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MARK HEMINGWAY

# WILL THE NEXT PRESIDENT UNDO THE IRAN DEAL?

BY REUEL MARC GERECHT

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## Articles




## Feature



## Books & Arts



COVER: PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY THE WEEKLY STANDARD

# Two-Faced Facebook

For nearly two decades now, conservatives have been scoffing at Hillary Clinton's suggestion that there is a "vast right-wing conspiracy," let alone that it is responsible for the fact that her husband can't keep it in his pants. However, the statement has also always had a sinister undercurrent, because one suspects the reason Clinton believes in such a conspiracy is pure projection.

Aside from the recent revelation that the Obama administration lied and overtly manipulated a pliant press to sell the Iran deal (for more on that, see Mark Hemingway's article on page 10), we now know that Facebook, arguably the world's biggest and most influential source of news, has been actively suppressing stories of interest to and beneficial to conservatives. While Facebook gives the impression it is a neutral platform, it's anything but. Trending topics on Facebook can expose millions of people to the news of the day, but what trends on Facebook is far from an organic reflection of what people are actually posting on the site.

Facebook employs "news curators" who have the power to blacklist topics that are gaining popularity on the site. An ongoing investigation by the tech blog *Gizmodo* has revealed that these curators are far from unbiased. "We choose what's trending," a curator told the website. "There was no real standard for measuring what qualified as news and what didn't. It was up to the news curator to decide." Not surprisingly, that meant keeping stories from highly trafficked conservative news sources such as TheBlaze from trending. But the real smoking gun was a follow-up report in which *Gizmodo* interviewed former news curators, who were quite open about what was being suppressed:

> Among the deep-sixed or suppressed topics on the list: former IRS official Lois Lerner, who was accused by Republicans of inappropriately scrutinizing conservative groups; Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker; popular conservative news aggregator the Drudge Report; Chris Kyle, the former Navy SEAL who was murdered in 2013; and former Fox News contributor Steven Crowder. "I believe it had a chilling effect on conservative news," the former curator said.
>
> Another former curator agreed that the operation had an aversion to right-wing news sources. "It was absolutely bias. We were doing it subjectively."

At the same time this was happening, curators were artificially promoting news and causes that were important to liberals, such as Black Lives Matter, which otherwise wouldn't have been given as much exposure. Oh, and as it happens, the Facebook executive in charge of trending topics and other news decisions on the site is a maxed-out Hillary Clinton donor whose own Facebook posts reveal he is emphatically liberal. The culture of Facebook suggests the whole company thinks it has a duty to enhance political correctness. Every week Facebook employees vote in a poll about what questions CEO Mark Zuckerberg gets asked in Q&A sessions within the company. Earlier this year, a sizable number of employees voted to ask Zuckerberg if they had a duty to exercise their opinion-shaping powers to stop Donald Trump.

Now, even a great many conservatives don't want to see Trump president, but the mounting evidence that powerful institutions (like Facebook) are trying covertly to steer the political process is one reason he's doing so well. When it comes to the existence of a "vast left-wing conspiracy," recent events suggest that you're not paranoid if they're really out to get you. ♦

## Kristof's Epiphany

Since the *New York Times* op-ed columnist Nicholas Kristof has been the butt of Scrapbook humor on occasion—indeed, was once the subject of a Parody—it's only fair that we give Mr. Kristof credit when credit is due. We're referring, in this instance, to his recent Sunday *Times* column entitled "A Confession of Liberal Intolerance" (May 8), in which he lays out the sad facts about faculty politics in America's colleges and universities.

Of course, when we say "faculty politics," we're not talking about tenure or jockeying for position within this or that department. We're talking about the astonishing, and all too obvious, fact that America's professoriate is predominantly, indeed overwhelmingly, left-wing—and determined to keep it that way.

In his column, Kristof explains that "on Facebook recently I wondered aloud about whether universities stigmatize conservatives and undermine intellectual diversity." Well, of course they do—and as Kristof quickly discovered, "the scornful reaction from my fellow liberals proved the point. . . . The scarcity of conservatives seems driven in part by discrimination."

To readers of The Scrapbook, this is no surprise, and neither does it surprise a sadder but wiser Kristof. He makes the obvious point that institutions of higher learning are the one place in America where the clash of ideas should be especially welcome, not violently suppressed. And he makes the further point that the conservative intellectual tradition—personified by any number of people he identifies—has much to teach inquiring young minds.

The problem, of course, is what to do about it. As Kristof explains, left-wing professors are strongly disinclined to welcome people they abhor;

and conservatives, in principle, disapprove of affirmative action for conservatives. The result is stalemate. The problem exists, but few faculty regard the absence of conservatives as a problem; and to make matters worse, the status quo discourages right-wing scholars from pursuing academic careers. Kristof offers no solution, except this pertinent thought:

> It's important to have a frank discussion on campuses about ideological diversity. To me, this seems a liberal blind spot. . . . Maybe we progressives could take a brief break from attacking the other side and more broadly incorporate values that we supposedly cherish—like diversity—in our own dominions.

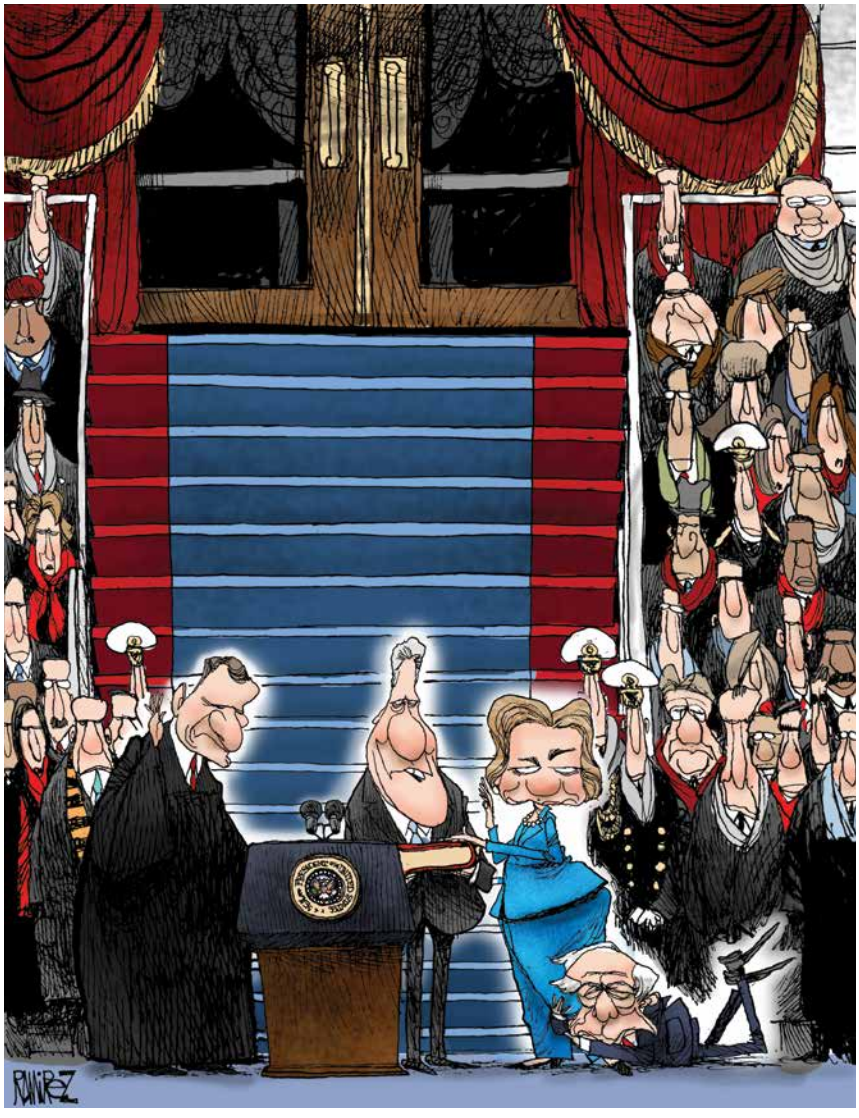
The Scrapbook, as it were, could not have said it better, and we expect poor Kristof's inbox is now bulging with progressive anger and contempt. But full marks to Nicholas Kristof for speaking truth to power, for searching his own soul, and taking a risk in embracing dissent. ♦

## Inclusive Harvard

Herewith The Scrapbook takes note of the troubling alignment of two separate stories.

As readers may be aware, Harvard University is in the midst of a self-imposed crisis, as the administration seeks to force single-sex "final clubs" to admit members of the opposite sex. Harvard's principal target, of course, is such venerable all-male institutions as the Porcellian Club, which was founded as long ago as 1791 and is best known to history for having blackballed Franklin D. Roosevelt (class of 1904). But there are female single-sex organizations at Harvard as well, which complicates the issue.

To be sure, and largely for political purposes, Harvard is determined to destroy the final clubs; but because the clubs have no official affiliation with Harvard, and American citizens theoretically enjoy freedom of association, the university is attacking them from their flanks. Accordingly, President Drew Gilpin Faust insists that the clubs violate Harvard's spirit of "inclusiveness"—tell that to the 94 percent of applicants Harvard turns down!—and demands that members of either sex be barred from leadership positions on campus.




Meanwhile, university spokesman Jeff Neal claims that places like Porcellian contribute to the culture of "sexual assault" on campus. In a letter to the *Wall Street Journal*, he notes that "a recent survey . . . found that 47 percent of female Harvard seniors participating in final-club activities had experienced nonconsensual sexual contact, compared with the campuswide average of 31 percent."

Now, if the truth be told, The Scrapbook is cheering for neither side here. There are greater problems in the world than the fate of Ivy League fraternities and sororities; and the Harvard University approach is indistinguishable from that of, say, Yale or the University of Missouri. But The Scrapbook was appalled to learn that, in the same week it was announced that President Obama's elder daughter will soon be enrolling at Harvard, after a gap-year interval, she stands a one-in-three chance of being sexually assaulted at Harvard—indeed, nearly a 50 percent chance if she "participat[es] in final-club activities."

Far be it from The Scrapbook to

tell the president and first lady where to send their child to school, but what sort of parent knowingly dispatches a daughter to a collegiate snakepit of sexual assault? Could it be that the Obamas secretly disbelieve the sort of statistics Harvard's spokesman cites? Surely not, for the president's own administration has been busy for years purveying similar statistics about the perils of sexual violence on American campuses.

Female Harvard undergraduates have now joined Porcellian in protesting Harvard's war on single-sex institutions. And who can blame them? If the culture of sexual assault is as bad as Harvard says it is, keeping the boys and girls in their separate clubs is not only fair but essential. ♦

## Must Reading

Contributing editor Yuval Levin published a new book last week: *The Fractured Republic: Renewing America's Social Contract in the Age of Individualism*. It couldn't have come out at a better time.

*The Fractured Republic* is partly a history of postwar America and partly a work of political philosophy. Levin's concern is the polarization that has come to dominate our political discourse, to the point where our politics now bears a closer resemblance to that of modern Europe than it does to that of even the America of 20 years ago.

American politics today, Levin observes, is largely the politics of baby boomer nostalgia. Liberals long for the good old days of their '60s radicalism. Conservatives long for the good old days of the '80s, when the Cold War was being won. And everyone is nostalgic for the '50s, when the economy was growing by leaps, social cohesion was relatively strong, and the American dream was real and attainable by large majorities.

Because of this nostalgia, he says, our two political parties are both stuck looking backwards. To the extent that they glance forward, it's only to try to graft the face of the future onto the frame of the past. And this, Levin argues, is a big part of why American politics has been caught in quicksand for a generation. It's why everyone, both left and right, is so frustrated. It's why everyone, both Democrat and Republican, thinks the country is on the wrong track.

*The Fractured Republic* is half diagnosis and half prescription. And both halves are essential reading, especially as we contemplate what the current election means for our body politic. ♦

## Correction of the Week

'Because of an editing error, an article on Monday about a theological battle being fought by Muslim imams and scholars in the West against the Islamic State misstated the Snapchat handle used by Suhaib Webb, one of the Muslim leaders speaking out. It is imamsuhaibwebb, not Pimpin4Paradise786" (*New York Times*, May 10, 2016). ♦





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# Browser Beware

I'm being stalked by a pair of cheap eyeglasses. They keep looking out at me with their eyeless stare. They're joined by a zombie pair of khakis, Hillary Clinton, and, creeping along on their spindly little legs, folding music stands. None of them will leave me alone.

This is not a Tim Burton movie, but my daily experience surfing the web. Wherever I go on the Internet, I'm followed by advertisements for things I don't want. Yes, I know it means I need to clear out the cookies clogging up my computer, those electronic markers that allow advertisers to track me. That said, I'm astonished at how clumsy, obvious, and off-puttingly persistent these ads are.

Internet advertising wasn't supposed to be this way.

The promise was that, sifting through oceans of data created by our online activities, computers would be able to predict our likes and wants, using those predictions to shape our behavior. Our devices, calculating opportunities to interest us in products and services, would subtly nudge us, presenting those products and services at just the right moment—whether that moment was defined by proximity to a store or psychological vulnerability to a pitch.

In practice, the electronic Mad Men only seem to be pitching to me exactly what I'm least likely to buy—things I've already looked at, considered, and rejected. If I had wanted those khakis, I would have bought them when I first had them up on my screen. I went to the cheap glasses site merely to check a fact in a writer's story on cheap glasses. I clicked on two or three pairs to confirm the prices the writer had cited. Now, months later, hardly a day goes by when I'm not presented with an online ad for crap eyewear.

Once, I clicked on a Hillary ad to see what kind of spiel her folks were currently making. (The things one does in the name of journalism.) Hillary's algorithm thinks that click means I'm a lead, and her bots have been determined for months to close the deal. Today I get a banner blaring "I'm With Her" at the top of the *New York Times* homepage. (Then again, it could just be advertisers assume anyone going to nytimes.com is a Hillary lead.)


DAVID CLARK

A couple of weeks ago I looked at a half-dozen folding music stands online. I clicked away without buying any of them. The *Chicago Tribune*, *Slate*, and the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* all think I just need another look. Like many other websites have in the last week, they are showing me half a dozen folding music stands that I don't like the look of.

Why does the web keep flogging the very things I've demonstrated I don't want? It's a mystery, but I do have a theory. Well, two theories.

Theory No. 1 posits simply that online advertisements aren't any good. The coders have their limitations, and among them is an inability to work any fancy anticipatory magic. The best they can do is hassle us about the stuff they've logged us looking at already. "Hey, mister!" the online pitchman wheedles and whines, grabbing our sleeves long after we've left the electronic store: "Hey, *mister!*!"

But given how grand the promises were, and the amazing things that the devices demonstrably do, is it really possible that online advertising is that lame? Could it really be that, after claiming to be able to intuit our deepest needs, all the devices are able to do is pester us about what we've already rejected?

Our machines know where we are at all times and most of what we're up to; they know who our friends are, what those friends are up to. Maybe the devices do know our needs and wants better than we know them ourselves and are using that knowledge to move us in ways that are profitable for the devices' advertising clients. But surely, then, the masterminds of digital advertising are savvy enough to know this is deeply creepy. Which brings us to Theory No. 2: They paper the web with obvious, preposterous ads—the zombie khakis and Hillary—as a ruse to make us think that's the best they can do, thus providing cover for the hidden, clever calculations deftly, surreptitiously, and relentlessly manipulating us.

Theory No. 2 is more fun to contemplate, as conspiratorial fantasies always are, but Theory No. 1 seems more plausible to me. To believe the second theory, you have to posit that our computer overlords are evil geniuses. All you have to believe, to credit the first theory, is that the digital ad-guys are frauds. I think that's more credible, Occam's-razor-wise.

Of course, now that I've written that, just watch me get months of online ads for shaving supplies.

**Eric Felten**

the weekly Standard

# The Hillary Myth

Hillary Clinton sounds like Paul Ryan on the economy. She says she's for "strong growth, fair growth, and long-term growth." She would abandon the slow-growth economics of President Obama and return us to those wonderful days in the 1990s when husband Bill was in charge. This is a different Hillary Clinton from the one we've seen in debates with Bernie Sanders, her socialist rival for the Democratic presidential nomination. It's the centrist-at-heart Clinton whom conservatives and Republicans eager for an acceptable alternative to Donald Trump can vote for.

Only there's a problem: This Hillary Clinton is entirely mythical. She doesn't exist. As the Democratic party has lurched to the left, she has lurched with it. While talking up growth, she has proposed no incentives to produce it. She relies on government spending to stir growth, Obama's woeful policy. On tax cuts, she's for boosting the top rate on individual income to 45 percent, the highest in three decades. Under her complicated plan, the tax rate on capital gains would jump from 23.8 percent to 39.6 percent, then to 47.4 percent with surtaxes. The Tax Foundation concluded her tax hikes would cut annual growth by 1 percent and shrink incomes by at least 0.9 percent. That's a recipe for less job creation, more wage stagnation, fewer business startups, and a despondent country.

An element of the Hillary myth is that she's on the same wavelength as her husband. She's not. He cut the capital gains rate from 28 percent to 20 percent, sparking the economic boom of his second term. He fought hard to enact the North American Free Trade Agreement. She attacks NAFTA and opposes the new Pacific trade treaty she once championed as the "gold standard" of free trade. Bill Clinton pushed through welfare reform that dramatically reduced poverty and welfare dependency. She would expand welfare with a new subsidy for child care and much more. And rather than defend his 1994 crime bill, she apologizes for it.

Another part of the myth is that she hasn't changed her views significantly to keep up with Sanders and Democratic progressives. "A lesser candidate would have veered to the left," the *Economist* wrote admiringly in April. She "has largely stood her ground." This is just plain wrong. On the minimum wage, she's flipped twice, first to $12 an hour, then saying she'd sign a bill setting the wage at $15. She answered Sanders's call for free public college with a scheme for debt-free college. She shifted his way on raising Social Security benefits and promises to make "the rich" pay for it. She's taken steps toward a single-payer, government health system, which Sanders favors. To counter his desire to ban fracking, Clinton says she'll create a maze of regulatory roadblocks to make fracking nearly impossible. Either way, the cost of energy will soar, hurting the lower middle class and poor disproportionately.

Her willingness to placate the left has whetted its appetite for Supreme Court nominations to sweep away conservative rulings and expand liberal ones. As president, she could instantly create a lockstep, five-vote liberal majority with her replacement for Justice Antonin Scalia. And no doubt she would. There's already talk of the Hillary Court's elimination of restrictions on abortion, reversing the *Citizens United* decision liberalizing campaign finance, ending the death penalty, forcing nonmembers to pay union dues, reviving an expansive reading of the commerce clause to justify government interference in the economy, and reinterpreting the Second Amendment to outlaw an individual's right to bear arms. None of this is farfetched with Clinton.

The Hillary myth ignores her reputation for dishonesty and untrustworthiness, since the public has caught on to her dubious ethics and penchant for lying. She lies when it's necessary and when it isn't. Her lies are so numerous—and palpable—that it takes 13 minutes for a new video to show even a fraction of them. In the past two weeks, she lied about her stated intention to shut coal mines. She lied in referring to the FBI's criminal investigation of her private email operation as a "security review." The FBI doesn't do security reviews. She lied in claiming to

THOMAS FLUHARTY

have never sent national security secrets by email. The lies never stop. She denied telling the parents of two security guards that an anti-Muhammad video caused rioters to kill them in Benghazi, Libya. Irrefutable evidence shows she knew she was lying.

Nor does the myth of mainstream Hillary deal with the corruption associated with her since the $100,000 she collected on a $1,000 investment in cattle futures in 1978. The Clintons always find ways to make money in politics or on the public payroll. The Clinton Foundation, which is more a slush fund than a charity, is only the latest and most extravagant example. Foreign governments and unsavory billionaires have donated millions, even as Hillary Clinton was secretary of state. Bill Clinton was hired to speak for as much as $750,000 a pop. We may never know what the donations brought about. But imagine if a Republican secretary of state had been engaged in such conflicts of interest? Heads would roll.

Only on national security and foreign policy does the Hillary myth come close to the truth. She is said to be a hawk. Indeed, she qualifies when measured against Sanders and Obama, both dovish in the extreme. Against President Reagan, she falls short. But, yes, she's become the friend of generals and she approves of military intervention on occasion. She pushed for arming Syrian rebels. She endorsed a surge of troops in Afghanistan. She favored leaving a residual force of troops in Iraq, as Obama did initially. She voted to invade Iraq when that was popular, then changed her mind as soon as it wasn't. She claims tough sanctions against Iran were her idea. Sorry, but they were forced on her by Congress. She was against the surge in Iraq in 2007. But after it succeeded, she is reported to have admitted privately she was wrong. But a hawk? No.

What about Trump? At best, he's a conservative by instinct, but not by philosophy. He's no supply-sider but he would cut personal and corporate tax rates substantially to create incentives to work, save, invest, and generate economic growth. Like Hillary, he's no free trader. He hasn't drifted to the left or, for that matter, to the right. He's asked for a list of potential conservative successors to Scalia. He exaggerates and mangles facts. But a nonstop liar like Hillary? Hardly. He's used every legal trick and heavy-handed tactic in the book in his business career. If he's corrupt, prosecutors haven't noticed. On foreign and national security affairs, he's a rookie, which is worrisome. He promises to stamp out ISIS quickly and build up our depleted military. He's not a hawk either.

On November 8, we'll choose between Clinton and Trump. It's not so much that he is better, though he is. But she fails to meet minimal standards a conservative or a Republican should insist on. A vote for Clinton would be wrong. Voting for a third-party candidate or not voting would be half a vote for Hillary. To defeat her and the myth, a vote for Trump is required.

*—Fred Barnes*

# For Who? For What?

In Philadelphia sports lore, there is a famous phrase: "For who? For what?" In 1995, the Philadelphia Eagles were thought to be one player away from Super Bowl contention. In the offseason they signed the NFL's best free agent, Pro Bowl running back Ricky Watters. In the final minutes of the first game of the season, the Eagles were losing to the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, badly. As Philadelphia marched down the field in search of an irrelevant late-game touchdown, quarterback Randall Cunningham threw a bullet to Watters over the middle. With linebackers closing in on him from three sides, Watters didn't even attempt to catch the ball. He batted it down.

In the locker room after the game, reporters asked Watters about his lack of effort on the play. He replied: "I'm not going to trip up there and get knocked out. For who? For what?"

They are questions Republican office-seekers ought to ask themselves before they endorse Donald Trump.

As a matter of loyalty or principle, why do Republican officeholders owe Trump their support? He has no history in the Republican party or of supporting Republican causes. Quite the opposite—he was, until the day before yesterday, a Democratic supporter of Harry Reid and Nancy Pelosi. If, after her 2008 loss to Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton had registered as a Republican and then won the GOP's 2016 nomination, would Republicans feel duty-bound to endorse her? Of course not. She would still be Hillary Clinton. And Donald Trump is still Donald Trump.

Republicans have not had a presidential nominee who pleased a wide majority of the party in a long while; most of their nominees have been mildly disdained. Yet as imperfect as Mitt Romney and John McCain were, they didn't prompt prominent Republicans to burn their party registration cards. There was never a question of whether to endorse them. The resistance to Trump from within the Republican party is a difference of kind, not degree.

Part of the argument against Trump has always been that it would be impossible for him to unite the Republican party. So far this has proven to be true. Trump seems not just incapable of working with elected Republicans, but uninterested. "I don't think it's imperative that the entire party come together," Trump told *Morning Joe*. "I don't want everybody." As if to drive home the point, the day after clearing the field, Trump went out of his way to reiterate his

theory about Ted Cruz's father being involved in the Kennedy assassination. He called Russell Moore, the head of the Southern Baptist Convention's policy arm, "a nasty guy with no heart!" He flipped on opposing the Democratic campaign to raise the minimum wage and bragged, "I'm very different from most Republicans."

And then, to add insult to insult, Trump lied about Paul Ryan and Marco Rubio. He told NBC's Chuck Todd that he was surprised that Paul Ryan had withheld his endorsement since the speaker of the House had called and congratulated him after the New York primary. Trump told Fox News's Bret Baier that he had several "really nice conversations" with Rubio and that Rubio had been "very supportive, very good."

According to Ryan's and Rubio's staffs, these conversations never happened and Trump's account is fictional. Not the usual way one builds party unity.

President Obama often complains that congressional Republicans reflexively opposed him without ever trying to work with him. To which Republicans reply that Obama was a deliberately polarizing figure who showed no interest in cooperating with the GOP Congress, preferring instead to mock and marginalize them. Trump seems to believe, like Obama, that unity can be demanded, rather than earned.

So as a matter of principle, Republicans owe Trump nothing. Of course, politics is sometimes inhospitable to principle. But even as a crass, electoral concern, it may be foolish for Republicans to support Trump. Understand that the term "Trump supporters" now includes not just the alt-right and the KKK, but every Republican officeholder who has endorsed Trump. If Trump loses in November, he will harrumph back to Mar-a-Lago unbowed. The fact that he will have no future in the party is likely to disturb him very little, since he had no past in it, either. But other Republicans—Bobby Jindal, Rick Perry, Chris Christie, Mitch McConnell—will not have the same luxury.

To endorse Donald Trump is to make your political career hostage to a man who may, at any random moment, accuse a former president of treason. Or encourage his supporters to physically assault their opponents. Or spin wild conspiracy theories, or tell obvious lies, or praise murderous dictators.

One of the oddities of politics is that its practitioners can be destroyed by a single moment. Think of Marco Rubio's New Hampshire debate flub. Or Rick Perry's 2012 mishap. Or Mitt Romney's "47 percent" comment. Or Howard Dean's scream. Or Al Gore's sighing. Yet some politicians can survive anything short of a full-scale nuclear first strike.

Both Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump have survived facts and statements that would have destroyed most politicians. It isn't fair, but fair's got nothing to do with it. Most people running for office do not have electorally the resilience of a cockroach.

Republicans considering whether to endorse Trump should ask themselves, honestly, whether they possess the same imperviousness as Trump. Because they're going to need it. Over the next six months, any Republican running for election who is supporting Trump is going to be importuned to defend every insane utterance, every lie, every dangerous idea that emanates from the man. They're going to be pestered, every day, at every campaign stop, to either endorse or disavow everything noteworthy Trump says.

That's the flip side to the "unity" arguments Trumpkins such as Mike Huckabee are mounting. It's easy for Huckabee to be pro-Trump—he'll never stand before voters again. But people with careers need to understand that there are no good alternatives in a Trumpist GOP, only less-bad ones. The choice isn't whether Republicans unite behind a guy who became a Republican five minutes ago and holds almost no views in common with theirs. It's whether Republican office-seekers should preserve some independence or yoke themselves to a perpetual scandal machine.

Republicans in the past have proved clear-eyed about such things. Remember Todd Akin's 2012 Missouri Senate campaign? Akin was one of those everyday politicians—the kind who can end their career with a single, stupid remark. He chose to dilate on the subject of "legitimate rape" during an interview with a local TV station.

Akin's remarks became a national sensation. Did Republicans rally behind him in "unity"? Akin, after all, had won his party's nomination fair and square. The people of Missouri had spoken! And Akin was an actual Republican: He served in the House of Representatives for more than a decade. He had opposed abortion and supported the Second Amendment and was even in favor of building a wall—or at least a fence—along the Mexican border.

Yet Republicans ran from Akin as if he had the plague. Mitt Romney and Roy Blunt abandoned him. So did Scott Brown in his Massachusetts race and Ron Johnson in Wisconsin. The National Republican Senatorial Committee not only stopped spending in Akin's race, but went so far as to issue a press release highlighting calls for Akin to *drop out*.

That NRSC press release about Akin makes for fascinating reading today. In it, Sean Hannity, Ann Coulter, and the *Wall Street Journal*—all of whom have conspicuously demanded Republican "unity" behind Trump—were cited, calling on Akin to give up his legitimately earned Senate nomination and drop out of the race.

The *Journal* lamented that "Mr. Akin has sunk his own ship." Coulter said that "Republicans can't risk these kinds of mistakes" and that if Akin didn't give up his nomination and withdraw she would "officially" "hate" him. Hannity implored Akin to understand that "elections are bigger than one person." So much for unity.

Any Republican running for office who supports Donald Trump is pledging their honor, their dignity, and their political life to this man. So before they make that choice, they ought to ask themselves: For who? For what?

*—Jonathan V. Last*

# The Selling of the Iran Deal

## Lies, lies, and more lies.

**BY MARK HEMINGWAY**

On May 5, the *New York Times* posted online a lengthy and candid interview with Ben Rhodes, the 38-year-old deputy national security adviser for strategic communications. The interview was something of a get—the profile by veteran journalist David Samuels, which would be published in the May 8 edition of the *New York Times Magazine*, accurately describes Rhodes as "the Boy Wonder of the Obama White House." Samuels notes that "nearly everyone I spoke to about Rhodes used the phrase 'mind meld'" to describe his relationship with President Obama.

Long, beat-sweetening profiles of senior White House officials have become a genre unto themselves in the prestige press, but Samuels delivered something better than that. As a result, D.C.'s media establishment and its insular world of foreign policy wonks were driven into a frenzy of loathing, from which they have yet to recover.

In his own words—and presumably his statements reflect the president he has a mind meld with—Rhodes and other White House officials brag about manipulating the media. They credit themselves with creating a foreign policy narrative divorced from reality to push through the Iranian nuclear deal. This revelation, coupled with increasingly widespread recognition that the Obama administration lied about key details of the Iran deal, has understandably caused an uproar.

> "We created an echo chamber," [Rhodes] admitted, when I asked him to explain the onslaught of freshly minted experts cheerleading for the deal. "They were saying things that validated what we had given them to say."

Rhodes boasted to Samuels that reporters were easy to manipulate, thanks to the elimination of veteran correspondents and foreign news bureaus:

> "Most of the outlets are reporting on world events from Washington. The average reporter we talk to is 27 years old, and their only reporting experience consists of being around political campaigns. That's a sea change. They literally know nothing."

Rhodes's assistant, Ned Price, then explained how they would specifically manipulate the coverage:

> The easiest way for the White House to shape the news, he explained, is from the briefing podiums, each of which has its own dedicated press corps. "But then there are sort of these force multipliers," he said, adding, "We have our compadres, I will reach out to a couple people, and you know I wouldn't want to name them—"
>
> "I can name them," [Samuels] said, ticking off a few names of prominent Washington reporters and columnists who often tweet in sync with White House messaging.
>
> Price laughed.

Finally Samuels gets White House officials to name names in the press. "People construct their own sense of source and credibility now," said Tanya Somanader, who worked under Rhodes.

> "They elect who they're going to believe." For those in need of more traditional-seeming forms of validation, handpicked Beltway insiders like Jeffrey Goldberg of The Atlantic and Laura Rozen of Al-Monitor helped retail the administration's narrative. "Laura Rozen was my RSS feed," Somanader offered. "She would just find everything and retweet it."

It would be hard to overstate how little reason the media had to trust the Obama administration on Iran. Initially, officials lied about even the existence of bilateral talks with Iran. The official narrative was that negotiations were keyed to the election of the "moderate" president of Iran Hassan Rouhani in 2013. State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki would later confirm reporting that talks with Iran actually began in 2011.

As for why journalists would carry so much water for the Obama administration, the simple answer is that they shared the administration's passion for a deal with Iran. Rozen's slavish devotion to Obama's Iran policy, for one, has been something to behold.

Late last summer, the Associated Press broke the news the Obama administration let Iran make a deal with the International Atomic Energy Agency to "self-inspect" its own Parchin nuclear site. The terms of this side-deal with Iran were never disclosed to Congress as required by the Corker-Cardin law that assented to the deal. In a *Daily Beast* column that now looks incredibly prescient, Naval War College professor Tom Nichols noted that the political and media response to the AP's revelations looked very coordinated and oddly lacking in substance. Nichols compared it to 9/11 truthers who say they are "just asking questions" as a way to sow doubt. And perhaps the most spurious such question was Rozen's baselessly wondering if the documents obtained by the AP were Israeli forgeries.

That's just the beginning. When the Iranian Revolutionary Guard leader Qassem Soleimani, responsible for killing American soldiers in Iraq, began violating sanctions against Iran by visiting Europe, Rozen asserted his travels were lawful. In January, when Iran boarded an American vessel in the Persian Gulf, she responded to a photo of the Americans being

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held captive by tweeting, "looks like they are making friends." (In Samuels's piece, Rhodes is quoted lamenting the fact that the leaked news of American sailors being taken captive—Rhodes was trying to keep it a secret—would overshadow Obama's State of the Union address later that same day.) When the controversy over the Rhodes profile launched a slew of criticisms directed at her, one of Rozen's notable supporters tweeted, "Laura Rozen has been the best & most informative feed on #IranTalks. You rock Laura! Keep going." The words of encouragement came from Abbas Aslani, a foreign policy reporter at Tasnim News Agency, an organization affiliated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

Jeffrey Goldberg of the *Atlantic* is in many ways a very different journalist from Rozen. Rather than the loudest person shouting in the echo chamber, he's much less ideological. He was always quick to emphasize reservations about the Iran deal. What's notable about Goldberg is his incredible access to the White House, including multiple interviews with the president. Goldberg last profiled Obama in the April edition of the *Atlantic*, and the interview caused quite a stir because Obama openly insulted American allies.

Goldberg responded directly to Samuels's article and had one legitimate beef. If the reputation of Goldberg and other journalists would be impugned, perhaps they should have been given a chance to respond. However, Goldberg undercut his own demand for fairness by claiming Samuels and his wife (Alana Newhouse, editor of *Tablet Magazine*) have a "personal animus," which he had discerned based on gossip from "people who are friends of mine." The usually affable Goldberg doesn't give any serious consideration to the apparent reality that White House officials believed they were spinning him.

It's worth noting that the policy infrastructure supporting Rhodes's echo chamber was amply funded. As reported by Bloomberg last year, the Rockefeller family gave millions to liberal and pro-Iranian groups advocating a deal with Iran. And the *Wall Street Journal* further reported that the White House, and Ben Rhodes specifically, was helping direct the efforts of those groups to pressure Congress on the Iran deal.


There were apparent financial consequences for groups that, as details of the deal started trickling out, weren't completely on board. Much of the pro-deal money was distributed via an antinuke foundation called the Ploughshares Fund. Ploughshares had been giving money to an antiproliferation group called the Institute for Science and International Security, aka "the good ISIS." ISIS stopped getting money a few years back and its president David Albright has so far declined to say it was because the organization wouldn't support Obama's Iran deal. But two days after the Samuels article was published, the organization tweeted: "We tried to warn Rozen, ACA [Arms Control Association], P-shares that official(s) overselling nuclear deal to them, should be more critical."

The terrifying reality of a nuclear Iran notwithstanding, what may be most troubling about this episode is how this manipulation of the press has become the new political playbook and how willing the pawns are to be manipulated. In 2014, Rhodes sold a band of liberal interest groups on the Iran deal, calling it "the biggest thing President Obama will do in his second term on foreign policy. This is healthcare for us, just to put it in context." It's an apt comparison, because the selling of Obamacare perfectly tracks the dishonest machinations of the Iran deal.

First, tell a bunch of brazen lies designed to soften political resistance, e.g., "Obamacare will be deficit neutral" and "if you like your health insurance you can keep it." Second, get a bunch of court stenographers to be "force multipliers" in the press—Ezra Klein, then at the *Washington Post*, and the *New Republic*'s Jonathan Cohn were relentlessly on message, as were hundreds of other reporters on the "JournoList" email list Klein maintained. Also enlisted were media-savvy wonks such as MIT economist Jonathan Gruber, who later admitted to being deceptive about aspects of the law to sell it, along with deep-pocketed liberal foundations.

THOMAS FLUHARTY

Third, when reality catches up with the narrative—Obamacare is going to cost trillions, and millions are losing their health insurance—call on the same echo chamber that lied in the first place to gaslight the critics, have them alternately insist everyone knew this was going to happen or that it's a small price to pay for being on the right side of history, and, finally, have your fellow-travelers bask in achieving your political objective even though the trail of self-serving lies left behind seriously erodes the public trust necessary to govern in the future.

The minor problem with this approach is that you can't fool all of the people all of the time. Perhaps the fallout over the Rhodes interview is best summed up by a headline in *Foreign Policy* from Thomas E. Ricks, the Pulitzer-winning reporter who covered the Iraq war for the *Washington Post*: "A stunning profile of Ben Rhodes, the a—hole who is the president's foreign policy guru." The substance of the article wasn't much more restrained. Ricks compares Rhodes to "the Kennedy smart guys who helped get us into the Vietnam War. Does he know how awful he sounds?"

Ricks is right that history probably won't look kindly on the Iran deal. It's jarring when you consider that Obama's two signature accomplishments, Obamacare and the Iran deal, were both achieved by systematically and deliberately lying. Rhodes is leaving the White House in a few months and likely knew exactly what he sounds like—a man who deserves credit for executing a winning strategy.

Besides, it's the victors who write history. On May 9, with the Rhodes controversy still raging, Fox News national security reporter James Rosen reported that the State Department had surreptitiously edited the official recording of a December 2013 press conference. An exchange where State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki admitted to Rosen the administration had been lying about when the Iran talks began had been excised from the full recording on the State Department's website and YouTube channel. ♦

# Zone Defense

## Sykes-Picot at 100.

**BY LEE SMITH**

This week marks the 100th anniversary of the Sykes-Picot Agreement, the document that shaped the modern Middle East. Known officially as the Asia Minor Agreement, it was authored by the British diplomat Mark Sykes and his French counterpart François Georges-Picot. They were charged with the task of mapping out new zones of influence in parts of the Ottoman Empire, should the Triple Entente, which at the time included czarist Russia, defeat the Ottomans in World War I.

The regions under negotiation were the Syrian coast and what became Lebanon, which would go to France; central and southern Mesopotamia, which would fall under British supervision; and Palestine, which would be under international administration. The huge block of mostly desert in between would have local Arab chiefs under French supervision in the north and British in the south. The agreement was signed May 16, 1916. Now, a century later, according to a wildly diverse body of opinion, from the leader of the Islamic State Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi to Israeli defense minister Moshe Ya'alon, Sykes-Picot has finally fallen apart.

Over the last hundred years, the very phrase Sykes-Picot has become shorthand for a number of ideas about Middle East history. To wit: Sykes-Picot imposed artificial borders on the region; it legitimized colonial interference in the Middle East; it represented the betrayal of the Arabs by the Western powers. As it turns out, all of these beliefs are premised on conceptions that are grounded not in historical reality, but political ideology.

All borders are artificial. Even before the advent of the state system, borders around the world were either agreed upon by two or more parties or imposed through war or threat of war. Borders are human conventions, even if they are set off by natural landmarks, like bodies of water or mountains. In any case, the Sykes-Picot Agreement did not establish national borders. The borders within the area that Sykes-Picot dealt with were later agreed upon by Paris and London. Sykes-Picot merely allocated zones of influence, a political demarcation consistent with the history of the region, dominated by empires for thousands of years.

"One empire, the Ottoman, lost," says Tony Badran, research fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, "and two other empires, the French and the British, divided parts of its holdings between themselves. That division was in keeping with how empires have dealt with this area throughout the ages. The imperial tradition in this zone dates back millennia."

Badran traces it back to the historical ancient Near East, when the region's great imperial powers included Egypt, Persia, and what's now Turkey, from the Hittite Empire, to the Byzantines, and lastly the Ottomans. What we refer to as the Levant, says Badran, has simply been a buffer zone between imperial powers. "It's a zone of conflict, a historical theater of war. The people who live here are always assets of bigger powers. If you ally with Egypt and the Assyrians win, it's a losing bet. The kingdom of Judah later sought to align with Egypt against the Babylonians. Egypt and Judah lost, resulting in the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile to Babylon."

Often faulted for being oblivious to the reality of the Middle East, as Badran argues, the Sykes-Picot

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Agreement actually represented a mature understanding of the region's history. The "colonial interference" that Sykes-Picot stands for was nothing but the latest instance of empires carving out zones of influence, partly to balance each other's power.

Even after Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan won independence—the Arabs rejected the 1947 U.N. plan to partition Palestine into independent Arab and Jewish states—many Arab political figures and intellectuals claimed that they'd been betrayed by the West. According to this view, the colonial powers had promised them a greater Arab homeland, and instead divided them into separate states. This is the Arab nationalist reading of recent Middle East history.

The central tenet of Arab nationalism is that the people of the Middle East who speak various dialects of the Arabic language constitute one indivisible nation with a shared past and a common destiny. As we now see with the sectarian and ethnic onslaught underway in Iraq and Syria, this notion is fanciful. If there really is such a thing as the Arab nation—rather than a collection of competing sects, ethnicities, and tribes—it is a nation at war with itself.

Indeed, the rise of Arab nationalist ideology coincides with the rapid decline of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. It was the Ottomans who, for all their very bloody methods, managed to maintain a certain amount of stability throughout the region, balancing warring factions. With the Ottomans on their way out, regional intellectuals and ideologues, including some among the Middle East's minority populations, saw Arab nationalism as a safety mechanism of sorts, intended to convince the region's various populations that more united them—language, culture, history, future—than set them apart.

The region's political leaders used Arab nationalism for a very different purpose—to undermine their regional rivals. For instance, Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser regularly attacked Jordan and Saudi Arabia for betraying the Arab cause—i.e., the war to eliminate the Zionists and liberate Palestine. It is hardly a coincidence that Nasser's targets were American allies, and his Egypt, like the other prominent Arab nationalist regimes, Syria and Iraq, was a Soviet client. Again, the middle of the Arabic-speaking Middle East was a buffer zone, where the world's two great powers competed for zones of influence.


*Sykes and Picot's map, showing direct French (blue) and British (pink) control, plus areas of influence*

Backing Arab nationalist causes and hanging the colonialist/imperialist label on Washington was part of Moscow's Cold War propaganda campaign. And indeed it was the United States that inherited the legacy of Sykes-Picot when Eisenhower ushered France and the United Kingdom out of the region with the 1956 Suez Crisis. Now, according to the Arab nationalist reading, the United States was the great colonial power.

Actually, that wasn't far from the truth, even if a country with its origins in anticolonialism rejected the description. The reality is that the Europeans were irrelevant. With the fall of the Soviet Union and the Cold War over, the Middle East enjoyed more than two decades of relative stability. It was the United States that kept the peace, a peace at least as stable as and an order much more liberal than that of the Ottomans. The peace that the region enjoyed had nothing to do with early-20th-century European diplomats, but was thanks to postwar American power. Sykes-Picot is the euphemism that Americans uncomfortable with the idea of empire have used to describe the American order of the Middle East.

For decades, the Arab-Israeli conflict was understood to be the region's central crisis—solve that, common wisdom held, and everything else will fall into place. As we now understand, compared with the Syrian war and the casualty count over 5 years which dwarfs that of the Arab-Israeli conflict over close to 70, the Arab-Israeli conflict is little more than a skirmish between two tribes. That the international community could afford to devote so much concern and resources to it over the course of decades is a testament to the nature of American power.

The issue isn't that the Islamic State crashed the borders of Syria and Iraq in 2014 and therefore the colonial legacy of Sykes-Picot. Rather, it's that the Obama White House wants out. It's the American order of the region that's been dismantled—not by ISIS, but by the president of the United States. In effect, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action that seeks to realign American interests in the region with Iran, while plotting a U.S. exit from the region, is a revision of Sykes-Picot.

We can't fix the Middle East, Obama deputy Ben Rhodes told the *New York Times Magazine*. It's about ancient sectarian and ethnic rivalries and hatreds. But the point was never to solve the problems of the region, a conflict zone for thousands of years. It was merely to ensure stability and protect American interests. The Ottomans were flushed out of the region when they wound up on the losing side of the Great War. The Obama White House opted out because it was tired. The region will pay the price for the administration's self-pity, as will the rest of the world, including America. ♦

# Giving Our Lenders a Haircut?

## Good thing investors don't believe Trump.

**BY ANDREW STUTTAFORD**

I don't know whether Gideon Gono, former governor of the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe, is still dreaming big dreams. But if he is, news reports from America must, if only briefly, have offered him hope that his talents would once again be in demand.

In the course of an interview earlier this month on CNBC, Donald Trump appeared (to some) to suggest that he would be able to reduce the U.S. government's debt (which at roughly $19 trillion needs some reducing) by subjecting creditors to what financial folk call a "haircut." That's a euphemism for being paid back less than 100 cents on the dollar.

What Trump said was this: "I would borrow, knowing that if the economy crashed, you could make a deal."

Quite how such a haircut would be arranged is anyone's guess, but the consequences are not: They would be catastrophic, a bloodletting of which ten thousand Sweeney Todds would be proud. Faith in Uncle Sam's credit underpins the global financial system. For the GOP's presumptive nominee for president even to hint that such faith may be overdone would, under normal circumstances, be to play with fire. But Donald Trump is not normal circumstances. The markets shrugged. Investors don't think he has a chance.

It's worth adding that the world's trust in the star-spangled spendthrift (Sam not Donald) is a windfall for Americans, enabling them to buy more—and borrow more—for far less than would otherwise be the case. Oh yes, most of the U.S. debt is held, not by wicked foreigners, but by the Social Security Trust Fund, federal agencies, our banks, our pensions, our money market funds, and even our neighbors. We have met our creditor and, more often than not, he is us.


*What's the problem? You're the government—you just add some more zeros.*

TRUMP: GAGE SKIDMORE!

Trump's comments caused something of a storm. He later explained that he had been misinterpreted in the "failing *New York Times* and other places." Default was "crazy" talk. United States bonds were "absolutely sacred." What he had meant was, well, before we get to that, there was this: "First of all, you never have to default because you print the money."

Did those words send another expectant thrill through Mr. Gono, father of the 100 trillion Zimbabwean dollar banknote? Treasury secretary? The Fed?

To be fair, Trump was not wrong. If a country's debt is denominated in its own currency, that country *can* print more of it to pay that debt off. Technically at least, it will avoid default. And technically counts in this field. The risk of default was one reason the eurozone crisis was so dangerous for that currency union's weaker members. Having given up their own money, they had lost the ability to print their debts away. This lack of a last resort triggered market nervousness about default, a nervousness that could all too easily have become self-fulfilling.

But there's no printing a free lunch. Print too much money, and sooner or later (as one day we will again find out) its value will start to depreciate as inflation gathers pace. Print too much and lenders will demand higher interest rates to compensate for the risk that they will be paid back in a currency worth considerably less at the time of repayment. Back in the day, relatively frugal, printing-press-phobic Germany was able to borrow far more cheaply in deutschmarks than Italy could in lire.

Print too much and international lenders will eventually only make loans repayable in a more respectable currency. Those loans will begin by being expensive and may end up in catastrophe: Russia, Argentina, there are plenty of ugly precedents to pick from.

The United States, mercifully, is not Russia and nor is it (yet) Argentina. It will remain large enough and powerful enough and enough of a safe haven to be able to borrow in its own currency both at home and abroad, and to do so more cheaply than its economic fundamentals might warrant. But it cannot print itself a free lunch either. The Donald's press

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would print inflation, and to the extent that inflation increased the cost of government programs (in many cases it would do so automatically, and Trump, of course, has said he "won't touch" entitlements), it could drive the deficit up further still. Interest rates would rise (a nasty thought with that $19 trillion outstanding); the only question would be by how much.

As I mentioned earlier, the self-proclaimed King of Debt says he was misinterpreted. He wasn't, he argues (more or less plausibly), talking about haircuts, but about taking advantage of a crash in the debt market. He'd do this by repurchasing government debt (which would then be trading at a discount to face value) in the marketplace. That would lead to a reduction in the nominal value of government debt outstanding. But as usual with quick fixes, there are some catches. The most likely reason for a sufficiently dramatic sell-off would be a suitably dramatic increase in interest rates. The net cost of any repurchase operations (which would be financed with new debt paying those higher interest rates) would depend on the depth of the discount, but it's very possible that the result would be far from an artful deal. And given the amount of U.S. government debt outstanding, it's doubtful that anything a President Trump could do would be of a size large enough to make any real difference.

Maneuvers of this type can make good sense in trading the securities of distressed companies (a field in which the King of Debt has some expertise), but beyond that, well . . .

Even if we accept Trump's explanation, markets are hardly going to be reassured by the thought of a country led by someone who "love[s] playing" with debt and for whom the printing presses may hold less fear than they should. There's also the fact that Trump wants to see a weaker dollar, not a point of view shared by those wicked foreigners. They may not hold most of our debt, but they do hold a lot of it.

Investors for now do not believe that Trump will win. What happens if that changes? ♦

# The Lessons of 1912

## Sometimes you have to split from a party to save it.

**BY JAY COST**

With Donald Trump the presumptive nominee of the Republican party, conservatives face their biggest crisis in generations. Professional Republicans are mostly boarding the "Trump Train," convinced their self-interest requires party unity, but principled conservatives find the choice between the dissolute, erratic Trump and the liberal, corrupt Clinton unacceptable. What comes next for them?


*Another one of these*

This insurgency should field a candidate for the White House in 2016, which would require a leader to offer him or herself to the voters on the November ballot. Trump and Clinton are the most unpopular nominees in the history of polling, so why can't the people elect a fresh face or a trusted elder statesman over these unsavory characters? Moreover, the danger for down-ballot carnage with Trump as the nominee is substantial, and an independent may provide electoral cover for vulnerable conservative officeholders.

Yet the calling for an independent candidacy is higher than this, for the ideals of conservatism are at stake. Trump is not like Barry Goldwater or George McGovern, decent men who were out of step with their times. They may have been unelectable, but at least each was bound by commitment to his principles. Trump has no principles and is quite pleased for us to know this. As he told California Republicans a few weeks ago, "Folks, I'm a conservative, but at this point, who cares? We got to straighten out the country." Real conservatives believe that it is their ideas that will "straighten out the country," but for Trump these were empty talking points offered to secure the nomination.

By selecting such a character, the Republican party has abandoned its commitment to conservatism. This is a dangerous development. Parties in the United States are meant to be more than just machines to further ambitious politicians, they are supposed to promote broad principles for the general welfare. The GOP was, for generations, the vehicle for advancing conservative ideology. This year it won't be.

Some may comfort themselves that Trump is sui generis, a one-off never to happen again. But why assume that? If the Republican party will abandon its principles for a failed casino mogul best known for tabloid

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antics and a reality TV show, what won't it abandon them for?

Conservatives cannot let this pass without a response, which is why an independent candidacy is essential. It isn't just a way to win the White House or hold the line in Congress, it is a statement of purpose and a warning to the Republican party that commitment to conservative ideas comes before party loyalty. If the party abandons the principles that have guided it for decades, it may no longer count on conservative support.

In this way, a conservative third-party candidate may serve the same purpose that Teddy Roosevelt's Bull Moosers did in 1912. Conservatives are inclined to castigate this party for its progressivism, and rightly so, but the Bull Moosers were reacting to a sense that the Republican party put special interests ahead of the general welfare. The first plank of the platform read:

> Political parties exist to secure responsible government and to execute the will of the people. From these great tasks both of the old parties have turned aside. Instead of instruments to promote the general welfare, they have become the tools of corrupt interests which use them impartially to serve their selfish purposes. Behind the ostensible government sits enthroned an invisible government owing no allegiance and acknowledging no responsibility to the people. To destroy this invisible government, to dissolve the unholy alliance between corrupt business and corrupt politics is the first task of the statesmanship of the day.

This is a fitting description of the Republican party in 2016: the unprincipled Trump standing at the head of a corrupt political force, flanked on one side by K Street lobbyists who use government to line their pockets and on the other by professional politicians regurgitating Reaganesque talking points but lacking true beliefs. Having betrayed the principles that have animated it for so long, this party cannot secure responsible government anymore.

Here's how the Bull Moosers reacted to Republican corruption a century ago:

> Unhampered by tradition, uncorrupted by power, undismayed by the magnitude of the task, the new party offers itself as the instrument of the people to sweep away old abuses, to build a new and nobler commonwealth.

Whatever one may say about the progressives, they weren't wrong about the GOP, which had been overrun by corruption. Instead of sitting idly by, the Bull Moosers rebuked their crooked old party and formed a new coalition.

Though Roosevelt did not win in 1912, the progressives eventually carried the day. They were such an electoral force that the Democrats, under Woodrow Wilson, gave them everything they could have expected. In 1916, the duly chastised Republicans brought the Bull Moosers back into the fold by nominating the progressive Charles Evans Hughes.

The 1912 election should focus conservatives on the bigger picture. This is not simply about one election, but about the ideas that generations of conservatives have advocated. If ever conservatives hope to win, they need to fight on behalf of those principles at every opportunity, not surrender for the sake of "unity" to a party that has disavowed their core beliefs.

It's time for a true conservative leader to come forward as an independent candidate for president—and time for conservatives to do everything they can on that leader's behalf. ♦

# It Wasn't Supposed to Work This Way

## Foreign drug cartels come to Colorado.

**BY DANIEL HALPER**

*Colorado Springs*

Local authorities in Pueblo, just 40 miles south of Colorado Springs, were recently alerted by a vigilant resident to a possible illegal marijuana grow operation. Within days, on March 31, sheriff's deputies from the Special Investigations Narcotics Section raided a single-family home that was in the process of being converted into a "grow house." Authorities discovered 127 marijuana plants, over $100,000 in growing equipment, and two Cuban nationals.

At first, no one seemed to take particular note of the individuals, Adriel Trujillo Daniel, 28, and Leosbel Ledesma Quintana, 41, who had recently moved to Colorado from Florida. They were arrested on felony drug charges but local authorities initially believed it was an isolated event.

But in the span of the next week and a half, local authorities would arrest at least four more individuals in the Pueblo area in similar cases, with similar backgrounds. All were recent transplants to the state. All were reported by neighbors or by other Pueblo residents who had witnessed suspicious activity. All were transforming residential homes into elaborate marijuana grow operations. And all were Cuban nationals.

"We have quite a bit of evidence" to believe they are members of "Cuban cartels," Pueblo sheriff Kirk Taylor says in an interview.

Local, state, and federal officials believe it's not just isolated to Pueblo. "It's across the entire state of Colorado," DEA assistant special agent in charge Kevin Merrill says. "It's just

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basically taken over the state, these residential grows."

Merrill likens the danger to that of meth labs in homes. Besides the criminal element, turning a house into a greenhouse invariably destroys the home. "The destruction of the homes and neighborhoods is even greater."

It is what Colorado Springs mayor John Suthers calls "the total nightmare" scenario, a byproduct of the state's recent legalization of first medicinal, and later recreational, marijuana.

People from out of town or even foreign countries move to Colorado and "buy or lease houses by the hundreds if not thousands," explains Suthers, who previously served 10 years as attorney general of the state.

The new residents then convert the residential homes to industrial grow operations. They're "basically trashing the houses because they're making so much freaking money they don't care, and growing hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of plants in each house. And transporting it out of state to marijuana markets nationally and internationally. Literally. Marijuana is going back to Mexico from Colorado," asserts Suthers.

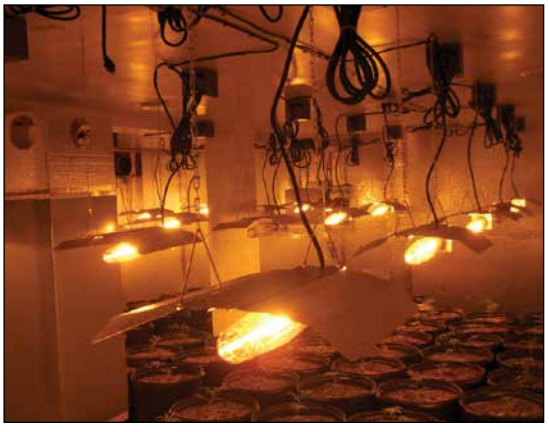
This criminal activity undermines a key argument used for legalizing marijuana in the first place. "One of the big arguments was, we're going to get the cartels out of the marijuana business. Because we're going to have all these legitimate businesses selling it. The Mexican cartels are going to dry up and go away," he says.

But now things are different. "Mexican cartels are no longer sending marijuana into Colorado, they're now growing it in Colorado and sending it back to Mexico and every place else."

With legalization of medicinal and recreational marijuana came the ability for locals to grow up to six plants at home—and sometimes up to 99, if they are a designated caregiver under the state law that legalized medicinal marijuana. "That has created an enforcement nightmare for the police," the state's former top cop says. "But it's going beyond that. Because of that aura of no enforcement, organized crime has come to Colorado to grow the marijuana."

"The surprising element is Cuban—Cuban cartels," Suthers says.

The DEA official insists the international element is increasing. "It's not just Cubans. We have Vietnamese-based organizations, Russian organized people. But we have seen a large influx of Cubans coming here. And we believe that all the organizations are here because we have a perceived lack of enforcement."



*Elaborate conversions of homes into pot factories such as that above require sophisticated—but illegal and dangerous—electrical infrastructure, below.*

Thanks to the ubiquity of marijuana in the state of Colorado, when they come, "they don't really have to hide," says the DEA official. "Their [main] risk of arrest or prosecution is when they move the marijuana outside the state."

Another reason the problem is particular to Colorado—and not in the other 22 states and the District of Columbia that have some form of legal marijuana—is that Colorado has uniquely loose medical marijuana laws, which are meant to allow the ailing to grow substantial crops at home. "In Colorado, if you go to a physician and you get a recommendation, you can grow 99 plants, so if you live with four others, you can grow almost 500," says Merrill, the DEA official. He has never seen any sort of mid- to large-scale home operation actually being used for medical marijuana. It is one of "the unintended consequences of the medical marijuana" law, Merrill contends.

The state's marijuana czar appears to agree with Merrill's contention—and has called for further regulation. "There has been evidence that people will abandon the black market for a regulated market, even at higher prices. However, as long as there is both an economic incentive to grow in Colorado and ship out of state, as well as legal loopholes to allow unlicensed individuals to grow large quantities of marijuana, it will be difficult for law enforcement to shut down the black and gray markets," says Andrew Freedman, the coordinator of marijuana policy for Colorado. "Interestingly, these loopholes are found in our medical marijuana laws, not in our recreational marijuana laws."

Which suggests John Suthers may find widespread support when he soon proposes to the legislature to eliminate the influx of foreign crime by outlawing home grows. That's a law even the legal growers and sellers of marijuana will likely support.

"A few more of these huge busts, and there will be lots of them over the next several months," Suthers predicts, and "I think they're going to say, give me a break, let's clean that problem out." ♦

IMAGES: PUEBLO COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

# Done Deal?

*Barack Obama's disastrous Iran legacy*

**By Reuel Marc Gerecht**

All administrations are short-sighted. Even the brightest, most reflective people can develop acute tunnel vision when they join the paper-pushing, crisis-a-minute senior ranks of the National Security Council and the State Department. When the president becomes obsessed with one issue, as Barack Obama was with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, he and his advisers are less likely to appreciate the possible unintended consequences of their actions. Of course, with a president at odds with so much of American foreign policy since World War II, it is tricky separating unintended from desired consequences. Given how many bright people in Washington supported the nuclear agreement who aren't blind to Iran's nefarious behavior and don't want to handcuff Washington in the Middle East, though, it's possible the president, like so many others, failed to see how the agreement would circumscribe American action. But it's certainly clear now that if the next president intends to restore American primacy abroad, or just return some capacity to coerce adversaries in the Middle East, he or she will have to be prepared to watch the Iranians walk away from the nuclear agreement. Downing the Islamic State is probably impossible so long as Washington is held hostage by the accord. As unpleasant as it may be to accept, there is now only one presidential candidate who could abandon Obama's defining foreign accomplishment, challenge the Islamic Republic's regional ambitions, and destroy the caliphate of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi: former secretary of state Hillary Clinton.

*One of three long-range Qadr ballistic-missile tests from northern Iran on March 9*

MAHMOOD HOSSEINI / AFP / GETTY

Though President Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry are quick to deny it, the nuclear accord has already become a straitjacket on policy. Just look at the administration's dithering awkwardness in responding to Russian plans to sell the clerical regime advanced fighter/fighter-bomber aircraft, which violate the accord and make a mockery of the timelines for legal conventional arms sales that were on the sidelines of the nuclear talks.

And look at the minor sanctions thrown at Tehran for its most recent ballistic-missile tests, which challenge the credibility of the agreement's time-limited restraints on the mullahs' atomic ambitions. There had been a blanket prohibition on nuclear-capable missile research under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1929: "Iran shall not undertake any activity related to ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons, including launches using ballistic missile technology." That wording was changed in Resolution 2231, which implemented the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action: "Iran is called upon not to undertake any activity related to ballistic missiles designed to be capable of delivering nuclear weapons. . ." Kerry and Ambassador Stephen Mull, the lead coordinator on implementing the agreement, were either daydreaming or fibbing when they told Congress that Resolution 2231 clearly restricted Tehran's lawful capacity to launch long-range ballistic missiles. The White House tried to spin its response to the tests—minor sanctions against individuals and companies in easily replaced procurement networks—as a serious punishment for Iran's continuing missile development, which the Islamic Republic's supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, has declared off-limits to U.N. oversight.

Then consider the White House's assiduous ambivalence about extending the 1996 Iran Sanctions Act, which underpins the more punishing 2010 Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act and expires at the end of this year. Extension doesn't mean enforcement: It would allow the president to threaten "snapback" sanctions against Iran's energy sector, in particular the critical upstream foreign investments in the oil and natural-gas industries. The administration has urged Congress to hold

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off, obviously worried that an extension could seriously upset the mullahs. But it's been hinting it will support renewal later in the hopes of siphoning Democratic support from the bipartisan effort for extension, which would allow Congress to pass new sanctions against the clerical regime for its continuing ballistic-missile development, human-rights violations, and support to terrorists. If the administration is so reticent now about showing just a bit of muscle, there is little reason to believe that as the agreement progresses Obama will be any more inclined to play tough against Tehran. In the end, he may choose to veto an extension, so as not to legislatively arm his successor, who may not share his hope that commerce will moderate the mullahs.

Perhaps most tellingly, look at the restrained Washington rhetoric around the Islamic Republic's actions in Syria. The president and his aides are harsher towards Vladimir Putin than they are towards Khamenei, even though Iran's contributions, both military and financial, to Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad's survival have been greater than Russia's. Hundreds of thousands of Syrian Sunnis have been slaughtered in the last five years and millions have been made homeless, displaced, and pushed towards Europe, and it's the clerical regime, not Russia, that has been the primary enabler of this horror show.

## IRANIAN HARDBALL

If the deal stands beyond Obama's presidency, there will be no meaningful pushback by the United States and Europe against Assad. Any serious military effort to aid the Syrian opposition would perforce target Iranians and Russians, who have become the linchpins of Assad's military power. Putin's recent decision to withdraw some of his forces doesn't really change this calculation. Russian aircraft are still bombing Syrian targets, and Moscow has kept naval and air bases in Syria, so any planes or helicopters withdrawn can quickly be sent back. If the United States decided to check the Assad-Iran-Russia axis, especially by giving military backing to the creation of a safe haven in Syria (once, perhaps still, Clinton's preferred Syrian strategy), it would challenge Iran's insistence on the survival of the Shiite Alawite regime.

Washington would also come into conflict with Tehran if the United States gathered and led a large Sunni Arab force in Iraq capable of pushing back against the Islamic State. The rise of the Wahhabi Sunni jihadist group has made Iraqi Shiite Arabs, who have had a long, tense, and sometimes bitter relationship with Shiite Iranians, much more dependent on Tehran. Iran has a strategic interest in preventing Iraqi stability and any Sunni-Shiite political settlement there.

Would an American administration attempt to counter *seriously* the clerical regime and concurrently enrich it through unfettered access to Western and Asian trade and financial markets? Would Congress stand for such a contradiction? A congressional veto-proof majority in favor of reimposing crippling sanctions would probably develop quickly if American soldiers started dying in Iraq or Syria through Iranian machinations, which isn't at all unlikely if Washington deployed significant numbers of combat troops in either country—the clerical regime effectively targeted U.S. soldiers in Iraq before 2011 via Iranian-made explosive devices, Iranian-trained militias, and hit teams. And if significant unilateral sanctions are thrown at Iran, for any reason, odds are excellent Khamenei, who obviously disliked the idea of making any concessions to Westerners during the nuclear talks, will abandon the deal. He might do so with considerable European indulgence, given how the agreement has whetted European commercial appetites.

More hawkish Democrats, who could come back into vogue if Hillary Clinton wins the presidency, might want to believe that they can keep the atomic accord and stop the bloody chaos spilling out of Syria. They don't appear enamored of the progressive argument that Syria is a quagmire for Russia and Iran and thus no American action is required. At least publicly, they've not yet come to the position, more or less held by Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump, that Assad has slaughtered his way to a morally and strategically superior position: His regime, and its Iranian and Russian enablers, is preferable to the rebellious, jihadism-infected Sunni Syrians.

Yet any hope that a more aggressive president with tougher rhetoric can handle Syria will crash against the hard fact that Assad, Iran, and Russia haven't demonstrated they're losing the will to fight. At a minimum, the Iranians surely want to keep Syria in some chaos: The Assad regime's dependency upon Tehran and the Syrian militias that the Revolutionary Guards have formed will continue to grow, giving Tehran greater influence on the battlefield and in politics. An Iraqi parallel is obvious: Chaos there also redounds to Iran's advantage.

Ken Pollack, a fairly tough-minded analyst of the Middle East, recently wrote a blue-ribbon policy report, chaired by Bill Clinton's secretary of state Madeleine Albright and George W. Bush's national security adviser Stephen Hadley, suggesting Iran would come to the peace table in earnest if the United States and its European allies dedicated "far more Western energy and resources toward forming a more robust opposition army capable of dominating the Syrian battlefields," which would include "American advisors and fire support." He claims that when the United States appeared serious in Syria, before Obama ignored his own red lines about Assad's use of chemical weapons, Iranians "quickly telegraphed that they would gladly discard Assad so long as Alawite interests were duly represented in any

future political settlement." But Pollack underestimates Iranian tenacity and the new sectarian alignment of the region.

A good rule for the Middle East, and an absolutely critical one for the Islamic Republic, is that private emissaries delivering messages that contradict strongly stated public positions should be viewed with the utmost suspicion. It is possible in certain dire situations that deeply felt ideology can be temporarily transgressed (during the dark days of the Iran-Iraq war, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini approved the missiles-for-hostages American mission to Tehran), but the written record is always the best guide to what men of serious faith will countenance. And the public commentary provides next to no evidence that the clerical regime would be willing to abandon Assad. Tehran has invested massively in his regime—overcoming, according to the late Iranian Revolutionary Guard general Hossein Hamadani, considerable resistance from Assad and the Alawite-dominated military to establishing militias modeled on the Lebanese Hezbollah. Assad and his loyal minions are now all-in with Iranian tactics and methodology.

The clerical regime is well aware that the Assad family built the Shiite Alawite dictatorship from scratch over five decades. It's a good guess Khamenei is deeply fearful that if the top comes off the Syrian power pyramid, the whole thing collapses. Revolutionary Guard losses are still relatively small in Syria. The corps has around 125,000 soldiers; it has deployed in Syria, according to Ali Alfoneh and Michael Eisenstadt, upwards of 3,000, though there may be only several hundred there today. Even if the regime is lying about how many have died in Syria (roughly 350), that number isn't likely to deter Iranian leadership, especially the leadership of the corps, which prides itself on the guards' love of martyrdom and hasn't had a chance to prove its worth since the end of the Iran-Iraq war in 1988. When Congress was considering the merits of the just-concluded Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action last summer, the administration was spinning journalists on the idea that Iran was tiring of its commitment in Syria and perhaps seeking a way out. Tehran was actually preparing a surge in coordination with Russia's military intervention in September. The White House and the State Department probably weren't being deceitful; they were just projecting their own intolerance for combat casualties.

The nuclear deal has helped relieve some of Tehran's financial stress from maintaining its commitments in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, but no bonanza has so far arrived, which has, predictably, reinforced the Obama administration's investment in Rouhani's future and its disinclination to do anything that could jeopardize Rouhani's reelection next year. The overarching political rationale for the deal—that the accord would strengthen moderates in Iran—obliges Obama to hang with Rouhani and ever-larger sanctions relief. Determining who is a "hardliner" and who is a "moderate," let alone figuring out how to support the latter against the former, hasn't been historically an American forte. The administration has tried to simplify the analysis: Anyone who supports the nuclear deal is a "moderate"; anyone who doesn't isn't. Although the White House denies it, the administration is almost certainly trying to figure out a means to allow the Iranians indirect access to large U.S. dollar transactions, though such access is not explicitly permitted under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. Surprisingly short-sighted, Rouhani and his foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, failed to demand this concession before the agreement was concluded. Rouhani's survival now trumps bipartisan American sanctions raised against the mullahs' support of terrorism, human-rights violations, the narcotics trade, money laundering, etc. If Rouhani fails to win reelection, administration officials fear, the atomic agreement could collapse. Reenergized "conservatives" could charge that the deal, compromising to Iran's national and Islamic integrity, failed to deliver the hundreds of billions of dollars Rouhani promised.

Valuing the nuclear agreement above all other Middle Eastern considerations unquestionably will disincline Obama's successor from looking at any nonnuclear nefarious Iranian actions with a critical, sanctions-friendly eye. If the Iranians hang tough with Assad, then Washington post-Obama would have to ratchet up pressure considerably if President Clinton really wanted to establish a safe haven in Syria. Supporting a "robust opposition" would require the United States to endanger the Damascus regime, which means that the American-supported Syrian opposition would need to kill more Revolutionary Guards. If Iran doesn't fold, the odds are high American soldiers in Iraq, and Syria if deployed to a safe zone, would be targeted. Would Congress and the next president just watch Iran kill Americans without reprisal?

## THE POLITICAL REALITY

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action amplifies the president's predilections: Without the agreement, Obama wasn't going to forcefully punish the Islamic Republic for its sins, even for advancing a ballistic-missile program that *everyone* in Washington knows is designed, one day, to carry nuclear weapons. As the president shouted out to the *Atlantic*'s Jeffrey Goldberg, Obama doesn't think that the Middle East is worth its price. For those who believe that no menace from the region merits another war, the nuclear agreement has more plusses than minuses. A half-million dead Syrians is a catastrophe, but it shouldn't draw the United States into another protracted campaign against Muslim foes on behalf of Muslim civilians

who, once saved, would likely reward us with an insurgency. More intervention in the region isn't opposed only by dogged "realist" foes of Pax Americana, like Andrew Bacevich, John Mearsheimer, and Stephen Walt, who don't find massive human suffering, certainly not in the Muslim Middle East, worth the risk of American lives and wealth. A penetrating observer of the Arab predicament, the chastened former Israeli-Palestinian negotiator Aaron David Miller, articulates well the dispiritedness of the foreign-policy set in Washington, who can't really see any way forward in "a broken and dysfunctional Middle East" where "common ground for comprehensive solutions to problems simply doesn't exist."

If it honors the accord, Iran can commence the mass production of advanced centrifuges in 2025, which gives Washington time to retreat from the Middle East and locals time to adjust, to ramp up their anti-Iranian defenses or acquiesce. If the United States is no longer concerned about internal Muslim dynamics so long as the Eastern Province in Saudi Arabia keeps pumping oil, if we are over 9/11 and prepared to absorb less-than-catastrophic terrorist strikes directed from holy-warrior emirates in the region, then do we really care whether the mullahs are expanding their power in the wake of collapsing Arab states? Are we really bothered by sectarian bloodletting among Muslims? Nuclear deterrence and proliferation may be a nightmare for Israel, which would have near-zero response time, not to mention the hair-raising complexity of countering and balancing the game of atomic chicken that could occur if Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Iran have nukes, but the United States has the distance and the nuclear arsenal, so the reasoning goes, to remain apart from Muslim-versus-Muslim-versus-Jew enmities. And if the Europeans come in range of nuclear-tipped Iranian missiles, well, that's their problem. The French and the British still have a *force de frappe*.

Could this mindset, which has gone mainstream in both the Democratic and Republican parties, change? Possibly. Events can alter foreign policy overnight. Syria could get a lot worse, sending even larger waves of refugees toward Turkey, Europe, and Jordan. Muslim refugees are already close to shattering the best and essential part of the European Union—open borders. President Obama has obviously been unmoved by European travails, but another, more transatlantic president might fear the North Atlantic Treaty Organization going down with the European Union. As Walter Russell Mead has highlighted, the global international order since WWII has held precisely because the United States had such disproportionate military power, responsibilities, and defense expenditures. A new president may discover, again, that Europe and the United States are joined at the hip, that the West really still means something, and that without "free-riding" Europe, the United States is alone and cannot for long act effectively overseas.

And European lives do matter. If Islamic terrorists keep striking our Western allies, a more transatlantic American president may decide that collective defense demands a larger, more determined military effort to destroy Baghdadi's caliphate and Assad's Sunni-killing machine, which is the root cause of the extensive radicalization of Syrian Sunnis. The French-speaking Islamic terrorists who struck in Paris and Brussels may view Europe as the *ventre mou*, the soft underbelly, of the West, but the overarching, if less accessible, target for such holy warriors remains America. One major terrorist strike against the United States, with hundreds dead, and what seems inconceivable now—an American military campaign in Syria—becomes compelling. Other regional realities that President Obama hasn't thought so important could also change American temperaments and priorities.

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## AMERICAN TRIPWIRES

Although the Shiite-dominated Iraqi government, backed by Iranian-organized Shiite militias and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, probably cannot drive Islamic State forces out of Mosul and the Iraqi west without considerably more American support than Obama has been willing to commit, it's possible that the successes of the Assad axis against the Syrian opposition will force the Islamic State to hollow out its forces in Mesopotamia to protect its Syrian possessions. A more effective Iraqi offensive could follow. Jordan could get flooded with even more Syrian and Iraqi Sunni refugees, many of whom would be militant and battle-hardened. The Hashemite monarchy, America's and Israel's favorite royals, could find itself confronting a lot of militants inside Jordan. The Hashemites have had more than nine lives; King Abdullah's ability to navigate when his primary benefactors, Saudi Arabia and the United States, have been "defeated" and "coopted" in Syria isn't going to lengthen the monarchy's lifespan. If the Syrian contagion spreads to Jordan's increasingly disgruntled Sunnis, both Palestinian and "East Bankers," Washington and Jerusalem would

quickly recalculate the cost of American retrenchment.

And Saudi Arabia will be the big Sunni Arab loser if the Russians and Iranians triumph in the Levant. Analyzing Saudi internal dynamics is difficult for outsiders and may not be that much easier for the Saudi royal family. When the Iranian nuclear negotiations became serious, the Saudis abandoned their preference for quieter diplomacy behind an American shield wall. They, like the Iranians, have reacted to Obama's aversion to the Middle East with a more militarized foreign policy—the exact opposite of what the president thought would happen with the "region-stabilizing" nuclear agreement.

If the Saudis are also defeated in Yemen, where they're battling Iranian-aided Shiite Houthis, then the kingdom, which is in the midst of a generational change of power, would face two lost wars at the very time oil income and hard-currency reserves keep shrinking. Saudi self-confidence will be shot. Tehran will press its advantage. We can be certain the Saudis will do what they always do when Shiites challenge: amp up Wahhabism at home and abroad in an attempt to claim the mantle of true Islam. Their response to the Islamic Republic's play for dominion will, in a replay of the 1980s, reinforce Sunni militants and fundamentalists uneasy with, if not dismissive of, the Saudi monarchy. Whereas the Iranian clerical regime keeps dividing against itself, creating opponents on its more Westernized "left," the Saudi regime creates its most potent internal enemies on its "right," religious dissidents, nourished by the Saudi Wahhabi religious establishment, who find the monarchy lax, immoral, and, given what is happening in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, probably feckless. The Islamic State and al Qaeda will reap the rewards. And it's a certainty that as the Iranian-Saudi clash intensifies, Saudi royals will aid both jihadist groups where they are combating Shiites, further eroding American and European military actions against the caliphate and al Qaeda.

Saudi Arabia suffers from the same syndrome as the Pakistani military: They can't stop supporting Islamic militants because foreign challenges and religious identity cross-fertilize each other. They persist in doing so even after bloody blowback. Princeton's Bernard Haykel, the most interesting scholar writing on the Islamic State, recently conjured up a scenario in which Saudi Arabia fractures into regions where Hobbesian Islamist war rages. Given the peninsula's tribal complexity, the intensity of its severe faith, and the House of Saud's many problems, this scenario is not implausible. The spillover from this, as Haykel notes, would be more destructive than Syria's crack-up, since the Eastern Province, where most of the country's oil and Shiites are located, would become a battleground. An American and European intervention there could be unavoidable if internecine strife, or the Iranians, threatened petroleum production. The idea that America's growing energy production will somehow insulate the United States from the global economic chaos that would arrive if the Eastern Province's production were in jeopardy just shows how many serious Americans, on both the left and the right, are in intellectual free fall in the age of Obama. And the Sunni-Shiite clash will, as the Saudi-Iran rivalry did in the 1980s, intensify anti-Americanism among Muslims. To most Americans, the distant war for Muslim minds seems abstract. Instability in the Persian Gulf and intensifying terrorism could bring it home immediately.

## POST-OBAMA

The next president may find Obama's primary foreign-policy accomplishment has become a distasteful paradox: Maintain the nuclear agreement and the United States de facto becomes a partner to the Islamic Republic's imperialism. There is probably no "Cold War" middle ground—an enforceable arms-control accord married to a muscular American effort to roll back Iranian adventurism. Any serious effort to push back Tehran will, at a minimum, include sanctions. Any new major sanctions would likely tank the nuclear accord. It is a conundrum the more forceful side of the Democratic foreign-policy establishment, which supported President Obama's nuclear diplomacy and, however reluctantly, his agreement, can't escape.

Congressional Republicans wanted to maintain the 2012 status quo—massive sanctions against the clerical regime. They were, however, profoundly uncomfortable articulating what they would advocate if sanctions didn't stop the installation of centrifuges or progress at the heavy-water reactor at Arak. In the heated exchanges that occurred during Obama's nuclear diplomacy and congressional deliberations on the accord, Obama accused Republicans of having no alternative to his diplomacy except war. Conservative columnists Charles Krauthammer and Bret Stephens, both steadfast hawks, argued in their withering criticisms of the nuclear talks that the answer to the president and the clerical regime should be more sanctions, that the president was setting up a false choice between the deal and war.

Perhaps. As tendentious as the president might have been, war has always been the threat that made sanctions credible. That hawkish conservatives were running away from this truth—that preventive strikes may well be necessary to deal with the mullahs' nuclear challenge—shows that most congressional Republicans probably agreed with Obama: War was just not an option.

It doesn't matter now if the sanctions advocates were right or wrong about whether Khamenei, the Revolutionary Guards, and Rouhani would have relinquished the nuclear-weapons program because of economic pain. What

ought to be crystal clear is that the level of economic pain obtained by 2012, when Iran faced a severe hard-currency crisis, the Europeans imposed an embargo on Iranian oil, and Obama began the secret American-Iranian meetings in Oman, will not return—unless an American president can somehow persuade the Europeans to go along. European avarice, denied once through the embargo initiative, a historically astonishing, *contre-nature* diplomacy led by the French and the British, is a mighty force. What Obama gave away is unlikely to come back.

This is where imagining an alternative to Hillary Clinton becomes hard. Trump would likely accept the deal, let it run its course, whether that's a year, four years, or a decade, and move on. He has shown himself extraordinarily nonchalant about nuclear proliferation, among so many other things; he's been fervid and consistent, however, about not fighting wars in Muslim lands. He's profoundly uneasy with Muslims at home and abroad. He has been averse to military mission creep and supportive, until recently, of the Obama administration's reductions in defense outlays, prone to see defense spending as a big-ticket item driving up the deficit (his Indiana victory speech implied that defense spending and foreign aid, not entitlements, are the biggest factors increasing the national debt). Concerning Syria, Trump has allied himself with the Assad-Iran-Russia axis. He has been adamantly opposed to any military intervention, American-protected safe havens, or military aid to Sunni Syrians. Trump's fondness for Iran's and Putin's ally in Syria—he's against overthrowing Assad—could easily develop regionally into a strategic alignment of the United States with the Shiites against the Sunnis. Admittedly, trying to logically connect the dots with Trump is a near-impossible task given the contradictions he spews forth. But it beggars the imagination to believe that he could adopt in the Middle East a more forceful foreign policy, vis-à-vis Iran, Islamic State, al Qaeda, the Taliban, etc., than President Obama's. Trump is probably the most anti-interventionist presidential candidate since Eugene V. Debs, the indefatigable socialist, in 1912.

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## HILLARY VS. KHAMENEI

As counterintuitive as it may seem to some on the right, the most effective way to derail the nuclear deal now is by accepting it while highlighting its flaws, and shifting the conversation about the Islamic Republic to its foreign policy and internal politics, especially its ruthless suppression of democracy. A president who starts to demand more of the agreement than Obama has—for example, curtailment of Iranian ballistic-missile development and the use of International Atomic Energy Agency standard practices in verification—would be a huge improvement. A president who is willing to counter Iran in Iraq and Syria, who can turn to the Europeans, as a card-carrying transatlanticist and supporter of the nuclear deal, and argue that more needs to be done to check the mullahs' imperialism, might just possibly reverse America's current trajectory in the Middle East.

Clinton has pledged to "vigorously enforce and strengthen if necessary the American sanctions on Iran . . . for its sponsorship of terrorism, its ballistic missile program, and other destabilizing activities." We can certainly doubt whether her actions will match her words. Her aides had an instrumental role in Obama's atomic diplomacy. Her primary foreign-policy adviser, Jake Sullivan, commenced the nuclear discussions in secret in Oman; even after his departure from government, he saw the negotiations through to their conclusion from his teaching perch at Yale. And Clinton didn't, so far as we know, strongly disagree with the president's decision to go to the left of the Europeans in 2012, thereby undercutting the French, who'd taken the toughest line against Tehran, and U.N. Security Council resolutions, which were much more demanding than the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

And there is no reason to believe that Clinton was at odds with the major American concessions in the accord: a recognized Iranian "right" to uranium enrichment, continuing advanced centrifuge research and development, the exclusion of ballistic-missile development from the agreement, accepting (and agreeing to fib about) an Iranian prohibition against international nuclear inspectors visiting Revolutionary Guard and military bases, and, last but not least, the accord's sunset clause, which allows Iran, after a decade, a massive industrial nuclear program through which the development of atomic weapons could be rapid and undetectable.

Yet Clinton is an insider with doubts. Her language about Iran hasn't been Obamaesque. She doesn't seem to believe in the transformational promise of greater trade with the clerical regime. Although she was out of office when the nuclear talks kicked into high gear, she didn't manifest any of the giddiness that afflicted many in the

administration—the president, his communications alter ego Ben Rhodes, the nuclear negotiator Wendy Sherman, and especially Secretary of State Kerry. To Clinton's good fortune, she never dealt with the clerical regime's foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, easily the most talented Iranian diplomat since the revolution. We don't know how she would have reacted to his reality distortion field, which inclines American officials to believe they aren't dealing with a sincere, mendacious Islamist. It's hard to imagine, however, that she would have conducted herself with as much diplomatic exuberance as Sherman, Kerry, and Obama.

Clinton may well remember the high hopes her husband's administration had for an evolution in U.S.-Iranian relations when Mohammad Khatami, a reformist cleric, unexpectedly won a landslide presidential election in 1997. The White House chose not to dwell, after Khatami's election, on the substantial intelligence connecting the Iranian regime to the deadly bombing against American soldiers at Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia in 1996. She surely remembers the disappointment in Washington when Khatami's reformers were downed by the supreme leader and the so-called pragmatists revolving around former president Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani and his often ruthless aide-de-camp, Rouhani. She may remember how apologetic her husband became in an attempt to entice Khatami and Khamenei into better relations. And how his apologias failed.

Clinton was a pretty mundane senator, who worked the nuts and bolts of both domestic and international problems. She voted for the war in Iraq—as did every Democrat with presidential aspirations. She'd also watched her husband try to deal with Saddam Hussein after the Gulf war. Anyone who watched her twist in the Democratic primary battle of 2008 knows she didn't enjoy becoming a war critic to keep up with Obama and the antiwar fervor of the American left. As the *New York Times*'s Mark Landler recently pointed out, she confessed in 2008 to General Jack Keane, an architect of the surge in Iraq, that she'd been wrong about opposing the surge. According to Landler, General Keane is "perhaps the greatest single influence on the way Hillary Clinton thinks about military issues." If that is true, then Clinton is capable of putting more American boots on the ground in the Greater Middle East.

If elected, Clinton will surely try to triangulate, maintaining the nuclear agreement while exploring options to counter the clerical regime's regional ambitions. This exploration will lead back to the cul-de-sac: Any serious opposition to Iran will inevitably include sanctions, which will imperil the agreement. It's not unlikely that Clinton and Sullivan didn't think through how tactically and strategically confining the accord would prove to be, in part because they may have shared Obama's general desire to downsize America's presence in the Muslim world.

For Clinton, the test will probably come over Syria and Iraq, where around 5,000 American soldiers are again serving. Iranian hubris always blossoms when others are weak. Clinton has surely noticed that the nuclear deal hasn't helped stabilize the Middle East. Assuming President Obama finds a legal way to allow the Islamic Republic to indirectly use American financial institutions to make large dollar-denominated transactions, she will get to see the mullahs' hubris grow quickly. The more cash the clerical regime has, the more trouble it will cause.

**She's not a neoconservative, but Hillary Clinton isn't uncomfortable with American power. Unlike Obama, she isn't the apologetic type.**

A race is on: Will what's left of America's will to intervene against a resurgent clerical regime, even one openly striving to advance its nuclear aspirations, evaporate before the mullahs push too far, either on the ground in Syria or Iraq or in their contempt of Western surveillance of their nuclear and ballistic-missile programs? Washington is currently in an acrimonious period of "bipartisan isolationism," to borrow from Ray Takeyh at the Council on Foreign Relations. Both Democrats and Republicans bristle at the "isolationist" label, but they are, with almost equal vigor, running from the Middle East and ambivalent about other commitments.

She's not a neoconservative, but Hillary Clinton isn't uncomfortable with American power. Unlike Obama, she isn't the apologetic type. Whatever her opinions were in the Vietnam era, she doesn't now view the Cold War ambivalently. She's certain that might married right in that struggle, even in the Third World, where Obama and many on the left have serious doubts. Any flirtation she's had with Iran is likely to follow the way of the French.

In 1993, France started "engaging" the Islamic Republic, hoping to profit from and moderate the regime's behavior. Despite the Iranian intelligence ministry's past bombings and assassinations on French soil, the French turned the other cheek, hoping for something new with President Rafsanjani. They hung in there when Khatami's presidency effectively collapsed in 1999 and led the charge in 2002 to engage Tehran anew when an Iranian opposition group revealed what the French intelligence service had known for some time: The mullahs had a clandestine nuclear-weapons program. The French, Germans, and Brits started "EU3" diplomacy because they feared George W. Bush's bellicosity as much as they feared the clerical regime's atomic ambition. When that diplomacy became

more intense, however, the French hardened towards Tehran. As Thérèse Delpech, the senior French official who wrote extensively on nonproliferation and Iran, put it, Paris just grew tired of the Iranians "always lying." Although French president François Hollande would likely not have publicly supported American preventive military strikes against the mullahs' nuclear sites, he was prepared to support America demanding far tougher positions than Obama did in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

A second Clinton administration will grow frustrated with the clerical regime's mendacity, anti-Americanism, and imperialist ambitions. Iran's ballistic-missile advances, echoing the progress in North Korea, with which Tehran has had close technical cooperation, will cause increasing concern. Time will shrink rapidly; envisioning the mullahs with an industrial-scale uranium-enrichment program will become more threatening. Rouhani's presidency, assuming he is reelected, will prove no more "moderate" than Rafsanjani's was in the 1990s. Rouhani, a founding father of the Islamic Republic's intelligence ministry, is a creature of the regime's deep national-security state. The common leftist refrain about Iran fighting the "good fight" against the Islamic State and al Qaeda will probably not play well with Clinton, who wanted to use American airpower against Assad. President Obama is content to allow history to judge his Iran gamble, admitting that in twenty years, if Iran proceeds with its nuclear designs, his bet may prove a colossal mistake. Clinton seems less of a gambler. Yet she will confront the same question that Obama did: If you're not really prepared to threaten war, how far can you make the Iranians bend through sanctions? If she isn't willing to fight, is she willing to bluff?

Given the insatiable demands of the welfare state, the decline of the United States' military—and with it the country's willpower, optimism, and strategic imagination—may be irreversible. Given the history of Iranian-American relations, how Washington has usually blinked at the mullahs' violent provocations, the odds have always been good that the clerical regime would win its nuclear struggle with the United States. But Hillary Clinton has the component parts to break free from Obama's legacy—provided Middle Eastern events prove sufficiently shocking. She seems tough enough to challenge the Iranians and the growing passivity and pacifism of her own party. She could make the case with our allies for re-isolating the mullahs. If America's writ is to be restored, if Islamic militants who intend us harm are to be thwarted, a liberal internationalist, one of the last ones standing, will have to do it. ♦


# Consumers Can't Count on the CFPB

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

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) is one of the country's most powerful and unaccountable government agencies. Instead of fulfilling its mission to "protect consumers from unfair, deceptive, or abusive practices," it often pursues an overtly political agenda to help its allies.

That's what is happening with a proposed CFPB rule that would ban language in contracts between companies and consumers prohibiting class action lawsuits. That may sound like a good thing for consumers, but it's not. This rule would effectively eliminate arbitration and replace it with class action lawsuits, which routinely leave consumers with pennies and lawyers with millions.

Is the CFPB attempting to eliminate arbitration because independent studies say it doesn't work? No. The CFPB itself concluded that 87% of class actions provide no benefit at all to class members. Of the 13% that provide some benefit, the average payout is $35. Plaintiffs' lawyers make about 31,000 times that amount, earning an average of $1 million per settled case.

If the class action system fails consumers, why is the CFPB embracing it? Because the powerful plaintiffs' bar hasn't been able to get rid of arbitration and expand class actions any other way. Congress hasn't responded, and in 2011 the Supreme Court upheld the type of contract language the CFPB wants to ban. The trial bar, having lost its argument in the legislative and judicial branches, turned to unaccountable regulators—all in an effort to increase lawsuit revenues.

The CFPB argues that its proposed rule doesn't directly prohibit arbitration; it merely bans contract terms prohibiting class action lawsuits. That's like telling a teenager, "I'm not taking your car, just the keys." The reality is that the CFPB's rule is the practical equivalent of a direct ban. If companies are forced to spend millions paying lawyers to defend class actions, they are going to stop subsidizing arbitration. Also, since trial lawyers won't take low-dollar arbitration claims, preferring lucrative class actions, the CFPB rule gives consumers fewer options.

Arbitration empowers consumers to resolve disputes easily and quickly on their own, without the burden of hiring a lawyer. It's a low-cost, user-friendly way to help wronged individuals bring claims.

As this administration winds down, special interest groups will continue to push for midnight regulations on issues where they've been unable to get Congress to agree to their agenda. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce won't hesitate to advocate against those regulations when they're harmful to our economy, U.S. businesses, and Americans. The arbitration rule certainly is. The CFPB must go back to the drawing board.

U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
www.uschamber.com/abovethefold

*'The Deposition' by Raphael (1507)*

# Beyond the Cross

## *Myriad meanings in the death of Jesus.* BY BARTON SWAIM

It's a commonplace observation, and yet somehow still a shocking one: In all of human civilization, no subject has been written and talked about more than the death of Jesus Christ. A typical subject you might study in graduate school—presidential politics, say, or the poetry of William Wordsworth—will occupy four or five shelves of a well-stocked university library. The death of Jesus generates that much material every decade and has done so for centuries.

Many scholars and theologians, of course, don't believe the New Testament to be a reliable witness to the historical Jesus' words and deeds, and their theories are many and diverse: Jesus was a political revolutionary, a countercultural philosopher, a crusading ascetic. Even if we confine ourselves to definably Christian interpretations, however, we are still faced with a multilayered body of doctrine and textual interpretation that, nearly 20 centuries after the event, continues to inspire worldwide scholarly inquiry—and at times fierce debate.

**The Crucifixion**
*Understanding the Death of Jesus Christ*
by Fleming Rutledge
Eerdmans, 696 pp., $45

Fleming Rutledge does not present her book as a definitive exposition but as a "series of theological reflections on Scripture and tradition," written mainly for Christian believers who want to know what the best Christian minds have thought about the meaning of the cross. Even so, I wonder if unbelieving or agnostic readers wouldn't profit by it as much or more: Rutledge's prose is winsome and engaging, her learning wide but never flaunted, and her book is a fine introduction to a subject that has puzzled non-Christians since the middle of the first century: Why would anyone worship a man who, by every account, had been publicly disgraced and executed as a criminal?

To be fair, this is a question many Christians today could not readily answer if they tried. Centuries of aesthetically tempered iconography have

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inclined us to forget that the cross was a shameful and revolting thing: a form of public execution involving the transfixing of a naked man, often already brutalized, to a tree or upraised post. And yet this very form of execution is what the earliest Christians insisted on emphasizing: "We preach Christ crucified," writes Paul in I Corinthians, and again, "I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." Rutledge does not blink:

> Many Christians would say, repeating words they have often heard, that the death of Jesus on the cross shows us how much God loves us. This is plainly stated in Ephesians 5:2 and in many other places in the New Testament. Jesus himself says in the Gospel of John, "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). But why would it be necessary for God's Son to die *in such a peculiarly horrible way* in order to show us this greater love?

Assume, for a moment, that Christianity's outrageous claim is true and that Jesus really was the eternal son of God and that he really *did* submit himself to the cross in order to save sinners. What, exactly, did he accomplish? Let me vastly overstate the case by saying that there are two overarching answers to that question, and the best theologians throughout the history of the church have acknowledged both.

The first is that Jesus died a death of penal substitution: By submitting a life of perfect obedience to the cursed death of the cross, he met the demands of God's law and paid the price we were incapable of paying. As the prophet Isaiah had it,

> *He was wounded for our transgressions,*
> *He was bruised for our iniquities;*
> *The chastisement of our peace was upon Him,*
> *And with His stripes we are healed.*

This understanding of Jesus' death, often described as substitutionary atonement, was expressed, in various ways, by a few early church fathers, famously by Anselm in the 11th century, more forcefully by the Protestant reformers, and eventually by Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions. Most modern Christians in the West, if they think about the question at all, think of Christ's work exclusively in these terms.

The other understanding, propounded by a greater number of church fathers, by Martin Luther in various places, and especially by some 20th-century scholars beginning with the Swede Gustaf Aulén in *Christus Victor* (1931), holds that Jesus in his death and resurrection took on the powers of Satan and death and overcame them. The latter interpretation makes sense of, for instance, the apostle John's statement in I John 3:8: "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." (Ask the average American evangelical why Jesus came into the world and you will almost certainly *not* get the answer, "To destroy the works of the devil.")

Rutledge rightly insists that both these understandings express different components of the same creed. She does not assume, as too many biblical scholars have and do, that a work as magnificent as God's redemption of mankind must be reducible to a tidy cohesive interpretation or "theory." And both these understandings, she rightly contends, find expression in a doctrine often called (rather dryly, to my mind) recapitulation: the doctrine that Christ came to undo what Adam did and to do what Adam failed to do. Hence Paul's great elucidation in the fifth chapter of Romans: "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" (5:19).

She contends, correctly, that "in the mainline Protestant churches of our times, there is no lack of exhortation to … be more inclusive, give more generously, embrace the Other, work for peace, minister to the needy, feed the poor, cultivate tolerance, seek justice, show hospitality, and so forth." What is often missing, she writes, "is the powerful proclamation of the One who is doing the calling, who has ratified our calling in his own blood, who has entered upon the life of 'Adam' in order to defeat *from inside human nature* the work of the Enemy."

*The Crucifixion* exhibits a genuine reverence for the Christian Scriptures, and for that reason it may surprise some readers that Rutledge is writing from a robustly "liberal" tradition. That tradition, beginning in earnest in the late 19th century and developing into various forms of theological moralism in the latter half of the 20th, is closely associated with critical, or historical-critical, scholarship. Critical biblical scholars, concerned primarily with the origins and authorship of texts, have generally operated on the premise that these texts are in no sense supernatural or revelatory. Since the supernatural events portrayed in biblical texts—Jesus' healing of the lame and blind, say, or the resurrection itself—cannot be accurate representations of what happened, they must have been invented at some later date for sectarian or political purposes.

One may approve or disapprove of that premise, and critical scholars themselves have found ways to treat texts as in some sense "sacred" without treating them as inerrant or even as divine revelation. But that has long been the de facto governing assumption behind critical exegesis of biblical texts. The trouble is that, from any point of view, it's boring. The biblical writings purport to tell us what God is like and how man can know him. All critical scholars are ever going to tell us is who wrote (or didn't write) which books and what sort of half-baked primitive ideas underlay their composition. That may be fine for desiccated scholarly monographs, but it will not sustain anyone's faith or motivate anyone to works of mercy.

Fleming Rutledge is one of a growing number of liberal scholars—probably the most well known is N.T. Wright—who insist on interpreting biblical texts on those texts' own terms. These scholars' interpretations do not always align with those of more orthodox, or "evangelical," scholars; but taken together, they signify a more theological turn in mainstream biblical exegesis—and, by extension, a turn away from the kind of lifelessly "scientific" readings that, over the course of the last century, led mainline church

leaders to ignore the Bible and, instead, promote various forms of up-to-date moral uplift.

Rutledge, like other liberal but orthodox-leaning biblical scholars, does not openly disavow critical scholarship or its presuppositions; and indeed, she accepts its commonly held conclusions—for example, that Paul likely did not write the Letter to the Ephesians. Instead, she sidesteps the whole tangled problem by observing that "this method of explicating [biblical] texts has probably taken us as far as it can take us."

Rutledge's liberalism shows up in other ways, too. Consider her chapter on the justice and judgment of God. Is God, as the Bible claims, angry at man's sin? A typical 20th-century liberal Protestant would have trouble answering that one, but Rutledge doesn't. Yes, she says, God is indignant at injustice; and the crucifixion itself only makes sense if he is the sort of God who is sufficiently repulsed by evil to interpose his own Son to provide a way of deliverance from his wrath.

Well, okay. But her description of the sorts of injustice that anger God are all corporate and social injustices, rarely if ever individual ones. That is wholly in keeping with the liberal tradition to which Rutledge belongs, in which the more "individualistic" tendencies of evangelicalism and pietism are frequently thought to encourage a lack of responsibility for collective life. It lets the individual off the hook rather too easily, however. "Why has the gap between rich and poor become so huge?" she asks in her intermittently hortatory style.

> Why are so many mentally ill people slipping through the cracks? Why does gun violence continue to be a hallmark of American culture? Why are there so many innocent people on death row? Why are our prisons filled with such a preponderance of black and Hispanic men?

An ordinary congregant, listening to a homily along these lines, might legitimately excuse himself from any guilt at all. *He* hasn't done anything to perpetrate these injustices.

Certainly there are biblical passages, especially in the Old Testament prophets, that inveigh against social injustices; but the preponderance of biblical writings is concerned with individual sins rather than corporate ones. In the Bible, as Rutledge correctly points out, "justice" and "righteousness" are the same word. What she doesn't point out is that this justice/righteousness far more often refers to individual conduct and character than it does to cultural customs or government policies.

This difference in outlook has shaped our politics to the present day. Conservatives tend to see individual decisions as more consequential (abortion and sexual license on the negative side, free market decision-making on the positive), whereas liberals, concerned primarily with corporate life, feel that an excessive concern with the individual leads inexorably to lassitude and injustice in the political sphere. There is truth in both outlooks and both critiques, but if we confine ourselves to the biblical worldview, it is not unfair to put it in the form of a question: Was the Son of God immolated on the cross for my sins or for America's?

The last two decades have seen scores of popular books about Jesus that promote all sorts of theories about who he was and what he was up to. The great majority of these achieved their aims by the simple strategy of discounting contrary evidence: that is, categorizing inconvenient New Testament passages as later inventions. It's easy to claim that Jesus was married, say, or that he was executed for advocating some proto-socialist utopia, when you can dismiss virtually the whole of the New Testament witness as somehow illegitimate.

Far more difficult, and in the long run infinitely more interesting, is the task of letting writers of the first century tell us what they saw and heard about Jesus' death without discounting or second-guessing them. That is what Fleming Rutledge has done, and she has done it with insight and skill. ♦

B&A

# A Survivor's Tale

*The rise and fall and rise of a career Maoist.*

BY HENRIK BERING

**Deng Xiaoping**
*A Revolutionary Life*
by Alexander V. Pantsov
with Steven I. Levine
Oxford, 640 pp., $34.95

An essential job requirement for a government minister in a totalitarian dictatorship is a willingness to suffer endless humiliation at the hands of the supreme leader. Deng Xiaoping (1904-97) delivers a master class in the art of self-abasement, when subjected to the sadistic whims of Chairman Mao. With his stupendous ability to absorb punishment, Deng is a fascinating combination: the ultimate hard man and Mao's helpless plaything. His only motivation, the authors suggest, is political survival at any cost. Notions such as human dignity, pride, and principle at no point enter into the equation.

Rather than the closet liberal with reformist urges dating back to the early 1950s that some scholars would have us believe, the authors show Deng to be very much Mao's enforcer, efficiently rooting out internal opposition. And although, in the late 1970s, he began to loosen the straitjacket of Maoist economics under the slogan "seek truth from facts"—one of the late chairman's own Delphic admonitions—by the end of his life he proved to be as intolerant as Mao himself, as demonstrated by the

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1989 massacre in Tiananmen Square.

Building on files from Russian state archives and interviews with his wives, children, and dissident leaders, this book serves as a useful corrective to panegyrics such as Ezra F. Vogel's *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China* (2011), which focused almost exclusively on Deng's economic reforms, and Michael Dillon's *Deng Xiaoping: The Man Who Made Modern China* (2014), which bent over backwards to find excuses for his crimes.

Born in the hamlet of Paifang in Sichuan Province to well-educated, landowning parents, Deng had a privileged upbringing. Pantsov and Levine detail his student years in Paris in the early 1920s, where the French inclination to view Chinese students as sources of cheap labor made him join the Communists and form a useful friendship with a slightly older Zhou Enlai. Then on to Moscow for some ideological fine tuning. Here the Chinese Communists were told to join the Kuomintang, the nationalist movement, and undermine it from within. Thus, in classic undercover mode, we find Deng in 1927 disguised as an antiques dealer in Shanghai, wearing luxurious gowns and fancy hats and enveloped in a cloud of expensive cigarette smoke.

On Zhou's recommendation, Deng's first chance to turn his newly acquired theories into practice was as emissary to the wild southwestern Guangxi Province in 1929. To explain communism to the Zhuang tribe, whose language did not contain the concept of "inequality," was uphill work. And as most of the local peasantry regarded Han Chinese with great suspicion, Deng made few converts. So "agrarian reform took the form of a series of robberies and murders, an orgy of armed banditry." (Or put another way, "there was no mass movement of peasants.") Such was the fiasco that only his link to Zhou allowed Deng to recover. This prompted the first of many self-criticisms, which he developed into an art form:

> [W]henever a dangerous intraparty collision occurred, Deng would follow the tried-and-true tactic of boldly admitting his "sins," thereby losing face, but by relying on his ties, preserve his place in the leadership.

What brought Deng to Mao Zedong's attention was a 1931 party conference in Ruijin, where Deng voiced his support of Mao's argument for guerrilla warfare against Chiang Kai-shek's forces rather than sticking with the Soviet doctrine of offensive warfare. And as one of 20,000 survivors of the 1934-35 Long March, Deng proved himself to be a resourceful battlefield commander. After the Communist victory in China's civil war, Deng wrote the plans for operations that crushed the Tibetan Army, and went on to repress "bourgeois elements" in southwest China, after which he was summoned to Beijing in 1952.

*The Dengs and the Carters (1979)*

"Papa," his daughter Nan asked, "in Sichuan everyone called you the head. What will they call you in Beijing?"

"The foot," Deng replied—and a heavy foot he turned out to be.

The authors' handling of the panic among the Chinese leadership and the deteriorating relationship between China and the Soviet Union after Nikita Khrushchev's 1956 "secret speech" denouncing Stalin is especially vivid. (As an exasperated Khrushchev later told the Chinese ambassador: "If you want Stalin, you can have him in a coffin. We'll send him to you in a special railway car.") By exposing Stalin's cult of personality and supposed infallibility, the speech struck at the very core of the Communist idea—and of Mao's rule. In response, Mao resorted to his favorite method of smoking out party enemies by inviting a manly exchange of opinions on the issue, or to use one of his favorite metaphors: "Let everything repulsive crawl out completely, since if they come out only halfway, they can hide again." Uncharacteristically tone-deaf about what the occasion called for—a complete and unequivocal submission to Mao—Deng first tried to fudge the issue by stressing that engaging in idolatry was a bad thing, of course, but had not Maoism always recognized the role of the inspiring leader in history?

In Mao's ever-vigilant mind, this waffle earned Deng a black mark. But Deng quickly got with the program in the party purge and Mao's subsequent "Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom, Let a Hundred Schools of Thought Contend" campaign to root out counterrevolutionaries by luring intellectuals to speak their mind. In both efforts, Mao was the initiator and Deng "the main executor" (in the authors' words).

AFP / GETTY

*Big Bird (left) on the Great Wall (1983)*

EVERETT COLLECTION

A half-million Chinese were hauled off to labor camps.

Beijing's break with Moscow left Mao free to launch his very own brand of socialism, the Great Leap Forward, demanding quantum increases in steel and grain production so that "in the future, all women would walk in high heeled shoes and wear lipstick." Everyone, Deng included, "was hurrying to jump on the utopian bandwagon." But of course, the idea of having farmers produce steel in their backyards was madness, and during 1958-62, an estimated 45 million Chinese perished from famine. Despite growing doubts, Deng continued to sing the praises of the Great Leap Forward until a 1961 inspection tour convinced him that collectivization doesn't work. The following year he approved the so-called Family Contract System, by which peasants could keep whatever they produced above the norm.

At a meeting to discuss the agricultural catastrophe, a defensive Mao confessed that "I don't understand many issues of economic construction." But he quickly counterattacked by demanding self-criticism from the participants: "A frenzy of confessions followed, every man turning himself inside out." What struck Mao as an especially unforgivable transgression was Deng's later comment that "it doesn't matter if the cat is black or yellow, as long as it can catch mice, it is a good cat."

This gave Mao nightmares about a "Chinese Khrushchev," so it is little wonder that Deng became a prime victim of the 1966-76 Cultural Revolution, Mao's comeback campaign targeting "capitalist roaders" in the bureaucracy. Encouraged to "bombard the headquarters," young Red Guards hauled Deng before revolutionary committees where he was forced to abase himself. Deng's children were required to condemn their father and work in the countryside. His son broke his back in a suicide attempt and, for a long time, was denied medical treatment.

At this point, most people might have given up; but Deng fired off another abject letter to Chairman Mao, begging for something to do. Mao's actress-wife Jiang Qing had demanded Deng's expulsion from the Communist party, but Mao chose to slowly return him to government: He was simply too efficient to lose.

In the post-Mao era, when it came to outmaneuvering rivals and pushing his economic reforms, Deng resorted at key moments to Maoist tactics by bypassing the party apparatus and appealing directly to the masses: "We do not have the right to refute or criticize the masses. … And there is nothing to be afraid of." Deng's famous Democracy Wall recalled Mao's old invitation to Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom.

But once the economic reforms were pushed through, the clampdown arrived. Thus the electrician Wei Jingsheng, who had called for democracy in China on the Democracy Wall, got 15 years in prison. And with Mikhail Gorbachev (whom Deng characterized as "very stupid") coming, Deng had no intention of unleashing the kind of chaos he saw in the Soviet Union. Hence the order for the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre.

So there was no secret liberal in Deng Xiaoping waiting to burst out, only a butcher with certain pragmatic elements. Deng's reforms have produced impressive growth, but the foundation remains shaky. The problem is that, if you ditch Mao, the Communists lose their claim to govern. Hence the insistence that Western notions of democracy don't apply in China. Like Deng, the current Communist Chinese leaders want to survive at all cost. ♦

B&A

# Sociable Skeptic

*David Hume, philosophical man of letters.*

BY STEPHEN MILLER

In his early twenties, David Hume (1711-1776), who is regarded by many observers as Britain's greatest philosopher, studied law and worked briefly for a Bristol merchant, but he soon decided he wanted to be a man of letters. Instead of moving to London and becoming a journalist—the usual path for most would-be men of letters in the 18th century—Hume moved to France where, supported by his family, he spent three years writing *A Treatise of Human Nature*. This "astonishingly ambitious" work, as James Harris calls it in this absorbing intellectual biography, was not a success; yet in three decades Hume would become Britain's best-known man of letters. In his early fifties, not only was Hume rich—the money he made from his *History of England* would be the equivalent today of £500,000—he was also "one of the most famous and widely respected men of letters of his day."

Hume's admirers included Edward Gibbon and Adam Smith. When Hume died in 1776, Smith, a close friend, said, "I have always considered him . . . as approaching as nearly to the idea of a perfectly wise and virtuous man as perhaps the nature of human frailty will admit." Hugh Blair, the Scottish literary critic and a leading figure in the moderate wing of the Church of Scotland, agreed: "Taking him all in all," he said, "we shall never see the like."

Hume, though, had his detractors. *Le bon David*, as he was called by his French admirers, was also called "the great Infidel" by many orthodox Christians because of his negative view of religion. Samuel Johnson told James Boswell that Hume "has so little scrupulosity as to venture to oppose those [Christian] principles which have been thought necessary to human happiness." Hume, John Wesley said, was "the most insolent despiser of truth and virtue that ever appeared in the world."

**Hume**
*An Intellectual Biography*
by James A. Harris
Cambridge, 633 pp., $55

Harris's main concern is clarifying Hume's thought, which is not easy because Hume wrote about so many different subjects: causality, morality, politics, religion, and the history of England. Harris disagrees with those who argue that the *Treatise* is the key to understanding all of Hume's writing. Because Hume was "acutely sensitive to the complexities of his time and place," many of the ideas sketched in the *Treatise* were abandoned or suffered a sea-change in later works. "There was nothing systematic," Harris says, "about the manner in which he chose the topics to which philosophical reasoning would be applied."

After completing the *Treatise*, Hume spent roughly a decade writing essays, many of them on politics and political economy. He also wrote books on human understanding and on the principles of morals. A decade later, in the 1750s, he wrote the *History of England*; he also wrote *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, which was published posthumously.

In the last 15 years of his life, Hume did little writing. In 1763 he told Adam Smith that he had "abjur'd all literary occupations," resolving "to give up my future life entirely to amusements." In 1772 he told a friend about his "great talent for cookery," to which he intended to devote "the remaining years of my life." The clubbable Hume enjoyed cooking and conversing with friends, but he also spent time revising and correcting his published works. He had a passion for writing clearly and elegantly.

In 1772, Hume told the Comtesse de Boufflers that he would not move back to Paris, where he had lived in the mid-1760s when he was secretary to the British ambassador. In Edinburgh, he wrote the Comtesse, "there are some people conversible enough." Conversability—also called sociability—is a central tenet of Hume's thought. If the citizens of a country where liberty flourishes lack conversability—that is, if they cannot discuss political questions without rancor and personal abuse—violent factional discord may ensue. To reduce the likelihood of violent civil discord, political leaders should promote "luxury," which roughly means economic growth.

In his essay "On Luxury" Hume argues that there is a strong correlation between commercial expansion and sociability. The expansion of commerce also increases wealth, promotes national power, and reduces idleness. Trade among nations is not a zero-sum game: Hume thought that Britain's commerce would benefit if other nations also had a flourishing commercial sector.

In *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith says that Hume was "the only writer" who noticed the positive political effects of commerce, but this is not accurate. Joseph Addison and Bernard Mandeville, two writers who influenced Hume, also wrote about the positive political effects of commerce; but Hume made the case for commerce with more nuance and depth than they did. His essays on political economy were admired by James Madison and Alexander Hamilton. Indeed, Hamilton says in *Federalist* 12 that "a prosperous commerce is now perceived and acknowledged by all enlightened statesmen to be the most useful as well as the most productive source of national wealth."

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Many British writers, however, disagreed with Hume about commercial expansion. In their view, luxury made citizens selfish and it undermined the military virtues. The antiluxury writers praised the classical city-state, whose citizens were supposedly animated by a disinterested concern for the public good. Hume, Harris argues, rejected the idea "that modern politics might be improved by a return to the ideals of the ancients." Ancient city-states, Hume says, often were riven with violent civil discord.

Hume worried that Britain's constitutional order was in danger because many Britons were infected with immoderate political passions. Hume especially disliked self-styled "Patriots," initially followers of the Tory writer Lord Bolingbroke. Summing up Bolingbroke's writings, Hume said that they contained "so little variety & instruction; so much arrogance and declamation." The Patriots often argued that liberty was in danger because the monarchy had corrupted Parliament. The "zeal of *patriots*," Hume wrote in 1741, was a threat to the nation.

In the late 1760s, the chief Patriot was not a Tory but the radical Whig John Wilkes. In 1768 Wilkes's followers rioted in London because Wilkes had been denied a seat in Parliament. Hume worried about "the frenzy of liberty"—so, too, did Benjamin Franklin, who wrote that "this capital … is now a daily scene of lawless riot and confusion"—and in 1771 Hume wrote his publisher that "nothing was ever equal in Absurdity and Wickedness to our present Patriotism." Thus, Hume agreed with Dr. Johnson that Patriotism—an unreasonable fear that the government is suppressing liberty—"is the last refuge of a scoundrel."

If Hume disagreed with writers who admired the ancient city-state, he also disagreed with writers who admired the Stoic notion of striving to be "above" the passions. When the young Hume tried to live by this ideal, he suffered a nervous breakdown. He soon came to the conclusion that the mind is a swirl of passions—some moderate, others immoderate. Strength of mind or virtue is not the suppression of the passions by reason but "the prevalence of the calm passions over the violent." And if Hume questions the traditional view of the mind, he also dismisses the notion that there is a moral sense. According to Hume, morality is based on sympathy, which is nourished by sociability: "No quality of human nature is more remarkable … than

*Portrait of David Hume by Allan Ramsay (1766)*

that propensity we have to sympathize with others." Hume argues that sociability is a necessary, if not sufficient, condition for morality. "Hume's conception of human nature," Harris writes, "is intensely, almost claustrophobically, social."

In Hume's scheme of things, religion is often an enemy of sociability. Christianity, he suggests, lauds the "monkish virtues of mortification, penance, humility, and passive suffering." Many Christians, he argues, are dogmatic, intolerant, humorless. In 1765 he wrote that in London, where he was living at the time, "the little company … that is worth conversing with are cold and unsociable." The English, he says in the same letter, "are relapsing fast into the deepest stupidity, Christianity & ignorance."

This letter, it should be kept in mind, was written to his close friend Hugh Blair, a leading minister in the Church of Scotland. Hume is teasing Blair—playing the role of "the great Infidel." Harris notes that, in his letters, Hume "was not very good at being serious about religion." Yet in joking about religion, Hume makes a serious point: Why is it so difficult for many people to look at religion from a philosophical point of view?

On his deathbed, Hume continued to joke about religion. According to Adam Smith's account of Hume's final days, Hume said that he had asked Charon, the boatman who ferries souls to the underworld, to give him more time on earth: "Good Charon, I have been endeavoring to open the eyes of people; have a little patience only till I have the pleasure of seeing the churches shut up and the clergy sent about their business." But Charon told him to get into the boat immediately because what Hume wished for would not happen for "200 years." But Hume did not think that religious belief would ever become a thing of the past. In his *Natural History of Religion*, he suggests that "the will to believe" (as William James put it) is widespread: "The belief of invisible, intelligent power has been very generally diffused over the human race, in all places and in all ages."

Hume once said that "the church is my aversion," yet for the most part Hume's irreligion is a calm passion. He often deleted passages from his writing that his religious friends found objectionable. Moreover, he disagreed with the dogmatic atheism of the French *philosophes*. Gibbon writes that the *philosophes* "laughed at the skepticism of Hume, [and] preached the tenets of atheism with the bigotry of dogmatists." Hume, however, was determined to publish his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* even though some friends urged him to destroy it. He finally agreed to have it published posthumously. The work disturbed his Christian friends because one of the characters says that the argument from design, which was

popular with both deists and moderate Christians, has no merit: One cannot infer from the uniformity of the works of nature that there is a God.

Hume does not say there is no God. He says that reason cannot lead us to God. Hume was not a believer, but the argument he makes is one that has been made by many believers, including (in his day) the orthodox wing of the Church of Scotland. It must have amused Hume, Harris suggests, to think that, on this question, he agreed with his Christian detractors.

Harris convincingly argues that Hume exaggerated the extent to which zealots—Hume's favorite term for those who attacked him—made life difficult for him. Yet Hume continued to be attacked long after he died. When Dr. Johnson died in 1784, an Oxford theologian published a sermon *On the Difference between the deaths of the righteous and the wicked, Illustrated in the Instance of Dr. Samuel Johnson, and David Hume, Esq.* Hume and Johnson can be seen as inhabiting two ends of the 18th-century British intellectual spectrum: the religious skeptic and the God-fearing Christian. Yet they had much in common. Both disapproved of stoicism, attacked "Patriots," and defended luxury. Both praised sociability and enjoyed conversing in clubs. Both criticized the Seven Years' War, and both thought an established church was necessary for political stability.

Both also had a dark view of human nature. Johnson would agree with Hume that "the mind of man is subject to certain unaccountable terrors and apprehensions." And he would agree with Hume that custom and ceremony help to curb "the natural depravity of mankind." Both Johnson and Hume objected to writers who downplayed human suffering by suggesting that it was somehow part of God's plan. Johnson criticized deist "speculatists" who explain away evil and suffering: Of one such writer, he says that he "decides too easily upon questions out of the reach of human determination." Harris notes that in Hume's *History of England* "there is unspoken contempt for the idea that the horrors he often describes admit of some kind of providential explanation."

It is sad that David Hume, who thought of himself as a man of letters, is nowadays mainly read by philosophers. The only chapters here that may be difficult for the lay reader are those on Hume's *History of England*: Harris walks into the thickets of English historiography in order to show how determined Hume was to be an impartial historian, agreeing neither with the Tory nor the Whig view of British history. "What he wanted from his readers," writes Harris, "was a willingness to join him … in a kind of conversation which … might best be called *philosophical*."

Join the conversation! ♦

B&A

# Cold War Nostalgia

## *What German television tells us about today's Europe.*

BY JAMES KIRCHICK

*Deutschland 83*, a hit German television show, available on Sundance Channel, has been lauded for its authentic evocation of early-1980s Cold War-gripped Europe. That much is true, but as far as the nonaesthetic elements of the series go, it is derivative, hackneyed, and predictable. When, several episodes after an adulterous NATO bureaucrat ensnared in a Stasi blackmail plot shoots himself in the head, another German military official does the same, it's clear that the writers have a tiresome penchant for suicide as an easy plot device. *Deutschland 83*'s popularity likely has more to do with resurgent Cold War nostalgia than its merits as a work of drama.

Like its far superior inspiration, *The Americans*, *Deutschland 83* is a retro spy thriller set in the Cold War, with the microcosm of superpower struggle transplanted from Washington, D.C., to divided Germany. East German border guard Martin Rauch is leading a simple life, caring for his sick mother, when his aunt Lenora, a chain-smoking, sultry Stasi official, presents him with an enviable, yet risky, opportunity. To advance his own career and secure his mother a privileged spot on the kidney-transplant list—so much for the Marxist credo "from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs"—Martin will cross the Iron Curtain and pose as aide-de-camp to a West German general, ferreting out NATO secrets for the comrades back home.

The way the Stasi infiltrates Martin into this position—assassinating an actual Bundeswehr officer whose identity Martin then assumes—is more than slightly preposterous. Are we really to believe that no one in West Germany, least of all the murdered soldier's family, realizes that Martin isn't who he claims to be? We're also expected to believe that this barely trained Stasi agent, who's never set foot outside East Germany, is able to pull off a series of incredible espial tasks, not to mention run circles around American generals and the NATO bureaucracy, eluding exposure throughout.

As in *The Americans*, the fictional action of *Deutschland 83* takes place against a backdrop of actual events, phenomena, and characters. In the inaugural episode's first scene, Lenora watches Ronald Reagan deliver his famous "Evil Empire" speech; the president's combative words ultimately convince her to recruit her nephew. In order to plant a bug at NATO's Brussels

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headquarters, Martin adopts the flirtatious tactics of "Romeo" spies—real-life Communist agents who seduced the secretaries of Western officials. A major storyline concerns the contentious debate over America's stationing of nuclear-tipped cruise and Pershing II missiles in Europe, a decision that gave birth to the influential West German peace movement, accurately portrayed as heavily penetrated by East German intelligence.

*Jonas Nay in* Deutschland 83

With its costumes, set design, and addictive New Wave soundtrack, *Deutschland 83* excels in its period realism. But the writers' urge to cram so much cultural and political arcana into a eight-episode miniseries makes Martin become a sort of Forrest Gump of early-1980s Cold War Europe, a well-meaning naïf who stumbles into the conflict's every flashpoint. One moment, Martin is unwittingly assisting Carlos the Jackal's 1983 bombing of a French Cultural Center in West Berlin; the next, he's single-handedly saving the world from nuclear destruction by alerting his handlers that the military maneuvering they believe to be a NATO nuclear first strike is really just a drill.

*Deutschland 83* never settles on what sort of show it wants to be. Is it a sober coming-of-age story about Martin's maturation from apathetic youngster into politically savvy hero? A Keystone Kops-style scenario involving the aborted kidnapping of an American general *in flagrante delicto* at a brothel and another featuring an Asian waitress-cum-karate-chopping assassin (whose presence goes entirely unexplained) provide awkward comic relief. Meanwhile, a bathetic subplot concerning clandestine gay relationships and the emerging AIDS virus—better suited to an afterschool special, circa 1988—is emblematic of the writers' overcompensating in their desire to capture the decades-old zeitgeist.

The critical acclaim, then, seems to derive from the accumulation of these tropes and throwbacks rather than the mediocre writing, acting, or plot. *Deutschland 83* is yet another manifestation of a far-reaching nostalgia for the Cold War that goes beyond pop culture: This fad is visible not only in popular entertainment (*The Americans*, *Bridge of Spies*) but the enduring, popular fascination with Berlin, the onetime epicenter of East-West confrontation that attracts an ever-increasing number of tourists, young Europeans in search of work (or nightlife), and journalists writing trend pieces.

This renewed interest in Cold War culture and politics isn't a fad. It points to a deeper longing for an earlier, simpler time, when the nature of global conflict was bipolar—as opposed to the confusing, multipolar mess we have today. In 1983, the West knew who its enemies were. The borders delineating that enmity were as obvious, and as physically stark, as the Berlin Wall. Tense and dangerous as those times were, at least we could distinguish good guys from bad—for the most part.

If only today's world were so simple. Though Russia has reemerged as an adversary, its efforts to (in the words of Ben Nimmo) "dismiss, distort, distract, and dismay" the West are far more sophisticated than Kremlin tactics of old. The Soviet Union's allies were easily identifiable as members of national Communist parties or fellow travelers. Now, the Kremlin enjoys support among a diverse group of ideological actors hardly limited to the extreme left. Even today's terms of engagement are more confounding and precarious: Hybrid war, "little green men," the conspiracy and disinformation-mongering Russia Today network, pipeline politics, shadowy influence networks, and innumerable other factors have combined to replace the Cold War's certainties with a postmodern cacophony of competing "narratives," making it difficult to grasp the nature of the threats we face.

And that's only Russia. Transnational terrorism, homegrown radicalization, loose nukes, a rising China, the disruptive potentials of climate change, political populism, vast migratory waves—to name just a few challenges—threaten to upend the liberal world order many assumed had been set in stone at the end of the twilight struggle. Whereas democratic capitalism was once on the march, now it is in retreat, with Freedom House registering a decade of decline in global liberty. Europe, whose peaceful political fate was supposed to be "settled" after the Soviet Union's collapse, is emerging once again as a region of instability and crisis. The anxieties of the present are making many yearn for the ostensible comforts, and predictabilities, of the past.

It says something ominous about the state of the world that the Cold War—with its rigid ideological convictions, clearly defined adversaries, and Mutually Assured Destruction—would invoke a sense of wistfulness. ♦

SUNDANCETV

# O Captain! My Captain!

*You're fun to watch, but impossible to comprehend.*

**BY JOHN PODHORETZ**

People love *Captain America: Civil War*, the latest Marvel comic-book movie. I mean, they *love* it. Say a word against it and their eyes narrow; by doing so, you have revealed to them your hatred of fun, and for this you must die. Well, maybe not die. Rather, they are sure you exist in a living death because you cannot enjoy that which is so wildly enjoyable.

It is, without question, about a hundred times better than the last superhero picture, *Batman v. Superman* (though that's a low bar, because the Zika virus is too). But what I don't get about this superhero flick is the same thing I didn't get about *Iron Man 2*, which came out six years ago. And that is its plot.

Directors Anthony and Joe Russo, working from a script by Christopher Markus and Stephen McFeely, simply assume they can just breeze by the need to establish its characters and give us plausible reasons for why they do what they do and just get to the conflicts between them the *Civil War* title promises.

This isn't my calcified living-death opinion. Joe Russo literally said so in an interview with the website *Deadline*: "One incredible thing about Marvel is the emotional investment that the audience has in the material has been built up over 10 years. There's nothing else like that in movie history, where you have characters from different franchises interweaving into a main story line," Russo said.

> As filmmakers, that's juicy for us, because we can take them on an emotional ride then in a way that you can't in a traditional story where everybody needs an introduction. The movie could never work if it was a film where each of those characters needed a traditional introduction. That would have been a disaster.

**Captain America: Civil War**
Directed by Anthony and Joe Russo

*Robert Downey Jr.*

Look, there's no arguing with success. The new movie made nearly $200 million in its first weekend and is likely to be the highest-grossing film of the summer. But I've seen all the Marvel pictures over the past 10 years, and I was completely lost; I could not help my daughters, 11 and 9, who have not. After a while, I could only meet the phrases "who is that" and "where are they" and "what's happening" with a confused shrug.

It seems that the Russos not only expect the movie's viewers to have taken in the movie's predecessors but to have done so several times each—and to have read up on their plots on Wikipedia before seeing *Captain America: Civil War*. That's just not good storytelling. No doubt it would have been difficult to pull off what Joe Russo said was impossible, but who doesn't love a good challenge?

All that said, there are, as usual, several sequences of surpassing delight in this picture, which showcase yet again the fact that these Marvel movies work best when they play the action for comedy rather than try to raise sodden and cliché-riddled issues. The centerpiece is a fight between two teams of superheroes on an airport tarmac, in which nearly every beautifully choreographed blow is designed to make witty sport of the rather peculiar powers and weapons they possess.

And *Captain America: Civil War* simply stops in its tracks for about seven minutes to bathe us in sheer pleasure as Robert Downey Jr.'s sybaritic inventor genius Tony Stark travels to Queens to enlist the help of a teenage kid who has just become Spider-Man. Downey has now played Stark in six movies, and his incomparable comedic timing at last finds its match in Tom Holland, a thrilling Briton who's not yet 20. The dialogue ping-pongs between them with a hyperactive zing reminiscent of the classic screwball comedies.

All in all, the movie is oddly named—for while its titular character is Captain America, the proceedings are dominated by Downey's Iron Man. Chris Evans, who plays Captain America well, simply fades from view whenever he shares a scene with the guy. Downey has played Tony Stark for almost a decade, and he still finds a way to make unexpected and thrilling acting choices in nearly every scene.

There's a staggering bit of special effects at the beginning when Downey is morphed into Tony at 20, with the Russos deploying some freakish computerized magic to make his face look almost as it did when Downey was onscreen as a post-adolescent in the 1980s. It's one of the most amazing things I've ever seen—but it really works because it's Downey who is moving and acting and sounding like himself three decades earlier. It's a feat that sounds easy but is likely the most difficult thing he's ever done.

If the Marvel Universe is the unprecedented triumph the Russos and everybody in Hollywood claims it is, the whole multibillion-dollar business may owe its greatest debt not to Marvel's intellectual property but to Downey, whose Tony Stark is the triumph of a superhero of film performance. ♦

MARVEL ENTERTAINMENT

*John Podhoretz, editor of* Commentary, *is* The Weekly Standard*'s movie critic.*

***"The White House on Monday worked to contain the damage caused by one of President Barack Obama's closest aides, who, in a seemingly candid, behind-the-curtain magazine story, ripped the Washington press corps, boasted of creating an 'echo chamber' of supporters to sell the Iran nuclear deal and appeared to dismiss long-time foreign policy hands, including Hillary Clinton, as the Blob."***
***—Associated Press, May 9, 2016***

**PARODY**

# A life of lies: the long and winding Rhodes

## TRUST ME, JON SNOW IS DEAD

*Career of deception spanned decades*

BY RITA SKEETER

ALAN LIGHT

Ben Rhodes, center, at the 1990 Grammy Awards with client duo Milli Vanilli, chosen Best New Artist

For most of his life, Ben Rhodes has been lying to the media, according to a Washington Post special investigation. The recent revelation that President Obama's deputy national security adviser misled news outlets in order to sell the Iran deal was only the tip of the iceberg. Documents dating as far back as the 1960s show that Rhodes, widely reported to be a 38-year-old wunderkind, was actually born in 1950 and involved in everything from the margarine-is-healthier-than-butter campaign to the Hitler diaries to the alleged death of Jon Snow in "Game of Thrones."

In one memo from 1967, Rhodes, then an intern with EMI, suggested to record executives that they fake the death of a Beatles member in order to boost sales. "I think Paul [McCartney] is a prime candidate," wrote Rhodes. "We can fill album covers with secret symbols and insert backward and subliminal messages into songs. The public—and the press—will love it! P.S. Doesn't 'cranberry sauce' sound a lot like 'I buried Paul'?"

When reached for comment, Rhodes laughed off the episode. "I was young and ambitious," he says. "But it was all harmless stuff, unlike those rumors about [Doors lead singer] Jim Morrison dying in a bathtub in Paris. Oh, wait, do people not know he's really alive?"

In 1986, while working as a production assistant at CBS, Rhodes suggested an entire season of the primetime soap opera "Dallas" be cast off as a dream. Patrick Duffy, whose character Bobby Ewing was killed off, wanted to somehow return to the show. "My career was on the skids," recalls Duffy, "but Ben said to me, 'Come on back and we can pretend all of season eight was just a dream. Don't worry, the press will eat it up. They're like a giant

BLOB CONTINUED ON A6

## Hillary Clinton strikes back

*'Shrill, maybe, sure. But I ain't no blob'*

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