’s advisers, including his brother Robert, saw the blockade as merely a prelude to a military attack.

Indeed, one of the more interesting features of Sestanovich’s potted histories is the poor light that they shed on most presidential advisers. For example, Lyndon Johnson comes off as much wiser than his assistants in his apprehensions about the direction the Vietnam war was going, although Sestanovich notes that his domestic agenda—in particular, his fear and loathing of Robert Kennedy, a potential presidential challenger in 1968—drove an unseemly amount of his Indochina policy. But nothing compares to the savaging that Henry Kissinger receives at Sestanovich’s hands: It is a tale of bullying weak allies, toadying to the Chinese, claiming credit for Nixon’s ideas, and sneering at beleaguered human rights figures such as Andrei Sakharov.

Yet presidents and advisers alike founder sooner or later, going too far either in reaching for the stars or in pulling back: “Just like the maximalists they scorn, [retrenchment presidents] overdo it,” Sestanovich writes. That is a judgment he passes on the current administration as well, albeit in modulated tones.

Any argument based on dualism is bound to have its difficulties. Sestanovich’s own lucid narrative makes it clear that all presidents were often ambivalent in their desire to exercise American power and influence and yet not overreach. By focusing on the most dramatic and controversial decisions, Sestanovich elides those aspects of continuity that are also features of American foreign policy but that undercut his thesis—such as the war of ideas against communism waged by Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy; the opening to India begun under Clinton and pursued by George W. Bush and Obama; the gradually deepening and institutionalized intelligence and military links with Israel since 1948; and the shift of strategic emphasis to the Persian Gulf begun under Carter.

Moreover, ideas such as “retrenchment” are relative, not absolute. It is a bit of a stretch to talk about Eisenhower reducing defense spending to 10 percent of GDP as being retrenchment, when current projections might take us down to slightly over 2 percent if the Obama administration has its way.

Still more problematical, any history of American foreign policy runs the risk of two kinds of solipsism. First, in their depiction of wavering, indecision, cluelessness, and inconstancy, disapproving historians and practitioners seem to forget that few, if any, countries exhibit anything but in their external affairs—and when they do, it is usually the result of a morbid condition, such as Britain’s steady contraction of influence and power since 1945.

Second, and more serious, American writers too often underplay the importance of all other actors in international politics, actors whose moves, or whose convulsions, compel a response from Washington. If the Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghan wars all became bloodier and more protracted than expected, it has a great deal to do with the behaviors of the Soviet Union, Iran, and Pakistan, all of whom decided, for reasons of their own, to take on the United States. If Ronald Reagan shifted from confrontation to accommodation with the Soviet Union, then (as, to be fair, Sestanovich notes) it had everything to do with the rise of Mikhail Gorbachev, an idealistic apparatchik who sensed, if he did not fully understand, that the Soviet Union was terminally decrepit.

Nor can domestic considerations be ignored. If Kissinger did, indeed, behave in some of the unseemly ways Sestanovich describes, it had at least something to do with a domestic environment, barely imaginable now, of upheaval and riot. Kissinger’s memoirs’ understanding of what happened to the United States in the late 1960s and early ’70s may be distorted, but they are subjectively accurate in capturing his dismay at what was happening to America’s intellectual elites, her cities, and her social cohesion. And that, in turn, shaped Kissinger’s approach to foreign policy.

Sestanovich is a troubled maximalist: “How to enjoy the benefits of maximalism without going too far—this is the recurrent dilemma of American policy,” he writes. He has no doubt, however, that the United States should err on the side of doing too much rather than too little. His narrative and argument are important, and not only because the Obama administration has been demonstrating, with a recklessness all its own, the limits of retrenchment. Other voices, on both left and right, argue that the United States is too dumb, too incompetent, or too poor to provide global order. Even more dangerous,

some argue that that the world and this country will do just fine without American leadership, which breeds far more trouble than it prevents.

The author of *Maximalist* disagrees. Through his life experience and study, Sestanovich offers a case somewhat at odds with his book’s central argument, because he is an able and eloquent expositor of a mainstream, generally bipartisan, American foreign policy that tends towards maximalism. On the whole, that approach, which dates back to Theodore Roosevelt if not earlier, has served us well—even if it occasionally operates on bang bang guidance. ♦



The Lives of Otters

*A centenary pilgrimage to the world
of Gavin Maxwell.* BY SARA LODGE

It is autumn and I am making a pilgrimage by sea to a literary gravestone. On my left rise the primeval, groined, and gullied mountains of Skye; on my right is the wild coast of Knoydart, one of the least populated regions of western Scotland. The colors of the land in this season are heart-stoppingly beautiful. Bracken and birch paint the hills gold, ochre, and saddle-brown; the heather is purple as a winter dusk. Light falls differently in this part of the world, where the air is free of particulate matter. It sweeps fast over the knotted ridges of the mountains in dramatic, cloud-shadowed patterns: Sunlight arrows through the heavens like a silver shaft, picking out a single inlet and scattering its water with diamonds.

I am here in search of one particular cove that lies by a chain of tiny islands to the east of the Sound of Sleat, this

stretch of sea, which is now flat as a mirror but can roil like an angry dragon. We drop anchor and launch a small dinghy, which we paddle to shore. The water is so clear that I can see tiny crabs on the sea floor, along with many different kinds of pebble—black mica, white and rose-banded quartz—rain-blue mussels, and whelks as big as my hand. We step ashore into absolute quiet, except for the syncopated shush of the waves.

This is Sandaig Bay, perhaps, after Walden Pond, the most famous retreat of any writer who sought to shun the busy haunts of men and seek solace alone in nature. This is where Gavin Maxwell (1914-1969) lived in a cottage and wrote *Ring of Bright Water* (1959), a book about finding freedom by living with a pet otter: an otter whose mischievous, irrepressible joy in its environment captivated millions of readers.

As we scramble up the beach, the full panorama of the view Maxwell enjoyed becomes apparent. The south-facing bay is like a theater stage, with the whole Sound of Sleat for its audience

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and the mountains of Knoydart and Skye as its wings. All his life, Maxwell was drawn to drama: fast cars, rough terrain, and narrow squeaks. His writing has a precise physical alertness that excites attention, as in the very first line of *Ring of Bright Water*:

I sit in a pitch-pine paneled kitchen-living-room, with an otter asleep upon its back among the cushions on the sofa, forepaws in the air, and with the expression of tightly shut concentration that very small babies wear in sleep.

Alas, Maxwell's cottage no longer exists: It burned down in 1968, killing Edal, one of the otters he loved. But the "ring of bright water," which consists of sea on one side and a freshwater stream that leaps downhill through a series of waterfalls on the other, remains. And there are two small memorial stones, one to Maxwell and one commemorating Edal, both of which are covered in shells and pebbles wayfarers have gathered from the shore.

Maxwell still attracts visitors. Yet, beyond his association with otters, he is not well known. His 10 other books of political writing, travelogue, and memoir are neglected. This past year, the centenary of his birth, offered an opportunity to remember a fascinating character whose life was galvanized by contradiction.

Maxwell was born into both privilege and loss. He was an aristocrat, a grandson of the duke of Northumberland, and could trace his lineage back to William the Conqueror. (He was also distantly related to Lord Byron.) He grew up on a rambling baronial estate at Monreith in the Scottish lowlands and was able to fulfill the dream of many children: to roam at liberty among hundreds of acres of land filled with birds, animals, and plants that he could collect as specimens—live or dead.

However, his officer father was killed in 1914 in one of the early battles of World War I. Gavin's birth occurred three months before this tragedy, and the shadow of his father's uniform hanging in the hall likely contributed to Maxwell's need to excel at conven-

tionally masculine pursuits: He was a crack shot and a rugged outdoorsman. Meanwhile, his mother's cossetting and determination that her children should be raised in the moral segregation of her strict Catholic Apostolic faith fostered a strain of solitude and sensitivity that made him instinctively withdraw from the demands of urban life.

Aged 16, Maxwell developed a rare hemorrhagic condition, and his adulthood was dogged by stomach ulcers and other sudden health crises that, he later theorized, were the product of mental torment. Nonethe-



Gavin Maxwell off the island of Soay (1946)

less, during World War II, he became a major in the Scots Guards, serving in the Special Operations Executive, a secret service that trained operatives who would conduct risky resistance and sabotage operations in occupied Europe. Maxwell, as an expert in small-arms and practical fieldcraft, found his perfect role teaching a grueling course of rock-climbing, silent killing, weapons training, night exercises, and boat work at a remote location in the West Highlands.

After the war, with a Romantic impulsiveness that was both his charm and his downfall, Maxwell bought the small Scottish island of Soay and founded a fishery catching basking sharks, valuable for their oil. The thrill

and difficulty of the hunt excited him: A basking shark can be as large and heavy as a London bus. But the logistics of capitalizing and running a business with multiple employees, seasonal catch, fleet maintenance, and distribution problems were beyond him. He had jumped in, feet first, without the cool financial appraisal that business demands.

This was to be the hallmark of many future Maxwell enterprises. The shark-hunting years, however, gave him the subject of his first book, *Harpoon at a Venture* (1952), which launched a varied and successful literary career, establishing him, the *Times* proclaimed, as "a man of action who writes like a poet."

This Scottish Hemingway tried his hand at travel writing and political exposé. His evocative account of traveling among the Marsh Arabs of Iraq, *A Reed Shaken by the Wind* (1959), is a minor classic, while his investigations into the Sicilian Mafia, exposed in *God Protect Me From My Friends* (1956), left many loose ends (including lawsuits that emptied the author's pockets) but proved beyond doubt Maxwell's courage and resilience in pursuing a story.

His sojourn in Iraq brought Maxwell his first baby otter, Mijbil, who became the hero of *Ring of Bright Water*. Smuggled onto a plane in Basra, the playful Mij, with a face like a teddy bear and a habit of turning on taps, proved to be a kind of otter new to Western natural history; he was classified as *lutrogale perspicillata maxwelli*. When Maxwell walked him in a harness on the streets of London, confused Cockneys wondered if he was a seal, a beaver, or a walrus.

The cottage at Sandaig, which Maxwell rented from a local landowner, gave Mijbil the chance to roam and to romp in the sea and waterfall, fulfilling the desire—which, Maxwell writes, is common to all otters—for water and other objects to be ever in motion. Alas, Mijbil's inevitable need for exploration brought him to grief. Otters were still widely regarded as vermin in this period, to be exterminated as predators on local fish stocks. Mijbil, having strayed into a local village, was killed by a road-mender. Maxwell reported that he mourned

more than he could have done for a human companion. Mij “belonged to the only race ever likely to bear my name.” He was Maxwell’s surrogate child, but also his child-self, a self that could remain always at liberty and ease in the landscape, free of the demands of society, publishers, and creditors.

Ring of Bright Water, with Maxwell’s memoir of early life *The House of Elrig* (1965), is his masterpiece. His writing is sharp, funny, and attuned to the colors, textures, and sounds of nature with the precision of a marksman and the poignancy of a lover. Like his contemporaries Laurie Lee and Gerald Durrell, Maxwell ushered in a new way of writing about the natural world that was both Romantic in its core belief that man has lost the roots of his physical happiness in the city and reflective of a new urgency in the postatomic age to consider how to heal humans’ relationship with their own, and other, species. Maxwell wrote of the vital importance “that even for our own sakes we should not move further into a wholly man-made world whose total unsuitability for mankind as a sane species is becoming clearer and clearer.”

His work was immensely successful in transforming public opinion about otters; they became a protected species in 1978 and have returned even to many of the urban rivers of Britain. But the irony of Maxwell’s bestselling status was that sightseers besieged his idyll. He had tried to camouflage Sandaig Bay under the name Camusfeárna (bay of alders), but the secret soon slipped out, and trippers eager to experience wild isolation found themselves in a queue to knock on Maxwell’s door.

I was privileged on my own pilgrimage to meet Jimmy Watt, who came to work for Maxwell as a teenager and who experienced firsthand the pleasures and rigors of life at Sandaig. He still lives amid the stunning scenery of this remote area. His memories of Maxwell were vivid. He described him as a very funny man who “had fits of giggles that lasted all afternoon” and who collected typographical errors from the *New Yorker* (e.g., “a heavy yellow frog descended on London”) to hang in the bathroom.

Days in the cottage could be magical. One of the best was when a local boat arrived to deliver coal under a sky rendered fluorescent green by the aurora borealis. “It was lit up like a big top,” Watt told me, “the sacks silhouetted against a livid sea.” But the developments and deliveries needed to house and feed the two African otters who succeeded Mijbil, alongside a houseful of humans, were extortionately expensive and transformed the cottage into a complex of pens, sheds, artificial pools, pipes, and wires. Even the live eels used to feed the otters had

land. This was Maxwell’s last home, and his residence has been preserved as a small museum to his memory. In the elegant long living room that he made by knocking down the wall separating two cottages, you can see Maxwell’s aristocratic taste for luxury combined with a more spartan love of sea-battered simplicity and solitude. Here is his wartime pistol, but also his delicate collection of ladies’ fans; here are harpoon spears and a silver cigarette case; here are glass cases in the Victorian manner containing stuffed birds (a reminder of the hundreds that



The lighthouse at Eilean Bán, where Maxwell lived (1968-69)

to be brought up by train from Manze’s eel-pie shop in London, confined in biscuit tins. Watt remembered handling them with Brillo pads.

The ménage—idyllic to outsiders—was chaotic, always on the edge of insolvency, and fundamentally unsustainable. Had the cottage not burned down in 1968, it would likely have run aground financially, much as Maxwell’s other schemes—to breed eider ducks for their feathers and to convert remote Scottish lighthouse keeper cottages to holiday rentals for the rich—did.

If you want to feel Maxwell’s presence now, the easiest place to encounter him is in the lighthouse keeper cottages on Eilean Bán, a small island now situated beneath the bridge connecting Skye with the Scottish main-

land. Maxwell shot in his youth), but also windows and a telescope that commands a view of the sea, where—if you are lucky—you can glimpse live eagles, porpoises, and otters and glory in them as they pass.

On the wall is a self-portrait of Maxwell as a very young man: angular, serious, introspective. Although he would have hated the roar of traffic on the Skye bridge, his place here is fitting, poised between island and mainland. For Gavin Maxwell could never be fixed. His genius, and his curse, was to be forever negotiating, between the life of the toff and the hobo, the literary lion and the recluse, the need for others and the liberty to tend only to one otter—a being that was all affectionate play, insistent will, and perpetual fluidity. ♦

Ennobled, Unnerving

One man, one war, and the cost of service.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

The overwhelming *American Sniper* is cast in shadow from start to finish by two real-world tragedies, one very broad and one very precise. The first is the irresolution of the Iraq war, the conflict to which the film's titular character—Navy SEAL Christopher Kyle—was deployed four times. The second is the 2013 murder of Kyle at the hands of a disturbed veteran he was trying to help. As a result of these tragedies, the movie that tells their stories is haunted and grave.

American Sniper is about the toll of war—on Kyle, on his family, on the people with whom he served—and the way in which the sacrifices Kyle and others made to serve their country ennobled them and made them grand. These are immensely powerful themes, and the movie leaves you in a state of devastated awe. Strangely, though, they aren't really the themes Chris Kyle himself stressed in the 2012 memoir on which the movie is based. Indeed, judging from that book, it's not clear that the Chris Kyle we see in *American Sniper* is all that much like the real Chris Kyle.

There isn't a lighthearted moment in *American Sniper*. It begins with Kyle on a rooftop in Fallujah; an Iraqi boy has been handed a rocket-propelled grenade and is walking toward an American convoy. Kyle is on "over-watch," keeping an eye on the streets as American forces patrol them. The shot is his call.

Director Clint Eastwood and screenwriter Jason Hall then jump back in time to Kyle's first time shooting a gun, while on a deer hunt with his father.

John Podhoretz, editor of Commentary, is THE WEEKLY STANDARD's movie critic.

American Sniper

Directed by Clint Eastwood



Chris bags the deer and drops his rifle to admire his own handiwork, at which point his stern father upbraids him for mishandling the weapon. We then see a kid beating up Chris's brother on a school playground and Chris interceding. After hearing about the incident, their father takes out his belt and is ready to mete out some justice until he is convinced Chris did the right thing.

The somber mood is not leavened by the budding love we witness between Kyle (Bradley Cooper) and his wife Taya (Sienna Miller). She is sharp and tough and fragile all at the same time; dating the wrong men has left her one of the emotionally walking wounded. Chris is quiet and interested but self-contained. She says her sister was engaged to a SEAL and so she knows they are self-centered. He responds that he would lay down his life for his country; how could that be self-centered? She has no answer. She trembles with fear as they become intimate.

When Chris deploys to Iraq, he finds his true calling. He is there to protect his country, and he does so by protecting its fighters—watching from above as they work the streets of Fallujah or Ramadi or Sadr City. He looks through a Leica viewfinder, spots an insurgent, and takes him out before the insurgent can injure an American.

He is not disturbed by the lives he takes. Rather, he is troubled by the lives he cannot save when he is not there. He is nerve-jangled at home by the very absence of the threats his

extraordinarily watchful eye could pick up from 1,000 or 2,000 meters away. Taya feels his distance and is terrified and angered by it. He will not acknowledge that anything is wrong.

As he goes on his second tour, and his third, and his fourth, nothing much seems to be changing. From one town reduced to rubble, he moves to another, and then to Baghdad's poorest and most dangerous neighborhood, where he and his fellows find themselves caught in an ambush just as a vicious sandstorm rolls in.

Chris Kyle must then reconstitute himself as a postwar warrior, haunted by what he has seen and the extremes of emotion and adrenaline to which his body has been subjected. It is a strain and a trial for him, and what we see is that he chooses to rebuild by returning to his first objective: devoting himself to helping others. And, in so doing, he loses his life.

That horrible, pointless death is key to the film, even though we never see it. The truth is that had Chris Kyle lived, *American Sniper* would likely be a very different film. The way Kyle saw himself was distinct from the character we see embodied here so unforgettably by Bradley Cooper, in a towering performance no one could have expected from him.

By his own account, Kyle was an aggressive and self-assured loudmouth who enjoyed mixing it up. He was not a reliable narrator of his own life. He told some tall tales at times, including one whopper about serving as a sniper at the Superdome during Katrina. Yet that aspect of his character—the self-mythmaking—is nowhere in evidence here. Nor is the fact that he reveled in the SEAL culture of hazing and the casual and almost jokey violence he and his comrades inflicted on one another. The book is full of bar fights and drunken revels and adolescent pranks that defined the SEAL experience for Kyle—behavior that, as he describes it, is consonant with the kind of physical toughness, stubbornness, and combativeness SEAL training celebrates, instills, and encourages.

Even more important, Kyle loved war. He says these words plainly and



Kyle Gallner, Bradley Cooper

without qualification in his book. He loved the life-and-death nature of what he was doing in combat, and he felt himself reduced in stature and his life reduced in meaning when he was away from the battlefield. He wanted in on the fight, and when he left active duty, it took him a long time to feel as though he hadn't surrendered an existence in which everything mattered, everything was heightened, everything was more vivid and more alive.

This is hardly a theme unique to Kyle. It was Robert E. Lee who famously told James Longstreet, "It is well that war is so terrible, otherwise we should grow too fond of it." The warrior's love of his trade and his craft is a condition the existence of which we are not supposed to note in 2015. We are to honor his or her service. We are to appreciate his or her sacrifice. We are to believe, and I think most of us do believe, in the nobility of his or her willingness to put everything on the line for love of country, love of home, and love of his or her fellow fighters. But that certain men today are the same as certain men have been throughout history is a truth we should all be able to acknowledge.

Chris Kyle was a warrior. That was

what he chose to be, what he trained to be, what the United States wanted him to be and taught him how to be. Fighting for his country was both his job and his vocation, and it channeled something deep within him and ennobled it.

Some of this was due to conviction. Kyle believed what he had done in Iraq was more important than anything else he could have been doing—more important than being with his wife and small children. He says this, too, unqualifiedly. He acknowledges that this created deep tensions in his marriage and that he needed to find a new way of being when he left the service.

American Sniper bowls you over because it succeeds dramatically in making Chris Kyle's story a parallel of the American experience in Iraq. The mission we see Chris embark upon is both practical and idealistic. The insurgents and their leaders are dreadful and monstrous and deserve their fates. The men on the front lines show resiliency and fortitude and immense seriousness of purpose. But the cause runs afoul of realities far above the pay grades of Kyle and his brethren. They did everything they were asked to do and more. Yet they would never taste victory.

This is the bitter truth about Iraq for all of us—whether you believe fighting the war was a mistake in the first place or you view the ultimate failure to have come about as a result of the political mishandling of the turnaround in the war's fortunes after the 2007-08 surge. In this way, *American Sniper* is not only apolitical, but also antipolitical. It is the story of the effect of the war *on the people who fought it and those they love*—not on the country, not on Iraq, and not on America's position in the world.

And that is one of the key reasons for the film's astonishing and unprecedented success. Eastwood and Hall do not relitigate the causes of the war or the reasons why things went sour before and after the surge. They tell the story of the conflict through its impact on one man. And in so doing, in focusing so closely on this one remarkable American and his experience, *American Sniper* defines the national consensus on the war in Iraq as no other work yet has. It acknowledges both the greatness shown by the effort and the horror of the result of a war this country chose, at different times, with different leaders, and for different reasons, not to win. ♦

“Among the most powerful moments of Selma . . . are the speeches, sermons, and eulogies [Martin Luther] King delivered during that tumultuous period. However, the speeches performed by actor David Oyelowo in the film do not contain the actual words spoken by King. This is because the King estate would not license the copyright in the speeches to filmmaker Ava DuVernay. Thus, the King estate’s aggressive stance on copyright has literally forced the re-writing of history.”

—“How Copyright Forced a Filmmaker to Rewrite Martin Luther King’s Historic Words,” Techdirt.com, December 30, 2014

I HAVE A DREAM

ACT III SCENE 2

MARTIN LUTHER KING (CONTINUED):

and growing confidence that, by some means or another, this situation will be rectified. So, in the meantime, let us not be unduly discouraged by some of the recent events which I have just outlined.

Camera pulls back swiftly from lectern to sweeping, wide-angle shot of Lincoln Memorial. Crane raises slowly to encompass edge of Reflecting Pool, followed by quick, successive close shots of random members of the audience, listening intently. Camera centers on King behind lectern.

MARTIN LUTHER KING:

Having said all that, however, I want to conclude by suggesting that, despite these manifold difficulties, I continue to have a vision for the future of race relations in America. It is a vision with considerable cultural and political resonance, not only in the black community, but throughout the history of the United States. In a nutshell, that vision is that sooner or later the United States will reconcile its practices with the principles enumerated in its creed: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.”

Indeed, as I was saying earlier to friends and colleagues, I have a vision that my four young children, who are with us here today, will at some point in the near future be evaluated by their peers not on the basis of their race, creed, color, country of origin, or sexual orientation, but on how well they relate to those peers, and how much