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the weekly

Standard

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OBAMA'S MIDDLE EAST MELTDOWN

- THOMAS DONNELLY
- REUEL MARC GERECHT
- STEPHEN F. HAYES
- WILLIAM KRISTOL
- MICHAEL MAKOVSKY
- LEE SMITH

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COVER BY JASON SEILER

PolitiFarce

Last week *National Review's* Jonah Goldberg and Kevin Williamson were left to sort out one of the most inane and idiotic media “fact checker” efforts THE SCRAPBOOK has ever seen. And when you consider what has appeared in these pages regarding PolitiFact, that’s saying something (see, among other entries, Mark Hemingway’s “Lies, Damned Lies, and ‘Fact Checking’” from our December 19, 2011, issue).

It all started with this line from a Goldberg column: “As my *National Review* colleague Kevin Williamson notes, ‘Everybody wants to know what Scott Walker and Sarah Palin think about evolution, but almost nobody is asking what Nancy Pelosi and Barack Obama think about homeopathy, acupuncture, aromatherapy and the like.’ Even though such remedies have been given elevated legitimacy under the Affordable Care Act.”

PolitiFact examined Goldberg’s contention that Obamacare has given “elevated legitimacy” to quackery and concluded that the statement was “half true.” Suffice to say, this conclusion is half-assed. Here are the facts, as even PolitiFact concedes: “Following a lobbying campaign by alternative-medicine practitioners, and assistance from then-Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, several provisions favorable to non-traditional forms of medicine were inserted into the health care law.”

PolitiFact goes on to note that Obamacare even provides millions in funding to these unproven and unscientific treatments, and that there’s a section of the law that is being interpreted as saying “as long as an alternative-medicine practitioner is fully licensed by a state, insurance companies must reimburse them just as they do medical doctors.” The Department of Health and Human Services later issued a guidance saying, “This provision does not require plans or issuers to accept all types of providers into a network,” which is being contested by “alternative” medicine providers, who would seem to have the text of the law on their side.

So where did Goldberg and Williamson go wrong? According to PolitiFact, “It’s important not to oversell the impact [of Obamacare on alternative medicine]. Most of the provisions in question are modest. . . . The statement is partially accurate but leaves out important details, so we rate it half true.”

This is a classic tactic of PolitiFact, hiding behind irrelevant and extraneous context when determining the truth of a binary statement. Does PolitiFact think that mandating taxpayer funding of alternative medicine confers legitimacy or not? And should the law be paying for treatments that don’t heal people?

The truth of the matter is that

Goldberg and Williamson’s point is a damning indictment of Obamacare, and rather than admit the law is deeply flawed, PolitiFact wants to leverage its Pulitzer Prize-winning institutional credibility to keep people from paying attention to this inconvenient fact. Otherwise, Americans might start to dislike the liberal health care law, lose respect for the party that passed it, and maybe even want to junk it. PolitiFact, after all, engaged in repeated and credulous defenses of Obama’s “if you like your insurance plan, you can keep your plan” promise. When millions of policies were inevitably canceled, PolitiFact was forced to do a 180 and concede it was the “Lie of the Year” to salvage its reputation.

It’s also telling that PolitiFact is uninterested in having the objects of their criticism defend themselves. Does PolitiFact not have a phone? The author of PolitiFact’s most recent disgrace sent Goldberg an email to a public account he rarely checks, and the sole attempt to contact Williamson was made by sending a tweet in his direction. PolitiFact is standing by its laughable “half true” rating but later conceded that attempts to contact Goldberg and Williamson “didn’t meet our standards.” However, since PolitiFact has no discernible standards to begin with, we suspect it isn’t too concerned when its reporters fail to live up to them. ♦

The Democratic War on Science

Roger Pielke Jr., a respected climate scientist at the University of Colorado, announced recently on his blog that he is being investigated by congressional Democrats. Rep. Raul Grijalva, the ranking Democrat on the House Committee on Natural Resources, sent a letter to the univer-



sity demanding to see all disclosure policies that are applicable to Pielke, detailed information about any sources of external funding and grants he may have received, as well as any communications related to external funding. He also wants copies of any speeches and testimony before lawmakers Pielke has delivered, as well as salary and travel expense information.

Pielke is one of seven climate sci-

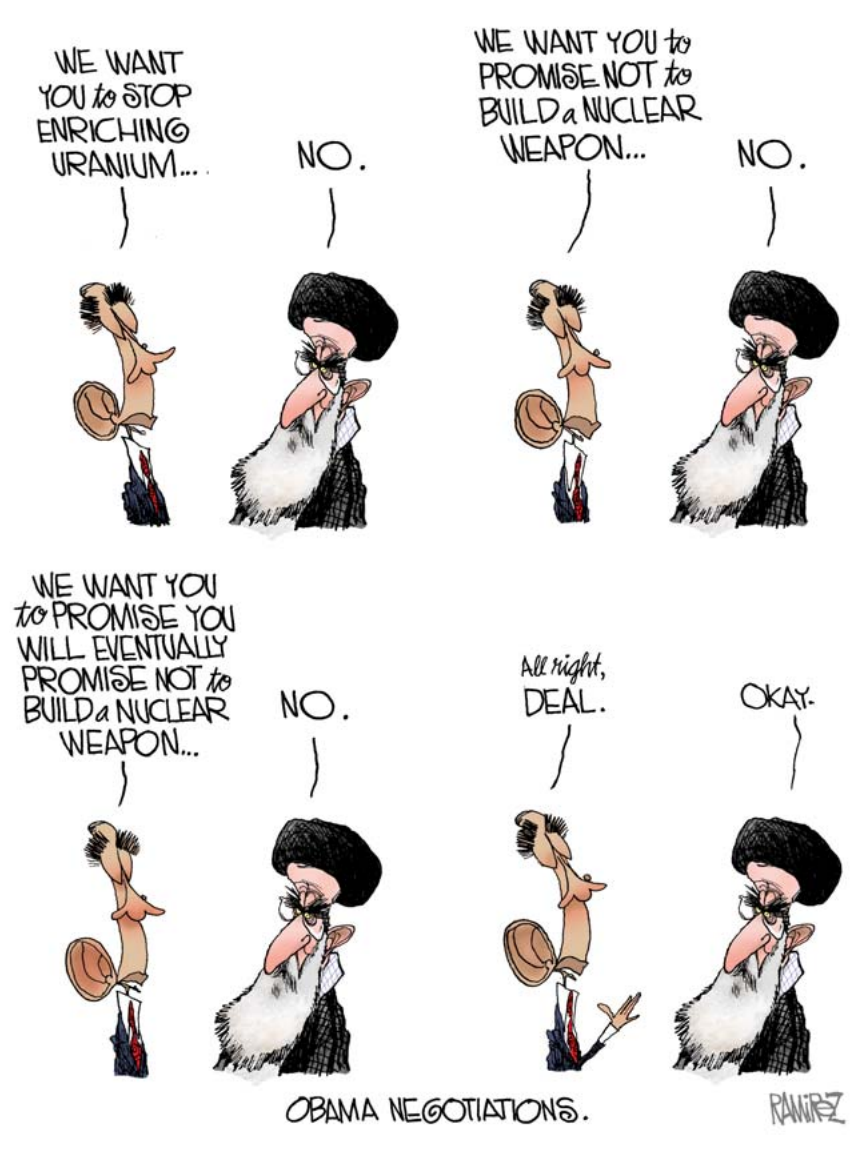
entists being targeted by congressional Democrats. Why are these seven scientists being targeted? Well, the common thread is that all of them are skeptical, to one degree or another, of the claims made by global warming alarmists.

In the words of the Democratic spokesman for the natural resources committee, these seven scientists seem “to have the most impact on policy in the scientific community.” It is a witch hunt, pure and simple. Grijalva and his fellow Democrats are abusing their power to try to dig up any information they can use to discredit these scientists and silence debate over the necessity of draconian government action to deal with climate change.

For his part, Pielke is standing firm, and it seems unlikely that the attacks on the tenured professor are going to do any damage. On his blog, Pielke has made it clear just how misguided this assault on him is:

The Congressman and his staff, along with compliant journalists, are busy characterizing me in public as a “climate skeptic” opposed to action on climate change. This of course is a lie. I have written a book calling for a carbon tax, I have publicly supported President Obama’s proposed EPA carbon regulations, and I have just published another book strongly defending the scientific assessment of the IPCC [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change] with respect to disasters and climate change. All of this is public record, so the smears against me must be an intentional effort to delegitimize my academic research. . . . Congressman Grijalva doesn’t have any evidence of any wrongdoing on my part, either ethical or legal, because there is none.

THE SCRAPBOOK can remember, just a few years ago, when Virginia attorney general Ken Cuccinelli was pilloried by the press for months for launching an investigation into University of Virginia climate scientist Michael E. Mann, whose famous “hockey stick” graph showing the rise of global temperatures has been widely discredited. Of course, there



were crucial differences in that investigation, namely, that hacked emails from the University of East Anglia that had been released to the public provided substantial evidence Mann might have been falsifying data. In other words, Cuccinelli’s investigation had a legitimate pretext, unlike Grijalva’s. Unfortunately for Cuccinelli, since Mann was a global warming alarmist toeing the Democratic line, the legitimacy of the concerns about his research were deemed largely irrelevant by the press.

As for how Pielke might fare in this blatant attack on scientific and academic freedom being waged by

elected representatives, well, the fourth estate is once again acting like a fifth column. “So far, I have been contacted by only two reporters at relatively small media outlets. I’d say that the lack of interest in a politician coming after academics is surprising, but to be honest, pretty much nothing surprises me in the climate debate anymore,” Pielke says. ♦

Must Reading

Speaking of global warming, THE SCRAPBOOK could have used a little more of it this winter. Meanwhile we’ve been bundling up against the

cold and curling up next to the fireplace with our favorite new book, Jay Cost's *A Republic No More: Big Government and the Rise of American Political Corruption*. If you read Jay's essay in these pages two weeks ago, "Stop the Rot," you'll know that he has homed in on a critical issue that transcends the headlines: the deep corruption that is undermining our political system. As Jay writes in the book, "The institutions the Framers created were competent to handle responsibly the powers they assigned them; Americans since then have added extra powers under the false assumption that the same institutions could handle the extra load responsibly. But they cannot, and so the government now behaves irresponsibly. This produces corruption."

The book not only tackles an issue of the utmost importance, it's also a great read. As THE SCRAPBOOK's boss put it in his weekly Kristol Clear newsletter:

One of the blurbs on the book jacket seems to me to put it well: "In explaining 'corruption as a permanent, institutionalized feature of our government,' Jay Cost has made a major contribution to American history and political science. His narrative is detailed and lively, accessible to citizens and scholars alike. And he makes a case for reform while suggesting its limits. A real tour de force." Hey, I wrote that blurb! But it's true.

Make haste to your favorite bookseller! (And while you're at it, if you haven't already done so, go to the "newsletter" tab at weeklstandard.com to subscribe to Kristol Clear.) ♦

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Incommunicado

This past week I decided to change living arrangements *chez* Epstein. I turned my office into a den and our spare bedroom into an office. Sounds simple enough. I soon realized that I would have to hire professional movers to lug a couch, a weighty television set, and several bookcases and a few file cabinets from one room to another in our apartment. I was prepared to do so, and to pay the expense, which came to \$288 plus \$60 in three \$20 tips for the men who did the lugging. I wasn't prepared for two days' loss of the use of my computer, television set, and landline phone, due to the loss of my cable connection, which rendered me, apart from the flip-phone I carry around, essentially incommunicado.

I don't use a smartphone because I would be checking it too regularly for emails, texts, and other information. I already do too much of this on my computer when at home. I am, I'm embarrassed to report, a man who checks his email 25, perhaps 30 times a day. What do I expect to find there? The usual things, I suppose: extravagant offers for my modest services, announcements of my having won grand literary prizes, news of vast inheritances, feelers for university presidencies in gentle climates or possibly for an obscure cabinet post. That none of these items has shown up hasn't stayed my optimism.

I should have but hadn't quite realized how strong a role these three machines—the Internet, television, and the telephone—have come to play in my life. Was it Emerson or some other Waldo who said “man rides machine”? Whoever it was, he got it wrong. Our dependence on these three machines has, if anything, grown greater and

greater. I write “our,” but perhaps I really mean “my” dependence.

I rise at 6:00 A.M. and, with tea and toast before me, begin my day reading a serious book. I also turn on the television set, with the sound off, and read the crawl, which gives me the weather and news of murders, fires, and political scandals in Chicago, none of which ever seems to be in short supply. At



7:00 A.M. I turn up the sound for *CBS This Morning* with Charlie Rose (*Il est Charlie*), which begins with a segment called “Your World in Ninety Seconds” that provides national and international headlines, and 90 seconds of it is all I can bear. An hour later, just before rising from my chair, I check the day's listings on my movie channels, hoping there is something worth recording to watch that evening or later in the week.

The television doesn't go on during the day, but at 5:30 P.M., a glass of Riesling in hand, I watch the evening news. I could never stand Diane Sawyer's false empathy, or Brian Williams's false earnestness, and so settle for Scott Pelley's false seriousness. (It helps that I refer to Pelley, if only to my wife, as Chuck E. Cheese.) Sometimes I will turn to the soulful ladies of the *PBS NewsHour*, or flick on Fox

News for the amusement of watching my friend Charles Krauthammer, wearing his game face, give the president of the United States his daily shellacking. Two days without these *divertissements*, I have to confess, threw me.

Email has gone a long way to replacing telephone calls for me, though I continue to get a few from friends, between the various calls asking me to donate my car, check my credit, or have my ducts cleaned. Only two people, my wife and granddaughter, have my cell phone number, and it rarely rings. The main drawback to being without a landline was that I couldn't ring in people who called from our lobby.

I missed the Internet most sorely. Apart from my tic-like checks of email throughout the day, I spend 40 or so minutes every morning reading a few blogs (*Anecdotal Evidence*, Bill Kristol, Jonathan V. Last, etc.), checking a few websites (*Arts & Letters Daily*, *Mosaic*, *The Daily Beast*), glimpsing the headlines and obituaries in the *New York Times*, reading John Podhoretz on Twitter. I am a Facebook friend to 10 or 12 people, but a one-way friend only, since I have never put an item on Facebook, nor ever intend to do so. Occasionally I'll Google myself, to see who has freshly insulted me. Only on the Internet can one be called, as I have been, both homophobic and an old poof.

When my telephone, television, and Internet were restored, I had six calls waiting, none of them of any importance, and 70 or so emails, only one of which was significant; no shocking items had appeared in the *New York Times* obits; Scott Pelley was as pompous as ever; and Charles was still kicking the president's butt. Might it make sense, I begin to wonder, to take two such days off every week, in the name of intellectual hygiene?

JOSEPH EPSTEIN

Obama's Failure

Barack Obama wants us all to simmer down about Iran. He wants Senator Bob Menendez, a fellow Democrat, and the donors he represents to butt out of the sanctions debate. He wants Republicans to quit crying wolf about Iran's nuclear weapons program. He wants the media to stop hyping terror threats. He wants the American people in the dark about the secret correspondence he's had for years with Iran's supreme leader. He wants John Boehner to be mindful of protocol. And most of all, he wants Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu to stop questioning his accommodationist approach to Tehran.

With the breezy confidence that is his trademark, the president has repeatedly delivered a reassuring message on Iran to the country and the world: Trust me.

With respect, Mr. President: No.

From the earliest moments of his first term, Obama sought to convince the country that threats from our erstwhile enemies were overblown. He forged an approach to jihadist attacks and rogue regimes meant to be a stark contrast from that of his predecessor. He ended the war on terror, quietly sought rapprochement with radical Islamist movements like the Muslim Brotherhood and the Taliban, and ostentatiously undertook a more conciliatory approach to terror-sponsoring regimes like Syria and Iran.

Notwithstanding periodic drone strikes on bad guys, Obama has demonstrated repeatedly that his instinct is to ignore, dismiss, or downplay threats to the United States and its interests and allies. The record over six years is a long list of mistaken judgments, awkward euphemisms, and false assurances.

So when Nidal Hasan opened fire at Fort Hood it wasn't a terrorist attack but "workplace violence." And when Omar Farouk Abdulmutallab tried to blow up a Northwest Airlines flight over Detroit, he was an "isolated extremist." And when Faisal Shahzad attempted to detonate an SUV in Times Square five months later, it was a "one-off" attack. And when jihadists attacked the U.S. diplomatic compound in Benghazi, Libya, it was a simple protest gone awry.

The problem in each of these instances wasn't just that the descriptions were incorrect. It's that the administration knew they were wrong and made the false claims anyway.

Numerous eyewitnesses reported that Hasan shouted "Allahu Akbar" as he shot. According to court documents in

the case of the Christmas Day bomber, Abdulmutallab confessed that he'd been trained and dispatched by Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula a full three days before Obama publicly labeled him an isolated extremist. The administration was aware that the Pakistani Taliban had claimed responsibility for Shahzad even before he attempted his bombing. And top intelligence officials on the ground in Libya repeatedly reported that al Qaeda-affiliated terrorists participated in the attacks and that there was no demonstration.

In the year before the 2012 presidential election, the Obama administration and campaign officials routinely claimed that al Qaeda was "on the run" or "on the path to defeat" or "decimated." But top analysts at the Defense Intelligence Agency were regularly providing Obama detailed assessments showing that the opposite was true. "When asked if the terrorists were on the run, we couldn't respond with any answer but 'no,'" said Lieutenant General Mike Flynn, former director of the DIA,

after he was forced out of his job a year early. "When asked if the terrorists were defeated, we had to say 'no.' Anyone who answers 'yes' to either of those questions either doesn't know what they are talking about, they are misinformed, or they are flat-out lying."

Or all three. There's little question that the administration misrepresented what it knew about our jihadist enemies. It's equally clear that the administration chose to set aside information that contradicted its campaign narrative.

The U.S. government captured more than one million documents during the May 2011 raid that killed Osama bin Laden. Top administration officials initially described it as "a treasure trove" of intelligence on al Qaeda and its affiliates. But more than three years later, the senior DIA official who ran the project, Colonel Derek Harvey, says the intelligence community has fully analyzed less than 10 percent of the collection. Top DIA officials were told directly to stop providing analyses based on the bin Laden documents. The administration had decided to end the war on terror, and no amount of new intelligence about threats from al Qaeda was going to change their minds. So they chose ignorance.

A central element of the efforts to "end the wars" was peace talks with the Taliban. Initially, top officials said the Taliban must satisfy certain preconditions—disavow al Qaeda, recognize the Afghan constitution—before talks



Nidal Hasan

could proceed. The Taliban never agreed to the preconditions, so the administration dropped them. Mullah Omar's men simply demanded that the United States free their top five commanders held at Guantánamo. In May 2014, the administration did just that, releasing the Taliban Five in exchange for Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl. Top intelligence officials testified that the five Taliban commanders were almost certain to return to the fight against the United States. President Obama portrayed the exchange as potentially opening the door to "reconciliation" talks. Indeed, this was the first reason the Obama administration wanted to release the Taliban Five—as a confidence-building measure to jumpstart negotiations with one of al Qaeda's strongest allies. This desperate attempt at diplomacy—preemptive capitulation—has failed. On February 24, the Taliban rejected press reports saying they were willing to negotiate with the Afghan government and decried the "occupation"

of Afghanistan, a reference to the U.S.-led international presence in the country. They had simply wanted their leaders freed—and they have been.

In early 2011, the Obama administration formalized its hopes for improved relations with Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad by restoring a diplomatic presence in Damascus. Ambassador Robert Stephen Ford presented his papers to Assad on January 25, 2011. Four months later, even as the Syrian regime was engaged in the slaughter of its own people, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton suggested that Assad was a "reformer." As the U.S. government accumulated evidence of Assad's role in the widespread killing, Obama called for him to go and warned that the movement or use of chemical weapons would be a "red line." But when the United Nations and the U.S. government confirmed reports that the Syrian regime had repeatedly used chemical weapons, the administration balked. Top Obama officials acknowledge that Assad was a puppet of the Iranian regime. In spite of that fact—or more likely because of it—Assad was allowed to cross the red line and continue the carnage. Although Assad agreed to ship some of his chemical munitions out of Syria, his regime has continued to slaughter Syrians with conventional weapons and barrel bombs. In the four years since the United States sent its ambassador, more than 200,000 people have died in the civil war.

In a January 2014 interview with David Remnick of the *New Yorker*, Obama famously suggested that the radical Islamist group amassing territory in Syria and Iraq and brutally killing those trying to stop it was nothing to worry about. Remnick asked Obama about the implications of the

Iraqis' losing Falluja to the Islamic State. Said the president, "The analogy we use around here sometimes, and I think is accurate, is if a jayvee team puts on Lakers uniforms that doesn't make them Kobe Bryant."

But ISIL was not jayvee. And by early summer, the Iraqis were urgently asking Washington for help. The State Department casually responded by noting that the United States would be training some Iraqi soldiers later in the summer. Even as vast swaths of Iraq were falling to ISIL—including Mosul, the country's second-largest city—Obama continued to boast that he had "ended the war in Iraq."

By September 2014, it was no longer plausible for the administration to downplay ISIL. The group had become such an urgent threat that Obama delivered a prime-time address to the nation to describe his efforts to address this "cancer." After months of dithering, Obama said: "I know many Americans are concerned about these



Ambassador Ford presents his credentials in Damascus, 2011.

threats. Tonight, I want you to know that the United States of America is meeting them with strength and resolve. . . . We will hunt down terrorists who threaten our country, wherever they are." But even as Obama finally acknowledged the threat from the Islamic State, he sought to portray it as just another violent group: "ISIL is not Islamic."

In his speech that night, Obama pointed to Somalia and Yemen as models of successful U.S. counterterrorism efforts. Five months later, Iran-backed Houthi separatists had overthrown the Yemeni government and the United States shuttered its embassy in Sanaa. And just last weekend, homeland security secretary Jeh Johnson warned Americans against visiting the Mall of America, just outside Minneapolis, in response to a video threatening attacks by al Shabaab, the al Qaeda franchise in Somalia. Models no more.

Today, senior administration officials speak of a campaign against the Islamic State that will take decades, and top intelligence officials testify that attacks from members of the Islamic State potentially represent an immediate and grave threat to the homeland. FBI director James Comey said last week that the "siren song" of ISIL's call for jihadist warriors has led to FBI investigations in each of the 50 states. The president is now calling for a new Authorization for the Use of Military Force for a group he dismissed just a year ago as terrorist poseurs.

The administration's efforts have reached new levels of absurdity in recent weeks. When the president of Uruguay agreed to accept high-risk Guantánamo detainees on humanitarian grounds because they'd been the victims of "a heinous kidnapping" by the United States, not only did

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the Obama administration fail to rebuke him for the slander, it expressed gratitude. White House spokesman Josh Earnest argued strenuously that the Taliban, which provided safe haven for al Qaeda before 9/11 and has fought alongside it against the United States ever since, isn't a terrorist group but merely "an armed insurgency." The president claimed that the victims of the attack on the kosher supermarket in Paris were "randomly" shot, despite the fact that the attacker himself said he'd chosen the target in order to kill Jews.

Obama claimed in an interview with *Vox* in late January that the world was transitioning to a new, more peaceful era. "The trajectory of this planet overall is one toward less violence, more tolerance, less strife, less poverty." But in recent months, his top defense and intelligence officials said the opposite. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel said: "The world is exploding all over." The assessment from Director of National Intelligence James Clapper was even more alarming. "Looking back over my more than half a century in intelligence, I have not experienced a time when we have been beset by more crises and threats around the globe."

To call Obama delusional at this point seems generous because it implies that the president is unaware of the reality he is so determined to ignore. But as these many examples make clear, he is not.

Perhaps nowhere is this willful self-deception more obvious than Iran. The very framework of the administration's approach to Iran—"decoupling" diplomacy over its nuclear program from the many other troublesome aspects of the mullahs' regime—exemplifies this approach. And once again, the problem isn't just that the administration is ignoring reality. It's that it is creating and selling an alternative, fantastical world that bears little relation to the real one.

For much of the decade before Obama took office, Iran was at war with the United States. The targeting of American military and diplomatic personnel in Iraq and Afghanistan was approved at the highest levels of the Iranian government. Iran is responsible for more than one-third of all U.S. troop deaths in the region, according to a retired general with vast experience there.

But two months into the Obama administration, top officials made clear their willingness to set aside that history. The Iranians were invited to a conference on Afghanistan, and State Department officials repeatedly claimed that the Iranians could play a "constructive" and "positive" role in Afghanistan and the region. Six years later, administration officials still say the same thing despite a steady stream of evidence that the opposite is true.

"Iran is mounting an aggressive campaign to fuel anti-American sentiment here and convince Afghan leaders that

a robust, long-term security partnership with Washington would be counterproductive," the *Washington Post* reported in 2012, noting "the Iranian initiative involves cultivating closer relations with the Taliban" and buying off politicians and media outlets.

More striking is Iran's support for al Qaeda. Last week, for the first time in nearly three years, the public saw new information from the bin Laden raid. Documents released as part of a terror trial in New York City show, in the words of the al Qaeda leaders themselves, Iran's availability for training and safe haven. One letter from a senior al Qaeda operative to bin Laden in June 2010 lays out the plans of a core al Qaeda leader to travel to Iran. The letter notes that "Sheikh Yunis" is ready to travel and "the destination, in principle, is Iran. And he has with him six to eight brothers that he chose. I told him we are waiting for final complete confirmation from you to move and agree on this destination (Iran). His plan is: stay around for three months in Iran to train the brothers there then start moving them and distributing them in the world for their missions and specialties."

This comes on top of what we already know about Iran and al Qaeda. As Thomas Joscelyn reported here last

week, at least three al Qaeda plots targeting Western interests were hatched in Iran since Obama took office. As the administration pined for Iran to rejoin the community of civilized nations, the Treasury was churning out reports showing Tehran had no such interest. In its designation of Yasin al-Suri, "a prominent Iran-based al Qaeda facilitator," Treasury wrote in December 2011: "Operating under an agreement between al Qaeda and the Iranian Government, al-Suri moves money and al Qaeda recruits from the Middle East through Iran and on to Pakistan and Afghanistan."

In February 2012, Treasury designated Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and Security a terror-sponsoring organization. "MOIS has facilitated the movement of al Qaeda operatives in Iran and provided them with documents, identification cards, and passports," not to mention "money and weapons," Treasury explained, "and negotiated prisoner releases of AQI [Al Qaeda in Iraq] operatives." AQI, of course, would later become the Islamic State or ISIL.

The MOIS doesn't just sponsor terrorism, it also protects Iran's nuclear program. According to a profile of the ministry published by the Library of Congress Research Division in December 2012, it focuses on Iran's internal affairs but plays an "integral" role in operations abroad as well. The MOIS identifies "external threats, specifically those aimed at Iran's nuclear activity," and specializes in "countering foreign intelligence agencies such as the CIA and [Israel's] Mossad," both of which have worked to undermine Iran's



Military parade in Tehran

nuclear program. Tehran even established an elite counterintelligence agency that “likely operates” as part of the MOIS and is “exclusively responsible for protecting all relevant information about Iran’s nuclear program, nuclear facilities, and the scientists working in nuclear facilities against threats, including threats from domestic opposition groups and foreign intelligence agencies.”

So the same agency responsible for Iran’s robust terror activities has crucial responsibilities in protecting and hiding its nuclear program. Obama may insist on “decoupling” Iran’s nuclear program from its terrorism. Iran doesn’t.

Iran’s centrifuges have been spinning throughout the lengthy negotiations over its nuclear program, and it has continued to make progress on its plutonium program. The administration has backed away from previous U.N. Security Council resolutions requiring Iran to suspend its nuclear activities. In the fall of 2014, the IAEA discovered that Iran was feeding hexafluoride gas into the IR-5 centrifuge at Natanz. When the State Department inquired about this prohibited activity, Iran stopped—a tacit acknowledgment that it had been caught red-handed.

And yet in his State of the Union, Obama claimed that the Iranian program had been “halted” and that the Iranians hadn’t violated the interim deal. What incentive do the Iranians have to abide by the terms of the deal if the American president will make excuses for them when they don’t?

The day after that speech, House speaker John Boehner invited Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu to address a joint session of Congress. White House officials howled in protest, calling the invitation a breach of protocol. It was a rich argument from a White House that had enlisted British prime minister David Cameron to lobby members of Congress against additional sanctions on Iran and a president who had invited the president of South Korea to address a joint session of Congress before asking congressional leaders for their blessing.

White House officials aren’t concerned about protocol. They understand that Netanyahu will give Congress and the American people exactly what the Obama administration has worked hard to avoid for six years: a detailed assessment of the threat from Iran.

Consider this question: When was the last time a senior Obama administration official gave a speech devoted to laying out the threat from Iran? It simply hasn’t happened. Perhaps the most extensive comment on the subject from the president himself came in October 2009, after Iran’s secret uranium enrichment facility at Qom was exposed. Obama appeared at a press briefing with French president Nicolas Sarkozy and British prime minister Gordon Brown, both of whom condemned the Iranian violations in the strongest terms. “The level of deception by the Iranian government, and the scale of what we believe is the breach of international commitments, will shock and anger the whole international community, and it will harden our resolve,” said Brown.

Even Obama sounded resolute, saying, “It is time for Iran to act immediately to restore the confidence of the international community by fulfilling its international obligations,” and, “To put it simply: Iran must comply with U.N. Security Council resolutions and make clear it is willing to meet its responsibilities as a member of the community of nations.”

But these flashes of rhetorical toughness were invariably paired with comedowns—Obama offering Iran a “clear path toward greater international integration if it lives up to its obligations.” Administration officials in briefings with reporters emphasized the “opportunity” the breach had given Iran.

An opportunity despite the fact that for the third time in a decade Iran had been caught lying about its nuclear program. An opportunity despite the regime’s crushing of the peaceful revolution four months earlier after the mullahs fixed the elections. And an opportunity despite our knowledge of Iran’s support for al Qaeda and its policy of targeting and killing Americans in Iraq and Afghanistan.

It was clear before he’d been in office a year that Obama would not seriously address the threat presented by Iran.

Netanyahu will. For that reason, and because of this context and the enormous stakes, John Boehner’s invitation was less a breach of protocol or partisan ploy than it was an act of statesmanship.

Long before he was elected president, Obama and his supporters complained bitterly about the lack of public debate before the Iraq war. It was a bogus claim on the particulars—that debate lasted well over a year, and the congressional authorization for war came nearly six months before the invasion. The principle they invoked, however, is a valid one and it ought to apply to Iran. If it’s important to have an extended debate about the threat from an aggressive rogue state before going to war, it’s equally important to have such a debate before deciding to capitulate.

Let it begin.

—Stephen F. Hayes

Netanyahu’s Moment

Sometimes a speech is just a speech. Benjamin Netanyahu’s speech about Iran policy on March 3 will not be his first address to Congress. It will make familiar, if important, arguments. One might assume that, like the vast majority of speeches, it would soon be overtaken by events in Israel and the United States and the world.

But the Obama administration’s reaction to the Israeli

prime minister's appearance suggests Netanyahu's is more than just another speech. An administration that disdains the use of disproportionate force has been, to say the least, disproportionately forceful in its efforts to undermine Netanyahu's message and discredit the messenger. What is Obama so worried about? What is he, if we may put it indelicately, so scared of?

We can get a clue from the almost equally disproportionate reaction of Obama's surrogates to Rudy Giuliani's suggestion that Barack Obama doesn't love his country. Why, really, should anyone care about Giuliani's comment? We have no crime of *lèse majesté* in this country. But Obama defenders did care. Did they suspect Giuliani had struck a nerve?

It seems he did. After days in which the entire media and most politicians, including many Republicans, hurried to condemn Giuliani and to assure everyone that Barack Obama loves our country as much as the next red-blooded American, a new poll from YouGov reports only 47 percent of respondents saying they think the president loves America, with a slight majority either thinking he does not (35 percent) or being unsure (17 percent). By contrast, 58 percent think Rudy Giuliani loves America, and only 10 percent think not. As for themselves, 85 percent of respondents say they love America, and only 6 percent say they do not.

What does this have to do with Netanyahu? Agree with his policies or not, no one doubts he loves his country. In fact, he seems to like America a lot, too. One suspects that if asked, respondents to the YouGov poll might have judged Netanyahu more of an America-lover than Barack Obama. And they would in a sense have been right.

After all, Obama is not just a citizen of America. He's a citizen of the world. And he's a disbeliever in American exceptionalism in any sense stronger than the British believe in British exceptionalism and the Greeks in Greek exceptionalism. There's nothing surprising about this. Obama is very much in the mainstream of modern progressive thought in his embrace of cosmopolitanism and his distrust of nationalism. He's not interested in riding a high horse equipped, as he would see it, with patriotic blinders or nationalist spurs.

Netanyahu, by contrast, is a patriot and a nationalist. He's an Israeli patriot and nationalist. But he also appreciates the historic role and accomplishments of the great nation-states of the West. History—the history of the Jewish people, but not only the Jewish people—is always on his mind. He is inspired by the example of Ze'ev Jabotinsky—and also of Winston Churchill. He appreciates the legacy of David Ben-Gurion—and also of Harry Truman.

When Netanyahu walks to the podium of the House of Representatives on March 3, he'll undoubtedly have in mind

an earlier speech given by a foreign leader to a joint meeting of Congress. On December 26, 1941, Winston Churchill addressed Congress, though in the smaller Senate Chamber rather than in the House, as so many members were out of town for Christmas break.

Churchill enjoyed the great advantage in December 1941 of having an American president who, after Pearl Harbor, was a clear and unambiguous ally in the war for the West. Netanyahu has no such advantage. So it might be hard for him to say, as Churchill did, that here in Washington he had “found an Olympian fortitude which, far from being based upon complacency, is only the mask of an inflexible purpose and the proof of a sure, well-grounded confidence in the final outcome.”

But Netanyahu won't be speaking only to the Obama administration, which has, after all, made clear its lack of interest in listening to Netanyahu and whose allies won't be there to listen. He'll be speaking to the American people.

So he can echo Churchill in appealing to them and warning that, in the struggle in which we're engaged, “many disappointments and unpleasant surprises await us.” He can echo Churchill in expressing confidence that the West, led by the United States, will prevail.

And he can look forward to a time when an Israeli prime minister will be able to say what Churchill could say in December 1941: “Lastly, if you will forgive me for saying it, to me the best tidings of all—the United States, united as never before, has drawn the sword for freedom and cast away the scabbard.”

President Obama has not, and will not, cast away the scabbard. Though Netanyahu will of course focus, as he should, on the details of a possible Iran agreement—the speech will be a moment that points beyond the particulars of an Iran deal. It will be a moment that could cause us to reflect on what kind of people we are, and, with new leadership, what kind of deeds we might once again be capable of.

As it will be a moment of vindication for Zionism, the cause to which he and his family have dedicated their lives. In past episodes of Jews' being consigned by the world to their fate, they were powerless to fight. And so the world (and not a few Jews) became accustomed to Jews' playing the role of victim. On March 3, something remarkable and historic will happen. The prime minister of Israel, speaking on behalf of not only his country and millions of Jews, but on behalf of the West itself, will command the world's attention as he declares his refusal to appease the enemies of Israel and the West. Both Jabotinsky and Churchill, both Ben-Gurion and Truman, would appreciate the moment.

—William Kristol



A patriot and a nationalist

The Chris Christie Comeback Tour

Down but not out.

BY MICHAEL WARREN

Moorestown, N.J.

A Chris Christie town hall feels a little like a rock concert. In this community recreation center in South Jersey, nearly 500 people are seated on the basketball court or in bleachers, forming a semicircle around the space where the big man will speak on a chilly February afternoon. The speaker system is pumping out Springsteen song after Springsteen song (including, wink wink, “Born to Run”). One of Christie’s staff members confidently takes the microphone, does a final sound check for the 15 TV cameras, and welcomes the audience. “Have any questions for me?” the staffer asks. He pauses for a beat while the audience stays quiet. “No one ever does,” he deadpans, and the crowd laughs. As warm-up acts go, he’s not bad.

Minutes later, the hefty (but noticeably trimmer) star of the show bounds out from behind a curtain. Christie shakes a few hands and grabs the mike to begin. As governor, he’s done this 127 times already, though it’s his first town hall meeting in New Jersey since last summer. That gives the proceedings the feeling of a comeback tour. “I like doing them, I enjoy doing them,” he says of town halls. “I miss doing them.”

Christie plays plenty of crowd favorites, like mocking Democrats: “I’m from Trenton, and I’m going to raise taxes, but it’s not going to hurt you.” His Jersey-style declaration

earns plenty of approving nods: “I’m not here to be loved, I’m here to be respected.” When it’s time for the Q&A, Christie takes off his jacket and blindly flings it to a roadie—sorry,



staffer—behind him. “Let’s get going,” he says, to applause.

Five years into his governorship, the likable and funny Christie still puts on a terrific show. It’s one he’s considering taking on the road in the form of a presidential campaign. He’s been making frequent trips to early primary states like Iowa, whose governor-for-life Terry Branstad is a close pal. And according to New Hampshire Republican party chair Jennifer Horn, Christie’s appearance at last month’s Merrimack County GOP Lincoln Day dinner drew the largest crowd that

event’s ever seen. Says Horn, who is remaining neutral in the presidential primary: “There was a lot of enthusiasm in the room for the governor and his message.” The same went for Christie’s appearance at the annual Conservative Political Action Conference in late February.

But to most of the political press, the idea of a Christie presidential bid is a joke, even though just over a year ago he was declared the frontrunner for the GOP nomination. Soon after his 2013 reelection, Christie became mired in a scandal involving the closure of several lanes on the George Washington Bridge, causing a major traffic jam. The Republican was accused of ordering this as retribution against the Democratic New Jersey mayors

who declined to endorse him, even though multiple investigations have turned up no evidence of Christie’s involvement. But since then, his poll numbers in New Jersey have declined. One poll has his approval rating at an appalling 39 percent. That has convinced observers that Christie is finished as a candidate before he’s even begun.

Meanwhile, the Republican presidential field has begun to take form without him. Wisconsin governor Scott Walker leads in all the early polls and has widespread admiration from conservatives in the party, while former

Florida governor Jeb Bush is picking up GOP establishment donors from Christie’s New York City backyard every day. Mark Halperin of Bloomberg, one of the few national reporters to make the trek to Moorestown, asks Christie after the town hall if he’s now an underdog.

Yes, Christie admits, but he acts as if that’s right where he wants to be. “When the son and brother of a president enters the race, they’re the frontrunner, and that should be no shock to anybody,” Christie says. “And

GARY LOCKE

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so, by definition, everyone else in the race is an underdog. That's fine, and if I decide to run, you've watched me for a long time. I fight pretty well."

Fight for what, exactly? When he ran for governor, his purpose was clear: Dishonest leadership had left the state in bad financial shape. Christie would talk straight about New Jersey's fiscal problems and fight hard against the entrenched interests blocking reforms. Christie's agenda in Trenton is, at best, incomplete, but a twice-elected Republican governor in a deep blue state is a compelling story. Christie, though, will need something more. Backstage after the town hall, I ask him how he'd distinguish his vision for the country from those of the other potential Republican candidates.

"The fact of the matter is we have had weak leadership in the White House for six years now, and that weak leadership has manifested itself in a weak economy and economic recovery, and in declining American prestige and influence around the world," he says. "And I believe that America deserves much better than that. My vision would start right there."

Most of the Republicans running to succeed Barack Obama will have a similar pitch. What separates Christie from, say, Walker or Bush?

"I'd suggest this to you," he says. "Somebody that's had to fight with a hostile legislature would be much better prepared to be president of the United States than someone who hasn't." Christie adds that he took on the teachers' unions "before anybody else did." Take note, Scott Walker.

Christie says when he talks to voters about the challenges facing the country, two issues keep popping up. "They're very worried about America's place in the world and how much more dangerous a world this is since Barack Obama's been president. This is a much more dangerous world than I can remember in my lifetime," he says. The second, he adds, is economic anxiety. "They worry about why it's now been 15 years of stagnant wage growth for middle-class earners in this country," Christie says.

"It's, like, how can they get ahead?"

Is Chris Christie, the guy who watches Dallas Cowboys games from the owner's box, really the candidate for the middle class? A moment at the Moorestown town hall is revealing. During the Q&A, a middle-aged man says he's concerned about having to leave New Jersey when he retires, after the state's high taxes and cost of living forced his own parents to leave for Florida (which has no state income tax) years ago. "I don't want to follow in my parents' footsteps," he says.

Christie looks around at the crowd, full of people in their fifties and sixties. Nobody, he says, wants to become "airplane grandparents," driven by bad government policies to move

away from their homes and their families. This, Christie explains, is what his reforms and his governorship are all about. When government's finances are in order, when leaders are clear and straightforward, people can live their lives more freely, where and how they want and, as Christie puts it, be there for all the little league games and birthday parties.

"Those are the events that make life meaningful," Christie says. "We work our whole lives to get to that point where we have a little bit of freedom, of time, and of energy, to say, 'I'm dedicating this to my grandchildren.'"

It's not a presidential platform or a fully formed rationale for a Christie candidacy. But for a guy who's been counted out, it's a start. ♦

Full Court Press

The Republican state AGs continue to be Obama's most formidable opponents. **BY FRED BARNES**

President Obama's legacy is in jeopardy. The fates of his main achievements—Obamacare, his amnesty for five million illegal immigrants, the Dodd-Frank financial institution reforms—are now in the hands of the federal courts.

This is extraordinary. Until Obama, no president has been in a situation in which judges rather than the elected branches of government can decide if his successful initiatives—successful in having been enacted by Congress or himself—live or die.

The instigators of putting Obama in a legal box are Republican state attorneys general. Once they began banding together in lawsuits to protect states from encroachments by the federal government, they became a powerful force and a thorn in Obama's side.

There are 27 of them, a majority of

state AGs. And they are determined to elect three more in the next two years. When they met in Washington last week, Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell showed up to encourage them. He committed himself to help elect a GOP attorney general in Kentucky's odd-year election this November.

"We haven't had a Republican attorney general in Kentucky since World War II," McConnell said. Little attention was paid to the office, he said, except by trial lawyers who were "focused like a laser on [electing] Democrats." The current AG, Jack Conway, is term-limited. So the seat will be open.

The prize in last November's election was Adam Laxalt of Nevada, the grandson of Paul Laxalt, the former senator and governor. Nevada is a swing state and Adam Laxalt, 36, won in a squeaker—251,539 to 246,671. He immediately joined 25 other

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Republican AGs in a lawsuit challenging Obama's immigration actions as unconstitutional. A federal judge in Texas ruled in the AGs' favor in February. The Obama administration has appealed.

Laxalt's participation irritated Nevada's Republican governor Brian Sandoval, who supports comprehensive immigration reform. He "continues to believe that the best course of action is a legislative solution rather than legal action," Sandoval's spokesman said. Laxalt didn't need the governor's approval. Under Nevada law, the attorney general is an independent figure, not the governor's underling.

The rise of the Republican AGs began in 2010, when they sued to stop Obamacare. They failed, but won limits on Medicaid expansion and neutralized the use of the commerce clause to broaden the reach of the federal government.

That was followed by another suit against Obamacare, filed by Attorney General Scott Pruitt of Oklahoma, to block the federal exchange used by

(in the case known as *King v. Burwell*).

The case against Dodd-Frank was engaged by 11 state AGs in 2013. They contended the "orderly liquidation authority" granted the Treasury secretary could threaten the investments of state pension funds and strip them of valuable property rights. But they were denied "standing" to join existing plaintiffs against Dodd-Frank. That ruling is under appeal.

Despite their success, the AGs were largely ignored by the media and liberals before the Obamacare case. Then in May 2014, an article in the *Atlantic* was headlined "Big Money

Comes to State Attorney-General Races." You can guess who the funds mostly went to. (It wasn't Democrats.) In October, the *New York Times* ran a lengthy piece on lobbyists' efforts to influence state AGs and another in December critical of Pruitt's contacts with energy firms.



Adam Laxalt



Scott Pruitt

residents of 37 states from handing out subsidies to buy health insurance. Pruitt argued the health care law didn't authorize subsidies for those who use the federal exchange, while it specifically allows subsidies to flow through the state-run exchanges. That issue is now before the U.S. Supreme Court

Trade: America's Next Big Success Story

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

Dramatically increasing American exports is one of the best opportunities we have to create jobs, spur growth, and reassert American leadership. Exports have been one of the rare bright spots in the American economy, and they have risen by more than 50% over the past five years. More than 38 million American jobs depend on trade.

Preferential agreements with trade partners have driven much of this growth, and they ensure that our commercial relationships are fair, transparent, and create an even playing field for U.S. workers and businesses. The benefits are broadly shared. Small and medium-size companies account for 98% of all U.S. exporters, and 40% of their merchandise exports go to our partner countries. Exports of U.S. farm and food products to partner nations increased by more than 130% between 2003 and 2013, according to the U.S. Department

of Agriculture. In 2014, American manufacturers sold \$674 billion in products to countries with which we have deals.

But we are only scratching the surface. More than 95% of the people we want to sell things to live outside our borders. We have negotiated 14 market-opening agreements covering only 20 countries and representing just 6% of the world's population. Opportunities abound—and if we don't seize them, our competitors will.

The good news is that our nation aspires to conduct more trade. Our leaders are pushing an ambitious agenda to open up new markets and facilitate more global commerce. Major new agreements are under negotiation with two of the most crucial regions in the world.

The United States is close to completing negotiations on the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement, which would open the Asia-Pacific's dynamic markets to American goods and services. TPP could boost U.S. exports by an annual \$124 billion.

Also in the works is the Transatlantic

Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), which would further remove barriers between the United States and Europe. TTIP could increase U.S. exports by \$300 billion annually and support some 740,000 new jobs.

Negotiating new trade agreements is essential to boosting our economy and making trade the next big American success story. Congress and the White House must work together to get the best deal for U.S. businesses and workers. For that to happen, 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.

Next week I'll discuss why TPA is vital to moving our trade agenda forward and how the business community is leading efforts to advance legislation in Congress.



U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
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Last month, the liberal website *Talking Points Memo* pointed to the effectiveness of the Republicans' suing as a team. "Republican attorneys general have mastered the process," *TPM* reporter Dylan Scott wrote. Indeed, they've recognized the phenomenon of strength in numbers. Judges are more likely "to take an argument more seriously" if a dozen or two state AGs are making it, says Georgetown University law professor Randy Barnett.

Obama's policies, especially those of the Environmental Protection Agency, have all but asked for legal pushback from states. They trample on states' rights, federalism, and the rule of law. And Republican AGs insist they're obligated to defend all three.

Now their focus is broadening beyond the Obama administration. Pruitt has started a project to examine state and local laws and regulations—in Oklahoma, in his case—for overreach and other violations. Other AGs are doing the same. "That's a second shoe to drop," says Leonard Leo, the executive vice president of the Federalist Society.

There's a third: old independent federal agencies like the Federal Trade Commission and Federal Communications Commission and newcomers such as the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and the Financial Stability Oversight Council. They are ripe for being frisked by Republican attorneys general.

Georgia AG Sam Olens says a wave of regulations is sure to pour out of Washington during Obama's waning presidency. Olens keeps track of regulations, not yet finalized, that are coming down the federal pipeline. "The administration is going to try to do as much as it can using regulatory authority rather than Congress," he says. "There's a lot of work to come in the next two years."

There will be many bright attorneys to do it. The offices of state AGs used to be backwaters. Now young conservative lawyers, including many fresh from clerking for conservative Supreme Court justices, are flocking to work for state attorneys general. Champions of Obama's policies beware. ♦

Retaking Mosul

It won't be easy.

BY THOMAS DONNELLY

In late 2001, when initial military operations in Afghanistan produced surprising successes, the opening skit on *Saturday Night Live* was a send-up of the daily press conference given by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. Actor Darrell Hammond made a perfect Rummy, complete with rimless spectacles and prune-face squint. But the real target of the sketch was the inanity of the media.

"Mr. Secretary, do you plan to halt bombing during Ramadan?"

"My answer would be ... I'm not going to tell you. Yes?"

Under the command of Barack Obama, the traditional idea that "loose lips sink ships" has gone out of fashion. In mid-February, anonymous officials from U.S. Central Command told reporters of a coming assault to wrest Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city, from the grip of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. ISIS has held Mosul, which had nearly two million residents, since June 2014.

The announcement was a surprise to new defense secretary Ashton Carter and to the White House. It was also disturbing to many in Congress; senators John McCain and Lindsey Graham complained to the president about the leak of the detailed campaign plan, writing: "Never in our memory can we recall an instance in which our military has knowingly briefed our war plans to our enemies."

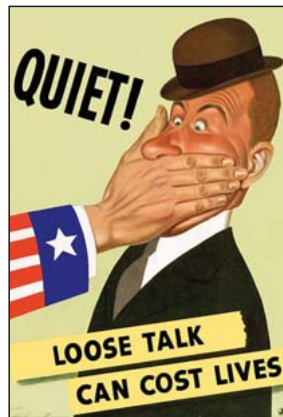
The leak was also a shock to Iraqis.

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While the retaking of Mosul has long been a topic of conversation in Baghdad, and the government of Haider al-Abadi is said to be eager to take the offensive as soon as possible, to have the Americans put a date on the calendar—the CENTCOM briefing said the attacks would begin in April or May—is to write a check the Iraqis may not be able to cash. And the stakes, both politically and militarily, for the

Obama administration as well as Abadi, could hardly be greater.

The response of the Kurdish leadership to the leak is illustrative. Asked by NPR if the Iraqi Army was ready to undertake the Mosul assault, Masrour Barzani, head of the Kurdish national security council, said, "I wish I could tell you they are ready, but they are not." He continued,



Let's not forget that for 10 years the Iraqi Army was trained and supported, and unfortunately they did not last for a long time fighting ISIS. Especially in Mosul [last spring]. Five Iraqi divisions and one federal police division were completely destroyed or abandoned their posts. And let's also not forget that fighting ISIS with new recruits is not that easy. So you have to have combat-hardened forces.

Even discounting Kurdish special pleading from this assessment, Barzani's points are well taken. Looked at from a distance—and one can never see Iraq too clearly from Washington—military failure in Mosul is very much an option.

Any assessment of the Mosul campaign's prospects must begin by remembering some of the basic facts

about the city. It's physically big—roughly the size of Washington, D.C., inside the Beltway—as well as populous, making it very difficult urban terrain. The city's also split more or less in half by the Tigris River, which creates a formidable line of defense.

In particular, the river forms a defense of the southwest section of the city, which is the stronghold of the Sunni population. Sunnis are a 70-percent majority of the population; Kurds account for about 25 percent; and the remaining 5 percent includes a congeries of minorities—but very, very few Shiite Iraqis. Mosul was once the retirement community for Saddam Hussein's officer corps—tens of thousands of them. It was the nucleus of Baathist and then broader Sunni resistance to the Shiite-led governments installed in Baghdad after the 2003 invasion and under former prime minister Nuri al-Maliki. It was also a hotbed of activity for Abu Musab al Zarqawi's Al Qaeda in Iraq, a precursor to ISIS.

The Kurds want little to do with the fight for this part of Mosul. They've secured the Kurdish parts of the eastern city and have had to absorb hundreds of thousands of refugees from Mosul into Kurdistan proper. “[Kurdish] *Peshmerga* [militia] will not enter alone,” says Barzani. Not only would this create “some political sensitivity,” he admits, but he's also aware of the limitations of the *pesh*, who lack the strength, weaponry, and logistics for such a mission.

And so it will fall to the few reconstructed elements of the Iraqi Army to crack the hardest nut. According to the battle-plan leaks, the Iraqi Army will put five brigades—maybe 10,000 troops total—into the operation, with just two of those conducting the initial attacks. Even if the shake-and-bake retraining effort begun last year is as successful as possible, these are not happy numbers. Many of the Iraqi “successes” trumpeted in recent months have been achieved by Shiite militias with varying degrees of Iranian support; that's not a recipe that will work in Mosul. Indeed, to the degree that the

operation is perceived as a Shiite attack on a Sunni city—which is how ISIS will portray it—resistance will stiffen.

The leaks also revealed that U.S. Central Command is uncertain “what is the final enemy disposition in Mosul.” Intelligence estimates are that ISIS strength is anywhere from 1,000 to 2,000. That's more or less the enemy order of battle in the second battle for Fallujah in 2004, Operation Phantom Fury, conducted by 6,500 Marines and 1,500 U.S. Army soldiers with about 2,000 Navy personnel in support, a battalion of the British Army's Black Watch, and several thousand hand-picked Iraqi forces. Second Fallujah was the bloodiest engagement of that war, costing 95 American lives. And that second battle in Fallujah had to be fought because the first attack was short-circuited by faint hearts in Baghdad and Washington. At this point, underestimating the tenacity or capacity of the ISIS “JV team” would be criminal. To be sure, ISIS has had a tough time governing and running Mosul since it fell into their hands, but they've had plenty of time to supply and fortify a citadel. And given how central the idea of the “caliphate”—that is, territory held—is to the ISIS mystique, prudent planning would presuppose that they'll stand and fight, bitterly.

The isolation of Mosul has already begun; Kurdish forces have accomplished that on the east side and at the crossroads town of Kiske, about 25 miles west of the city, roughly halfway to Tal Afar. It's far from clear how much this latter effort will really cut off ISIS forces in the city, for the western approaches to Mosul are entirely open country. That's ideal for employing U.S. airpower, but a complete cutoff would require constant patrols and a lot of aircraft. And the city's developed limits stretch west five miles and more from the Tigris. One of the rationales advanced for the CENTCOM leaking was that it would contribute to the psychological isolation of ISIS in Mosul. This is, after all, an administration that takes the battle for the Twitterverse to be more critical than any physical battlefield.

If there's one group of hearts and minds worth fighting for, it's the Moslawis. Even if an estimated 500,000 of them have fled, a million or more are still living in the midst of what will soon be a bloody battlefield. How they respond to the coming mayhem may go a long way to determining the outcome. Rasha al Aqeedi, born in Mosul but living in Dubai, describes what life in the city has been like in recent months in an empathetic essay published in the *American Interest*: The population anticipates “the joy of ridding Mosul of ISIS” but is terrified at the prospect of “retribution and revenge by the Iraqi army, the peshmerga, or the Shia militias, which have infiltrated the volunteer fighters.” She quotes “Abu Ahmed,” a retired accountant, saying: “I wish the U.S. Army would free us instead. . . . We are on death row simply awaiting the day of execution.”

That day must come sometime this spring. Having announced that the attack will take place in April or May, it will be difficult to postpone too long the day of reckoning. This might have been the moment for the Obama administration to exercise some of that “strategic patience”—or at least “operational patience”—it's so proud of, but instead it's putting pressure on a fragile government in Baghdad that might not survive defeat.

The administration is also putting a lot of pressure on itself. To have any hope of success, the tiny Iraqi assault force will need lots of U.S. firepower. We cannot bomb Mosul in order to save it, and it's too big for the “Kobane treatment.” That means American tactical air controllers will have to be embedded in Iraqi ground maneuver units, with enough U.S. foot soldiers to defend them. It's getting to be boots-on-the-ground time.

President Obama has never met a red line he couldn't walk away from. Backing down from ISIS would be very bad, and allowing the status quo in Mosul to continue would be worse. But a defeat in Mosul at the hands of ISIS would be truly catastrophic. President Obama has to get in it to win it, at least this once. ♦

Appeasement in Our Time

One unforced error after another.

BY MICHAEL MAKOVSKY

Is Barack Obama another Neville Chamberlain? I've been reluctant to make the comparison, but as talks with Iran have unfolded, it's become impossible not to think of the 1938 Munich conference, where Britain and France agreed that strategically and economically vital Czech territory be ceded to Germany, leading soon after to German conquest of Czechoslovakia and World War II. America's looming deal with Iran rivals Munich in its unnecessary and catastrophic recklessness. It is an inexplicable unforced error that will have disastrous consequences unless Congress, or Israel, does something to stop it.

An acceptable diplomatic solution to the danger posed by Iran's nuclear program might have been available, but only had the United States maintained tough sanctions and a credible threat of military force. President Obama instead utterly undermined U.S. leverage and has offered so many irresponsible concessions that any deal struck under this president would be a dangerous deal.

First, the administration, through the Joint Plan of Action interim deal, conceded that Iran can maintain its nuclear program, contravening decades of U.S. policy and multiple legally binding U.N. Security Council resolutions. We won't be able to stop the proliferation cascade that will ensue in a region already rife with violence and instability.

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Second, the administration moved its stated red line from denying Iran nuclear weapons capacity to ensuring its nuclear breakout time is at least a year. But there's really no way to guarantee that. The multitude of steps across multiple institutions that would



A worrisome resemblance

have to be taken to detect, verify, and try to resolve diplomatically any Iranian attempt to sneak out or break out means a year would pass before a military strike could even be considered. In any case, prompt and thorough verification would be virtually unachievable because the deal won't require full Iranian transparency on its past research into nuclear weapons technology.

Third, with the latest U.S. offer reportedly allowing 6,500 operating centrifuges, Iran would have to verifiably export or eliminate almost all its enriched uranium stockpiles to push the breakout time to more than 12 months—something it won't do. It would also have to verifiably dismantle the rest of its 19,000 centrifuges—something it won't be required to do.

Fourth, the deal will include a sunset clause whereby Iran eventually would become a normalized nuclear power operating as large an enrichment program as it likes. So in perhaps a decade, based on recent reports, Iran could be treated like Japan.

Finally, the deal ignores Iran's ballistic missile program—the largest in the Middle East—despite ongoing advances that could allow it to develop the capability to target the United States around the same time the agreement would expire.

One could go on, but it's clear that Obama is not trying to prevent a nuclear Iran and merely hoping to manage its approach to that point. This is an error of potentially catastrophic significance, representing in several ways a more unnecessary and unjustified betrayal than Munich.

Chamberlain believed he alone could secure peace with Hitler and integrate Germany into the community of nations. He chose not to work with the Soviet Union or the United States, which would have given him more leverage against Berlin. In cutting out potential partners and capitulating completely to Hitler, he upended a growing anti-German coalition and solidified the Führer's domestic position. Notably, though, Britain didn't have deep-seated strategic ties with or treaty obligations to the Czechs or neighboring countries.

The United States, however, does have enduring strategic relationships with the countries whose existence is threatened by a nuclear Iran. We have supported Israel since its founding. For decades, U.S. policymakers have spoken of the country as our closest ally in the region, with whom we have close cultural, diplomatic, economic, military, and intelligence ties. We also have supported the Sunni Arab regimes in the Persian Gulf, led by Saudi Arabia, through military sales, basing agreements, intelligence cooperation, and the (Jimmy) Carter Doctrine's explicit promise to defend the region from outside aggression. The primary threat to both our Arab and

Israeli allies for decades has been the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The Obama administration is willing to ignore these close ties and betray our allies—completely unnecessarily. In 1938, Britain's global position was in decline while Germany was rearming. In contrast, the United States today remains the world's sole superpower, capable of inflicting tremendous damage on Iran—a third-rate power suffering from sanctions—that would set back its nuclear program for years. Yet Obama has chosen to put himself into as weak a position as Chamberlain found himself in.

As damaging as Munich was to Britain's global position, a bad deal with Iran could do worse damage to American global leadership. Given our historical interests in the region and 20-year bipartisan commitment to preventing a nuclear Iran, American credibility would be severely undermined. Any offer of a “nuclear umbrella” to protect our Arab allies will ring hollow if America isn't prepared to fight a limited conventional war to prevent a nuclear Iran now, when the costs and risks are lower. America's Arab allies would pursue their own nuclear deterrents, and/or feel compelled to cut deals with Iran, Russia, or China. Credibility is the currency of a deterrent posture, and few countries in Asia or Europe would believe in American commitments once the United States abandoned its core, longstanding, prominent interests in the Middle East. Israel could choose not to become another Czechoslovakia and preemptively attack Iran's nuclear facilities. All this makes the prospect of wars in the Middle East—including nuclear conflicts—much more likely. Congress should vote to reject the deal if it's made, and presidential candidates should declare they will not be bound by any such deal if they are elected.

Chamberlain told the British public that in Munich he had achieved “peace with honour. I believe it is peace for our time.” Churchill argued in response, “You were given the choice between war and dishonour. You chose dishonour and you will have war.” The same can be said of President Obama as he approaches his Munich. ♦

Iran as Partner

Obama's deep game.

BY LEE SMITH

Last week it was reported that the White House and Iran may be moving toward a deal over the Islamic Republic's nuclear program. The proposed phased agreement, lasting 10-15 years, would initially attempt to freeze the program. But during the last years of the agreement, Iran would be allowed to resume activities that would lead to a nuclear bomb.

The deal's “sunset clause” means that after the agreement has expired, this state sponsor of terror will become legally entitled to the same treatment in nuclear energy matters as Japan, say, or Germany, or any other non-nuclear-weapon state with a civil nuclear program.

For the sunset clause to kick in, of course, Iran must fulfill its obligations under the terms of the agreement. The problem, however, is that Iran could get away with pretty much anything it wanted because no one's watching—or more specifically, no one would be allowed to watch. The International Atomic Energy Agency would be responsible for monitoring compliance, but just last week the U.N. agency reported that Tehran still refuses to allow inspections to address concerns regarding the possible military dimensions of the nuclear program. The IAEA, said the report, “remains concerned about the possible existence in Iran of undisclosed nuclear-related activities involving military-related organizations, including activities related to the development

of a nuclear payload for a missile.”

According to the IAEA report, it is because Iran has not answered all the outfit's questions that “the agency is not in a position to provide credible assurance about the absence of undeclared nuclear material and activities in Iran, and therefore to conclude that all nuclear material in Iran is in peaceful activities.”

In other words, the deal under discussion is a very bad one even on the administration's own terms. After first claiming that its goal was to halt the Iranians' march toward a bomb, the White House lowered the bar and is now apparently content with slowing the program.

At least that's what the administration says, which is why it wants to lengthen the time it will take Iran to “break out” and make a bomb. But there is no way to know the time frame for a breakout without a rigorous inspections regime. But that is impossible to establish unless the Iranians satisfy concerns regarding the possible military dimensions of the program, and allow regular and unannounced inspections of all their facilities. That would include controversial sites like the military base at Parchin, which the regime has made off-limits to inspectors. Therefore, even under the best of circumstances, the proposed deal would leave Iran a screwdriver's turn away from a nuclear weapon.

It's finally beginning to dawn on people what a comprehensive agreement with Iran really means. The foreign policy establishment, Democratic and Republican, has long dreamed of a



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GARY LOCKE

historic reconciliation with the clerical regime, which would include not only a deal over the nuclear program but also agreements on a broad range of other matters of vital interest to both parties. However, it's becoming increasingly clear that very few have imagined what rapprochement would actually look like on the ground.

For example, even Flynt and Hillary Mann Leverett, purveyors of the myth that Iran was rebuffed when it reached out to strike a "grand bargain" with the Bush administration, and longtime advocates of such a bargain, have assumed that as part of a deal Iran would agree not to develop a nuclear weapon. But the Obama administration is paving the path to an Iranian bomb. In the Leveretts' imagined deal, Iran stops supporting terrorism in exchange for recognition of its interests. But in fact, the White House is already recognizing those interests for nothing in exchange—reportedly sharing intelligence with Hezbollah and coordinating its campaign against the Islamic State with Iranian proxies in Syria and Iraq, while it accedes to Iranian expansionism, from Beirut and Damascus to Baghdad and Sanaa.

Elsewhere, the White House has virtually teamed up with Iran. Most notably in Tikrit, where Iran's terrorist in chief, IRGC-Quds Force commander Qassem Suleimani, is, it appears, going to be overseeing the Iraqi forces—trained and equipped by the United States—in their campaign to wrest the Sunni city from the Islamic State. How is it possible that the same White House that thinks Israeli settlements are a source of Arab frustration and despair also thinks it's a good idea to back Suleimani in a likely campaign of sectarian cleansing of a Sunni Arab region? Maybe the White House's Middle East policy is a deranged plan to destroy the lives of thousands of Middle Easterners and ruin the American position in the region. Or maybe there is some method to the apparent madness.

Compared with the surge in Iraq, which the Bush administration counts as one of its signal achievements, the Obama administration's

policy is the antisurge. Where the surge backed Sunni Arab tribesmen against a Sunni insurgency led by foreign fighters, the antisurge virtually guarantees the Sunni rebellion will grow exponentially, as Sunni tribesmen make common cause with the Islamic State to protect themselves against Iran and its allied Shiite militias. It also means that Sunni Arab powers like Jordan, now enlisted in the coalition against IS, will have no choice but to drop out of a military campaign led by Iran's Shiite triumphalists.

One way to see the White House's policy in Iraq is that it really had no choice but to go along with Iran. Sure, the administration has paid lip service to the notion of getting Sunnis to fight against IS, but it has no ability to make that happen. With the 2011 withdrawal of U.S. forces, the White House left Iran the sole kingmaker in Iraq. Any U.S. arms, supplies, or money sent to whatever is left of the Sunni Awakening has to go through the government in Baghdad, which means Tehran has the final say.

The other possibility is that the White House's Iraq policy is the result of a conscious choice. That is to say, what many Middle East experts, journalists, and policymakers thought unimaginable until only recently is really and truly the case: The Obama administration seeks to enter into a condominium with the Islamic Republic.

This is such a dangerously bad idea that it's given rise to bipartisan opposition, even on the part of former administration officials. "It is fanciful to imagine that the United States could convince Iran to shift from the region's most threatening revisionist power and become instead a partner in establishing a new order in the Middle East," writes Martin Indyk, the Obama administration's former envoy to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

American allies are also aghast. "I still thought it impossible that anyone in Washington would pin their hopes on Iran," the Netanyahu government's former national security adviser Yaakov Amidror wrote recently. Now Amidror

is more inclined to believe his own eyes and ears. "During my visit to the United States two weeks ago I heard from several people," Amidror elaborated, "that a nuclear agreement with Iran will contribute to regional stability in the Middle East, and that future relations between Iran and the U.S. will advance U.S. interests; an American U-turn, heading toward a special relationship with Iran."

Up until now, those in the U.S. foreign policy establishment who have fancied striking a grand bargain with the clerical regime didn't understand what historical reconciliation would really mean. Presumably, they imagined the two nations would have comity and peace and mutual respect, even if the United States were required to atone for its transgressions against this great and ancient civilization (as they would put it). Maybe in time the regime would in turn apologize for taking Americans hostage in 1979 and targeting American soldiers, diplomats, and intelligence officers in, among other places, Lebanon, Iraq, and Afghanistan over the last 35 years, as well as plotting countless terror operations against American citizens, allies, and interests. Friendship might not come right away, but the two nations would eventually come to see not only their mutual interests, but also their shared values.

But this sentimental view is precisely why American policymakers have failed to come to an agreement with the Islamic Republic over the course of the last four decades and six administrations. At some point, the Iranians would do something to appall the American side and push it from the table. It is a revolutionary regime and its actions have repeatedly borne out its indelible character.

Obama understood early on that if you really want to make a deal with Iran you need a strong stomach. From this perspective, it's easier to understand how the nuclear negotiations fit into Obama's new reality, which is an Iran with the bomb and regional hegemony. This isn't a bug in Obama's Middle East system. It's a feature—perhaps the main feature. ♦

Be Prepared

How to respond if the Court ends Obamacare subsidies. BY JAMES C. CAPRETTA & YUVAL LEVIN

Few people expect much to happen on health care in the 114th Congress, certainly not President Obama. He plans to continue bending and twisting his interpretation of Obamacare's many complex provisions as necessary to keep it afloat and to avoid dealing at all with opposition to the law among the public or the Republicans who now run Congress.

But *King v. Burwell* could upend the president's plans. That's the case, now on the Supreme Court's docket, contesting the legality of subsidy payments to people in states that chose not to build their own Obamacare insurance exchanges. A decision against the government's provision of the subsidies would undermine the law in the 37 affected states and, in the process, disrupt insurance for millions of people who signed up for coverage on the assumption that the subsidies would be available to them.

The blame for the mess that would surely ensue should rightfully fall on the Obama administration and Democrats in Congress. Congressional Democrats wrote the statute on their own, and the administration has enforced it. If the Court rules that the statute was written carelessly and enforced lawlessly, Democrats will have no one to blame but themselves.

But don't expect them to take responsibility. If the administration loses the case, Obama is sure to denounce the ruling as an ideological power grab by the Court and then to demand that Republicans in Congress

fix it, with no strings attached. Further, the administration will almost certainly develop a workaround for the states, allowing them to designate and use the federal exchange as if it had been built by the states. This would give administration officials a justification to continue paying federal subsidies in the



...and harder to ditch than it might seem.

states agreeing to the workaround, even if it were legally questionable.

It will be tempting, under these circumstances, for Republicans in Congress to stand back and watch events unfold rather than step into the breach with a plan of action. After all, they had nothing to do with writing or implementing Obamacare, so why should they have to offer a solution? Moreover, many conservatives will see the loss of federal subsidies as the first step in the full unwinding of the law. Why on earth would the GOP want to step in?

What exactly would happen in the aftermath of a Court ruling in favor of the plaintiffs is certainly unpredictable. It is possible, perhaps, that the public would be so disgusted with the lawlessness of the administration that opinion would swing in the GOP's favor, tempting the party to do nothing while the administration is forced to scramble to pick up the pieces. But it seems more

likely that a combination of the president demanding a simple fix and public concern about the fate of the several million people with disrupted insurance arrangements in the affected states would put at least some of the pressure for a fix on Republicans.

And the pressure could be especially acute on Republican governors in the affected states. They are the ones who will be presiding over insurance markets that could unravel entirely. If the president offers them an easy route to building a "state" exchange, and there is no prospect of an alternative coming from Congress, then it seems probable that many Republican leaders in these states will succumb to the pressure coming from both the administration and the public to fix the mess by adopting state exchanges. Several Republican governors have stated that they would not accept such a "solution," but as we have seen with the lure of Obamacare's Medicaid expansion, the pressure to do so could ultimately be hard to resist.

If events were to unfold this way, it would, of course, be politically disastrous for the GOP. But it would also mean the party had missed a huge opportunity. Obamacare is being fully implemented nationwide. There will be some 10 or 11 million people getting insurance through the exchanges, and another several million more getting covered through Medicaid. The longer implementation proceeds, the harder it will be to undo. If the Court strikes a significant blow to the law, it will be perhaps the last opportunity for Republicans to begin moving health care policy in a very different direction in the Obama years. Despite the political risks, the GOP should recognize and take advantage of such an opportunity.

A decision to invalidate the federal subsidies in states that chose not to build their own exchanges would provide a natural opening for offering these states an alternative to the Obamacare framework. This need not take on every objectionable provision in Obamacare—full repeal could only come under the next president. But it should offer to the states a market-driven alternative to that law's

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top-down regulatory approach. It should offer an off-ramp from Obamacare that advances the cause of repeal and replacement while addressing the particular pressures created by a favorable *King* decision.

The key pieces of such an approach can be found in proposals offered both in Congress (like the plan sponsored by Senators Richard Burr and Orrin Hatch and Rep. Fred Upton) and outside of it (like the plan put together by the 2017 Project, a conservative non-profit). Those plans propose to replace the Obamacare subsidy structure with a simplified, age-adjusted tax credit to allow households without access to employer coverage to buy insurance in the private market.

Such credits should form the foundation of the GOP response to a *King* decision. Republicans should advance legislation that effectively allows states to opt out of Obamacare's entire regulatory and subsidy structure and into a far simpler and more flexible system that points in the opposite direction: toward a competitive, consumer-centered marketplace for coverage. In that system, state residents not offered health coverage by their employers could receive a federally funded, age-based credit for the purchase of any state-approved health-insurance product—including those bought outside of any exchange and regardless of whether they meet Obamacare's coverage requirements. Anyone who remained continuously insured in this system would be shielded from higher premiums or exclusion from coverage based on a preexisting condition, giving consumers a strong incentive to buy coverage without a mandate to do so. And all other insurance regulation would be up to the states.

A major difference between the Burr-Hatch-Upton and the 2017 Project plans is that Burr-Hatch-Upton ties the tax credits to the incomes of the households using them, and phases them out altogether for families with incomes above three times the federal poverty line. The 2017 Project proposal provides its credits to all households outside the employer-sponsored

insurance system, regardless of their incomes. This is the better approach, as the tax credit is designed to balance the large tax break associated with job-based coverage. Under Obamacare and Burr-Hatch-Upton, middle-class families that do not have an employer plan get no additional help with their insurance premiums. But a potentially significant selling point of a GOP-sponsored response to the *King* case is that middle-class families in states opting into the alternative structure would get far more help toward their premium payments than from Obamacare. Moreover, in states that did not opt for the Medicaid expansion, families with incomes above Medicaid eligibility but below the federal poverty line would get a tax credit too—something they don't get under Obamacare.

States that opted out of Obamacare and into the alternative avenue would also regain control over the insurance plans offered in their markets. States would determine the manner by which consumers would identify and select their insurance plans. In doing so, states could use an exchange-like structure if they wanted to, but they would not be required to do so.

The protection for people who remained continuously covered would both offer security to Americans with preexisting conditions and provide a powerful incentive for individuals to use their tax credits to get at least catastrophic insurance, and thus retain their status as continuously insured. Insurers would have an enormous incentive to offer plans with premiums set exactly equal to the credit, so that people could purchase them for no up-front costs out of pocket—essentially allowing them to obtain catastrophic coverage for the same price they now pay to be uninsured: nothing. The Burr-Hatch-Upton plan would go one step further and allow states to provide default insurance to anyone who neglected to select a plan with his tax credit—again, with premiums set exactly equal to the credit to ensure the person owed no additional premium. This would leave people with essentially no reason to remain uninsured while helping create a robust,

competitive market for coverage.

A final important component of a GOP-drafted state opt-out of Obamacare would be Medicaid flexibility. Under Obamacare, the Medicaid expansion and the exchange subsidies are disconnected programs. The GOP should offer governors the opportunity to reform their Medicaid programs, without the need for a federal waiver, so that Medicaid becomes a supplement to the federal tax credit for the lower-income population. This would allow Medicaid-eligible families to enroll in the same health insurance plans as those with slightly higher incomes, and they could keep these plans as they found better and higher-paying jobs. Most important, these plans would provide access to networks of hospitals and physicians that today do not typically serve many Medicaid patients.

This is, of course, just one form that a state-opt out from Obamacare might take. Some conservative health care experts have proposed another, which would provide funding to the states, in the form of a block grant, instead of to individuals in the form of tax credits. Their model is the children's health insurance program (CHIP), created in 1997. CHIP provides fixed allotments to the states for the purpose of expanding health insurance enrollment among low-income children. States have substantial flexibility in designing the program within broad federal rules. A similar funding stream could be made available to the states affected by a decision in favor of the plaintiffs in the *King* case. The funding would replace the subsidies to individuals invalidated by such a ruling.

A block grant approach has some appeal. It eliminates the need to specify the important but knotty and sometimes controversial details of how to implement a tax credit for insurance, because states would be in charge of designing the subsidy programs, not the federal government. In addition, a block grant also provides budgetary certainty, as federal funding would be limited to the amounts provided in the allotments to the states.

The key drawback of this approach is that it could easily lead to a series

of bureaucratic state solutions replacing the bureaucratic federal solution of Obamacare. CHIP has not ushered in an era of creative market-based solutions for children's health insurance. Instead, it has largely become an add-on to the heavily regulated state Medicaid programs. A new funding stream for coverage expansion could easily lead to the same disappointing outcome.

Still, what's needed now more than anything else is a workable conservative solution in the event of a decision in favor of the plaintiffs in *King*. A new federal allotment to the states might have some drawbacks compared with a credit approach with minimal regulation, but it would be far better than no response at all. A strictly time-limited extension or substitution of existing subsidies, like the sort proposed by Senator Ben Sasse this month, could also be constructive as a first step if Congress were not inclined to more aggressive action immediately.

The Obama administration would find both approaches unacceptable, and would surely fight against either one tenaciously. But that's not a reason for the GOP to abandon drafting a plan. The president will demand that Republicans pass a clean "fix" to Obamacare to authorize the payment of federal subsidies in all exchanges, whether state- or federally built—insisting that the party that wants to repeal the law should instead fix it and effectively sign its name to it. And he will demand that this fix be permanent and unconditional. Such a radical set of demands should obviously be a nonstarter for Republicans. But the GOP will be in a much better position to resist, to strengthen the hand of Republican governors, and to force serious negotiations toward rolling back Obamacare if it has offered a credible alternative that would broaden insurance enrollment and improve the health system without the left's authoritarian central-planning approach to health care. The opt-out would meet that test—addressing the specific pressures states would face if *King* is decided for the plaintiffs and advancing the cause of a conservative alternative to Obamacare.

King v. Burwell could be an enormous

opportunity for those who want to replace Obamacare with a consumer-driven health reform that would offer flexibility rather than rigidity and encourage the development of a functional and sustainable market for affordable coverage and care. But it

will only offer such an opportunity if conservatives are prepared to give the states a serious alternative arrangement. If they fail to prepare, a decision for the plaintiffs could easily prove as perilous for conservatives as it would be for the administration. ♦

Implausible Deniability

Lame excuses by sinister governments have a purpose. BY JOHN LONDREGAN

Santiago, Chile

Across Latin America there are a slew of cases in which governments are engaging in more or less transparent misconduct, ranging from simple corruption to repression to murder, and offering patently implausible excuses. The litany includes Venezuela, where the most popular antigovernment mayor has languished in prison for the past year while sham judges maunder. Then there is Ecuador, where President Rafael Correa has taken to tearing up newspapers in public and prosecuting them when they are critical of the government. Add to the list Argentina, where a prosecutor was murdered the night before he was going to exposit his case that President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner was being bought—by Iran! Finally there is the comparatively benign case of Chilean president Michelle Bachelet's son taking advantage of his mother's position to extract a massive low interest loan from a prominent bank, a misdeed about which President Bachelet has remained aloof.

In each case, the government claims, implausibly, that nothing wrong has

taken place. Why do governments caught *in flagrante* across the gamut from opportunistic influence peddling to murder make such lame excuses?

A guide to what's going on can be discerned in the 2006 "murder by state" of Alexander Litvinenko, a critic of Russian strongman Vladimir Putin. Litvinenko was poisoned by a minion of the Russian government using a radioactive isotope of polonium found in nuclear reactors. The Russian government might as well have advertised its involvement with a full-page ad in a major newspaper. No private individual, indeed no nongovernmental crime syndicate, can lay its hands on the exotic poison used to murder Litvinenko—yet the Russian Federation denied any role, and to this day feigns indignation that anyone would be so unkind as to suspect its involvement.

Given their long experience with such matters during the Cold War years, it beggars belief that the Russian secret police could not have found a more surreptitious means of committing murder. Why act in such an obvious fashion? Precisely because everyone will know from the use of polonium that Litvinenko was murdered by the Russian government to silence him, and so others will be intimidated. And because it is convenient for

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its diplomats to be able to show up at international events, because of the comity of conducting business with a pretense of being civilized, and to allow the British government an excuse to humiliate itself by not taking stern reprisals, the Russian government goes through the motions of denial.

In the epitome of what we might call *implausible deniability*, Putin sent his message: The world knows Litvinenko was killed for speaking out against me. The flimsy fig leaf of implausible deniability is there only to provide the rest of the world with an excuse not to act.

Perhaps out of nostalgia for the Cold War, the Latin American left seems once again to be following Moscow's lead. Consider the case in Venezuela of Leopoldo Lopez. This principled public figure was elected mayor of the municipality of Chacao. Last year he called for peaceful protests against the rule of despot Nicolás Maduro; he has been in military prison ever since. False corruption accusations against Lopez brought by the government of Hugo Chávez spluttered to failure in the courts. Since then the government has gained firmer control over the judiciary. President Maduro's new strategy is to deny Lopez's lawyers access to tribunals, and to keep the brave leader in jail without bothering to convict him of anything.

As if to mark the first anniversary of the detention of Lopez, 80 of Maduro's hooded henchmen descended on the offices of metropolitan Caracas mayor Antonio Ledezma and brutally abducted him. Ledezma is now in the same infamous prison as Lopez. Maduro has also recently jailed several pharmacy executives who had the imprudence to continue trying to serve the Venezuelan public. The pretense? There were queues of customers at the pharmacies. No one mistakes Maduro's actions for law enforcement, but we are not supposed to be fooled. The real message is that with the new, low price of petroleum, the government of Venezuela will be replacing its earlier policy of badly administered subsidies

that appealed to the greed and envy of a segment of the public, with a system of control based on fear—criticize the government, and you can join Lopez and Ledezma in prison.

Not to be outdone by his Venezuelan OPEC partner, President Correa of Ecuador has loosed his country's police and judiciary—both sedulously follow orders from the president's palace—against the gifted political cartoonist Xavier Bonilla, and the independent newspaper, *El Universo*, that has the audacity to publish his work. The



Leopoldo Lopez goes into custody, February 18, 2014.

attack is predicated on the paper-thin pretext that a cartoon critical of government legislator Agustín Delgado, who became flummoxed during his own speech in the Ecuadorian congress, was motivated by racism (the assembly member and quondam soccer player is of African heritage). The government has sentenced *El Universo* to apologize. It is also likely to levy a huge fine. Of course, nobody believes Bonilla is a racist, but we're not supposed to—the message is that government critics will pay, and pay dearly.

In Argentina, President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, a critic of the “dirty war” waged by her country's former military government, now finds herself accused of negotiating amnesty for the Iranians who in 1994 bombed a Jewish community center in Buenos Aires, killing 85 people. The accusation was delayed when, the night before he was to testify on the matter

before a congressional committee, the tenacious prosecutor, who was being “protected” by the Argentine secret service, was fatally shot in the head. The government's string of absurd denials of responsibility, punctuated by witness intimidation tactics one might expect of a crime syndicate, fool no one. But they're not intended to deceive. The message is that prosecutors who pursue a trail of evidence that leads to the government will die.

In contrast with its sister republics of Venezuela, Ecuador, and Argentina, Chile remains a free country, and the level of scandal is two orders of magnitude less severe. Yet the same outlines emerged in the recent exposure of unseemly behavior on the part of President Bachelet's son, Sebastian Dávalos, who exploited his connections with the president to extract a substantial concessionary loan from a major Chilean bank to his wife's business, Caval Limited. Tagged “Nueragate” in the press (which translates as “daughter-in-law-gate”), the scandal was sufficiently severe to cause Dávalos to resign from his sinecure as presidential socio-cultural director. President Bachelet maintained silence for weeks and then laconically declared that she knows only what she's read in the press about her son's abuse of influence. And the government's only official comment on the case has been that Dávalos acted legally. The remainder of Bachelet's coalition, who never resist the chance to noisily denounce scandal when it taints the opposition, have, with a few noble exceptions, devoted more time to misrepresenting concerns in the press as mere caviling about Caval than they have to denouncing Dávalos's abuse of influence.

The message is clear: Businesses should expect to provide concessionary loans and other favors to family members of high ranking government officials—especially if that high-ranking relative is Her Excellency the President of the Republic. The forecast for the future? Expect more implausible denials. ♦

The message is clear: Businesses should expect to provide concessionary loans and other favors to family members of high ranking government officials—especially if that high-ranking relative is Her Excellency the President of the Republic. The forecast for the future? Expect more implausible denials. ♦

The Lowdown on Higher Education

A crisis in search of better answers.

BY JAMES PIERESON & NAOMI SCHAEFER RILEY

Scott Walker was never going to win fans among the faculty at the University of Wisconsin. Four years ago, Wisconsin professors were in the state capitol protesting the governor's plans to limit public employee collective bargaining powers. But, boy, did he make enemies this month when he proposed \$300 million more in budget cuts to the state's university and altering the words of the school's mission. Walker has clearly made some tactical missteps in recent weeks—and the fact that he himself doesn't have a college degree doesn't add to his credibility. But Walker's problems are those almost everyone in the Republican field could soon have. As we embark on another long election season, it is worth asking how conservatives should talk about college. Scott Walker started the conversation, but every candidate is going to have to address it.

The problems of American higher education are widely known. Tuition is too high, student debt has become crippling, students are woefully underprepared for the workforce, political activism is put ahead of real learning, students spend little time in class and even less time studying, and traditional liberal arts education has been replaced by trendy classes on race, class, and gender.

For liberals, the answers to the economic issues, at least, are obvious. If

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we simply throw more money at the problem—higher levels of financial aid, free community college tuition, more research grants to public and private colleges—the rest will take care of itself. There are some on the



Maybe fantasizing will help: Berkeley, 2014.

left who want to tie greater funding to so-called accountability measures, like President Obama's recently proposed college rating system, but ultimately they want the government to pick higher education's winners and losers.

For conservatives, things are more complicated. While it has been obvious to economists for decades that higher levels of federal financial aid have driven tuition prices ever upward, voters rarely want to hear that Congress should cut scholarships to poor kids. First and foremost, it is the job of Republican presidential candidates to explain the perverse incentives at work here—college administrators jack up prices because they know that taxpayers will foot the

bill. According to data from the Labor Department, the price index for college tuition grew by 79.5 percent between 2003 and 2013. Medical costs, by contrast, grew 43.1 percent, and the consumer price index grew 26.7 percent.

And the more expensive colleges are disproportionately rewarded by the current system. Instead of giving students a voucher toward paying tuition, we hand them more money if they choose a higher-priced school. Which is why Pell Grants have turned from a program to help the poor reach college to a broad middle-class entitlement: In 2010, 60 percent of college students received a grant.

Finally, Republican candidates need to show how the government has pushed private lenders out of the student loan business, making rates artificially low and leaving taxpayers on the hook for an even greater share of the bill.

What about the other side of the balance sheet, though? Couldn't colleges do more to cut their costs and make higher education more affordable? Yes, administrative staff has been growing at about twice the level of instructional staff for over a decade now. According to the Mackinac Center in Michigan, for instance, the number of administrators and service staff in Michigan's 15 state universities increased from 19,576 in 2005 to 22,472 in 2009. And average compensation increased by 13 percent. Between 1975 and 2005, spending on American higher education tripled while the faculty-student ratio remained the same. Which is one reason Scott Walker was met with such opprobrium when he suggested professors at the University of Wisconsin teach more courses per year.

For senior faculty, this is not such a bad idea. Many older tenured professors do lead a pretty cushy life at taxpayers' expense—at elite private schools and public flagship ones, they teach fewer than two courses a semester. At the other end of the spectrum are adjunct professors, who have little job security and low pay. They

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oversee large numbers of students and have almost no time to interact with them outside the classroom. Increasing their workloads will only bring a lower level of instruction to students who need it most.

Then there is graduate education, which, especially in the social sciences and the humanities, has become a huge waste of money and a dead-end career path for many students. As Claudia Dreifus and Andrew Hacker noted in their book *Higher Education?*, between 2005 and 2007, American universities awarded over 100,000 doctoral degrees but created just 16,000 assistant professorships.

Which brings us to the substance of a college education. Conservatives are right to be skeptical about both the curriculum and the campus atmosphere these days. Neither fosters much in the way of critical thinking, let alone open debate, but conservatives need to be careful not to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Of course universities offer too much that is silly and trendy, but “we don’t need no stinkin’ college degree” gives too much weight to Sarah Palin and not enough to Allan Bloom. William F. Buckley Jr. may have quipped that he’d rather be governed by the first 2,000 names in the Boston phone book than by the Harvard faculty, but he wasn’t advocating that the country be comprised only of people who thought with their “gut.”

Walker’s budget struck language that included promoting public service, improving the human condition, and searching for truth and reduced the university’s mission to “meet the state’s workforce needs.” Walker backtracked, but this error highlights an important question for conservatives. From the taxpayer’s perspective, is there a point to college beyond the economic one?

Fortunately for candidates who want to answer thoughtfully, there is a sweet spot between college as a purely utilitarian endeavor to create a better workforce and college as a foundation for seeking truth and becoming a better citizen.

Conservatives can note employers

seek graduates who know how to read and write well and do math and science both accurately and creatively. College administrators love to talk about how the future will be different, but the future will still need people who have the fundamentals of an education. Should political candidates want to wade into the question of what a college education should consist of, they could do a lot worse than emphasizing historical knowledge, proficiency in a foreign language, serious mathematics requirements, etc.

In other words, they might advocate eliminating superfluous politically correct programs and make-work administrative positions, and making colleges more clearly focused on education either for the workforce or traditional learning.

Which brings us to the final question. How important is going to college anyway? And how important should it

be to a conservative candidate? While it has been observed that too many people go to college—that the degree is just a credential, signifying that you are a certified member of the middle class who can be counted on to show up on time for work—it is also true that high school is doing less and less to prepare Americans for work, for life, and for citizenship. So college is, as a result, more necessary than ever.

While there may be rare exceptions like Scott Walker—and Steve Jobs and Mark Zuckerberg—who can rise to the top of their professions without a college degree, most parents know that for their children to have the greatest range of economic opportunities and the greatest chance of contributing to their communities, a college degree is the first step. Which is why Scott Walker’s son is in the midst of earning his. ♦

The Justice and Her Fans

The progressive cult of Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

BY BENJAMIN SILVER

Like many Americans, Supreme Court justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg napped through a portion of the president’s 2015 State of the Union address. This was hardly important news—she was caught napping during the 2013 address, too—but the story made a splash anyway, helped by a widely circulated photograph. The kicker came a few weeks later, when Justice Ginsburg revealed what led to the snooze: She had been a bit inebriated during the president’s speech. “We sit there, stone-faced, the sober judges, but we’re not—at least I wasn’t—100 percent sober,” she said.

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The wisecrack prompted pundits on both sides to chuckle. Far from causing outrage or offense, the line added to the mystique of the oldest member of the Supreme Court.

The media report on Ginsburg more than on any other justice, and people gobble those stories up. There’s something adorable about a small, dainty, elderly woman who likes to stick it to the man. (“Every now and then it helps to be a little deaf,” she once recalled her mother-in-law-to-be telling her. “That advice has stood me in good stead. Not simply in dealing with my marriage, but in dealing with my colleagues.”) With her sharp wit and come-what-may attitude, she has cultivated a full-fledged persona with the public—call



Notorious R.B.G. dozes off...

her “America’s bubble”—unprecedented for a Supreme Court justice. Like popular and largely respected Democratic presidents (FDR, JFK, and LBJ), she can be readily identified solely by her initials: RBG.

Ginsburg, who cofounded the ACLU’s Women’s Rights Project, is an opinionated jurist, and her salty, sometimes irreverent comments in court opinions and interviews have made her a mascot for the left. Progressive groups, like the Center for Reproductive Rights and the Human Rights Campaign, frequently “memefy” her to ask for donations and drum up support. Popular T-shirts for sale carry droll taglines like “Can’t spell ‘Truth’ without ‘Ruth’” and “Don’t be a hater, it’s Ruth Bader.” Last Halloween, blogs lit up with the story of a mother who dressed up her infant son as “Ruth Baby Ginsburg”—complete with large-framed glasses and a jabot—and another woman made headlines in January for having a likeness of the judge tattooed on her upper arm. There’s even an entire blog—“Notorious R.B.G.,” a reference to murdered rapper Notorious B.I.G.—devoted to cataloguing Ginsburg memes and stories in a way that makes her seem cool and tough, like the rapper. The *Atlantic*’s David A. Graham wasn’t wrong when he wrote that a “supreme cult of personality” has sprung up around Ginsburg.

All of which might seem odd,

because Americans typically reserve their political hero worship for holders of the highest elected offices. Ronald Reagan inspired nearly as much adoration among conservatives as



... but awakens for a hug.

Barack Obama once did among liberals. But the landscape has changed in many ways since 2008. Political figures are now turned into memes—which makes them easier to laugh at but harder to criticize earnestly. Take Joe Biden (please). If Ginsburg is America’s hardheaded but lovable Jewish grandmother, Biden is the embarrassing but endearing uncle. The media—especially the quasi-progressive *Opinion*, which features him as a recurring character in their made-up, satirical news stories—have helped turn the gaffe-prone vice president into the bumbling but ultimately harmless “Uncle Joe,” allowing his admirers to laugh off his

more offensive blunders (such as his off-color terms for Jews and Asians).

Ever since George Washington left office, American politicians have used charisma and personality to improve their chances of winning elections. But jurists have always been immune to such concerns. The Framers insisted that judicial rulings be determined by the merits of the arguments, not the will of the public. That’s why Supreme Court justices aren’t elected by the people or their representatives and hold lifetime tenure.

By and large, the Court’s members have embraced the insulation and professional privacy afforded them by the Constitution. They have seldom sought the spotlight, preferring to appear disinterested and even boring—“sober,” as Ginsburg put it. So only in truly exceptional cases, such as Chief Justice Roger Taney’s ruling against the Lincoln administration in *Ex parte Merryman*, have they emphatically challenged particular politicians’ particular policies.

But this idea of the Court—that it should be and historically has been relatively disinterested—is falling out of vogue. In progressive legal circles, it is now considered naïve to think that the Court can simply interpret the law; that’s not only impracticable, these theorists say, but impossible. Rather than arguments about what a word or a clause means, or whether some standard of proof has been met, judicial disagreements are really petty squabbles over interest groups or impasses caused by incompatible values. The Court thus becomes just another political arena within which the parties can fight their battles, and the justices become politicians (as if America needs any more of those).

Ruth Bader Ginsburg didn’t create this state of affairs. One might say, in fact, that it created her. Her witty wisecracks have given rise to a cult of personality because they showcase her dedication to advancing political causes, not a dispassionate pursuit of justice. But her celebrity will help undermine what respect Americans have left for the Court as an impartial, nonpartisan institution. ♦

IMAGES: NEWSCOM

Violent Extremist vs. Holy Warrior

The consequences of the president's linguistic dodge

BY RUEL MARC GERECHT

Is Barack Hussein Obama wrong to avoid appending “Islamic,” “Muslim,” “Islamist,” or even “jihadist” to the terrorism that has struck the West with increasing ferocity since the 1990s? This question has at least two parts: Is the president historically correct to do this? And is he politically smart to do it?

The president could be a historical ignoramus and yet be strategically right to use the linguistic dodge. If Islam really is a faith that lends itself to hideous violence, does it do any good for a Christian American president, especially one with Muslim forebears, to censure Muslims for their failings? The American right is chock-full of folks who show Christian hubris when they highlight the Islamic world's manifest problems. Intentionally or not, a presidential bully pulpit could egg them on. Michael Gerson, George W. Bush's lead speechwriter, recently wrote in the *Washington Post* a defense of Obama's and Bush's appeals for an irenic interpretation of the Islamic faith. In Gerson's view, an American president just can't say unkind things about a religion with a billion-plus believers. Gerson may have overlooked Bush's brief flirtation with—and sincere intellectual curiosity about using—“Islamofascist” to refer to jihadists, but his point is well taken: Bush finally decided not to use provocative, religiously laden language in public to refer to Muslim radicals.

Obama is doubtless well aware that the Islamic world

has a particular problem with “violent extremism,” as are counterterrorist officials and analysts elsewhere in the government. Obama may personally be afflicted with a bad case of Edward Said Syndrome, a malady brought on by reading the late Columbia professor's *Orientalism* at an impressionable age, which renders liberals incapable of seriously criticizing Muslims for fear of being seen as racist, imperialist, or inauthentic. But he nonetheless

understands enough—as do lower-level officials in the Department of Homeland Security, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Central Intelligence Agency, who still target militant Muslims at home and abroad more assiduously than they target potentially violent Marxists and neo-Nazis. The president's linguistic gymnastics probably don't much affect the way the U.S. government operates; we haven't returned to the Clinton years, when the FBI really did rein in its surveillance for fear of violating the civil liberties of even visiting Muslims.

To be sure, political correctness can intrude into how cops do their work. The massacre at Fort Hood, Texas, in 2009 certainly suggested that the U.S. Army had allowed political correctness to deter a thorough assessment of Major Nidal Malik Hasan before he killed. Even so, domestic counterterrorism since 9/11 has remained a politically incorrect profession in the United States and Europe. The rise of the Islamic State, with its thousands of Western Muslims flocking to the cause, has guaranteed that disposition will continue.

The primary danger is that the president's sensitivities about Islam may have prevented a more effective strategy for dealing with Muslim holy warriors overseas. Having the history wrong seldom conduces to sound foreign policy. Disconnecting rhetoric from history can easily lead



A European depiction of marauding Ottomans in 1568

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to sloppy thinking and baleful action. As Bernard Lewis pointed out 25 years ago in the *Atlantic Monthly*, the roots of Muslim rage against the West are deep. What if being provocative were actually a good thing strategically? What if provocative rhetoric from Western officials could actually help bring into focus the all-critical internal discussion among faithful Muslims about “violent extremism”?

No one in his right mind would want an American president to encourage a clash of civilizations—to do an American version of the vituperations hurled at us by Iran’s supreme leader, Ali Khamenei. If the Muslim Middle East is going to progress, democratic space will need to be made for people of faith to participate in politics. American words and actions that encourage the region’s secular generalissimos to pummel the politically religious, which is what Obama and his secretary of state have done in Egypt, can only intensify the anger that religious Muslims feel toward the United States without any lasting strategic gain for the West. We certainly don’t want Western officials on anti-Islam rants suggesting to Muslims that they must accept the latest Western values before they have any right to self-government.

Internal political, cultural, and religious evolutions—the three, as any reader of Tocqueville knows, are inseparable—are the key to extirpating the Muslim radicalism that mutates into jihadism. American rhetoric and actions should always be keyed to encouraging the pacific and democratic evolution of the Muslim world’s politics. We want Muslims to have great debates about man, God, and holy law. We want them to have searing discussions about political sovereignty and self-government (which many of our Arab “allies” in the fight against the Islamic State would not like). Westerners have often provoked great debates among Muslims. All of the liberal advances in the Middle East have come about through Western stimulation and sometimes Western coercion.

Obama’s way hasn’t so far produced any notable success overseas: Islamic militancy, which always has an anti-American edge, is more powerful today than when Bush left office. Whether one scans the Arabic, Persian, or even Turkish media, it’s hard to see any lessening of anti-American agitation since Obama announced in his Cairo speech in June 2009, “I consider it part of my responsibility as president of the United States to fight against negative stereotypes of Islam wherever they appear.”

Obama’s anodyne discussion of Islam and Muslim holy warriors is surely linked to his determination to withdraw the United States militarily from the Middle East. Downplaying the Islamic quotient in terrorism dovetails well with downsizing what the United States can and should do to fight jihadists. It’s possible to be intellectually serious about the nature of Islamic radicalism and also be

disinclined to support any substantial increase in American military efforts against the Islamic State. Graeme Wood’s much-noted piece in the *Atlantic*, “What ISIS Really Wants,” is an example of serious reflection on the religious roots of the Islamic State’s radical appeal paired with a reluctance to commit more American ground troops to the Middle East. But that’s not where the president and his intellectual compatriots are. Obama obviously believes that his rhetoric is moral, strategically astute, and historically sound or he wouldn’t cling to it so tightly. It takes an intellectually fearless man to host a conference on “violent extremism”—after the Islamic State has conquered a big slice of the Middle East and the *Charlie Hebdo* murders have rocked Europe—that specifically aims to curtail any discussion of the Islamic components of the terrorism brewed in the Greater Middle East.

ISLAMIC HISTORY REVISITED

At the heart of Obama’s palliative approach is the oft-heard sentiment that “Islam is a religion of peace.” All great faiths, even those that laud the warriors among them, ultimately promise some peaceful transcendence and comity among men. Like any religion that lasts, Islam has given enormous comfort to its believers. Anyone who has spent much time visiting Islamic shrines can see the decency and kindness that pilgrims bring to them. In the Middle Ages and into the modern era, an objective traveler wandering through Christian Europe and the Muslim lands would certainly have viewed the former as the more bellicose and intolerant. In Islam’s many variants since its birth in 7th-century Arabia, “peace” has even sometimes been the explicit goal. Sufi mystics and merchants preaching an eclectic doctrine in which love and fraternity figured prominently helped spread Islam into southern Asia. But Sufism isn’t just the love poetry of 13th-century mystic Jallaludin Rumi, so prominently displayed in new-age bookshops. Like much else in early Islamic history, Sufism quickly developed a “warrior tradition.” It mellowed with time, but as late as the 16th century, perhaps the most famous and wildly eclectic Sufi order, the Safavids, went jihadist and, under the leadership of their sheikh-turned-demigod-turned-shah Ismail I, conquered Iran and irrevocably converted that land to Shiism.

Religions are forged and reformed by their believers. They do not exist, as Obama seems to suggest and Islamic fundamentalists insist, as fully formed ideals. Islam has evolved. The religion’s birth, however, has had an irresistible centripetal pull on the faithful. The Koran is the literal word of God. What is vouchsafed to the believer in the Koran—inheritance laws, private property, multiple wives,

slavery, to name just a few divinely ordained “rights”—has not easily been denied him by Westernized Muslim dictators in modern times. Muhammad is the central player in Islamic history. The ethical, political, and juridical structure of all Islamic societies—even Shiite ones, where the prophet’s son-in-law and cousin Ali and his descendants are a theological aristocracy—in important ways hinge on Muhammad’s life. Rice University historian David Cook nicely sums up this dependency:

The *hadith* literature [purported statements by the prophet or purported eyewitness accounts of his actions], thus, is the basis for the *sunna* [way of the prophet], and upon these traditions rest the equally vast edifice of the *sharia*, the Divine Law, which is the supreme legal expression of medieval Islam. This classical Muslim civilization is the fountainhead of all contemporary Muslim societies.

And the prophet was a military leader. An indispensable part of the accepted historical record of Muhammad drawn up by revered compilers of his “traditions” Ibn Ishaq (d. 767) and al-Waqidi (d. 822) carries the title *Kitab al-Maghazi, The Book of Battles*. Although it would be historically and religiously gross to reduce Muhammad’s life to his military campaigns, or to view the Koran primarily through its discussion of wars between the faithful and infidels, it is simply dishonest, let alone insulting to the Muslim faithful, to turn Muhammad and his close companions, who became caliphs of an ever-expanding empire, into apostles of peace.

For centuries the faithful have understandably admired their warrior prophet who overcame tremendous odds to triumph over the superior forces of unbelief. Similarly, the early caliphs with Bedouin armies laid low two great empires—the Persian Sassanid and the Byzantine. When the leading figures of modern Islamic militant thought—the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb, the Indian-Pakistani Abu Ala Mawdudi, and the Iranian Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini—developed their doctrines of holy war, they were following a well-worn path back to the prophet.

So, too, the Islamic State. This rampaging outfit may be crude, without a first-rate mind among them, but they aren’t historically illiterate. Muhammad and the “Rightly-Guided” Caliphs—Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali—created a massive conquest society. As Graeme Wood noted in his essay, these 21st-century holy warriors are not squeamish about enslaving captives for the simple and undeniable reason that the prophet and the early caliphs weren’t squeamish about enslaving or killing many of those they conquered. Muhammad put to the sword all of the males of the Jewish tribe of the Banu Qurayza, who had rebelled against his rule, and enslaved all its women and children. In the 7th century, this act was disturbing but hardly uncommon among warring societies.

Obama has called Muslim “violent extremists,” including al Qaeda and the Islamic State, a “perversion” of Islam. That’s a sensible, modern view, one with which many Muslims agree. But they agree primarily because most contemporary Muslims have left behind the ethics of a 7th-century conquest society. Any informed and sensitive Muslim, nevertheless, understands how the Islamic State—and Qutb, Mawdudi, and Khomeini before it—plays on the historical nerves of Muslims. Islamic militants have been resilient in modern times in part because they draw on a beloved narrative that cannot be easily gainsaid by faithful Muslims. Even secularized Muslims can be unnerved by historical arguments that get too close to the prophet. It’s difficult for many Muslims to tackle head-on the immorality of the past, as seen from today, when the Koran, the prophet, and his companions come into view. The Koran, it always bears repeating, was dictated by God.

Christians inevitably view faith through the lens of Jesus, who was nothing like a military leader. Yet for a time, Western Christianity was led by Germanic princes who excelled at combat and slaughter. Theirs might have become a real warrior’s faith, especially after popes Gregory VII and Urban II—reacting to the destruction of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in 1009 by the Fatamid caliph al-Hakim and to the battle of Manzikert in 1071, where Seljuk Turks broke the back of Byzantine power in Anatolia—launched the Crusades to save and recapture the Christian Near East. But Orthodox Christianity was never comfortable with Byzantine emperors trying to turn the faith into a weapon. When the emperor Nicephorus Phocas (963-969), who led Byzantine armies back into the lost province of Syria, “attempted to institute,” as the Michigan historian Michael Bonner tells us, “a kind of crusade, granting the martyr’s halo to the soldiers of Christ who had ‘sacrificed their lives to serve the holy emperors and to liberate and avenge the Christians,’” the Orthodox clergy “nipped this effort in the bud, citing a 4th-century canon of Basil the Great that recommended that Christian Roman soldiers who had killed in war be excluded from the sacraments for a period of three years. The Byzantines persisted in their old ideas, afterward finding the Latin Crusaders, with their fighting priests, at least as dangerous and barbarous as the Saracens.”

Christian revisionism—adapting the faith to a secularizing age—has proceeded more smoothly because Jesus gave theological liberals so much more material to work with. It’s easy for them to transform Jesus into an apostle of love for the LGBT community. Trying to similarly transmogrify the prophet Muhammad just doesn’t work. Pick other progressive Western causes—pick older liberal ideas like the individual’s inalienable, “natural” rights—and

it's hard for many faithful Muslims to look back at the prophet respectfully and lovingly and balance it all out. Westernization of the Muslim world has been changing minds profoundly for two centuries, but it has also been generating a reaction—Islamic fundamentalism—that anchors its legitimacy in the *sunna* of the prophet. President Obama's glib discussion of Islam depicts Muslims as if they'd already successfully made the jump into the ethical realm that is, more or less, our own.

HELPFUL PROVOCATION

A more thoughtful, productive presidential approach to the Muslim predicament would be an honest discussion of Islam's difficult passage into the modern era. It would be useful to keep in mind the issue of slavery, which Muslims failed to confront until Great Britain sent the Royal Navy to interdict slaving ships. (The Muslim slave trade, largely supplied through emirates in eastern Africa and the Arabian peninsula, was much larger than the North Atlantic trade.) With time and constant Western pressure, Westernizing Muslim elites changed their minds about the propriety of slavery. Unlike in the West, however, the clergy was not on the cutting edge of emancipation. To this day, disquisitions by accomplished theologians on the evil of slavery are, to put it politely, rare. The prophet casts a long shadow.

It may be an unbearable contradiction for many on the left, but it's no coincidence that the Arab world's most liberal moment occurred when European imperial powers—chiefly Great Britain and France—still held sway throughout the region. European domination didn't prevent Westernizing Muslims, who usually loathed European supremacy as much as traditional Muslims did, from absorbing and advocating Western ideas. The cleverer ones tried hard, not always with great success, to clothe these appealing foreign notions in Islamic garb. And European imperialists could be witheringly offensive to their Muslim subjects. President Bush's brief (and commendable) use of "Islamofascist" seems like a study in good etiquette by comparison.

It's in all probability not a coincidence that the so-called Arab Spring exploded after the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq superheated the debate about representative government in the Middle East. Most Arab democrats loudly condemned America's war against Saddam Hussein—and yet, when the Great Arab Revolt began in Tunisia in 2010, no one argued that America's actions had compromised the appeal of self-government. This is not a recommendation that the United States be overbearing towards the Middle East's Muslims, shouldering a new "white man's burden." It's just to suggest that we

shouldn't treat Muslims like children. They can withstand stiff debate from non-Muslims, even those they loathe.

Tocqueville can always help. He highlighted in *Democracy in America* the intolerant and lethal religious statutes that early Anglo-Americans had established in some of the colonies. He writes:

Among these documents we shall notice as especially characteristic the code of laws promulgated by the little state of Connecticut in 1650. The legislators of Connecticut begin with the penal laws, and strange to say, they borrow their provisions from the text of Holy Writ.

"Whosoever shall worship any other God than the Lord," says the preamble of the Code, "shall surely be put to death." This is followed by 10 or 12 enactments of the same kind, copied verbatim from the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy. Blasphemy, sorcery, adultery, and rape were punished with death; an outrage offered by a son to his parents was to be expiated by the same penalty. . . . The Code of 1650 abounds in preventive measures. It punishes idleness and drunkenness with severity . . . and simple lying, whenever it may be injurious, is checked by a fine or a flogging. In other places the legislator, entirely forgetting the great principles of religious toleration that he had himself demanded in Europe, makes attendance on divine service compulsory, and goes so far as to visit with severe punishment, and even death, Christians who chose to worship God according to a ritual differing from his own.

Tocqueville goes on to suggest that it was the very power of local, republican government, which had instituted these severe measures, that also mitigated their enforcement. America became the world's greatest debating society. More often than not, religion in America became a vehicle for liberal, individual empowerment, a complementary, inextricable adjunct to the ballot box. So much of Washington has now relegated the democratic experiment in the Middle East to the trash bin. On the left and right, we find applause for the Egyptian dictator, general-turned-president Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. But we've been down that road before. Sisi's predecessors tried to kill off Islamic militancy, only to help it grow. Egypt, still the pivotal Arab land, is now a society without debate.

In the end, Muslims will have to solve their own problems. American military power will likely be an essential factor—much more than Obama can possibly condone—in ensuring that Islamic radicalism doesn't create another effective base for terrorist operations against the West. The Western bully pulpit, a tool unused under Obama, could play a big role. But Muslims have to do the heaviest intellectual lifting. The odds are good they can do so only as Westerners did: through the gradual expansion of the rights of man via unrelenting, often brutal, sometimes bloody debates. In other words, democracy, with all its frightful messiness, remains the answer. ♦

Hidden in Plain Sight

*What the Democrats hope you will keep on ignoring
about Obama's foreign policy*

BY DAVID GELERNTER

President Obama has ignored the recent history of U.S. foreign policy, faithfully repeating failed strategies and turning his back on successes. The pattern is so strange and striking, we can almost hear it trying to tell us something. The something is this: You cannot be a nationalist and a globalist simultaneously; not if you take either of those ideologies seriously. The president takes them very seriously, and has made it clear that he is not a nationalist but a globalist.

Globalists believe that nations should act together. Globalists denigrate or dismiss such ideas as national interests, traditional alliances, and traditional enmities. They believe in the interests of ethnic communities or peoples and of the world as a whole, not of old-fashioned nations. They recoil from traditional alliances, which fracture the seamless world community into small-scale liaisons. Because they reject national interests, they reject traditional enmities. And naturally globalists believe in international organizations, and the inevitability, in the long term, of the whole world's uniting. They see Europe as the world's most sophisticated place by far, and the EU as the obvious model and advance guard for world unity.

There's nothing wrong with being a globalist. But if you are a serious globalist, obviously you cannot be a serious nationalist too: You cannot *also* believe that "my country's interests always come first," that our goal in world politics must be to promote our national interests first and mankind's second. A morally serious nationalist will tend to believe that his country's interests and mankind's often coincide. But that doesn't mean that his nation's interests are usually the same as other *nations'*, or that his national interests are *necessarily* the same as mankind's.

The president's deafness to history is one of his defining traits. It can hardly shock us. In many cases it goes no deeper than the fact that history is not the president's strong suit;

he's not interested. He has told us so himself over the years, in richly revealing campaign slips. But a president's repeating policies that have failed in the *recent* past, his ignoring historical precedents that his aides will *obviously* have told him about, can be crucial in understanding his worldview. When he takes the trouble to ignore precedent, to repeat something that has been tried and has failed, he's putting stickers all over the policies he is repeating. They say, Look at This! This Is Important! Pay Attention! You might believe that history tells us that this is a bad idea. But I think it's such a *good* idea that I'm doing it anyway.

Obama's foreign policy tells us something crucial about the man and the Democrats that, on the whole, we'd rather not know. But we have a duty to know it.

Consider one of his most important and characteristic acts (a true Obamanation). He removed American troops from Iraq as abruptly as a child snatching away a cloth from a set table to show us that nothing moves. Someone should have told the president that this trick never works. But Obama had promised during the campaign to "end the war in Iraq."

Of course George W. Bush had already ended it, by winning. The surge and first-rate leadership on the ground had left al Qaeda with no important Iraqi territory under its thumb, with its leader (Zarqawi) dead and its leadership rejected by the Sunnis who were supposed to be its powerbase. So "ending the Iraq war" didn't mean ending the war; to Obama, it meant removing every last American.

Now, our Iraqi victory had not come cheap. It was a costly, precious accomplishment that should have been laid down and treasured like fine wine awaiting maturity. Instead, Obama tossed it casually at the nearest garbage can and missed.

Saddam Hussein's murderous, totalitarian Iraq had been smashed to pieces and then glued carefully back together in the shape of a sane, democratic nation. But the glue needed time to set. The State Department and Pentagon had settled on 10,000 as the minimum number of U.S. troops to stay behind while the new Iraq stabilized. The major Iraqi political parties had agreed. But Obama was restless. No doubt he had looked forward for the longest time to ending a war. His

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administration proceeded to undercut its own decision, and the Iraqis who had agreed to it, by waffling on the number of Americans to remain behind. Obama reveled in the subsequent collapse of status-of-forces talks with Iraq, pulled every last man out, and celebrated the “end of the war.” Two and a half years later, American troops are back, facing not a sane, reconstructed nation but a simmering catastrophe.

Even before we glance at history, we can see a crucial piece of Obamic philosophy through the loose weave of events. The Iraq war had been won—a great gain that had come at great cost; Obama’s only duty was *not to screw it up*. Why would he risk failure at this tremendously simple and important assignment?

Because for Obama, our victory in Iraq was not the kind of victory that counts. It was a mere victory for America. What matters for Obama is not America’s victories over her enemies but Democratic victories over Republicans. Those are *real* victories. And I am not accusing the president of mere small-mindedness. His views emerge from deep beliefs that conservatives would rather ignore, and the left would rather have them ignore.

The Democratic left is increasingly a globalist party. The left is frankly tired of the whole nation-state bit. Obamiacs see themselves as citizens of the world. The globalist urge is evident in Europe, but you see it on display in America too in its early stages, announced clearly by our leading universities—as ever, the heart of the establishment. It’s not just a matter of what our fanciest universities think and teach but what they do. They are passionately anxious to go global and are opening new campuses all over to prove it—in Asia and the Middle East especially. The sooner they become truly global, the sooner they can stop being American.

As for the president, it is obvious that American interests don’t move him. He is protected only by our natural reluctance to say so, or even think so. Yet how could he *be* any plainer? He wants to open our borders and blur the line between citizen and inhabitant, harmonize our health care with Europe’s, fulminate about *the* quintessential globalist issue—man-made climate change—and, in foreign affairs, act like one more low-key, stylish European nation. Our ambassador to Libya was murdered in Benghazi. To kill an ambassador, who stands for us and speaks for us, for *the whole nation*, is a crime *against* the whole nation and was intended to be. No self-respecting state could conceive of leaving such a crime unpunished. Yet Obama reacted as if this assault on America were a low-grade political nuisance for the Democratic presidential campaign. Did he feel it *as an American*? The answer is obvious.

Michael Doran recently argued, in *Mosaic*, that détente with Iran has always been the hidden center of Obama’s foreign policy. He is convincing; I agree with him. But one can be convinced by Doran and still search deeper, for the reason

behind Obama’s flagrantly outrageous reaction to Benghazi and other striking decisions that go beyond Iran.

How much more clearly can he spell it out? Obama *doesn’t care about “American interests.”* He has *moved beyond them* to higher and more important things—to the welfare of the whole world, not just America. The very idea of America strikes him as antiquated, primitive, embarrassing. And, naturally, the road to globalism runs straight through the Democratic party.

New York’s ex-mayor Rudy Giuliani made big headlines last week by accusing the president of not loving America; of lacking patriotism. Giuliani ought to have known that one can’t make such accusations without evidence. And even if the evidence is forthcoming, the accusation will be treated unenthusiastically (to say the least) by an establishment that dislikes and disapproves of patriotism. It doesn’t yet feel entitled to say so, but that doesn’t change the facts.

The view of Obama I outline here is related to Giuliani’s, but I’m not accusing the president of anything. I merely note that, given the conflicting ideologies of patriotism or nationalism versus globalism, the president obviously prefers globalism. My goal is to understand the assumption that connects many seemingly unrelated Obama policies—and (equally important) the ways in which these assumptions are shared by many other Democrats.

At the same time, Giuliani’s statements struck a chord (or a nerve) everywhere. They were ill-considered, indiscreet. But many people have been thinking along the same lines as they watch the administration’s increasingly reckless and bizarre reaction to jihadist terrorism.

Obama wants jihadist terror to be like street crime. Mere street criminals can’t dismember a city. Globalism would be likewise untouched by random terrorism that affects every nation equally. But jihadist terrorism makes a lie of globalism. It proclaims (just as Nazi Germany, Stalinist Russia, and Imperial Japan proclaimed) that “our interests and the rest of the world’s are irreconcilable, and our interests must dominate everyone else’s.”

It is likewise natural that, in Iraq, the president should have exchanged an American victory over al Qaeda for a Democratic victory over Republicans. In the long run, American victories are unimportant. But *party* victories for the Democrats point to the beautiful globalist future.

The same thing has happened before—albeit in different circumstances. In Vietnam, as in Iraq, we had got ourselves into deep trouble before a radical shift in strategy turned the war around. In June 1968, Creighton Abrams replaced William Westmoreland as American commander. Abrams focused the U.S. war effort on making South Vietnam safe, village by village, instead of using enemy body counts as the decisive measure of success. The U.S. public was satisfied: The 1972 presidential election became a referendum on the

war. “Come home, America!” exhorted George McGovern, a proto-Obama—as he lost to Richard Nixon in a landslide.

But the cultural revolution—the decisive event in American history between the Second World War and today—had turned the establishment against the war. And then came Watergate, Nixon’s bizarrely elaborate and prolonged *Götterdämmerung*. Gerald Ford became president. When North Vietnam violated the ’73 cease-fire agreement by invading the South (again), President Ford desperately sought emergency funds from Congress to support South Vietnam. Congress refused. Saigon fell. The congressional Democrats had won a great victory—against the Republicans.

“Let’s pull every last man out of Iraq; to hell with the consequences.” Not so different from “Let’s pull every last man out of Vietnam; to hell with the consequences.” Of course in Vietnam, the results were no catastrophe—except for the untold thousands who were driven out to sea in rowboats, shot to death, or slowly murdered in reeducation camps. The main thing was, the Republicans were trounced. It took eight years of Reagan to rebuild American capability and confidence, to recover from the left-Democratic 1970s.

It’s probably not fair to say that the post-Watergate Congress was indifferent to America in the modern globalist sense. Then, the Democratic left clearly disliked America—but the “global economy,” the EU, and the Internet had yet to present the obvious globalist alternative. Still, Obama’s affinity for the anti-Vietnam war Democrats is as clear as his affinity for Jimmy Carter.

Many of Obama’s foreign policy disasters go back to Jimmy Carter and the shah of Iran. The fall of the shah was a complicated story. He was a friend of the West—yet he and his secret police had ruled brutally. But towards the end of his reign (and his life) he wanted to compromise. Carter’s government was split: National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski and his pro-shah hardliners versus Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and his gentleman leftists. For a long time, Carter went with Brzezinski. Then he switched to Vance. The shah had appointed a moderate government whose head (Bakhtiar) decided the shah himself must get out. The shah, tired and dying, looked to Washington to decide. After much pondering and throat-clearing, Carter agreed with Bakhtiar. The shah left. Catastrophe followed.

For Carter this was truly a hard problem, way over his head. Obama might have profited from Carter’s mistakes, but chose to replicate them instead. When brave Iranians swarmed the streets of Tehran protesting tyranny in the summer of 2009, Obama blew them off. Not even Carter combined so successfully the twin policies of toadying to the mullahs and getting them to hate you at the same time.

Obama instinctively prefers America’s enemies to its

allies: The logic of globalism suggests that America should neutralize its unfair advantage by favoring enemies—not just Iran but Russia and China—and cold-shouldering friends, such as Israel and Canada. Carter’s instincts were the same. But Carter was honest enough to admit, after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, that he had completely misjudged Moscow. Putin’s invasion of Crimea and eastern Ukraine gave Obama the same opportunity to correct himself under the cover of events—which he brushed off.

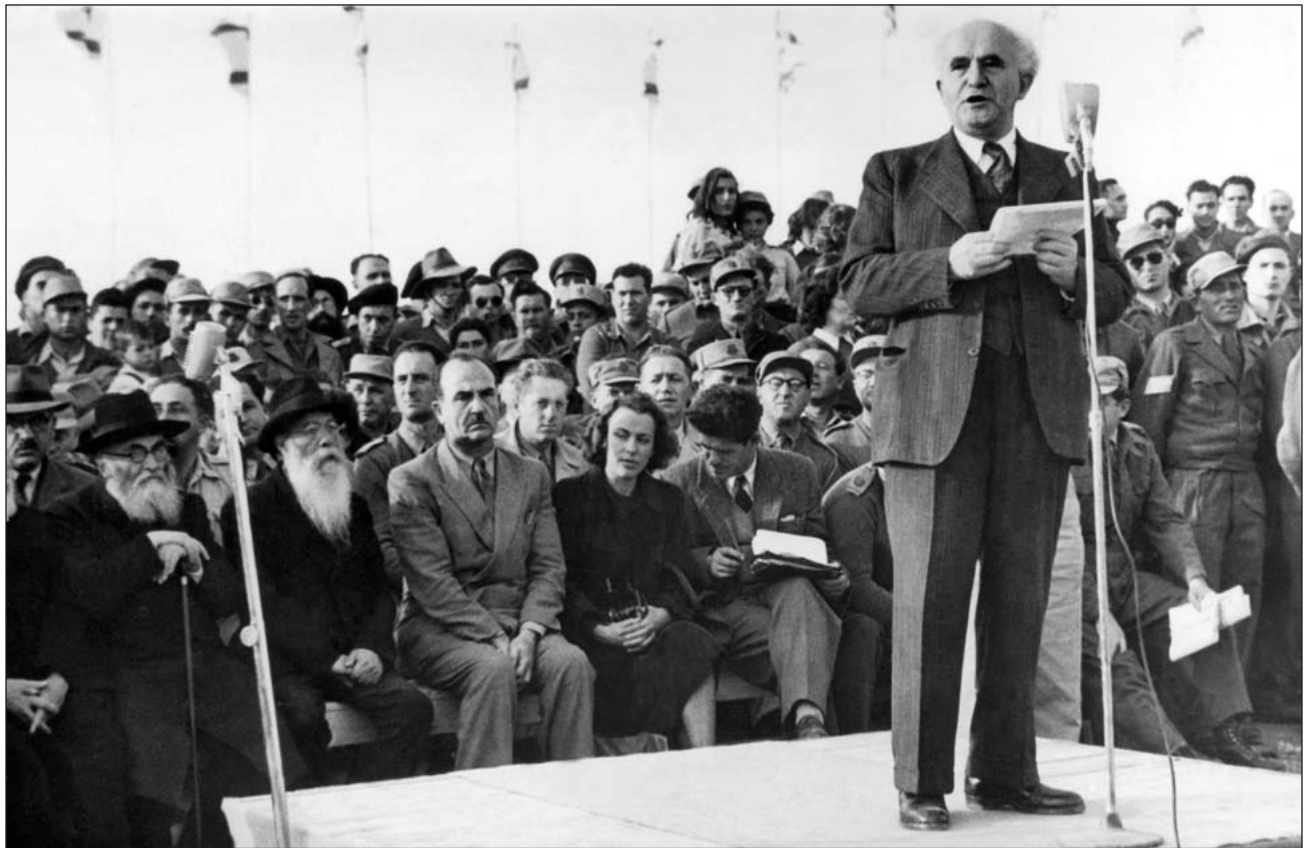
Obama tacitly supported the Iranian mullahcracy, but would not support Mubarak in Egypt. He shrugged off Mubarak’s long history of standing with Washington—and let him be knocked off. Although Libya’s Muammar Qaddafi had made the dramatic gesture of laying his nuclear arms at our feet, Obama helped knock over Qaddafi too—again, with no apparent thought about what was to follow. Obama carefully postponed support for the rebels in Syria until the situation there was out of control.

George W. Bush had a useful doctrine that Obama has also made a point of ignoring. It was a supremely sane and important doctrine, although Bush never “enunciated” it; it was common sense and he took it for granted. The rule in a rough neighborhood is, hit me once and I’ll hit you twice, *hard*. This is how you deal with young thugs who are old enough to hit but not think. The world at large saw our reaction to 9/11 in simple terms. We smashed the Afghan government and then we smashed the Iraqi government. We had good reasons to go into Iraq, but in larger terms we could have accomplished the same thing by destroying the governments of Syria or Libya. Our message said *don’t mess with us*, loud and clear.

We know the Bush policy worked because the terrorists failed to capitalize on the momentum of 9/11 by murdering more Americans. We know it worked by Qaddafi’s voluntarily surrendering his nuclear weapons in 2004, to get on our good side—suddenly it *mattered* whether you were on our good side.

We must be far more careful, in the future, to ask our presidential candidates a delicate, embarrassing, but crucial question. How much do you care about the United States of America? About this nation versus the world at large? Where do you stand on nationalism (on *Americanism*) versus globalism? Of course it won’t be easy to get straight answers where they actually count.

Not to care much about America doesn’t make you mean or bad—you might care deeply about the welfare of the poor, about the lives of women or religious minorities or the elderly or wild animals or domestic animals, about international trade or space exploration or world peace. You might be a fine candidate for sainthood. But you are a rotten candidate for president. Think carefully about Obama and his record—please!—before you turn the page. ♦



David Ben-Gurion at the opening of the road from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem (1948)

Israel's 'Old Man'

The long life, and longer reach, of David Ben-Gurion.

BY BENJAMIN BALINT

In one of his more whimsical short stories, the late Israeli satirist Efraim Kishon pits two characters against one another in a game of “Jewish poker,” a game “played without cards, in your head, as befits the People of the Book.” The rules are simple: Whoever thinks of a higher number wins the round. In the end, one character, sure of his triumph, reports that he has thought of infinity. The other, not to be outdone, cries, “Ben-Gurion!” and takes the pot. Both players accept that there can be no higher.

Benjamin Balint is a writer in Jerusalem.

Ben-Gurion
Father of Modern Israel
by Anita Shapira
translated by Anthony Berris
Yale, 288 pp., \$25

In a concise new biography, Anita Shapira, professor emerita of Jewish history at Tel Aviv University and doyenne of Israeli historians, expertly charts David Ben-Gurion's transformation from labor leader (as secretary-general of the Histadrut, or General Federation of Jewish Labor, 1921-35) to national figure (as prime minister, 1948-53, and minister of

defense, 1955-63). Along the way, she gives us the materials to understand why Israel's founding father remains, in the eyes of many Israelis, both the ne plus ultra of statesmanship and an enduring presence in the country's political imagination.

The man at the center of one of the great dramas of the 20th century came into the world as the son of a pettyfogger from Plonsk, Poland. The teenage Ben-Gurion joined the Marxist Zionist party (Poale Zion) and left town at age 18 for Warsaw, where he discovered his life's purpose. Unlike the devout Jews who placed their trust in God, or the assimilationists who

KEYSTONE-FRANCE / GETTY IMAGES

put their trust in Europe's enlightened hospitality, Ben-Gurion advocated self-trust. He resolved early on that emigration to Palestine was the only way to save imperiled Jewish life and achieve autonomy. This, in Shapira's telling, remained the first of his lifelong imperatives, the fulcrum of his career in politics: "This state cannot exist without the Jewish people," he said, "and the Jewish people cannot exist without the state."

The short young man, though not favored with charisma, trusted mightily in his own destiny. "God or nature," he wrote in 1904, "endows the genius with sublime talents, not out of love for him, but from a desire to bestow upon the world sublime creations. . . . I trust in the future ahead of me."

In 1906, when he was not yet 20, Ben-Gurion acted on that trust and followed his convictions to Palestine. In his last letter to his father before embarking, he wrote: "A few more hours and I will have left the dark recesses of exile, and from the freedom of the high seas, on the way to the land of our rebirth, I shall send you my greetings."

But after several years working as a farm hand in agricultural settlements, the new immigrant became persuaded that the Jewish rebirth in Palestine, a country which had been under Ottoman rule for four centuries, would depend on the pashas' favor. In 1912, he donned a fez and traveled to Istanbul with a forged matriculation diploma from a Russian gymnasium. He intended to acquire an Ottoman legal education and, ultimately, to join the Turkish parliament "so I shall be able to defend Zionism."

The second of Ben-Gurion's unwavering aims was to secure the support of a world power for the Zionist project. (Compared with this, he often said, reaching an agreement with the Arabs paled in significance.) The aim may have been unchanging, but at a time that saw the dissolution of three empires (Russian, Turkish, and British), the favor of great powers would prove fickle. Shortly after Ben-Gurion's return to Palestine after three years of study in Istanbul, the Turks

decided to deport Zionist activists. Ben-Gurion fled to New York. There, he met Paula Munweis, a nurse from Minsk who would be his wife for the next 51 years.

After the Great War, Ben-Gurion returned to Palestine and devoted himself to courting British power. He toiled to exploit both the Balfour Declaration of 1917—which had pledged British support for a Jewish national home in Palestine—and Winston Churchill's declaration, five years later, that Jews were in Palestine "of right, and not on sufferance."

At the same time, Ben-Gurion, whose Zionism had been inflected early with Marxism, remained ever alert to the rise of Soviet power. As a young man, he had translated a book by the mercurial Marxist professor Werner Sombart, the first book on socialism to be published in Hebrew. Ben-Gurion expressed great admiration for Lenin's ruthless will and regarded the October Revolution as a "sacred revolt." He visited Moscow in 1923 in a failed bid to soften the Kremlin's hostility toward Zionism and to forge ties with Soviet trade unions.

Although his enthusiasm for Marxist teachings and their Soviet manifestations waned in the late 1920s, Ben-Gurion's cast of mind remained fundamentally revolutionary in another sense. Zionism, he wrote in the following decade, "is a revolt against hundreds of years of tradition, the tradition of actual life in the diaspora and the feeble and barren longings for redemption. In place of sterile longing, bloodless, irresolute and ineffectual—the will to realization; in place of rootless diaspora life—efforts to build and be productive upon the soil of the homeland."

This man born of the diaspora came to call the diaspora "shameful" and "imitative." The old religious longing for redemption, he insisted, would be replaced by secular action. Before 1948, at least, he seldom used biblical rhetoric or spoke of the land as an ancient patrimony. He had little intuition for the sacred. Instead, he talked of a productive

labor that would enrich the land for all its inhabitants. Shapira describes a 1934 meeting in Jerusalem between Ben-Gurion and Musa Alami, a Cambridge-educated Arab legal adviser to the British Mandate.

Ben-Gurion opened his talk with Alami in the accepted Zionist manner by describing the development and economic growth the Jews had brought to Palestine. Alami responded that he would prefer the country to remain backward for another hundred years until the Arabs were capable of developing it themselves.

Ben-Gurion could not afford to wait. As the hour of conflagration drew close, his first aim—the immigration and ingathering of exiles—was no longer a matter of mere Zionist theory. In 1933, Ben-Gurion bought a copy of *Mein Kampf* in the Munich train station. He took its menace seriously: "The disaster which has befallen German Jewry," Ben-Gurion forecast a few months later, "is not limited to Germany alone. Hitler's regime places the entire Jewish people in danger." In 1937, he warned of an impending "world-war catastrophe [*shoah*]."

The sense of crisis quickened Ben-Gurion's unflinching resolve. Isaiah Berlin, having met Ben-Gurion, described him as a man "who prefers desperate situations in which he is with his back to the wall, defying all the storms of the world, dying in an agony of glory and violent resistance to everything and everybody, thus canceling many centuries of humiliating Jewish history."

Both before and after the British White Paper of 1939, which closed Palestine's shores to Jewish refugees, Ben-Gurion vigorously advocated for immigration, legal or otherwise. "We must assist the English in their war as if there were no White Paper," he announced, "and resist the White Paper as if there were no war." In sketching Ben-Gurion's deep engagement in promoting mass migration to Palestine, Shapira refutes the charges brought by Tom Segev, in *The Seventh Million* (1993), that Ben-Gurion's state-building monomania rendered him indifferent to the plight of European Jews.

During a trip to Germany in October 1945, Ben-Gurion was the first Jewish leader to visit the displaced persons camps, where he was greeted rapturously, and the former death camps of Dachau and Bergen-Belsen. The chief Jewish chaplain of the U.S. Army in Europe accompanied him to a camp in Zeilsheim, near Frankfurt. The camp's streets were named Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and Bialik (after the national Hebrew poet). Shapira gives us the chaplain's account:

importance to America," Weizmann said in 1943, "in contradistinction to Great Britain, repeating the slogans which one hears occasionally here that the British Empire is doomed, that the greatest force which will emerge out of the war is America."

(Ben-Gurion's search for allies continued through the 1950s, when he confronted the threat posed by Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser, and to the eve of the 1967 war, when he reproached Israeli chief of staff

from his commander, Yigal Allon, the subject of a previous biography by Shapira, to conquer the West Bank.) Later, he oversaw the construction of Israel's nuclear program at Dimona.

Ben-Gurion saw political independence as a means "to cement the unity of the Jewish people . . . and to become a source of dignity and pride for all the Jews of the world." So, too, he regarded the fledgling Israel Defense Forces as an instrument in forging the national ethos. In 1948, a colleague asked him why the government had not set up a ministry of culture. In fact, Ben-Gurion replied, such a ministry already existed: "Today the ministry of culture is the ministry of defense. A hundred thousand Jews are fighting for their people's freedom—that is the greatest human creation in our era. It will serve as a source for literature and art for generations to come."

In 1963, the Old Man, as he was affectionately known, at last abdicated and retired to a modest kibbutz in the wilderness of the Negev. He died a decade later, just after the 1973 war. On his instructions, his simple gravestone overlooking a desert *wadi* bears three dates: that of his birth, his death, and his arrival in the Land of Israel.

Ever since, David Ben-Gurion has threatened to drown his biographers in detail. He saved every letter he wrote. He left 750,000 items in his posthumous papers, including his diaries—50 volumes of them—dating from 1915 until nearly his dying day.

Anita Shapira, who met Ben-Gurion, manages to stay afloat while navigating some treacherous currents. Drawing on the work of biographers Michael Bar-Zohar and Shabtai Tevet, as well as on recently declassified archives, she steers well clear both of hagiography and of the contempt with which Israeli "new historians" regard the father of a country they argue was conceived in sin.

Unlike other writers, and against the grain of her subject's self-perception, Shapira also paints Ben-Gurion in personal, rather than world-historical, terms. Though she uses a large canvas, she does not merely give us a larger-



Harry Truman, Abba Eban, David Ben-Gurion (1949)

As Ben-Gurion stood on the platform before them, the people broke forth into cheers and song, and finally into weeping. At last he began to speak, his voice choked up, his eyes filled. He had to stop as he broke down for a moment. . . . Very few eyes were dry. For the incredible was true: the impossible had happened. Ben-Gurion was in their midst and they had lived despite Hitler.

With the British grip on Palestine loosening, Ben-Gurion tightened the focus and the tempo of his second aim: to recruit international legitimacy and cultivate allies. Unlike his rival Chaim Weizmann, who was still dedicated to backroom diplomacy with Britain, Ben-Gurion forecast the significance of friendship with the United States. "[Ben-Gurion] attaches a decisive

Yitzhak Rabin for putting the country in danger of war in the absence of a powerful ally.)

In May 1948, against Secretary of State George Marshall's cautions, Ben-Gurion declared independence. As Shapira shows, he succeeded not only in imposing a single political authority over a nation that had never, in its long and fragmented dispersal, enjoyed such a thing; he also brought the various militias (Haganah, Palmach, Irgun) under a unified command. He presided over the procurement of military surplus from the United States, directed the year-long war of independence against the invading armies of four Arab states, and determined the state's defensible borders. (He rejected the proposal

than-life embodiment of a nation's aspiration. She shades in a more intimate portrait: an introverted lover of books who would browse incognito in the bookshops of Charing Cross Road; a son and husband beset by loneliness. And by depletion.

When he retired, the Old Man placed the memoirs of Churchill and Charles de Gaulle on his desk and sat down to pen an autobiography for those generations to come. He had published more than 30 books—many of them collections of his pronouncements and speeches—but he now found himself incapable of writing his own life.

In a sense, however, a memoir would have been a superfluity, and not only because Ben-Gurion remains in the marrow of a country impossible to imagine without his fatherhood. As befits the People of Ben-Gurion, Israel's political game still follows his rules. If, today, his successors at once play up the country's defiant self-reliance (we can only count on ourselves), anxiously gauge its international support (can we still count on them?), and pragmatically cultivate alliances (we must count on them)—they are, for better or worse, largely playing the hand that Ben-Gurion dealt. ♦

in the popular vote. He remains a winner, one of the few 19th-century names known to most, and one of the fewer read by many. No other American writer has an NFL team named for one of his poems. The republic of letters has honored his memory, too, with praise from aristocratic poets and prose entertainers alike. Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Valéry saw Poe as an *homme sérieux*, an aesthetic pioneer who heard “supernal ecstasies” in verse, the swish of modern horror in the raven's wing. Arthur Conan Doyle admitted that Poe invented the detective story. H.G. Wells admired his science fiction. Guy de Maupassant adopted Poe's translation of the Gothic supernatural into the modern psychological. William Carlos Williams credited him with a greater translation: Poe created a “New World” of American verse.

There were carpers, however. Emerson dismissed Poe as “the jingle man,” and T.S. Eliot, in his essay “From Poe to Valéry,” accused Poe of “slipshod writing . . . puerile thinking . . . haphazard experiments.” But Eliot also called him the “directest, the least pedantic, the least pedagogical” critic of his age. Poe, he said, was “both the *reductio ad absurdum* and the artistic perfection” of Romanticism, a founder of modern “poetic consciousness.”

Jerome McGann believes that Poe has been underrated as a poet. McGann teaches at the University of Virginia, where Poe briefly studied, and his appeal is not to the mob, the reading public, or the circus performers, the practitioners of verse. His jury is the clergy, not the laity, the imperial souls for whom reading is a “textual event.” It is as difficult a brief as defending Bob Dylan as a novelist, or John Lennon as a nice person.

Poe is an acquired taste, like whiskey or opium. He was a poet in the way that William Blake was an artist: idiosyncratic and obscure, a commercial adventurer who lacked business sense, a marginal antagonist who became a national treasure, an etcher of sharp and violent lines with a dazzled eye for overdone color. His hero was Byron: a first-rate celebrity but a second-rate poet; really, a debauched Augustan. No less

BCA

Poe's Shadow

A look at the laureate of self-destructiveness.

BY DOMINIC GREEN

There he is on the cover of *Sgt. Pepper*, tottering between Carl Jung and Fred Astaire, breathing fumes over Marilyn Monroe's bare back and William Burroughs's bald pate. Edgar Allan Poe, the original Man in Black—before Johnny Cash, before the Beatles in Hamburg, before the bohemians in Paris. The first American rocker, the steampunk wild man, bound for death or glory, and getting both.

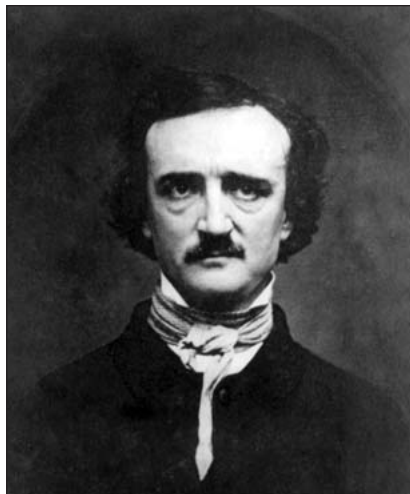
The *Sgt. Pepper* cover is a pantheon, a countercultural sibling of the Valhalla Memorial at Regensburg. The Beatles and designer Peter Blake placed Poe in the center of the back row. If this were a genealogy, he would be the founding father, the unquiet ghost of the pop *unheimlich*. This is the Poe whose “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” Bob Dylan included in the pop pantheon of *Highway 61 Revisited*, along with the names of those other moody entertainers, Ma Rainey and Beethoven;

Dominic Green is the author of The Double Life of Dr. Lopez and Three Empires on the Nile.

The Poet Edgar Allan Poe

Alien Angel

by Jerome McGann
Harvard, 256 pp., \$24.95



the Poe that Lou Reed set to music in *The Raven*; the Robert Johnson of the Romantic blues, martyred at the crossroads of art and commerce.

Sgt. Pepper confirmed Poe's victory

conventionally, Poe called Tennyson the greatest living poet. If Poe's biography is Byron's catastrophe on a budget, his poetry is Tennyson unhinged by Thomas de Quincey. As heroic Romanticism slides into boggling horror, meter becomes an avalanche.

Poe was a peerless self-destructor: He was a liar and a plagiarist, a drunk in the office and a beggar in the street, who pandered to a public he despised and married his 13-year-old cousin. McGann skirts the biographical disaster and concentrates on Poe's writing. But without the tragic setting, Poe's verse wilts into melodrama, and as McGann forgoes context, he takes Poe at his own assessment, which Poe, a chronic self-publicist, supplied in his marginalia and essays.

It is true that in "The Poetic Principle," posthumously published in 1850, Poe describes a Modernist theory of poetry as purely subjective—a refined private music, an art for its own sake. It is also true that, like the Pre-Raphaelite painters of the same period, Poe's 1846 essay on "The Philosophy of Composition" replaces the Romantic pose of "inspiration" with the Modern virtue of technical expertise. Poe, the child of two actors, denies that poetry is the "spontaneous creation" of Coleridge's "Kubla Khan." The aesthetic sublime is a matter of craft and special effects, of levers and pulleys. Poe, says McGann, was an actor in the "theater of post-Romantic artifice," named for Edgar in *King Lear*.

It is no less true that Poe exaggerated his originality. He wrote "The Philosophy of Composition" to capitalize on the success of "The Raven." Like Eliot's footnotes to *The Waste Land*, it is a kind of rarefied press release. The polarities of true poetry and the market, true love and society, were already Romantic commonplaces. In 1781, before Madame de Staël named Romanticism, the machines and moving sets of the stage designer and artist Philip James de Loutherbourg's *Eidophysikon* demonstrated that the Romantic sublime was a technical illusion, a "conscious artifice."

As Mallarmé saw, Poe could not be taken at his own word. Poe did not

take himself at it. Poe the critic warns that showing the audience the "wheels and pinions" of the "machine" will weaken the "legitimate effect" of the performance. Poe the poet does exactly this: His ostentatious rhymes and repeated puns are a Centre Pompidou in verse. Technical excess is part of Poe's originality. It is also part of the problem with Poe.

"Do you know why I have translated Poe so patiently?" Baudelaire asked. "Because he resembled me." In Poe's stories, Baudelaire found "not only subjects dreamed of by me, but phrases thought by me and imitated



Poe's grave in Baltimore

by him, twenty years' earlier." The urban detective in Poe's 1840 story "The Man in the Crowd" predates Baudelaire's *flâneur*, the free-associating "artist of modern life" who drifts in the *paysage opiacée*, the "opiated landscape," of the modern city. Poe called for a confession of the "heart laid bare." Baudelaire wrote its fragments in *Mon Coeur Mis à Nu*.

Baudelaire's translations elevated Poe to a higher key; he became the first American artist to be more esteemed abroad than at home. For Baudelaire, Poe was the model *poète maudit*, the artist-rebel. For Mallarmé, Poe's rhythms were a way out of French traditions. For Valéry, Poe's idea of the self-sufficient poem underpinned the ideal of

la poésie pure. The French connection, McGann says, is "an academic surprise, at least to many American academics."

Why did the French embrace Poe while the Americans recognized him slowly, and with reservations? McGann does not say. But Aldous Huxley explained it in "Vulgarity in Literature" in 1949, the year that Eliot assayed Poe's French influence. As Baudelaire's Poe translations show, the Frenchman was not fluent in English. He was so soaked in French classicism that even his prose ran in Alexandrines—notably, in the preface to *Spleen de Paris*. The stresses in French verse are equal, the stresses in English and Latin verse are not. Huxley says that Baudelaire's imitations of medieval Latin hymns make Bernard of Cluny sound like "he had learned his art from Racine." Baudelaire read Poe with regular stresses, too. A splendid error: Poe joined *les immortels* in a case of mistaken identity.

When the Alexandrine corset is loosened, Roberto Calasso says, the result is an endless "wave" of rhythm. Huxley used the same word—but with a commercial sneer: Like a hairdresser, he said, Poe excelled at the "permanent wave." Poe was a detective of dark emotion, but he lacked what Verlaine called *la Pointe assassine*, the fatal stiletto. He belays with a Byronic hammer, jauntily outrageous. Musicians, especially musicians who deal in heavy rhythms and short stories, love Poe for the same reason that poets doubt him. Poe's verse, like most rock 'n' roll, aspires to the condition of music. The most literate of sixties rockers, Dylan and Reed, made brilliant use of Poe's tricks and gore.

Poe died at age 40, after being found in a gutter on Election Day in another man's clothes, too intoxicated to explain what had happened. The theories are gothic and elaborate (no other writer is suspected of dying from rabies). Plied with drink and drugs, Poe was abducted, marched around to polling booths and forced to vote under assumed identities. Having starved as an artist in the marketplace, he died from a surfeit of democracy. He lives on by the popular vote, too. ♦

One Man's Meat

Finding sustenance in the afternoon serials.

BY WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD



Mary Stuart, Lynn Loring, Karl Weber in 'Search for Tomorrow' (1955)

Why should I, an elderly literary gent who spends much of his time reading, talking, and writing about Shakespeare or W.B. Yeats, spend an hour every weekday watching a soap opera? How odd is it that after a hardworking class teasing out the syntax and ambiguities of Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale*, or some complicated Yeatsian lyric, I come home at noon to plunge wholeheartedly into a world not of language but of characters, of people I like or dislike? After warning students not to "identify" with Prospero or with J. Alfred Prufrock, could I be doing that very thing when one of my favorite soap heroes triumphs or suffers? Is it possible to justify the activity of soap-watching not as a momentary fit or frivolous

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aberration, but as something willingly embraced over four decades?

How did this addiction, if that's what it is, take hold, not to let go?

It must have begun where things tend to begin, in childhood, when, after school, I would listen on the radio to the adventures of *Jack Armstrong, the All-American Boy*, a serial brought to me by Wheaties. Sporadic visits to lunchtime soaps like *The Romance of Helen Trent* or *Our Gal Sunday* or *Ma Perkins* (featuring a lovable fellow named Shuffle) helped things along. But it wasn't until 40 years later that, as a mature adult, I decided to try out a short-lived television soap titled *Somerset*.

Only a half-hour, unlike the other hourlong shows, it didn't seem an excessive amount of time to spend on a diversion. When *Somerset* went under, I moved over to *Search for Tomorrow*, one of the longest-running of the soaps back in 1976. The star of *Search* was an

actress named Mary Stuart, who, as Joanne, endured many trials, tribulations, and a number of partners, the most interesting of whom was a southern fellow named Martin Tourneur (played, I later realized, by the father of Jennifer Aniston, who hadn't yet swum into my ken).

Perhaps as a result of its half-hour status, *Search* fell to the bottom of the ratings, and a local television channel decided to replace it with a mindless talk show. Incensed, I wrote a letter to the powers-that-be deploring this act of wanton brutality. I also sent the letter to our hometown newspaper, which provoked a column about me that was picked up by the national wire services.

Here was a story: How charmingly incongruous that a (respected) college professor should indulge himself in this way! The whole thing, as we now have been taught to say, went viral: "Prof lathers in soaps" was only one of the more inventive headlines the story received. I began to get letters of condolence—all of them from women who, like me, were fans of *Search*. A lady from Georgia even offered to tape the show as it went along and send me the tapes. My phone began to ring with requests for radio interviews and photo opportunities.

The most exciting of the phone calls was from the producers of *Search* itself, inviting me to come to New York City and be king for a day, with a tiny walk-on appearance (they eventually paid me \$75) and a night's dinner and hotel room at their expense. Accordingly, I performed my walk-on task, preceding one of the cast into Bigelow's Bar ("Big's"), where I seated myself on a bar stool and spoke not a word but was given a beer by Big himself.

All very satisfying, but this was not the end of the saga. Upon returning home, I got another call from New York, this one from the folks at *Good Morning America*, which featured the glamorous interviewer Diane Sawyer. I showed up early in the morning to be made-up and primed for my seven-minute talk with Ms. Sawyer. Unfortunately, the two-hour show had scheduled too many players, one

of whom was the infamous Louis Farrakhan, whose brief career in the news involved his less-than-agreeable attitude toward Jews. Farrakhan preceded me and managed to bewitch the interviewer (not Diane Sawyer) into allowing him extra minutes for his rant—thus cutting into and, it seemed, obliterating my own appearance.

“Sorry!” they exclaimed (including Diane) as I, furiously embarrassed, headed outside for a taxi to the airport and a glum trip home.

As I stood on the curb, my makeup still intact, I was followed and hailed by someone from the show announcing that they had squeezed out a seven-minute spot for me after all. Diane Sawyer was charming, alluding to a line from a Yeats poem about how women “eat a crazy salad with their meat” and suggesting that my crazy salad involved soap opera. What did I find absorbing about this low form of art?

Groping for a good answer, I said it was a nice change to step down from Milton into the banalities of daily life in a bogus midwestern city. And I claimed that while poems, plays, and novels have their beginnings, middles, and ends, the soap opera plays a different game, its sole aesthetic purpose being to continue the story from week to week without end, until the network decides to kill it (as they would do to *Search* a couple of years after my intervention).

Is there anything in high art that even approaches the soap in its hopefully endless proliferation? I hadn’t thought of one until the fiercely outspoken reviewer Marvin Mudrick called a novel from Anthony Powell’s series *A Dance to the Music of Time* “the most interminable soap-opera since Australopithecus”—whoever he was. Mudrick’s aim was to abuse Powell’s novels, but since I love the book he was disparaging, it reminded me that I never wanted Powell’s *Dance* to end, would have been content to read on and on.

In fact, the forced ending of any soap opera after the kill order comes in is extremely painful to watch, in its desperate attempt to make a meaningful and satisfying disposal of the remaining good characters (the bad

ones have been gotten out of the way the previous week). When *Search for Tomorrow* breathed its last, Joanne was asked by her longtime pal, Stu, just exactly what she was searching for.

“Tomorrow” said Jo shyly. “And I can’t wait.”

For the past few years, I’ve been watching a highly rated hourlong soap, *The Young and the Restless*. Young they may not all be, but restless they surely are, and should be, worrying about whether they’ll still be in business next year or next week. Many of *Y&R*’s characters are rich, running cosmetic firms or other mysterious enterprises.

The head honcho is Victor Newman, who has been married to more than one of the current characters. He is mainly concerned with Family and will stop at nothing to protect his Legacy. Phyllis—once married to Victor’s son and now wife to Jack Abbott, Victor’s hated rival—has just emerged from a year-long coma (a very useful staple of soaps) and is out to punish those who have betrayed her in the interim. Michael Baldwin, the suave attorney, is “battling” prostate cancer, fearful it

will ruin his husbandly sex life. Neil Winters, another successful businessman, has recently lost his sight and is, as yet, unaware that his glamorous young wife Hilary is getting it on with his son, Devon (a millionaire, by the way).

There are many other ongoing plots I will spare mentioning.

Because of my encasement in the ivory tower, I’ve missed all sorts of current expressions that the soap brings to my attention. I now will attempt to “be there” for someone I love, and under no circumstances will I “bail” on that person but rather “have” his or her back at all times. These cringe-making banalities are really not the fault of the characters, since, in the words of David Slavitt’s poem “Soap Opera,” *They wade through sorrows scriptwriters devise / in kitchens, hospital rooms, divorce courts, jails . . .* The closing lines of this excellent poem may say it all:

Stupid, I used to think and partly still do, deploring the style, the marwiskiness. And yet, I watch. I cannot get my fill of lives as dumb as mine. Pine Valley’s mess is comforting. I need not wish them ill. I watch, and I delight in, their distress. ♦



Past as Prologue

A ‘yes, but’ perspective on ‘what-if’ history.

BY JAMES M. BANNER JR.

A noted historian of modern Germany, Richard J. Evans has entered the lists of historical combatants in recent years as a sharp opponent of counterfactual history—also known as “what ifs.” His entry into this particular fight, one that’s as enjoyable to witness as it is important to understand, shouldn’t be surprising, for, as the author of an earlier work on historical thinking,

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Altered Pasts
Counterfactuals in History
by Richard J. Evans
Brandeis, 176 pp., \$29.95

practices, and findings—*In Defense of History* (1999)—he’s given sustained, deep, and wide-ranging thought to the labors of his professional tribe. This latest book will add to his reputation as a fierce debater. It’s lively, learned, erudite, and damaging. But it’s not the last word.

As Evans points out, what-ifs have a long history, were satirized as long ago as Livy, and began to make their appearance as serious ventures in historical thinking in the 19th century. It's only in recent years, though, that they've gained a large literature and gone beyond what he dismisses as "mind games." When he attributes the size and appeal of this literature to conservative historians' reactions to histories that emphasize large impersonal forces like Marxism, novel theories of historical development like postmodernism, and what they see as the removal of decision-making humans from the center of the field, we know we're entering an ideological boxing ring. But the ideological dimensions of this argument are beside the point and deflect us (as they deflect Evans) from the basic issue: the validity and utility of historical counterfactuals. For, try as hard as Evans and others do to argue against "altered pasts," counterfactual thought is woven into the very structure of the historian's pursuit.

A historical what-if asks what might have occurred if an act, decision, or event had not happened; or, if it had happened, whether things might (or might not) have turned out differently if some preceding act or decision had been otherwise. What if Lee had won at Appomattox?—a famous question wonderfully satirized by James Thurber. What if Truman had decided against dropping atomic bombs on Japan? What if steam power hadn't been invented?

The best what-ifs, as Evans and others are at pains to point out, are of narrow scope, take a "least re-write" approach (imagining only the most minor and proximate adjustments to actual events), are among the options/information/thinking available to the actors of the time (even if other options are known to us now), and meet the test of plausibility. Thus, one doesn't ask whether the change in the flight pattern of a butterfly in Europe might have caused the 19th-century revolutions in Latin America. That offends normal thought. One has to stick close to known facts,

adopt accepted notions of causation, and proceed with prudence in any counterfactual exercise.

As Evans points out, amateurs break these rules routinely. The worst offenders are writers of science fiction, historical novelists, and those with political axes to grind, most of whose counterfactuals are preposterous and should be taken to be precisely what they are: what E. H. Carr famously called "parlour games." So-called alternate histories do no harm as long as they're fenced out of serious historical work. But the fact

done something he didn't do—or avoided doing what he did! Such wistfulness comports readily with conservative impulses; but the left is no stranger to the same line of thinking. There's nothing to be gained by tagging those who support the practice of counterfactual historical speculation as conservatives, at least on the grounds of their employing what-ifs. What-if thinking—whether conservative or liberal, hopeful or dour, dystopian or utopian—can be appealing to all segments of the political spectrum and all kinds of historians.



'Red Dawn' (1984)

that counterfactuals have increasingly become a subject of interest and practice to professional historians is what gets Evans's goat—and I know of no one who's gone at the job of trying to demolish counterfactual thinking among serious historians with more wounding relish than he.

Evans sees counterfactuals as often originating in disappointment: "If only this had happened, we'd be better off." To him, this is simply wishful thinking—the tendency to imagine the world improved if certain things had turned out differently. If we're regretful that Napoleon didn't win at Waterloo (and elsewhere), we naturally try to figure out how he might have emerged victorious. If only he'd

Evans makes a stronger case in attributing the rise of "if-only" thinking to the decline in the appeal of the ideologies that captivated the past two centuries.

As fascism, communism, socialism, Marxism, and other doctrines vanished from the scene or were transmuted into milder, less rigid ideologies . . . so teleologies vanished and history became open-ended, freeing up a space for speculation about the course or courses it might have taken.

Evans blames much of this newly discovered space on "postmodern skepticism" (which he seems to like about as much as conservatives do), because it "freed up writers of all

kinds to imagine what might have been and tie their imaginings in one way or another to real historical events and real historical personalities.” Not surprisingly, Evans has a field day with some of the results. Many of them deserve the drubbing he administers, and here’s where the book best applies its robust energy. But note that Evans himself indulges in an unstated, wistful if-only: If grand ideologies hadn’t lost their authority, then it can be assumed that we wouldn’t have had so much alternate history. Author, you can’t have it both ways!

As Evans also points out, the fading of “isms” has freed more space for the consideration of the roles of major figures in the past—usually political and military ones, who always make for faster-paced history than others. This, Evans argues, makes it easier to speculate counterfactually. It’s far simpler to imagine alterations in the actual past had a single major figure acted differently than to imagine what our world would be like without, say, industrialization or mass communication.

Yet, as Evans argues, when historians indulge in such possibilities, they put “enormous imaginary power” into the hands of such major figures—the ability to see and comprehend more than most mortals can. And, Evans implies, the historians who bestow such power on their subjects no doubt enjoy holding (if only on paper) the same enormous power as their subjects in imagining what these figures might have done. Nevertheless, what-ifs do restore a sense of contingency to history when it’s lacking, and no one disputes that contingency has diminished in interpretive power over the last century and has needed resuscitation. Historians know well the lure of assuming that what happened *had* to happen, even if they don’t always escape it. Counterfactual thinking offers protection against that assumption.

Evans is on strongest ground when he attacks the frequent nonideological defects in counterfactual history. One of the most significant, even if one follows the “least re-write” rule by avoiding large deviations from

what actually happened, is the tendency of what-ifs to exfoliate without limit into endless causal chains. Once we start unraveling the known past with an imaginary one—what if, say, General William Howe had joined up with General John Burgoyne at Saratoga instead of heading for Philadelphia in 1778, and had thus secured New York for the British?—there opens a horizonless frontier of possibilities. If the British had won that New York battle, they would have cut off New England from the middle states, which would have allowed the British Navy to venture further south and to the Caribbean, which would have led to the defeat of the revolution—and so on.

Who knows? The White House might now be the Governor-General’s House, and Her Britannic Majesty might sail up the Potomac in the royal yacht to preside over Congress. However, one only has to posit the occurrence of a hurricane off the northeast coast just when a large British fleet was en route to Yorktown for the entire imaginary train of events to collapse.

Given the absence of any real limit on the possible number and kind of unanticipatable events and decisions, a counterfactualist historian can only exert self-control. And, as Evans observes and historians seem to understand, the best way to exhibit self-control is simply to avoid stating the many consequences that may ensue from a single act by keeping counterfactual speculation short—to essay form. You just can’t sustain an imaginary set of claimed-to-be-possible historical events going without exhausting readers’ credulity. So, tellingly, you don’t find long works of what-if history. You can almost hear the sneering in Evans’s words: If extended what-if history could be written, it would be; that it hasn’t been proves its weakness.

These are points worth scoring against what-if practitioners, and those who are in Evans’s sights—none more so than Niall Ferguson, on whom Evans is especially rough—will have to defend themselves. Yet Evans’s

irritation with counterfactuals seems as much a matter of temperament as of thought. We all tire of the schoolmarmish tendency to scold people for having failed to do what we’re sure they could have done. It’s easy to throw cold water on alternate history; but we shouldn’t be quick to do so, even after applauding Evans’s approach. Why? Because there’s no escape from counterfactual thinking.

It’s puzzling that Evans doesn’t grapple with this fact, well-established by logicians and philosophers. Their demonstrations are tucked away in scholarly literature, and they’re not easy to read. But a great number of formidable minds have made clear that within every historical argument is a complementary one, usually not stated, that something else would have occurred—what else we don’t know—had the event for which we have evidence not happened. This renders invalid Evans’s argument that one has to posit a specific alternative for what we know to have happened in order for a counterfactual to have any weight. And it makes his study less authoritative than it might have been had he dealt with this objection.

Yet it would be a mistake to ignore what Evans argues, just as it would be a mistake to dismiss this book as nothing more than a leftist attack on rightist history. There’s too much value in it, more than any review can cover. If you overlook the slashing academic tactics that Evans musters—and for some, it will be difficult to do so—you have here the best evaluation of the genre we possess. In many respects, it even salvages the value of thoughtful counterfactuals. It surely provides support for the heuristic value of controlled, prudently argued what-ifs. Most important, it’s likely to make for stronger counterfactual argumentation among students of the past. No historian can afford to ignore it. And for nonhistorians interested in the way historians go about their work, how and why they argue as they do, and what’s at stake in their disagreements, *Altered Pasts* is hugely illuminating. It’s also hugely enjoyable. ♦

Is Hollywood Racist?

It depends on which Hollywood you're talking about.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

The question that haunted the American motion-picture industry in the two months leading up to the Academy Awards broadcast was this: Is Hollywood racist? In December, leaked emails revealed how one of Hollywood's longest-serving studio chiefs, Amy Pascal, and its most prestigious producer, Scott Rudin, had amused each other by cracking jokes about Barack Obama's favorite movies all being black-themed—in a manner only slightly more elevated than a colloquy about how our first black president must love fried chicken and watermelon.

A few weeks after that, the Oscar nominations were announced—and not a single person of color was nominated in an acting, directing, or writing category. Meanwhile, the year's most serious film on the subject of race, *Selma*, received what can only be described as a token nod in the Best Picture category, which, given its lack of support in other categories, effectively meant it had no chance of winning.

The case appears to be airtight—and ridiculous at the same time. It's airtight because, well, the head of Sony wrote private racist emails and the 6,000-plus members of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences gave the backs of their hands to the cultural contributions of African Americans in the year 2014.

And yet it also seems ridiculous, because only a year earlier the Best Picture Oscar had been bestowed upon *12 Years a Slave*, the brilliant and punishing depiction of antebellum perfidy. In the intervening months, America was riven by the protests arising from the

deaths of Michael Brown in Missouri and Eric Garner on Staten Island—and all across social media, the world of entertainment spoke as one in its rage and upset at what it perceived to be the monumental injustices done to these unarmed black men.

In any case, how on earth could it be that the epicenter of self-righteous liberal sentiment, the cultural carrier and transmitter of every fashionable idea about the need for radical change to the American body politic over the past half-century, is simply a high-end Denny's?

Well, here's the straight answer: It is.

The motion-picture industry is startlingly retrogressive on the subject of race, and its lip service and political support for progressive causes provide unimaginative studio executives and get-along-to-go-along producers with an all-too-comfortable cover.

It's not just the culture's refusal to take account of stories involving race that do not conform to the stock liberal view that's problematic but also its dogmatic insistence on ghettoizing its subject matter. With the exception of action pictures starring Denzel Washington, Hollywood is incapable of promoting movies featuring African Americans that don't traffic in contemporary stereotypes—movies like Tyler Perry's comic melodramas or the blockbuster *Think Like a Man*, designed and marketed to appeal solely to black audiences.

Indeed, the industry's attitude toward race is exactly the kind of patronizing head-patting that was on display during the Oscars show itself. The host, Neil Patrick Harris, made a particular point of talking to African-American celebrities in the audience (See! We love black people!), made a joke about how the awards celebrated the “best and the whitest,” and offered his post-perfor-

mance opinion that the song from *Selma* was “fan-tastic”! The critic Wesley Morris said of Harris that he dedicated the night to turning actors like *Selma*'s David Oyelowo “into employees and party tricks—and now a black British person!” Morris said that Harris was using them the way other hosts have used stars like Jack Nicholson and Meryl Streep in years past: “You can see what Harris was after, but his touch just left a stain.”

Harris is not to blame; he was reading from a script. The script for the Oscars is the American motion-picture industry's attempt at being lovable and anodyne and inoffensive. And its very inoffensiveness was offensive.

Meanwhile, take a look at the small screen. Over the past three years, there have been three breakout broadcast television series—the only breakouts the networks have seen in a decade. Two of them—*Scandal* and *How to Get Away with Murder*—are on ABC and are the brainchildren of the African-American writer-producer Shonda Rhimes. *Scandal* has been ABC's runaway show for three years. *How to Get Away with Murder* premiered in the fall of 2014 to ABC's highest ratings in a decade. The third phenomenon, *Empire*, is the first network television program in a quarter-century to improve on its ratings every week since its debut in January.

These are all shows with black protagonists. Their plots are melodramatic and crazy. But the key to the shows is that they are not about race. They are not problem plays. *Scandal* is about politics. *How to Get Away with Murder* is a trial-attorney show. And *Empire* is a full-on soap opera (based on, of all things, *King Lear*) set in the world of hip-hop. The shows appeal to black audiences, of course, but they offer depictions of black people fully active and functioning in government, law, and business.

These three shows are revivifying network television. Meanwhile, the liberal lions of the motion-picture industry are seeing attendance decline and their place at the center of the popular culture entirely usurped while they pat black people on the head and tell them that their nice song about Dr. King's march on the Edmund Pettus Bridge was just fan-tastic. Give them a hand, folks! ♦

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