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Standard

PRIME-TIME CONSPIRACY THEORY
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COVER: A U.S. ARMY SOLDIER RESTS AFTER NIGHT-LONG FIGHTING IN FALLUJAH, IRAQ, NOVEMBER 9, 2004; SCOTT NELSON / GETTY

Stanford Prison Experiment, Anyone?

For nearly 40 years, the federal government has enforced the "Common Rule." The rule required researchers in the social and medical sciences to get the approval of an independent review board, or IRB, for their federally funded experiments. The purpose of the boards, which are usually set up by the researchers' universities, is to protect human research subjects—college students, usually—from potentially harmful experiments. The most infamous example is the Tuskegee syphilis study, conducted by the U.S. Public Health Service, which allowed syphilitic patients to go untreated for decades in the name of medical research.

Nothing like Tuskegee is taking place today, so far as we know. Even so, the IRBs serve as a useful stay against overenthusiastic researchers whose sense of their own virtuous mission might lead them to disregard the consequences of their research methods. After all, scientific researchers—the producers of all that "data" that big thinkers are forever citing in service of one special interest or another—sit pretty high in the saddle these days.

Now those researchers think they ought to be policing themselves. And federal regulators seem to agree.

In January the Department of Health and Human Services relaxed its regulations governing the use of the review boards. For example, psychological researchers who believe their experiments entail only "benign behavioral interventions" can exempt themselves from seeking the approval of their IRB, so that once they have all their human guinea pigs lined up, they can just let 'er rip, scientifically speaking.

The new rule won't take effect until next year, and not everyone likes the change. Tom George, a bioethicist at the University of Texas, told the *New York Times*: "There seems to be a major paradigm shift going on away from the original goal of the IRB to protect human subjects and toward the convenience of researchers in the name of so-called efficiency. I find that of deep concern."

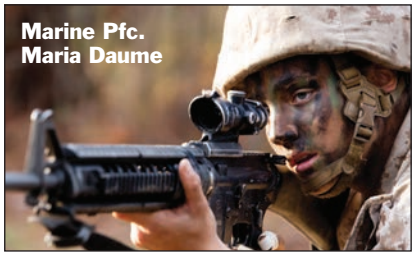
The Scrapbook does too, and not only because we mistrust anything done in the name of "efficiency." Drunk with the deference journalists and laypeople show them, social scientists of all sorts are throwing off the shackles of professional norms. To cite another example: According to NPR, members of the American Psychiatric Association are hoping to repeal the APA's "Goldwater Rule," which forbids members from pronouncing on the psychological health of public figures whom they haven't examined personally. Its name comes from the notorious magazine story in 1964 that reported more than a thousand head-shrinkers had declared then-candidate Barry Goldwater psychologically unstable.

Unburdened by the Goldwater Rule, APA members will at last be free to pronounce that any public figure they disagree with is nuts. You don't suppose they're thinking of Donald Trump, do you? Whatever you think about the various screws loose in the president's psyche, the confusion of professional judgment with political belief would be a terrible development.

It pains The Scrapbook to find itself on the side of regulations and gag rules. But the exalted role social scientists have assumed in the public conversation requires that we view them with redoubled scrutiny and skepticism. "Trust Us, We Know What We're Doing" is a suspicious motto for any profession. ♦

Leatherneck Ladies

With all due respect to the Marine Corps, "The Few, The Proud, The Gender-Neutral" just doesn't have the same ring to it. Yet there is now a movement in the corps—even backed by some female jarheads—to require women to meet the same physical fitness standards as the men. In some respects, this is



quite a laudable development, though we have to scratch our heads at how this is being reported by *Marine Corps Times*: "A growing chorus of critics" say that having two-tiered fitness requirements "creates a double standard and implies that female Marines are not as physically capable as men."

What's being implied here is a biological reality and one that's not open to debate. With incredibly rare exceptions, women simply *aren't* as physically capable as men when it comes

ABOVE IMAGES, BIGSTOCK; BELOW, USMC

to the most arduous tasks related to combat. But the standards aren't just about biology, they are wrapped up in questions of what roles women should have in the Marines.

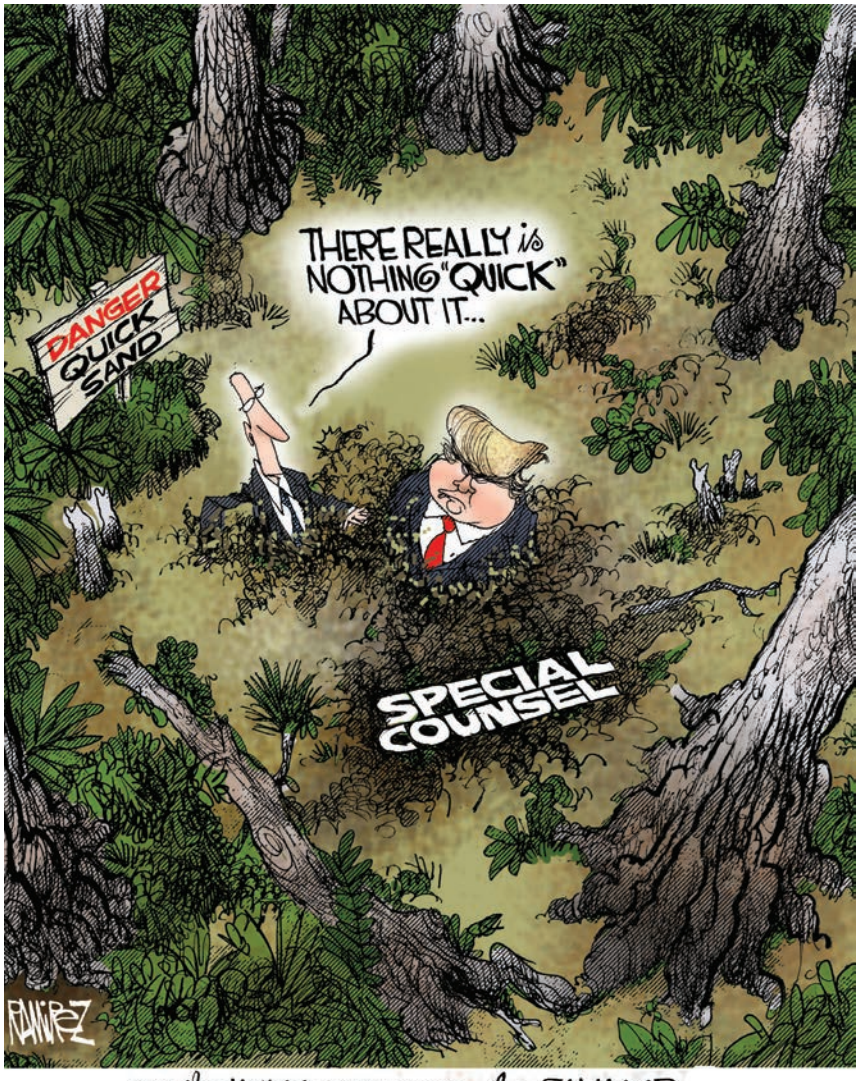
The corps had been the last holdout among the armed services, resisting political demands that women be allowed in combat infantry units. But last year the Marines finally buckled under pressure. So far, they have kept this transition from becoming a complete disaster by requiring that any women who serve in key combat positions meet the same physical fitness standards as the men.

In the year since the infantry was opened to both sexes, exactly one woman—Marine Pfc. Maria Daume—has joined the infantry via the traditional entry-level training process requiring her to pass the demanding fitness requirements, such as evacuating a 214-pound body while wearing a fighting load. (Aside from being obviously physically gifted, Pfc. Daume was born in a Siberian prison and was orphaned before being adopted. Everything about her seems exceptional.)

Despite the "growing chorus of critics," the *Marine Corps Times* reports the corps has no plans to create a single physical fitness standard for all Marines just yet. Even though a lot of female Marines sincerely endorse raising standards for women, bureaucratic logic would likely dictate splitting the difference by easing the standards for men. Certainly women can make—and have made!—incredible contributions to our military, but war is dangerous business and survival often depends on the strength and speed of the soldier next to you.

So we salute Pfc. Daume, but as a general rule, female Marines will never be as physically capable as men, and the prospect of eroding standards to place women in combat situations will disproportionately endanger them. A generation ago, draft-dodging hippies asked, "How many men have to die for a lie?" We regret to say that the fact we're now asking how many women have to die for one is not a sign of social progress. ♦

TWS PHOTO ILLO: PRINCE, DAN MARSH; BEAR & FIGURE, BIGSTOCK



Apocalypse Now

The Prince of Wales did not mince words in warning about the ravages of global warming. No piddling

nonsense about a few inches of sea-rise; nothing so trivial as coastal erosion; no focus on the plight of the polar bear. No, the prince had a louder alarm he was sounding, one about the Future of Mankind: The "threat of catastrophic climate change," he said, "calls into question humanity's continued survival on the planet."

These strong words, The Scrapbook hastens to point out, come from March 2009, when Prince Charles was visiting Brazil. That date is significant because the prince was convinced that time was, even then, running out. And not in some vague, way-off-in-the-distant-future kind of running out: The reckoning was to be upon us on a very

specific timeline. "The best projections tell us that we have less than one hundred months to alter our behavior before we risk catastrophic climate change, and the unimaginable horrors that this would bring."

This was not an offhand bit of scaremongering. The ticking doomsday clock was so central to HRH's remarks that the speech was titled "Less Than 100 Months to Act."

Of course, 100 months from March 2009 just happens to be right about now. So where is the irrevocable catastrophe? Where are the unimaginable horrors?

There are reasons to think that the prince's predictive powers are not infallible. For example, he also declared in Brazil that we "will soon see prices for oil rocket again." Well, he wasn't alone in missing the shale oil revolution. But how could he have been expected to divine the technological future? One might ask, in the same spirit, how Charles could claim to have a crystal ball on the climate.

But that would be unfair. The Scrapbook is happy to recognize the good prince as a visionary expert. We will take him at his word that 100 months after March 2009 it will be too late to do anything to save humanity from climate catastrophe. That said, since it's too late to do anything now, we guess there's no reason to listen to the climate experts telling us to do this, that, and the other. After all, what's the point? As Charles told us 100 months ago, now is when we will no longer be able to "ensure our very ability to survive." Our fate is sealed. One consolation, at least: We don't have to listen to any more climate predictions as our doom is already here. ♦

A Real Side-Splitter

Some of the entertainment coming out of California these days is simply outstanding.

No, we're not talking about Hollywood. Rather, we're enjoying the spectacle of well-intentioned laws steamrolling the state's left-wing constituents. There's an old saying that a conservative is just a liberal who's been mugged. Here, the mugging is coming from Sacramento legislators and bureaucrats. Pass the popcorn.

The plot goes like this: In January, a new law took effect in California cracking down on the scourge of fake autographs. According to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the law "requires any dealer (defined as a 'person who is principally in the business of selling' autographed items for more than $5) to provide a certificate of authenticity with the sale." The law further "requires a cumbersome documentation process, and the records must be retained for seven years." Fail to comply, and you're liable for damages, plus "civil fines of 10 times the actual damages."

But here's the twist: The *Chronicle* reports that the new law is "causing anguish for an unlikely victim." Caught in the law's grip, it turns out, are local bookstores that hold book-signing events with authors. The co-owner of one independent chain, Book Passage, told the paper, "If we had to do everything this law requires, it would kill our author event program, which is the bedrock of our business." The bookstore is suing the state.

The bookstore crackdown could tragically endanger the appearance of one author coming in to talk about, according to Book Passage's website, "his exploration into healing modalities [that] led him to become a deep tissue body-worker and counselor, as well as a male mid-wife." Patrons might be denied the wisdom of another author, who promises to teach how to "use your sensuous, desirous, wildly feeling female body as a steadfast and trustworthy compass."

We don't know how this ends, but as a comedy, we give it two thumbs up, even though the script sounds awfully familiar. ♦

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BPA WORLDWIDE

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The Case of the Missing Stylist

Edward Said saved my life. And I don't mean that the work of the late American intellectual and Palestinian activist rescued me when I needed intellectual or emotional or moral sustenance. Sure, at one point in my political odyssey, Said's work was important to me. Even now, though my ideas about the Middle East have changed a great deal since my graduate school days when I met Said, I believe that *Orientalism*, his most famous book, offers valuable, if skewed, insights into that volatile region. When I say Said saved my life, I mean it literally. You see, one snowy afternoon in the late '90s, Susan Sontag was going to kill me.

I was working at *Talk* magazine, founded by the former editor of the *New Yorker*, Tina Brown, who had the staff on 24-hour call looking for what was hot and what generated buzz. As the editor of the book section, I was competing with celebrity wranglers who promised, for instance, a cover shot of Tom Cruise—in the nude, more or less. There's not a lot of buzz with poets, novelists, and biographers. Even if their books are hot and buzzy, their lives and looks are rarely glossy magazine material.

But Said, one of New York's best-known intellectuals right then and a dramatically photogenic guy, had just published a memoir, *Out of Place*. Was this buzzy enough? I consulted with my friend and colleague Jim Surowiecki, who suggested that we do a story pairing Edward Said with another writer, a woman—how about Susan Sontag? She'd published a novel recently, and here's the hook—they were both suffering from illnesses! Wouldn't that be a great story—putting two New Yorkers in their 60s together to discuss not feeling well!

In retrospect I don't know why Tina let me do it. Maybe nothing else matters if you have Tom Cruise nearly naked on the cover of your magazine. I probably could've gotten away with a celebrity profile of Immanuel Kant. "Here in the Grill Room, Henry Kissinger walks by us and nods at the author of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, who puts another forkful of arugula in his mouth . . ."

Tina green-lighted the interview with the two unwell writers, and I arranged for a hotel suite in midtown Manhattan, a caterer, and the photographer to capture what would no doubt be stunning and dramatic black-and-white images of the two major intellectual figures of the moment.

BRITT SPENCER

Said was the first to arrive. A blizzard was starting to take shape outside and as he shook the snow out of his hair, it occurred to me I'd dragged a sick man through the biggest snowstorm of the year. I asked if he wanted some tea. We talked about his memoir, which soon turned into a conversation about his father, whom he remembered very fondly.

Soon after, Sontag arrived. She and Said exchanged greetings. They had indeed known each other a very long time. I'd never met her before. The photographer was setting up his camera and lights. Sontag asked where the stylist was. Pardon me, I asked. The person who is going to take care of my makeup and hair, said Sontag.

This wasn't going to end well for me. Sontag knew a lot about photography—the art, she'd written a book about it, and the profession, she was in a long relationship with the famous celebrity photographer Annie Leibovitz. Sontag was a very attractive woman whose casual beauty won her the adoration of several generations of followers. I suspect both age and illness had understandably made her more protective of her appearance, especially now that she was going to be photographed alongside a man whose countenance age and illness seemed to have made finer, sharper, tragic. Sontag was right to be angry. I believe she screamed at me.

Eventually, Said rose from his chair, unfolding his tall frame. "Susan," he said, and took her arm and walked her into the other room in the suite. I don't know exactly what he said, but I like to imagine it was something along the lines of, "Susan, you are beautiful. God, you've always been gorgeous, and are more beautiful now than ever. The photographs will be fine because you are beautiful."

That's what I imagine he said—along with blaming me for being such a dolt. They came out a couple of minutes later and sat for the pictures and then we started the interview. It was terrible, but when I turned off the tape-recorder after an hour of two intellectuals performing for each other, a stillness settled over them both. Now they were really talking, and listening to each other. The part not on tape was fabulous. He talked about music, and she explained how and why her idea of novels had changed since she was a young essayist. They were wonderful together. I could've listened to them all afternoon but eventually of course they had to go, and walked back out into the cold blizzard.

Lee Smith

the weekly Standard

Winning the 9/11 Wars

Manchester, in the aftermath of the bombing

On April 30, 2012, Barack Obama's top counterterrorism adviser made a bold prediction: It was possible to envision a world in which al Qaeda's central leadership would "no longer [be] relevant" to the United States and the organization itself would be eliminated. "If the decade before 9/11 was the time of al Qaeda's rise, and the decade after 9/11 was the time of its decline, then I believe this decade will be the one that sees its demise," boasted John Brennan.

This wasn't an analytical assessment. It was a political claim, coming just six months before the 2012 election, at the beginning of the Obama administration's coordinated public relations campaign to portray al Qaeda as "on the run." Like his boss, Brennan was reflexively dismissive of the jihadists' desire to capture territory and build a radical Islamic state. In a June 29, 2011, speech, Brennan had dismissed "al Qaeda's grandiose vision of global domination through a violent Islamic caliphate" as "absurd," a "feckless delusion."

Brennan went on to become Obama's CIA director. ISIS went on to capture large chunks of Syria and Iraq and declare itself a global caliphate. And al Qaeda went on to recruit thousands of jihadists, building new guerrilla armies in South Asia and Syria, as well as in hotspots throughout North and West Africa. These forces joined existing al Qaeda branches in Afghanistan, Somalia, Yemen, and elsewhere, all of which grew. Al Qaeda's men have conducted hundreds of attacks, while seizing more territory than the group ever possessed before. ISIS, an outgrowth of al Qaeda in Iraq, "maintains the intent and capability to direct, enable, assist, and inspire transnational attacks," according to recent testimony from Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats. "ISIS continues to pose an active terrorist threat to the United States and its allies because of its ideological appeal, media presence, control of territory in Iraq and Syria, its branches and networks in other countries, and its proven ability to direct and inspire attacks against a wide range of targets around the world."

Neither al Qaeda nor the modern jihadism it pioneered will be gone anytime soon—as the brutal attack in Manchester, England, reminded us this past week and as the excellent cover story by Thomas Joscelyn makes clear. But efforts to downplay jihadist terror came to an end on the final day of the Obama administration.

Donald Trump made clear in his speech May 21 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, that he recognizes the threats posed by radical Islam and that he is not reluctant to speak about those threats in a direct and forceful way. These are important and welcome changes. But they won't win the 9/11 wars.

What was true under George W. Bush remained true under Barack Obama, and what was true under Barack Obama remains true under Donald Trump: We cannot prevail in this long war without strong, resolute American leadership.

Can Donald Trump provide it? We'd like to believe so, and Trump has among his many national security advisers some of the finest minds on the subject. There are nonetheless many reasons to temper expectations.

The biggest question is the president himself. Trump is an instinctive non-interventionist and has been for decades. And yet he has said consistently that he will defeat ISIS, al Qaeda, and other jihadists. This tension will have to be resolved one way or the other: The 9/11 wars cannot be won without the United States playing the dominant role, which will require a heavy lift from the U.S. military, intelligence professionals, and diplomats.

PAUL ELLIS / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

Take Libya. On April 20, Trump hosted Italian prime minister Paolo Gentiloni at the White House. After their meeting, a reporter asked Gentiloni what kind of help he expected from the Trump administration in efforts to stabilize Libya and asked Trump if he saw a U.S. role in helping to provide that stability. Gentiloni expressed gratitude for U.S. assistance in the struggle to keep post-Qaddafi Libya from turning into a safe haven for ISIS and other jihadists. "We need a stable and unified Libya," he said. "The U.S. role in this is very critical."

Trump contradicted Gentiloni one second later:

> I do not see a role in Libya. I think the United States has right now enough roles. We're in a role everywhere. So I do not see that. I do see a role in getting rid of ISIS. We're being very effective in that regard. We are doing a job, with respect to ISIS, that has not been done anywhere near the numbers that we're producing right now. It's a very effective force we have. We have no choice. It's a horrible thing to say, but we have no choice. And we are effectively ridding the world of ISIS. I see that as a primary role, and that's what we're going to do, whether it's in Iraq or in Libya or anywhere else.

In the same breath, then, the president says the United States has no role in Libya but will play the primary role in ridding the world of ISIS, including in Libya.

Although ISIS has lost ground, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's loyalists continue to operate in Libya. As does Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and its more covert network. Authorities in the United Kingdom believe that Salman Abedi, the terrorist bomber in Manchester, may have traveled to Libya for training. Abedi's brother and father were arrested there. In January, the United States bombed two training camps in Libya thought to be tied to the Islamic State's "external plotters"—operatives targeting Europe and beyond.

Ridding Libya of ISIS will require more of this, not less. Ridding the world of ISIS, al Qaeda, and other jihadists—even just diminishing the threat they present—will require a concerted, global effort led by the United States.

The moral clarity Trump has provided helps define the challenge ahead. It doesn't win the war.

—Stephen F. Hayes

Generation Trump?

In a cover story in this magazine almost a decade ago, the late Dean Barnett hailed "the 9/11 generation" and held out the hope—nay, the expectation—that they would contribute more to the nation than their parents, the baby boomers:

> In the 1960s, history called the Baby Boomers. They didn't answer the phone.
>
> Confronted with a generation-defining conflict, the cold war, the Boomers—those, at any rate, who came to be emblematic of their generation—took the opposite path from their parents during World War II. Sadly, the excesses of Woodstock became the face of the Boomers' response to their moment of challenge. War protests where agitated youths derided American soldiers as baby-killers added no luster to their image.
>
> Few of the leading lights of that generation joined the military. Most calculated how they could avoid military service, and their attitude rippled through the rest of the century. In the 1970s, '80s, and '90s, military service didn't occur to most young people as an option, let alone a duty.
>
> But now, once again, history is calling. Fortunately, the present generation appears more reminiscent of their grandparents than their parents.

Well, over the last decade, history has taken its usual cunning and circuitous path. The hope that the 9/11 generation would ride to the country's rescue turned out to be premature. Young people were attracted to Barack Obama as candidate, and stayed mostly loyal to him as president. But every generation is entitled to one mistake.

And then in 2014 a host of young candidates from the 9/11 generation, mostly Republicans, were elected to office. Some had served in the military and some not, but they seemed to manifest, in various ways, a kind of seriousness and impressiveness of the sort Dean Barnett had seen in a few of their peers. And with Hillary Clinton as the prohibitive favorite to be the Democratic nominee—and what better embodiment was there than the Clintons of so much that was wrong with the boomers?—it seemed that the GOP, by contrast, could become a grand new party, the vehicle of a generation possessed of an ethic of self-government and responsibility.

Then came Donald Trump. It turned out the baby boomers' assault on the nation's well-being hadn't yet spent itself. Indeed, the boomers had saved the worst for last.

Now a new Pew study suggests that almost a quarter of those between 18 and 30 who in late 2015 identified as Republican or who leaned Republican have changed their minds and abandoned the GOP. The Republican party, for all its problems, had a couple of years ago seemed on the verge of being led by a crew of younger and more impressive men and women. Instead it now has Donald Trump at its helm, and the young are deciding that party isn't for them.

What can be done? President Trump isn't going anywhere in the near future. But he can perhaps be prevented from defining Republicanism—and for that matter, conservatism—down.

For there is a big difference between a Republican party that allows itself to become a subsidiary of the Trump Organization and a party with leaders who stand against Trump or at least apart from him. There is a big difference between a party that embraces a Trumpian

future and one that defines its own future. There's a big difference between a party of resentment and a party of reform, between a child-like party and a youthful party.

The key to the GOP's future is not so much the oscillating hourly and daily fortunes of Donald Trump. It is the behavior of other Republican leaders. Do they excuse the inexcusable? Do they defend the indefensible? Do they fail to denounce what deserves denunciation?

So far the signs aren't altogether encouraging. So far, almost all the party's leaders have chosen to accommodate themselves to Trump rather than embrace the spirit of the 9/11 generation. These leaders are excused, to a degree, by the novelty of the situation that confronts them and the unusual character of the challenge. But they can't duck responsibility forever. This is a generation-defining moment.

—William Kristol

Indefensible

Rolling out the Trump administration's formal 2018 budget, acting Pentagon comptroller John Roth confessed that Defense secretary James Mattis "hasn't spent one moment" looking beyond the coming budget year. But even a cursory glance at the plan makes one wonder whether he paid much attention to this year, either.

Once again, White House budget director Mick Mulvaney seems to have pulled a fast one on the Pentagon. From the draft "skinny" budget outline produced in March, it was already apparent that there would be no Trump defense buildup. But this time around, Mulvaney—previously a leading member of the deficit-obsessed Freedom Caucus in the House of Representatives—has managed to weld shut the one safety valve Congress has used to mitigate the cuts mandated in the 2011 Budget Control Act. Now the funding for Overseas Contingency Operations, or OCO, is no longer an estimate of what the military's war-related costs might be. It has become a cap, an upper limit, a fixed amount.

And while the $65 billion for OCO in 2018 specified in the Trump request might seem like a lot of money, it's $18 billion less than the $83 billion Congress just approved for 2017. The likelihood that the pace of U.S. military operations will decrease by almost a quarter next year—stepped-up activity in the Middle East alone has already reduced overall munitions stocks to an 18-month supply—is near zero. And here's another point of comparison: Trump's 2018 OCO request is almost $10 billion less than the average for each year of the second Obama term.

While in Congress, Mulvaney was a die-hard opponent of OCO, repeatedly describing it as a "slush fund." In written answers sent to the Senate for his confirmation as OMB director, he vowed to abolish the practice. And not only has he turned the 2018 estimate into a cap, but the Trump budget cuts the annual OCO forecast to just $10 billion by 2022, a figure that all but returns to pre-9/11 levels.

The biggest problem for the Pentagon is that the Trump budget approach makes it almost certain that Congress will be unable to follow a normal appropriations process—although you could almost say that continuing resolutions, threatened government shutdowns, sequestration, and last-minute "cromnibus" bills are the new normal. The combination of overall spending reductions and very deep cuts in domestic programs ensures that the Trump proposal is, as Sen. John McCain put it, "dead on arrival."

This is something that won't surprise Mulvaney. We've seen this movie before, with Mulvaney frequently playing a prominent, if secondary, role. More than likely, he is pleased with the prospect of a congressional trainwreck that will work to constrain federal spending closer to the austere levels set in the Budget Control Act. For budget hawks like Mulvaney, disrupting the Pentagon's fiscal planning is a virtue.

However, the budget as proposed would almost certainly deal a fatal blow to the administration's larger legislative agenda, health care and tax reform as well as any infrastructure spending and border walls. If Donald Trump wants to make America great again, Mick Mulvaney wants to make America fiscally prudent again.

The Republican leadership in Congress already had a lengthening list of reasons to distance itself from the White House, and its performance in "repealing and replacing" Obamacare has raised doubts about its ability to govern. Moreover, Mitch McConnell and Paul Ryan have twice before negotiated budget compromises with Democrats, and the path to a deal—a combination of both defense and domestic discretionary spending increases—is plain. Indeed, many Democrats understand the need to begin to repair the military and support the higher defense spending levels outlined by McCain and his counterpart on the House Armed Services Committee, Rep. Mac Thornberry. But not at the cost of further cuts to domestic programs.

Beyond the practical political gains that would come from preventing a budgetary train wreck, this is also an opportunity to reaffirm fundamental principles within Republican ranks. Neither the Trump cult of personality nor the Mulvaney cult of accountancy befits the party of Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, and Reagan. Just because Secretary Mattis can't spare a moment to plot the rebuilding of the American military doesn't mean that Congress—the body with the ultimate constitutional responsibility in such matters—shouldn't do so.

—Thomas Donnelly

The Republican To-Do List

Congress may still accomplish big things.

BY FRED BARNES

Republicans are not dead yet. In the House, they are moving ahead briskly on tax reform. In the Senate, Republicans are talking privately in hopes of agreeing on how to repeal and replace Obamacare, the House having already passed its bill overhauling the health care system.

And there may be a third item on the GOP agenda with a far more enduring impact than changes in the tax code or health care. It's the possibility of another vacancy on the Supreme Court—the second for President Trump—leading to a conservative majority for years to come.

In all this, Republicans are not overly optimistic. Indeed, the two legislative initiatives would be difficult to enact in any year. Tax reform is often proposed, but it hasn't been approved by Congress since 1986. And then it had bipartisan backing. Today, Democrats are totally opposed. "It's not your father's Democratic party anymore," a Republican official laments.

Republicans are comfortable in dealing with taxes, but that's not true with health care. It's a Democratic obsession. Republicans have a history of fumbling the issue. And despite rumors that Justice Anthony Kennedy, 80, may step down after nearly 30 years on the court, he may decide that writing landmark opinions beats retirement. A Reagan nominee, he is the court's lone centrist.

Republicans on the Hill know Trump won't be much help. But the notion that his troubles will prevent them from making any headway is a myth fostered by Democrats and the media.

On the contrary, the appointment of a special counsel to oversee the FBI investigation of Trump, his campaign, and Russia is a blessing in disguise for Republicans. "Strategically, it really helps," says Rep. Peter Roskam (R-Illinois). It doused the anti-Trump fever, for now anyway.

Mitch McConnell, right, talks to the media after a weekly Senate Republican luncheon, May 23.

What gives the GOP hope for success? On health care, it's the role of Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell. He's organized a series of meetings at which senators search for common ground not so much on repealing Obamacare—Republicans agree on that—but on what should replace it. That's the hard part.

The meetings are not idle discussions. The senators are under pressure, both from McConnell and the grassroots. He believes it's critical for Republicans to follow through on what they have promised to do since Obamacare was enacted in 2010. Last week, senators met twice in one day. Are they making progress? Who knows?

But David Leonhardt of the *New York Times* wrote recently there's "an alarmingly large chance" Republicans will agree on a bill. As you might expect, Leonhardt is a critic of whatever Republicans are up to—in this case, he says it would amount to "taking health insurance from their fellow citizens."

When Republicans are blamed for this, it's usually because they would eliminate Obamacare's gun at the head of every American forcing them to buy health insurance. Without this mandate, the Congressional Budget Office estimates millions will choose not to buy insurance. They probably won't change their minds until the "essential health benefits" imposed by Obamacare are tossed out and less expensive policies are allowed. Democrats refer to those who voluntarily decline to buy insurance as having "lost" it or having had it "taken away."

Democrats and their media allies tend to ignore what Republicans actually favor—that is, a freer market in health care in which people can buy (often with subsidies) the level of insurance they want. Republicans, unfortunately, do a pathetic job of selling this product to the public.

They do better on tax reform. No help is needed from Trump, even if he could deliver it. The key here is to rally around a single bill. The White House, McConnell, House speaker Paul Ryan, and the chairmen of the tax committees, Orrin Hatch at Senate Finance and Kevin Brady at House Ways and Means, have agreed to come up with one.

They have a ways to go. A point of contention is the border-adjustment tax, a levy on imports that would create a level international playing field with countries that apply a value-added tax (VAT) to imports. It makes sense, but it has enemies, particularly retailers whose wares are produced abroad.

Both Brady and Roskam, chairman of the Ways and Means subcommittee on tax policy, are persuasive

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defenders of the border tax. But Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin contends it stands in the way of a bill Republicans can agree on. It's not dead, as the *New York Times* claims, but Mnuchin's intervention may be too much to overcome.

Meanwhile, should Kennedy announce his retirement when the court finishes its term late next month, Republicans will be in an enviable position. Trump has committed to choosing a nominee from a list of conservative judges and jurists—the same list from which he picked Justice Neil Gorsuch.

Trump has a way of making trouble for himself, but he was on his best behavior after selecting Gorsuch to fill the late Antonin Scalia's seat. And Gorsuch was a superb witness in confirmation hearings, unflappable and pleasant.

Confirmation won't be as easy a second time, though Democrats have lost the ability to filibuster. A nominee in his or her late 40s or early 50s who hasn't ruled on cases involving abortion or gender issues would be ideal.

Trump interviewed four candidates before deciding on Gorsuch. Judge Thomas Hardiman of the 3rd U.S. Court of Appeals came in second. Longevity matters. Gorsuch is 49, Hardiman 51. Scalia, by the way, was on the court for 27 years after President Reagan, who appointed him, left office.

To defeat a nominee, three Republican senators would have to defect. It would take a real issue—unlike the fake ones drummed up against Gorsuch—for that to happen. Would Democrats insist that no president under investigation by a special prosecutor should be allowed to choose a Supreme Court justice? Maybe, but that doesn't sound like a winning argument.

Consider, finally, what's at stake this year and next. The prospect, assuming Kennedy retires, of a reliably conservative court, the dream of Republican presidents since Eisenhower. Tax reform. Obamacare out, a new health care system in. That trifecta may be a long shot. But a new justice and tax reform? Quite possible, I'd say. And in Trump's first two years, no less. ♦

VIA LINKEDIN

Prime-Time Conspiracy Theory

The Seth Rich nonsense and how it spread.

BY JOHN MCCORMACK

At 4:20 A.M. on July 10, 2016, gunshots rang out in Washington, D.C. When Metropolitan Police Department officers arrived at the scene, about two miles north of the U.S. Capitol, they found Seth Rich, a 27-year-old employee of the Democratic National Committee, lying down but "conscious and breathing with apparent gunshot wound(s) to the back," according to the brief police report available to the public. Rich was transported to a local hospital where he died shortly before 6:00 A.M.

Seth Rich

The murder has never been solved. Police have not revealed what, if anything, Rich may have said about his attackers during the final hundred minutes of his life. Rich's brother told the *Washington Post* in January that emergency responders said "they were very surprised he didn't make it. He was very aware, very talkative." Police have suggested it may have been a robbery gone wrong. None of Rich's possessions was taken, but there were signs of a struggle—Rich had bruises and his watchband was torn, according to his family.

It remains a heartbreaking mystery, but the reason Seth Rich's murder became a national story this month is because of the conspiracy theories surrounding it—namely the claim that Seth Rich was involved in the hacking of DNC emails, a batch of which were published by WikiLeaks 12 days after Rich's death. The conspiracy was stoked by Julian Assange of WikiLeaks and by Donald Trump ally Roger Stone in 2016, but it wasn't until the middle of May that a textbook case of media malpractice resulted in the conspiracy theory being widely promoted outside the fever swamps.

On May 15, a private investigator named Rod Wheeler said in an interview with the Washington, D.C., Fox TV affiliate that he "absolutely" had sources in the FBI who had seen "tangible evidence on Rich's laptop that confirms he was communicating with WikiLeaks prior to his death." Wheeler's investigation was funded by wealthy Dallas businessman (and *Breitbart News* contributor) Ed Butowsky, but Wheeler had signed a contract with the Rich family that he would speak about his investigation only with the family's permission, which he did not receive for any of his recent interviews. A spokesman for the family says when they agreed to the arrangement they weren't aware of Wheeler's dubious reputation. (Wheeler has claimed in the past that gangs of lesbians carrying pink pistols are roaming the country and raping young girls.) Despite Wheeler's penchant for spreading wild stories, his claim, once elevated by the local Fox TV interview, quickly zipped around the Internet: "DEAD DNC STAFFER 'HAD CONTACT' WITH WIKILEAKS," read the Drudge Report banner headline. "NOT RUSSIA, BUT

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an Inside Job?" asked *Breitbart News*.

And then Wheeler's story quickly fell apart. On the afternoon of May 16, Wheeler told CNN's Oliver Darcy that he was relying solely on information from a FoxNews.com reporter named Malia Zimmerman. "I only got that [information] from the reporter at Fox News," Wheeler told CNN. Zimmerman had published a story on May 16 at FoxNews.com in which she claimed a single anonymous federal source told her Rich had sent over 40,000 emails to WikiLeaks. "I have seen and read the emails between Seth Rich and Wikileaks," Zimmerman's alleged source supposedly told her.

The FoxNews.com story also quickly fell apart. "[A] current FBI official and a former one completely discount the Fox News claim that an FBI analysis of a computer belonging to Rich contained thousands of e-mails to and from WikiLeaks," NBC's Alex Seitz-Wald reported. "Local police in Washington, D.C., never even gave the FBI Rich's laptop to analyze after his murder, according to the current FBI official."

"I am confident that the FBI never played any role in the investigation of Seth Rich's murder," Rich family spokesman Brad Bauman tells me. According to Bauman, "local law enforcement did examine the laptop." D.C. police told the family that "there was no evidence on the laptop in any way, shape, or form tying anybody with WikiLeaks or anybody associated with WikiLeaks" to Seth Rich. Since that time, "the family has [had] the laptop, the family has always had the laptop," Bauman adds. NBC disputed the Fox report on May 17, but FoxNews.com didn't retract its report until May 23. A vague statement from FoxNews.com said that the story was "not initially subjected to the high degree of editorial scrutiny we require for all our reporting. Upon appropriate review, the article was found not to meet those standards and has since been removed." Zimmerman and Fox News spokesmen declined further comment.

By then the damage was done. The baseless stories had wounded the family of Seth Rich, subjecting them to the unwanted attention of conspiracy theorists and the scurrilous claims that their son and brother was a thief who had betrayed his colleagues and employer. Moreover, they had spread far and wide the insane claim that agents acting on behalf of a major political party or presidential candidate assassinated a young man as retribution for leaking emails. Like conspiracy theories about 9/11 and the Iraq war, this bizarre theory fuels the belief that America is no better than some despotic country like Russia.

D.C.'s local Fox affiliate and FoxNews.com bear responsibility for publishing such thinly sourced and damaging stories, and Fox owes a better explanation of why it retracted its story. But the news sites and media personalities who regurgitated the story also bear responsibility for promoting it. That includes former speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, who uncritically repeated it on *Fox & Friends* on May 21. But perhaps the worst actor of all in this twisted game of telephone is Fox News host Sean Hannity.

Hannity repeatedly used his primetime show to promote the conspiracy theory to millions of viewers. On May 16, Hannity touted "explosive developments in the mysterious murder of former DNC staffer Seth Rich that could completely shatter the narrative that, in fact, WikiLeaks was working with the Russians, or that there was collusion between the Trump campaign and the Russians."

Hannity let Wheeler spout off on air and never reported later that Wheeler had backtracked. Hannity never reported on his TV show that FoxNews.com retracted its own story, only saying on May 23 that he would "out of respect for the family's wishes, for now, [not discuss] this matter at this time." The family had immediately objected to coverage, but Hannity went silent only after pressure had been put on his advertisers. As the story disintegrated, Hannity grasped at straws, going so far as to promote on Twitter unsubstantiated and bizarre assertions from an Internet troll and convicted hacker from New Zealand who goes by the name "Kim Dotcom."

Devotees of this wild, anti-American conspiracy theory dwell on the fact that Rich's belongings were not taken—proof, they say, that it wasn't an attempted robbery. They don't ask why assassins wouldn't be smart enough to take the wallet to make it look like a robbery, why they'd get into a physical altercation with Rich, or why they would leave him breathing and conscious. They pretend Rich was killed in a safe neighborhood, when dozens of murders and hundreds of armed robberies have occurred in the area in recent years. They ignore the fact that the FBI had detected the DNC computer breach long before July 2016, that U.S. intelligence agencies agreed Russian hackers were to blame, and that Republican officials who have seen the intelligence accept the claim that Russian hackers were responsible. Even Donald Trump, who initially cast doubt on Russian responsibility, said after an intelligence briefing: "I think it was Russia."

But the thing about conspiracy theorists is that their beliefs tend to be non-falsifiable. Flip any fact or set of facts, and they will come up with an argument why the opposite set of facts still proves their theory. You might be tempted to laugh them off if not for the very real damage they cause.

"Imagine living in a nightmare that you can never wake up from," Rich's parents wrote in the *Washington Post*. "Imagine having to face every single day knowing that your son was murdered. Imagine you have no answers—that no one has been brought to justice and there are few clues leading to the killer or killers. Imagine that every single day, with every phone call you hope that it's the police, calling to tell you that there has been a break in the case."

"Imagine that instead," they continued, "every call that comes in is a reporter asking what you think of a series of lies or conspiracies about the death. That nightmare is what our family goes through every day." ♦

They Deserve Our Gratitude

Serving the country by serving Trump.

BY JONATHAN V. LAST

Tom Ricks is disappointed in General H.R. McMaster. On May 15, during Donald Trump's *hebdomas horribilis*, McMaster, the president's national security adviser, appeared briefly outside the White House to attack a story in the *Washington Post*. The *Post* piece alleged that the president had revealed classified information to Russian diplomats during a meeting in the Oval Office. McMaster said the *Post* story was "false." The next day, in a more formal press briefing, he amended this claim, saying that "the premise of that article was false." And he then went through a series of maneuvers which might charitably be described as non-denial denials.

All of this prompted Ricks to write a short piece about McMaster for *Foreign Policy*. Ricks knows McMaster from ten years ago, when McMaster was the colonel in charge of the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment in Iraq. Ricks respects him a great deal. Which is probably what caused him to write that "my guess is that when McMaster was trotted out before the cameras last night, he gave up a little piece of his soul." A good deal of the non-Trump world seemed to agree: General McMaster was on the way to becoming exhibit No. 537 in how Trumpism corrupts.

But there is an alternate reading of events in which McMaster's tortured defense of President Trump isn't a disappointment at all—in which it might well be heroic.

Let's stipulate that in a normal administration—if the president were

Bush or Reagan or Gore or Clinton or, God help us, John Kasich—it would be bad for McMaster to humiliate himself the way he did. We'd expect a man of principle and character to refuse such an errand and, if necessary, resign rather than carry it out.

But this is not a normal administration. President Trump is being scrutinized by a special prosecutor 120 days into his term. He seems to set his agenda by watching cable news. (Recall his March tweet-storm about Guantánamo Bay composed while watching *Fox & Friends*.) He has, by his own admission, no grasp of public policy. ("Nobody knew health care could be so complicated.") Twenty-four hours after being sworn into office, he sent his press secretary out to insist that more people had attended his inauguration than had attended Barack Obama's. ("This was the largest audience to ever witness an inauguration—period," proclaimed Trump's press secretary, in ludicrous contradiction of all evidence.)

President Trump browbeats allies (remember his heated conversation with Australian prime minister Malcolm Turnbull) while sharing classified information with strategic competitors (as he did in the meeting with the Russians), all while sowing confusion about America's strategic commitments (see his on-again, off-again views of NATO). And his two closest advisers are his daughter and her husband.

Put aside politics and ideology, conservatism and liberalism and nationalism. None of that is what makes Trump's administration extraordinary. If Newt Gingrich were president and pursuing the exact same policy agenda, it would be an invigorating experience. Depending on your politics, it might be exhilarating or maddening, but it would not be terrifying. Donald Trump is no Newt Gingrich.

Which leads us back to McMaster. General H.R. McMaster is one of the handful of grownups in a position of authority in Trump's administration. What would you have him do? Resign? McMaster is one of the last lines of defense within the administration in the event that the president decides to do something catastrophically unwise.

And even if you don't believe McMaster would stand up to President Trump in such a situation, he's doing an enormous service just sitting in his chair at the National Security Council. If he were to resign, his replacement could be another opportunistic Russophile like Mike Flynn. Or worse.

It's precisely *because* Donald Trump is what he is that McMaster was right to do what he did. America is almost certainly better off with McMaster running the NSC. If staying in that job means courting humiliation in an effort to keep Trump happy, then what McMaster did was self-sacrifice. He jumped on a grenade, at some cost to his reputation, in order to serve the country.

THOMAS FLUHARTY

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A year ago in these pages ("Thinking the Unthinkable," May 9, 2016), James W. Ceaser and Oliver Ward argued that should Trump become president, it would be invaluable to have good people working for him even—especially—if you opposed his administration:

> Should good and qualified persons, despite serious reservations about the suitability of Trump for the presidency, make themselves available if asked? The risk of doing so, besides the danger of becoming tainted by association, is that it might once again add a measure of credibility to a campaign. The advantage is the chance that Trump, as both candidate and president, will receive competent advice and perhaps prove willing to accept some part of it. As for a cabinet, what would clearly be best for the country are appointees of substance, who might have opposed Trump but have not burned every bridge with him and who if asked to serve would do so with a certain degree of independence and with a willingness to depart if the president did not deal with their counsel responsibly. By this reasoning, even ardent supporters of a Stop Trump movement should see the wisdom of maintaining a potential group of quality cabinet appointees from whom Trump might pick. These people should be shielded, rather than shunned.

The same logic suggests that even those most appalled by the president should appreciate, not castigate, Gen. McMaster. Instead of piling on, we all ought to honor his sacrifice. ♦

Hubris in the U.K.

Theresa May's 'dementia tax' misstep.

BY ANDREW STUTTAFORD

Special advisers to political leaders need to get out more. Prime Minister Theresa May's decision to sneak what was quickly labeled a "dementia tax" into the Conservative party's general election manifesto (the British general election will be held on June 8) was reportedly heavily influenced by Nick Timothy, a Rasputin (with beard to match) in the court of a prime minister with few confidants. It was inserted into the manifesto at the last minute absent, reportedly, much consultation to speak of with those who would be actually facing the voters. That was a mistake.

Within days of the manifesto's release, one poll showed that the Tory lead had dropped by 5 percentage points to (a still immensely comfortable) 12 percent. This was almost certainly due, in no small part, to the dementia tax (or, to describe the culprit more politely, one of the new proposals for the funding of "social care").

A protester outside a May discussion of the 'dementia tax,' May 22

Medical progress is uneven. Lifespans have been extended, but bodies and minds have struggled to keep up. There has been rapid growth in the number of the elderly who find it difficult or impossible to cope on their own, and there has been a corresponding growth in the expense of caring for them. In the U.K., government will pay for nursing-home care, but only after the person staying there is down to his or her last £23,250 in assets (roughly $30,000). If Methuselah is looked after in his own home, however (something that saves the state money), the value of his residence is not counted in that total: He gets to hang onto his house and pass it on to his heirs. Responding to the widespread perception that the system was too harsh, David Cameron's coalition government had earlier brought in reforms that included the introduction (delayed until 2020) of a porous and less than comprehensive "cap" of £72,000 on what anyone could be charged for social care.

May's idea was very different. Instead of a cap there would be a floor. To put it far too simply, the last £100,000 in assets would be shielded. Apart from that, there would be no limit on how much Methuselah could be asked to pay. Turning the screw still tighter, the old boy would no longer be doing his heirs much of a favor by staying on at home. Under May's rules, the value of the house could be used to defray the cost of his care, although (if he preferred) only after his death: Compassionate conservatism lives on.

People with Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia can be relatively physically fit, at least initially. They can live on for quite a while, and the bill for looking after them can rise accordingly: A lifetime (or lifetimes) of savings could thus be wiped out by bad luck or a bad gene. On the other hand, be fortunate enough to be killed off, say, by cancer or a kindly coronary, and the state will still pick up the tab. The thought that some diseases were to be rendered more equal than others obviously didn't worry May's team overmuch. And the prospect of draining wealth from the wealthier they considered a feature, not a bug. May intends to drag the Conservative party to the left. A

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further slice of redistribution would not come amiss.

To believe this was either good politics or good policy was nuts. Voting turnout among the over-65s (some three-quarters of whom are home-owners) is high, and, at the time the election was called, they strongly favored the Conservatives. Well, they did: The "dementia tax" (which could hit millions of people) has triggered some of their deepest anxieties about what lies ahead in what's left of their lives.

Mrs. May might not have much time for Mrs. Thatcher, but she would have done well to remember the Iron Lady's reluctance—fueled both by fear of punishment at the polls and of damage to the country—to do anything that could hurt "our people." Our people save, our people own their homes, our people want to pass something onto the next generation. These were qualities that Thatcher rightly believed were good for the social and economic health of the nation, qualities that, as she also understood, attracted such people, *our people*, to her version of Conservatism.

And our people have *already* paid a disproportionate amount of tax to fund a welfare state that, if May got her way, might stick them—at a time when they were essentially helpless—with another, possibly monstrous bill, a dying-too-slowly tax, lest the death tax itself (Britain's inheritance tax) was not enough to do the trick. The richest could, in all likelihood, weather the costs. As is so often the case with redistributive taxation, those who would be hurt the most would be the aspirational, the middling successful: *Our people*.

The private sector can do only so much to defray the costs of long-term home care. It would be a challenge for insurers to offer affordable coverage against a risk that is so unpredictable and, potentially, so large, even to the young. Those foolish enough to have entered middle age (let alone anything grayer) by now would have a vanishingly small chance of finding the insurance they might need. Risks of this type are best very widely pooled. In Britain that means either extra funding by the taxpayer or cutbacks in government spending elsewhere: Whatever some may claim, there are places to look for the latter.

The last time that May's government took aim at our people (by attempting to increase FICA-style charges on the self-employed), it had to back down. And despite dishonest denials in recent days of a U-turn, that looks to be how it will go with the dementia tax. There will be a cap, although, significantly and cynically, May has not yet said how high it will be.

That evasion may be one reason to suspect that the majority she seems on course to win will not be too big. Which may be for the best. May's opponent, Labour's far-left Jeremy Corbyn, cannot be trusted with any degree of power. But the dementia tax is a reminder that the over-promoted Theresa May cannot be trusted with too much. ♦

Misreporting Iran

The 'moderate' is also a liar with blood on his hands. BY KELLY JANE TORRANCE

Complaints of media bias seem to be reaching a fever pitch—from conservatives and liberals alike. Right-wingers accuse a broad swath of the press of trying to undermine the presidency of Donald Trump. Left-wingers lament the airtime and credence outlets give to Trump supporters. Both groups object to what the media report and how they report it, but they point fingers at different culprits. Neither seemed to notice last week that one big story was narrated the same way by virtually every outlet: the presidential election in a country where chants of "Death to America" are a routine occurrence.

"In the closing stretch of Iran's presidential race, it's a moderate reformer against a hard-line cleric," *PBS NewsHour* reported in the run-up to Iran's May 19 election. Those who know anything about life in Iran—or how many of its citizens have been deprived of it in the last few years—should have bristled to discover that the "moderate reformer" was incumbent president Hassan Rouhani. With 57 percent of the vote, he soundly beat "hard-line" challenger Ebrahim Raisi, who garnered 39 percent. (Two other candidates split the rest.) And stories announcing his win invariably included in the headline or first sentence at least one of the same adjectives PBS used. "Iranian President Hassan Rouhani wins re-election in victory for moderates," CNN announced. "Iran's moderate president Hassan Rouhani secured his re-election this morning," CBS News declared, while ABC News reported: "Iran's President Rouhani wins reelection by wide margin, giving the moderate cleric another term to see out agenda." An Associated Press story that ran in thousands of outlets was headlined "Iran's president trounces hard-liner to secure second term."

It wasn't just "mainstream" or "liberal" media that covered the story this way. "Iran's President Hassan Rouhani won re-election by a wide margin Saturday, giving the moderate cleric a second four-year term" was the first sentence of the election report on the Fox News website. The *Wall Street Journal* began its coverage thus: "Moderate Iranian President Hassan Rouhani won re-election by a wide margin Saturday, defeating a hard-line challenger . . ."

Rouhani visiting Khamenei after the latter's prostate surgery, September 10, 2014

COURTESY OF THE SUPREME LEADER

You might think that reporters simply forgot to put the word "relative" in front of "moderate" in describing Rouhani—a moderate in Iran could be very different from a moderate in the United States, after all. Rouhani is a cleric who, as head of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, was a leader in brutally ending student protests in Tehran in 1999. He stated then, "Our revolution needs a thorough cleanup," and declared the regime would "crush mercilessly and monumentally any move" made by "these opportunists and riotous elements." The government injured thousands and killed up to two dozen. But his opponent Raisi was part of a four-man "death committee" that executed as many as 30,000 dissidents in 1988.

The media did not frame the election, however, as a choice between the lesser of two evils. NBC News began a story the day before the election with this summary of the stakes: "Iranian women have made significant strides under moderate President Hassan Rouhani, but many fear that progress could stall if a hardline rival wins Friday's presidential election." The opening sentence of the *New York Times*'s election report echoed that view: "Riding a large turnout from Iran's urban middle classes, President Hassan Rouhani won re-election in a landslide on Saturday, giving him a mandate to continue his quest to expand personal freedoms and open Iran's ailing economy to global investors."

Rouhani has brought "significant" progress to Iranian women and is on a "quest to expand personal freedoms"? One woman elected to parliament last year was stopped from taking her seat, apparently because a picture of her without a head scarf surfaced. It's true that during the campaign, Rouhani paid lip service to the notion of easing prohibitions in one of the most restrictive societies on earth. He did the same thing in the race that brought him into office in 2013—and went on to prove his words were empty. Freedom House summarized the situation in the country earlier this year: "Human rights abuses continued unabated in 2016, with the authorities carrying out Iran's largest mass execution in years and launching a renewed crackdown on women's rights activists." Iran is second only to China in executions.

In analyzing the election, the *Wall Street Journal* claimed, "Many Iranians gravitate toward Mr. Rouhani because of his relatively tolerant views

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on freedom of expression." Rouhani offered a self-centered thanks for his win on Twitter: "Great nation of Iran, you are the winner of the election." But the social media site is banned in Iran—only those who have figured out how to get around the censorship could read the tweet. As Freedom House notes, "News and analysis are heavily censored" in Iran. As are all forms of art. The nonprofit gives some examples: "In June 2016, filmmaker Hossein Rajabian, his brother, musician Mehdi Rajabian, and an associated musician, Yousef Emadi, began serving three-year prison sentences after being arrested in 2015 for allegedly distributing underground music. In October, the writer and activist Golrokh Ebrahimi Iraee was taken to jail to begin serving a six-year sentence for her authorship of an unpublished story about the practice of execution by stoning in Iran."

Opponents of the government not only have trouble running for office in Iran—candidates must be approved by the Guardian Council, whose members are appointed by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and Iran's chief justice, who is himself appointed by Khamenei—some of them can't even be mentioned. Former president Mohammad Khatami backed the Green Movement that sprung up after the 2009 reelection of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad looked to have been fixed. Iranian media are not permitted to mention Khatami's name, quote his words, or show his picture—and he supported Rouhani in the 2013 election. Rouhani promised during that race to free Green Movement leaders under house arrest; they remain in captivity and haven't even faced trials. No wonder most Iranian voters mentioned in Western media over the last week wouldn't give reporters their full names. The *New York Times*, for example, quoted a woman "who did not want to be identified for security reasons."

The election doesn't look to have been fought mainly over freedom, either. "Raisi has refrained from raising any of the social issues his faction usually cares so much about, such as Islamic dress codes and segregation of men and women, as they might put off potential voters," the *New York Times* noted, reporting that Raisi "campaigned as a corruption fighter and called on Iran to solve its own economic problems without help from foreigners." He promised to offer more in government handouts, but voters rejected them. Rouhani helped secure the nuclear deal that has allowed Iran to do increased business with foreigners, and he campaigned on the notion that he could open up the economy even more. When Rouhani took office, Iran's unemployment rate was 16 percent; it's now 11 percent.

Many commentators claimed the United States could learn from the story they spun of Rouhani's win. One *New York Times* piece leading up to the election carried the headline "Iran Has Its Own Hard-Line Populist, and He's on the Rise." The national-affairs correspondent for the *Nation* tweeted that the "worldly & moderate candidate prevailed" in an election with high voter turnout and said, "Lesson for the US!" Jane O'Meara Sanders, the wife of Democratic presidential candidate Bernie, re-tweeted the message and added, "Iranians show the world how it's done." Neither mentioned—and it was usually buried in media coverage of the election—that the president of Iran has to answer to someone far more powerful than the United States Congress or Supreme Court. Ultimate hardliner Ali Khamenei remains the head of state in Iran. Days before the election, Rouhani made a point of mentioning "the exalted leader, whose hand I am willing to kiss dozens of times." ♦

Japan Returns

To find China on the doorstep.

BY CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL

Tokyo

It is not yet obvious that the dominant political leader of the Age of Donald Trump will be Donald Trump. Others are vying for that distinction, including Theresa May of Britain and Shinzo Abe of Japan. Like Trump, Abe came to power on a claim that his country's economy had been mismanaged. He felt the interests of his nation were poorly understood by politicians at home and sometimes disrespected abroad. He is close to world leaders who feel similarly—Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel and especially Narendra Modi of India, with whom aides say he has electric sympathy. He is close to Vladimir Putin of Russia, too, whom he has met 17 times. In 2013, he visited Yasukuni shrine, where his country's war dead are memorialized. The visit was controversial abroad.

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He has managed relations with the new U.S. administration skillfully. Those who know him say he understood off the bat that Trump was to be taken "seriously, not literally." At Mar-a-Lago, where they spent two days together in February, the two bonded over their respective ill-treatment in their country's news media. Abe explained that Japan pays a higher share (75 percent) of U.S. military expenses on its territory than any other ally. Nor was Trump's bolt from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a trade agreement negotiated over years, a dead loss—negotiating the deal helped Abe break the hold of agricultural lobbies on his party machinery. This was a consensus view of politicians and political observers on a mid-May study trip arranged by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Unlike Trump, Abe has ushered in a return to political normalcy since he returned to power in 2012, following

half a decade in which Japan's leadership changed as frequently as that in a cacique-ridden banana republic. Abe himself began that period, resigning in 2007 after barely a year in power to treat his Crohn's disease. Five PMs would follow, from both Abe's conservative LDP (the usual party of government) and the progressive DPJ. One of the progressives, Yukio Hatoyama, was so irresolute in his promise to close a U.S. military base in Okinawa that Japanese pundits gave him the nickname "Save As . . . ," after the word-processing command.

At the end of the Cold War, Japan accounted for 15 percent of world GDP, and American politicians feared it would dominate the world. But a quarter-century of stagnation followed. China rose. Americans demanded the movement of Japanese manufacturing facilities to the United States. While still the third-largest economy, Japan today commands 6 percent of world GDP at most. Japan was lectured, scolded, and threatened over its welfare state (the assets of its pension system alone run into the trillions of dollars) and its policy on immigration (which is, basically, not to have any).

And yet a lot of what looked to be liabilities for Japan in an information-age economy have turned out to be boons. A year ago, the *Wall Street Journal* Tokyo bureau chief Peter Landers summed up Japan's enviable stability in two numbers. First, the foreign-born in Japanese society—nannies from the Philippines and Indonesia and property speculators from China—account for 1.3 percent of the population. That is a tenth of the level in the United States and Western Europe. Second, Toyota CEO Akio Toyoda made $3.5 million in 2015 to run the largest and most successful car company in the world, turning a $20 billion profit. By contrast, General Motors CEO Mary Barra got a 70 percent raise to $28.6 million to run a company that since the Obama administration has been in part a government concession.

Japan is tied with Germany as the oldest country in the world. It has a median age of 46 and its population may fall below 100 million by mid-century. But the birthrate is rising again, to 1.46 per woman (the U.S. rate is now 1.87 and falling). For the time being, a tight labor supply means automation is an asset, not a threat, and jobs (washing windshields, keeping parks clean) are still plentiful for the unskilled. Japan has the world's lowest crime rate. This vast country—with more people than the United States had when it won World War II—sees fewer than a thousand murders a year. Chicago saw 762 last year.

Abe must now spend some of the credibility won on domestic issues to manage the most complex foreign policy challenges Japan has faced in the postwar era. Chief among them is the imminent nuclearization of North Korea, which in May made a test-launch of a ballistic missile, its seventh, into Japanese waters. Ordinarily this would be a problem for South Korea as well, but it has been a scandal-ridden election season in Seoul. The new president, human rights activist Moon Jae-in, has been less interested in answering North Korean provocations than in unifying all Koreans around the idea of Japanese historic injustice. Starting in the 1990s, activists began demanding apologies and money for the conduct of the Japanese military in World War II, when it dragooned females, many of them Korean, into serving as "comfort women" for its troops.

A Japanese surveillance plane over the Senkaku Islands, October 13, 2011

It is through China—which provides almost all of North Korea's imports and is the only major buyer for its coal—that North Korea must be brought to heel. It is unclear whether China has stopped coal imports as promised. But China is also busy probing Japan's military defenses by air and sea. Each country is a chokepoint for the other. Japan's shipping lanes to Persian Gulf oil and European consumer markets run through the South China Sea. But the long Japanese archipelago, which runs from Russia through Okinawa to Taiwan, pins China in shallow waters, as long as the U.S. 7th Fleet is allowed to operate all along the archipelago. That is why the Chinese have began launching extraordinary probes of the uninhabited rocks known as the Senkaku Islands, say Japanese officials, sending as many as 500 Chinese fishing boats along with 15 cutters—often "gray hull" Navy boats painted as Coast Guard craft.

China is also spreading its influence financially. Sri Lankan strongman and former president Percy "Mahinda" Rajapaksa borrowed billions from China to build an international airport in his podunk hometown. When he could not pay them back, China agreed to accept a 99-year lease on a port as a good-faith gesture. The vast infrastructure loans being made to Uzbekistan and other Central Asian countries as part of China's New Silk Road initiative risk putting them all on the hook. This process reminds Japanese people of the way China's Ming dynasty operated 500 years ago. You could also compare it to the mountain of Latin American and other loans that the United States emitted in the 1960s, '70s, and '80s before lobbying the debtor countries to support a rewriting of the rules of the international economy.

Things are changing. Having ended its self-imposed ban on arms-dealing in 2014, Japan is now selling anti-submarine reconnaissance systems and patrol vessels to Malaysia and Vietnam, and boats to the Philippines. Abe has considered amending Japan's pacifist postwar constitution—for the first time—to permit its "self-defense forces" to become a full-fledged military. Until some new defense arrangement can be devised, the waters and airspace in which four of the world's half-dozen largest militaries operate (China, Russia, and North and South Korea) are going to be defended by the United States if they are defended at all. ♦

NEWSCOM

Unprecedented?

Trump is hardly the first president to be surrounded by attackers. BY JAY COST

President Donald Trump seems to be suffering a political death of a thousand cuts—from anonymous sources throughout the government providing information to the press about his missteps, misjudgments, and misbehavior. The Trump administration and its allies are up in arms, blaming an unprecedented effort to smear the president and undermine democracy itself.

This defense rings false. The forces arrayed against Trump are hardly unprecedented—presidents have had to deal with such challenges again and again, ever since the country was founded. The real difference is Trump himself, who is supplying his opponents with seemingly endless opportunities to embarrass him.

Conservative supporters of Trump have a new favorite catchphrase—the "deep state," meant to convey an occult alliance of anti-Trump officials in and around the government who are intent on destroying him. This is a convenient excuse, but the deep state is nothing new, at least if it is understood as executive officials and bureaucrats who offer up information outside the chain of command. After all, Mark Felt served as "Deep Throat" for Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein during the Watergate scandal, helping to bring down the Richard Nixon administration. Indeed, the deep state is as old as the government itself. Thomas Jefferson was infuriated that Alexander Hamilton seemed to be sharing confidential cabinet discussions on foreign policy in his anonymous articles. James Madison, for his part, suggested in his articles that Hamilton was a monarchist, a view informed by Hamilton's confidential speeches

THOMAS FLUHARTY

from the Constitutional Convention.

That we have had a deep state since the 1790s demonstrates a fundamental truth: Public officials are not always going to follow the party line. They are human beings, after all, capable of exercising their own judgment, based on their own interests and understandings of right and wrong. This is human nature, and it has influenced the course of American politics since the very beginning. Even assuming that today's leakers are motivated by politics, rather than concern for the general welfare and anxiety that Trump is serving it poorly, hardly excuses Trump. It is the duty of the president, in his capacity as head of the executive branch, to *manage* these officials—not to bellyache when his mismanagement leads to politically embarrassing leaks.

Many of the leaks have come from the White House itself, which is staffed with Trump's own people. News outlets have taken of late to bragging about how many sources they have inside the West Wing. Such leaks are not a product of the deep state at work, but rather Trump's inability to staff the White House with competent officials who can be counted on to remain loyal to him in times of trouble.

And what of the notion that the president is beset by *partisan* enemies, especially in the press? No doubt this is true to some extent, in that the press is manifestly ill-disposed toward the president. But how is this any different from its attitude toward other Republican presidents in the last half-century? Was not the media harder on Nixon, Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, and George W. Bush than they were on Democratic presidents? Of course. The press is made up almost uniformly of Democrats, and there is an obviously liberal slant to much of the "mainstream" news. But this has been a *constant* problem for Republicans—and not an insuperable one. Many Republican politicians have thrived despite the hammering they took from the press.

Maybe the press is more partisan now than it was in the past, but this is mitigated by the fact that this is an industry in a swift decline, and conservatives have more opportunities to get their message out than ever before. Yet Trump is in a substantially worse political position at this point in his administration than any Republican president since the invention of public opinion polling.

It is axiomatic that one cannot explain change with a constant, and the deep state and our partisan press are constants. The difference is Trump himself. He has comported himself in ways unbecoming a chief executive. That this misbehavior has been aired publicly does not, cannot excuse Trump.

Did the deep state instruct Trump to tweet that President Obama was tapping his phone line? No. Did it insist that Trump ask FBI director James Comey to go easy on Michael Flynn? Of course not. Did it induce him to fire Comey in a spectacularly incompetent way, then brag about it to the Russian foreign minister? Nope. Did it encourage him to keep the counsel of political hacks and dandified showmen with too-close relations with the Russian government? Again, no.

Did our partisan press dupe Trump into being rude on his telephone call with the Australian prime minister? Did it insist that he mismanage the Republican effort to repeal Obamacare? Did it pen the poorly written executive order regarding immigration from Muslim-majority countries, then botch the rollout of the order? Did it force

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him to make the manifestly untrue statement that his inauguration crowd was comparable to Obama's? Nonsense.

Donald Trump is responsible for all these errors. And importantly, they are quite different from the mistakes that previous commanders in chief have made. In sum, they point to a man who is out of his depth, who lacks the discretion, acumen, and temperament to manage the executive branch. That the deep state is pointing this out to a partisan press does not alter the basic facts of the situation.

Trump is the author of his own misfortune. The challenges he faces are no different from those other presidents have had to encounter. Blaming the deep state or the partisan press is simply shooting the messenger. ♦

In Praise of the Aircraft Carrier

Always on the verge of obsolescence, yet always proving its worth. BY GEOFFREY NORMAN

Pensacola

The staging is perfect. A raised dais with a formation of A-4 Skyhawks suspended overhead, in the signature colors and markings of the Navy's Blue Angels. The venue is the National Naval Aviation Museum, which occupies space adjacent to Sherman Field on the naval air station in Pensacola—the birthplace of naval aviation and home of the Blue Angels.

The museum is not a busy, up-tempo military installation, so today's event, its 30th annual symposium, qualifies as an exciting day. Past themes—with speakers ranging from former President George H.W. Bush to Secretaries of the Navy John Lehman and James Webb—have focused on the battles of Midway and Coral Sea, the stories of legendary squadrons like the Black Sheep, and overviews of entire conflicts: the Vietnam war, Operations Desert Storm and Iraqi Freedom.

This year, however, the focus is on battles of the future, budget battles, that is. The assorted admirals, ensigns, and civilians have gathered to consider "Power Projection in the 21st Century" and more specifically, "the role of large deck air-capable warships."

It is both a timely debate and one that never seems to end. Does the United States really *need* aircraft carriers? Can it afford them? The arguments against the carrier come down to cost and vulnerability as they always have, and they run hot and cold. These days, they are running very hot. Not quite so hot as they did in the days after World War II and before Korea, when the Truman administration canceled construction that was underway on a new super carrier and was busy mothballing the carriers that remained in the fleet just as thousands of soldiers poured across the 38th parallel. The Korean War made the need for carriers plain again.

Our fleet today might be said to descend from the first nuclear-powered carrier, the *Enterprise*, which was commissioned in 1961. *Enterprise* saw service around the globe, notably six deployments off Vietnam during that war, which was a busy one for carriers, and sailed until 2012. Retired Navy captain Sterling Gilliam, the museum's director and impresario of this year's symposium, was the same age as the *Enterprise* were the same age when he served as one of the squadron commanders in the ship's air wing on 9/11. The *Enterprise* had been deployed in the Arabian Sea for seven months to enforce the no-fly zone over Iraq and was two days into its return trip. The carrier turned about and was joined by, its relief, the *Carl Vinson* to begin air operations against al Qaeda. Two carriers, on station, less than 48 hours after the 9/11 attack.

All this, and much more, was background for the day's proceedings, which kicked off with the air group commander and his subordinate squadron commanders from the USS *Eisenhower*. And who better to talk about power projection? I recalled the old joke about the country boy being interviewed by a scholar researching his thesis on rural religious practices.

"Do you believe in baptism by immersion?" the college type asks the son of the soil.

"Believe in it?" comes the reply. "*Believe in it*? Hell, boy, I seen it done."

The aviators on this first panel had personally and strenuously projected power for more than seven months in the eastern Mediterranean, the Red Sea, and the Arabian Gulf. They flew, day and night, dropping bombs in the war on ISIS.

The aviators tended to speak in technical locutions and acronyms. But this was something a curious civilian could actually find reassuring. This wasn't Tom Cruise playing *Top Gun*, though more than one of the panelists during the symposium would say he had been inspired to join the Navy and fly by that hit movie from the summer of 1986. These were professionals, and they talked the language of their profession—one that happens to require their leaving home for months at a time to go abroad and do dangerous things. The blandness of their presentations spoke to their mastery.

There was one moment that struck an emotional note. Commander Brendan Stickles introduced himself and told the audience that his small hometown outside of New York had lost eleven people during the 9/11 attacks, people who commuted to the city to jobs in the twin towers.

"That works out to one person every three blocks," he said. So his

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deployment was an opportunity for him to "take the fight to the enemy."

His air wing commander, Capt. Marc "Stem" Miguez, later described the enemy as "people who need to be eliminated from this earth," and promised the audience that "Mosul will fall."

So those were warriors up there on the dais even though, most of the time, they spoke softly of things like OFRP. (That would be the optimized fleet response plan.)

Stickles and I talked a little after the panel. He is a jet jockey, certainly, but that is not the end of it. He is a graduate of the Naval Academy with an MBA in international business from the University of North Carolina and another advanced degree from Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. He is good at his work, obviously, or he would not be a squadron commander, flying the EA-18G "Growler," which is described in the literature as an "advanced airborne electronic attack platform." (Professionals, at ease with acronyms, shorten this to "AEA platform.") Stickles describes his mission in this concise fashion: "For us, every antenna is a target. And there are a lot of antennas out there."

Stickles thinks and writes seriously about the future of his profession. His article in the U.S. Naval Institute's April 2016 *Proceedings* journal, under the title "The Twilight of Manned Flight?" examined the arrival of unmanned aircraft and what they portend for the carrier fleet and its mission. In short, the day seems to be coming when aviators as we know them will be obsolete.

But, then again, maybe not. In the present, the case for the carrier can be made by reading from the logbook. In a late morning panel, Captain Paul Spedero, commanding officer of the USS *Eisenhower*, sums up his ship's recent deployment in relief of the *Harry S. Truman*.

- The ship was deployed for 241 days and spent 21 days "underway" between its home port at Norfolk and the Mediterranean.
- Its aircraft flew 12,831 sorties.
- Of these, 2,054 were combat sorties.
- These resulted in 1,423 "kinetic events" with 1,598 weapons delivered.

Leading one to ask, "If we don't need big carriers, why are we working them so hard?" Why the long deployments with the constant resupplies at sea so that the crews will be eating well, which is a big thing when you are working 16-hour days in close spaces or on a dangerous, noisy flight deck? (There was, Spedero tells his audience, one near-crisis in this regard when there was no fresh lettuce for the admiral's salads for several days.)

Even as the role of the carrier was being dissected at the symposium

The USS George H.W. Bush

in Pensacola, the USS *George H.W. Bush* was carrying on the work of the *Eisenhower* and the *Truman*. And in the Pacific, the *Stennis* was making its presence felt off Korea while the *Reagan* was conducting training operations off Japan.

Another obvious question: If the carrier is obsolete—vulnerable and too expensive—why are so many nations so eager to acquire them? China, India, Russia, the U.K.

Whatever its distant future, the aircraft carrier is plainly not on any list of endangered weapons systems and the proof lies in what they are doing, every day, around the globe.

The newest of the U.S. Navy's carriers is the *Gerald Ford*. It has been completed but still needs to go through more tests before joining the fleet, sometime later this year at the soonest and at least three years beyond the date originally estimated. Three years and billions of dollars.

Nobody, of course, is happy about the delays. But, for perspective: The *Enterprise*, the first nuclear carrier, went over budget by so much that some of the weapons systems that were designed into the ship had to be left off as a way of saving some money. And as with any big project, whether a weapons system or not, the real test comes when it is operational. If it performs over time, then the delays in getting it into service are forgotten and the costs that ran beyond budget are amortized. The people at the symposium believe the *Ford* will easily prove to have been worth the price. Certainly this is true of its first commanding officer, Rear Admiral John "Oscar" Meier, who speaks with me after lunch and again, in the evening, over a cocktail.

Meier speaks softly and deliberately but can't conceal the pride he feels in his new ship. There is nothing about the *Ford* that doesn't rivet his attention and admiration. This, he says, is an entirely *new* carrier. New design, new technology, all the way down to the catapults that the president seems to think are, somehow, too digital.

"This ship is designed for growth," says Meier, who waxes rhapsodic even about the "plasma arc waste destruction system," which incinerates the ship's garbage into fine ash. And don't forget the air-conditioning. All that machinery and steel tends to make ships hot. The forward portion of an aircraft carrier has always been an especially hot part of the ship. But not on the *Ford*, says Admiral Meier. To which someone in the audience says, "Next you'll be telling us your sailors are volunteering for the special sea and anchor detail." A little Navy humor.

The essence of Meier's feeling for the ship and its future is in something he says about the men and women in the crew and their enthusiasm for their mission and the *Ford*. "It is going to last for 50 years," he says. "For the life of the ship."

I suppose my expression asked the question for me. How does he know?

"It is baked," he says, "into the steel."

The debate over the carrier is not going away and will, no doubt, intensify. Count on the carrier itself and its advocates to mount a very strong defense. ♦

U.S. NAVY

Unfinished Business

What it will take to make America safe again

By Thomas Joscelyn

Donald Trump is fond of claiming that his predecessor mismanaged America's role in the world. "And I have to just say that the world is a mess. I inherited a mess," the president noted during a joint press conference with King Abdullah of Jordan in the Rose Garden on April 5. "Whether it's the Middle East," he continued, "whether it's North Korea, whether it's so many other things, whether it's in our country—horrible trade deals—I inherited a mess."

The world is an inherently messy place, and each president is left with problems unresolved by the man who preceded him. But when it comes to America's fight against terrorism, Trump has a point. Barack Obama claimed that he brought the war in Iraq to a "responsible end" and promised do the same in Afghanistan. In reality, he ended neither of the 9/11 wars. While Obama was arguing that the "tide of war is receding," new conflicts emerged and old ones intensified.

Obama always had a tin ear for the psychological impact of terrorism. He liked to tell his staff that the number of Americans killed in terrorist attacks each year was smaller than the number who perished in car accidents or by slipping in the bathtub. But this argument is myopic. Jihadist groups, not automobile manufacturers, are fighting for the control of entire countries. The terrorist threat over here only grew as they gained ground over there. There have been large-scale plots, such as the Islamic State's assault on Paris in November 2015 and the March 2016 Brussels bombings. Small attacks have become widespread. The December 2015 shooting in San Bernardino and the June 2016 nightclub massacre in Orlando both shocked this nation. Such attacks are often described as the work of "lone wolves," but this is misleading. Al Qaeda has long sought to inspire individuals to strike out on their own. The Islamic State took this tactic further, using online applications to both attract and guide recruits in the West. The emergence of the so-called caliphate in 2014 created a new justification and urgency for believers to lash out in their home countries.

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On May 22, the West was reminded, once again, of the persistent threat when a jihadist detonated a shrapnel-laden bomb at the conclusion of an Ariana Grande concert in Manchester, England. The bombing, for which the Islamic State claimed responsibility, targeted children who just wanted to see a favorite pop star. At least 22 people were killed and 64 wounded. Britain, like Paris and Brussels before it, was put on high alert as officials worried that a follow-up attack was in the works. Western officials have worked around the clock for years to prevent just such attacks. The casualty count would be much higher if not for their efforts. Thousands of potential terrorists now tie up counterterrorism and law enforcement resources throughout Europe and the United States. The U.S. and allied governments are rightly focused on the jihadist threat—not on the work of bathtub manufacturers or automakers.

Barack Obama does not bear all the blame; he inherited the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan from his predecessor, George W. Bush. The Arab uprisings occurred on Obama's watch, and they opened new opportunities for the jihadists in countries where they had only a minimal presence beforehand. The revolutions were beyond America's control, but Obama did little to counter the growing jihadist menace and even exacerbated problems. He sought to downplay or dismiss every jihadist threat during his presidency. With few exceptions, such as the killing of Osama bin Laden, there is little Obama can point to as a counterterrorism success in his eight years in office.

The Trump administration is currently crafting its own counterterrorism strategy. An 11-page draft memo was leaked to Reuters on May 5, and in keeping with the president's views on foreign policy, the administration seems to be planning to call on America's allies to do more. "We need to intensify operations against global jihadist groups while also reducing the costs of American 'blood and treasure' in pursuit of our counterterrorism goals," the document reads. "We will seek to avoid costly, large-scale U.S. military interventions to achieve counterterrorism objectives and will increasingly look to partners to share the responsibility for countering terrorist groups."

There's nothing wrong, in principle or in practice, with asking our allies to do more. President Trump was

Medics rehydrate a member of the U.S. Army's 101st Airborne Division who was overcome by heat and exhaustion while conducting a mission intended to deny sanctuary to al Qaeda and Taliban fighters along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, July 23, 2002.

SCOTT NELSON / GETTY

never likely to order nation-building projects or massive troop deployments. But it is worth noting that Obama described his approach to counterterrorism in terms remarkably similar to those used in the Trump memo. In his last major counterterrorism speech, on December 6, 2016, Obama noted that the current war effort against the Islamic State cost "$10 billion over two years, which is the same amount that we used to spend in one month at the height of the Iraq War." "Instead of pushing all of the burden onto American ground troops," he said, "instead of trying to mount invasions wherever terrorists appear, we've built a network of partners."

Obama's plan, too, was built around reducing "the costs of American 'blood and treasure.'" It's a fine goal and, in some ways, a sensible one. Limiting the number of American casualties has to be any president's top concern. Nor can America be the primary force in every country that faces a jihadist fight. Substituting others' boots reduces the cost to U.S. taxpayers. But an "Allies First" strategy has its limits. There is no better example than the ongoing war in Afghanistan, where America's partners are struggling to keep the jihadists at bay.

AMERICA'S LONGEST WAR

Late in 2009, Obama ordered 30,000 additional troops to Afghanistan. But he promised that the Americans deployed under his leadership would come home before the conclusion of his reelection campaign, and he delivered on that pledge.

"We've broken the Taliban's momentum in Afghanistan, and begun the transition to an Afghan lead," Obama announced in September 2012. "Next month," he continued, "the last of the troops I ordered as part of the surge against the Taliban will come home, and by 2014, the transition to Afghan lead will be complete." The soldiers came home, but the Taliban's "momentum" was never truly broken. It was just slowed. Even Obama eventually realized he had to keep more American troops in Afghanistan than he originally planned. Today, more than 15 years after we invaded Afghanistan in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, large parts of the country are falling back into the hands of the Taliban.

According to the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, who reports directly to Congress, at least 164 (40 percent) of Afghanistan's 407 districts were either contested or under the insurgents' control or

influence in February. The jihadists are able to execute spectacular assaults like the April 21 raid on an Afghan military base near Mazar-e-Sharif that left more than 100 dead. The number of civilian casualties has increased as well. The U.N. Assistance Mission in Afghanistan reported in February that 11,418 civilians were killed or wounded in 2016. By contrast, 5,969 civilian casualties were recorded in 2009—Obama's first year in office.

Testifying before the Senate in early February, Gen. John W. Nicholson, who leads all NATO and U.S. forces in Afghanistan, said that a "few thousand" more troops were needed to stabilize the war effort. He called the conflict a stalemate, but there is no denying the Taliban gained significant ground over the previous year.

President Trump's national security adviser, Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster, who held commands in both Iraq and Afghanistan, reportedly wants to send several thousand more U.S. soldiers to the country. Their primary mission would be to train additional Afghan forces in the hopes of stemming the Taliban's advance. There are currently 8,300 U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan, so the total proposed force would still be a far cry from the 100,000 or so troops stationed there in 2010-11.

Some in the Trump administration object to even this modest strategy. The *Washington Post* reported that Afghanistan is now "derisively" called "McMaster's War" by his West Wing rivals. White House counselor Steve Bannon has been particularly vocal in opposing any troop escalation in Afghanistan—as he opposed the president's decision last month to strike the Syrian airfield from which the Assad regime had launched a chemical attack. It's easy to see why Bannon is willing to give up on Afghanistan. The landlocked nation bedeviled foreign powers long before the Taliban ever rose to power. The Afghan government is rife with corruption and often unreliable. Over the last 16 years, 2,387 Americans have perished in the war for Afghanistan and 20,261 others have been wounded. The thought of sending more off to fight in a seemingly intractable war would be disheartening for any president.

The thought of sending more Americans off to fight in a seemingly intractable war in Afghanistan would be disheartening for any president. But the restoration of the Taliban, or anything close to it, would have dire consequences for the United States, particularly because it would be seen as the result of our capitulation.

But the restoration of the Taliban, or anything close to it, would have dire consequences for the United States, particularly because it would be seen as the result of our capitulation. The myth that faith in Allah was sufficient for the mujahedeen to drive the Soviets out of Afghanistan in the 1980s (ignoring the billions of dollars in arms supplied by the United States) fueled the generation of jihadists from which al Qaeda arose. It is not difficult to imagine what a second vanquished superpower would do for their cause.

"Allah has promised us victory and America has promised us defeat, so we shall see which of the two promises will be fulfilled," Mullah Omar, the Taliban founder, once said. He passed away in 2013, but his words are beginning to look prophetic. Indeed, an American retreat would be widely regarded as a vindication not just of Mullah Omar and his Taliban heirs, but of Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda.

THE TALIBAN-AL-QAEDA ALLIANCE

Part of the Obama administration's strategy for ending the Afghan conflict was an attempt to separate the Taliban from al Qaeda. It was a fool's errand, as anyone aware of the overlapping structures and interests of the two understood. But for eight years, Obama's advisers built a policy in Afghanistan on this deeply flawed assumption.

Since well before the 9/11 attacks, al Qaeda's chieftains have been loyal to the Taliban's overall leader. In June 2016, Ayman al Zawahiri, who followed bin Laden as the head of al Qaeda, swore a blood oath to the Taliban's emir, Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada. In December, as something of a commemoration of the Obama policy failure, the Taliban released a lengthy video celebrating the historical alliance. There was footage of al Qaeda and Taliban figures—living and dead, including bin Laden and Mullah Omar—and no hint at all that the Taliban regretted the collapse of its rule in Afghanistan in the wake of the U.S. invasion in October 2001.

Al Qaeda commanders are integrated with their Taliban counterparts throughout the Afghan insurgency to this day. The man who runs the Taliban's military operations, Sirajuddin Haqqani, is particularly close to al Qaeda. He and his father, Jalaluddin, were among bin Laden's earliest allies.

Throughout his tenure as president, Obama repeatedly insisted that al Qaeda was "decimated" and "on the run." He was willfully blind to the situation in Afghanistan until the end. "Today, by any measure, core al Qaeda—the organization that hit us on 9/11—is a shadow of its former self," Obama claimed in his December valedictory

speech. It is true that al Qaeda suffered significant losses at American hands in Obama's eight years in office. But the organization has survived the war on terror; it has evolved and it has grown.

In October 2015, the U.S. military made a startling announcement. Over the course of five days, a joint team of American and Afghan forces had raided an al Qaeda training camp far bigger than the one that produced the 9/11 hijackers and their comrades. The facility was nearly 30 square miles—about half the size of Washington, D.C. It was located in the Shorabak district of the southern Kandahar Province and had gone unnoticed for months, even as it churned out scores of new trainees. The whole of Shorabak district was overrun by the Taliban early this year.

The massive camp is indicative of a bigger problem. The Obama administration routinely downplayed the extent of al Qaeda's footprint in Afghanistan. The CIA estimated in late June 2010 that there were just "50 to 100" al Qaeda operatives inside Afghanistan. U.S. officials stuck with this assessment for years, even as contradictory evidence mounted. Files recovered in Osama bin Laden's compound in May 2011, for instance, demonstrated that his men were operating in at least eight different Afghan provinces as of June 19, 2010. Just one al Qaeda "battalion" operating in the provinces of Kunar and Nuristan, the files showed, had 70 members.

The U.S. military continued to launch raids against al Qaeda positions, but the "50 to 100" range remained fixed. U.S. officials finally conceded in April 2016 that the extent of al Qaeda's operations inside Afghanistan had been underestimated. In December, just weeks before the end of the Obama administration, Gen. Nicholson noted that 250 al Qaeda operatives had been killed or captured in Afghanistan since the beginning of 2016.

One of those killed was an especially important target. Faruq al Qahtani had been tasked by Osama bin Laden with organizing al Qaeda's relocation to Afghanistan from northern Pakistan in 2010 at the peak of the Obama administration's drone campaign. A significant number of al Qaeda leaders and fighters made the move, which allowed them to survive the drone onslaught. Qahtani and his men fought alongside their Taliban comrades. But that was not his sole mission. After Qahtani was struck down in October 2016, the Pentagon announced that he had been "one of the terrorist group's senior plotters of attacks against the United States." Al Qaeda is still plotting against America from Afghan soil in 2017, and a complete U.S. withdrawal would only make it easier for them to do so.

Al Qaeda has been expanding throughout South Asia. In September 2014, Zawahiri announced the creation of a new entity: Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS). He explained that after two years of negotiations and planning, several preexisting al Qaeda-allied groups in Pakistan and its neighboring countries had merged. Almost immediately after this announcement AQIS members attempted to hijack a Pakistani frigate and fire its missiles at Indian and American warships. The goal was to get India or the United States to retaliate for a perceived attack by Pakistan and start a regional war. The plot, which was carried out by terrorists who had infiltrated Pakistan's navy, was narrowly averted while it was in motion.

Thus far, the Trump administration has said little about how it plans to fight the Taliban-al Qaeda axis. The U.S. military has been mainly focused on fighting the Islamic State's upstart presence in eastern Afghanistan—known as ISIS-K, for Khorasan, an old name for the wider central Asian region. Three American soldiers were killed during raids on ISIS-K positions in Nangarhar Province in April, and there is no question that the group poses a challenge. But it is not the gravest threat to Afghan security. At the height of their power, the Islamic State's representatives controlled approximately ten Afghan districts and contested several others. Today, they control at most three. That is a far cry from the Taliban-led insurgency, which either dominates or is challenging Afghan and NATO forces in more than 160 districts across the country.

The Taliban has its allies, too. Iran long ago cut a deal with it to counter America's presence in the region. The Russians have provided rhetorical support at the very minimum. Pakistan remains as duplicitous as ever, fighting

Taliban fighters in western Afghanistan gather to listen to their leader, November 3, 2015.

JAVED TANVEER / AFP / GETTY

some jihadists and allowing others to roam free. What little leverage we have in Pakistan today would surely be lost in the event of our withdrawal from Afghanistan. The Taliban was, after all, originally a Pakistani proxy.

NATO countries may be willing to contribute more forces to the Afghan war. And despite the Afghans' many problems, they will always be the ones doing the majority of the fighting and dying in this war. NATO and the Afghans can do more, of course, but are most likely to do so with the spur of a significant American commitment.

IRAQ AND SYRIA

President Obama was always dismissive of any jihadist threat emanating from Iraq. He described the Islamic State and its predecessor organization as a "kind of mafia" and the "jayvee team," even as its fighters were laying the groundwork for their caliphate. Underpinning Obama's casual dismissal was, as he told the *New Yorker* in January 2014, the idea that "jihadists who are engaged in various local power struggles and disputes" aren't a serious threat to the West. Today, the Islamic State's tentacles reach around the globe, from Southeast Asia, through the Middle East and Africa, all the way into the heart of the United States.

Obama was never going to keep nearly 150,000 troops stationed in the country when he took office. But even a small contingent would have interrupted the rise of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's caliphate. Obama and his surrogates liked to blame the Iraqi government's refusal to enter a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) for America's complete withdrawal at the end of 2011. The claim is false. Obama celebrated his "ending" of the Iraq war throughout his 2012 reelection campaign. It was a point of pride for him, not a lament.

Leon Panetta, Obama's secretary of defense from 2011-13, wrote in *Time* in 2014 that the president was never interested in negotiating a new agreement. The Obama administration was "so eager to rid itself of Iraq that it was willing to withdraw rather than lock in arrangements that would preserve our influence and interests," Panetta explained. Obama's rationale is also belied by the fact that when he eventually sent American troops back into Iraq in 2014, he did so without a new SOFA. Difficult negotiations with the Iraqi government aren't the reason Obama closed the door on Iraq. He believed that the jihadists weren't a serious threat to American security.

Nonetheless, as his two terms came to an end, Obama argued that his course correction in 2014 left President Trump with a successful strategy for defeating the Islamic State. During his December 6 speech, Obama said, "the results are clear: ISIL [Islamic State] has lost more than half its territory. ISIL has lost control of major population centers. Its morale is plummeting. Its recruitment is drying up. Its commanders and external plotters are being taken out, and local populations are turning against it." Pointing to the campaigns in Mosul and north of Raqqa, the group's "self-declared capital," Obama added: "The bottom line is we are breaking the back of ISIL. We're taking away its safe havens."

It may be the case that the zenith of the Islamic State's power is past. But Obama's use of ad hoc allies and proxy fighting was an outgrowth of his hasty withdrawal and eventual reversal; it was never a cogent strategy. Iraqi government forces melted away quickly as the Islamic State's killers marauded their way through the country in 2014. The United States worked to rebuild their capabilities in the years since, but there is no good reason to think the Iraqi army can stand on its own. What's more, many of the anti-Islamic State actors fighting in Iraq are allies of Iran, which is fomenting an anti-American revolution throughout the region.

Iranian expansion was the poison pill in Obama's plan for the Islamic State. Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), which are involved in the battle for Mosul and

operations throughout Iraq, have strong ties to Iran and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). During the height of the Iraq war, the IRGC's elite Quds Force hunted American-led coalition forces. The deputy commander of the PMF is Abu Mahdi al Muhandis, who has long worked with both the IRGC and Hezbollah, the notorious Iranian terror proxy in Lebanon. In 2009, the Treasury Department designated Muhandis a terrorist for his role in orchestrating attacks against Americans and allied forces in Iraq. Today, he and his men fight as part of the coalition against the Islamic State. The Shiite jihadists battling Baghdadi's goons in Iraq do not serve America's long-term interests, they serve Iran's.

President Trump is aware that Iranian aggression throughout the region is one of Obama's most troubling legacies. During his speech in Saudi Arabia on May 21, he said that "no discussion of stamping out this threat would be complete without mentioning the government that gives terrorists all three—safe harbor, financial backing, and the social standing needed for recruitment." Trump meant Iran and continued, "From Lebanon to Iraq to Yemen, Iran funds, arms, and trains terrorists, militias, and other extremist groups that spread destruction and chaos across the region. For decades, Iran has fueled the fires of sectarian conflict and terror." It was important for the president to make it clear that the United States views Iran as a major source of terrorism, but it is not at all easy to see how the new administration will untangle the fight against the Islamic State in Iraq from Iranian interests.

President Trump is aware that Iranian aggression throughout the region is one of Obama's most troubling legacies. During his speech in Saudi Arabia on May 21, he said, 'From Lebanon to Iraq to Yemen, Iran funds, arms, and trains terrorists, militias, and other extremist groups that spread destruction and chaos across the region. For decades, Iran has fueled the fires of sectarian conflict and terror.'

If Obama could claim some progress against the Islamic State in his December speech, he could not claim victory. The campaign has been a slog. The fighting to liberate Mosul began seven months ago. The Islamic State is close to losing the city but is also still operating throughout Iraq, having quickly reverted to a potent insurgency in many of the areas it lost. The fight for Raqqa has yet to begin. It is under threat from multiple directions, but the jihadists have had ample time to build a defensive house of horrors for their approaching enemies. The group has also redeployed its forces, securing ground along the Euphrates River and in the eastern province of Deir Ezzor, one of the organization's longtime strongholds. The end of the caliphate may be in sight, but the end of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria is not.

Complicating matters is the fact that America's chosen partners in Syria include members of the Kurdish Peoples' Protection Units (YPG), which is affiliated with the Kurdistan Workers' party (PKK), a U.S.-designated terrorist organization. The Trump administration has decided to deepen this alliance, which was first struck under Obama. Earlier this month, the president approved a plan to directly arm the YPG, which is the leading partner in the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). There may be no other choice at this point. The SDF has played a crucial role in taking territory from ISIS in northern Syria, including the city of Tabqah and the surrounding area, which are key to the western approach to Raqqa.

The movement for Kurdish independence is gaining momentum, but hopes for a new state are mired in internal rivalries. America has Kurdish allies in both Iraq and Syria, but they are far from a unified force. The presence of YPG/PKK fighters in Iraq has caused persistent problems for the Kurdish regional government, which is coordinating the anti-Islamic State fight in the north of the country. America's Kurdish partners in the battle for Mosul (the Peshmerga) are sometimes allied with our Kurdish surrogate ground forces in the fight to take Raqqa (YPG/PKK), but they also clash with each other.

Turkey's government, moreover, is vehemently opposed to the YPG/PKK and, more generally, to any expansion of the Kurdish regional footprint. The Turks present problems in their own right, beginning with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's increasing autocracy. The country is a safe haven for numerous bad actors, from senior Hamas operatives to al Qaeda figures, and has been the main jihadist pipeline into Syria.

Throughout all of this, Bashar al-Assad's genocidal regime remains a power in Syria. Without the support of Iran and Russia, Assad would long since have been sent to the gallows. Iranian-backed Iraqi militias have been deployed to Syria on behalf of the butcher of Damascus, and today Assad is safer than he has been in years. If Obama had acted more urgently in 2011 when Assad first started his campaign of mass murder, the region and Europe—which has taken in hundreds of thousands of refugees—might look much different today. There is no serious effort, U.S.-led or

otherwise, to hold Assad accountable for his crimes. While it is tempting to suggest that wholesale regime change should be America's policy in Syria, only naïve ideologues could overlook the fact that Sunni jihadists are the strongest force opposed to Assad.

The U.S. focus on fighting the Islamic State has obscured another problematic development: the rise of al Qaeda in Syria. In the first three weeks of 2017, the Defense Department launched airstrikes it says "killed more than 150 al Qaeda terrorists" in Syria. One target was the Shaykh Sulayman training camp, which has been operational since at least 2013. More than 100 al Qaeda fighters were killed in that attack alone. Al Qaeda has also built up al-Nusra Front, which Brett McGurk, whom Obama appointed as special presidential envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIS in 2015, has described before the Senate as al Qaeda's "largest formal affiliate in history." U.S. officials estimate that al-Nusra has amassed at least 10,000 fighters.

Between September 2014 and December 2016, the Obama administration launched repeated drone strikes against individual al Qaeda terrorists residing in Syria. But they were not as significant as the bombings in January. The bulk of al-Nusra's forces, which now fight under the name of the Assembly for the Liberation of the Levant, long went untouched, and, though they are battling both Assad and Iran's Shiite militiamen, no American ally is currently fighting this group on the ground.

In April, Asim Umar, head of Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent, announced that 'America is not only fleeing from Afghanistan, but [giving] up the leadership of the world. The "America first" slogan is the first step.' Umar detected the problem in Trump's rhetoric: It is not clear that there is any difference between putting American interests first and retreating from our pre-eminent position around the globe.

YEMEN AND SOMALIA

When President Obama announced his strategy for fighting the Islamic State in September 2014, he said it would mirror his administration's efforts in Yemen and Somalia. Within months, the Yemen plan was a shambles.

The U.S. government had been relying on Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi's government, supported by targeted drone strikes and Special Forces operations, to suppress Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). But in January 2015, Hadi was forced into exile when Houthi rebels stormed the presidential palace in the Yemeni capital, Sanaa. The Houthis adhere to their own peculiar brand of Shia Islam and opposed the Sunni-dominated Yemeni government. They have been cultivated by Tehran, which views them as an ally against Saudi Arabia. While the Houthis are not a purebred Iranian terrorist organization like Hezbollah, they are increasingly anti-American, even firing missiles at U.S. ships off the coast of Yemen. They draw crucial support from former Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Saleh, who was pushed aside in 2011 during the Arab Spring. Saleh wants to reclaim power, and he has cut a deal with the Houthis, previously his foes, in an attempt to get it.

AQAP is a major force in Yemen. The group took advantage of the Houthi offensive against Hadi to claim parts of southern Yemen. After the United Arab Emirates and the Saudis intervened in 2016, AQAP's forces melted away, declaring it was better to leave Yemen's more urban areas intact rather than raze them in a bloody intra-Arab fight. The jihadists lived to fight another day.

The Trump administration has already stepped up the air campaign in Yemen. The United States launched more than 80 airstrikes against AQAP between January and May. The previous high was 41 bombings in all of 2009. President Trump has also approved riskier operations. One Special Forces raid in January gained notoriety for the death of a Navy SEAL in an intense firefight at an AQAP compound, which also led to numerous civilian casualties.

America's chief partners in the Yemen fight, the UAE and Saudi Arabia, are focused on hitting the Houthis and reinstalling Hadi in power. But AQAP also fights the Houthis, which makes for uncomfortable bedfellows. Hadi's men are also sometimes AQAP's battlefield allies. Meanwhile, no ground force is significantly opposing AQAP. The UAE does have troops who skirmish with them, but such clashes are so far minor. The situation is further complicated by the fact that Saudi Arabia is widely accused of carrying out indiscriminate bombing raids.

The troubles in Somalia are similar to those in Yemen. The African Union Mission in Somalia and government forces are struggling to contain al Shabaab, the local al Qaeda branch. Earlier this month, a Navy SEAL died in a battle with the group—the first American killed in combat in Somalia since the "Black Hawk Down" episode of 1993. Under Obama, American service members were to "advise, assist, and occasionally accompany regional

forces." In late March, Trump approved a plan that allows them to "provide additional precision fires in support of" our local allies. American service members are going to be called upon to do more in Somalia.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

In late April, Asim Umar, the head of Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent, released a provocative message. In it, he asked, "What is becoming of that very America?" and took direct aim at Trump's foreign policy. "America is not only fleeing from Afghanistan, but with the jihadist strikes conducted against it by the sons of the Muslim ummah, inshaAllah, inshaAllah, it will also flee from, and give up the leadership of the world. The 'America first' slogan is the first step."

Umar detected the problem in Trump's "America first" rhetoric: It is not clear that there is any difference between putting American interests first and retreating from our preeminent position around the globe. It is striking that Umar sees the Trump doctrine as the "first step" to the demise of American "leadership of the world."

It doesn't have to be this way. The new president is right when he says he "inherited a mess." He can begin to fix it by setting the record straight with the American people. We are still fighting a global war against jihadism. Al Qaeda is very much alive and, contrary to the Obama administration's assertions, remains an international organization active on multiple continents. While the Islamic State has taken its lumps, it is not close to a total defeat. Today's enemies may not possess the industrial might and war machines of yesterday's foes, but they are persistent and committed to an anti-American ideology we cannot afford to ignore.

Trump and his advisers can explain why Afghanistan—the original 9/11 war—remains an essential fight. The 9/11 hijackings were launched from Afghan soil, and an American retreat in Afghanistan would be a clear victory for the Taliban-al Qaeda axis. Obama's total withdrawal from Iraq in 2011 proved disastrous, and a replay of that scenario in South Asia—where Pakistan, the only nuclear-armed state infested with jihadists, is located—could be worse. Trump should quickly approve the McMaster plan to send more troops to Afghanistan. They will not win the war, but they can stem the tide of the jihadists' advance. The Trump administration wants our NATO allies to step up their commitments. NATO follows America's lead, not the other way around.

The multi-sided proxy wars in Iraq and Syria are a terrifying mess. During a press briefing on May 19, Secretary of Defense James Mattis said that the American strategy, on its present course, would "annihilate" the Islamic State. Mattis praised President Trump for delegating more authority to his military commanders and for blessing a plan to surround "the enemy in their strongholds" and prevent "the return home of escaped foreign fighters." The previous week, during testimony before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, Director of National Intelligence Daniel R. Coats sounded less optimistic. He warned that the Islamic State would maintain "enough resources and fighters to sustain insurgency operations and plan [terrorist] attacks in the region and internationally" for the foreseeable future.

In other words, the U.S. intelligence community is not expecting the defeat of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's enterprise anytime soon. America's allies are moving slowly in Syria. In Iraq, we have already witnessed how quickly jihadists can rebound from a defeat. To make matters worse, no American-backed force is ready to move on al Qaeda's strongholds in northwestern Syria. Iran has used the war against the Islamic State to pursue its long-term objective of becoming the regional hegemon, expanding its footprint in Iraq, Syria, and beyond. The president should have the U.S. military developing aggressive options for fighting the jihadists in Iraq and Syria and for maintaining our position as the chief regional broker.

An anti-U.S. protest in Sanaa, Yemen, by Houthi backers, May 12

NEWSCOM

Speaking before the National Governors Association on February 27, President Trump reminisced about the good old days as he remembers them. "We have to start winning wars again," he said. "I have to say, when I was young, in high school and college, everybody used to say 'we haven't lost a war'—we never lost a war—you remember." Trump pointed out that "now we never win a war." "We never win," he reiterated. "And we don't fight to win. We don't fight to win. So we either got to win, or don't fight it at all." He then complained about the vast sums spent fighting in the Middle East since 2001.

The jihadists believe, as al Qaeda's Asim Umar said earlier this month, that eventually America won't fight at all. The president of the United States can prove them wrong. ♦

Toy factory, Lianyungang, Jiangsu Province, China

IMAGINE CHINA / AP

Tigers at Bay

They're roaring, but for how long? BY JOHN PSAROPOULOS

There is little doubt among economic forecasters that over the medium term, Asia's emerging economies—China and India foremost among them—are expected to drive global economic growth. Taken as one, the region from India to Japan is not only the biggest market for raw materials, energy, and the shipping industry that carries them; it is both the European Union's and the United States' biggest trading partner.

As a region, it is also more robust than either the EU or the United States, where the International Monetary Fund forecasts that growth will rise from 1.6 percent last year to 2 percent next year. In contrast, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) will grow by more than double that rate (5.2 percent in 2018), and even though growth is forecast to slow in China, it will still stand at an enviable 6 percent next year. In India, it will be 7.7 percent. The sustainability of this growth is an object of study for obvious reasons. In China, the key trading partner on whom much of the region's and the globe's prosperity rests, concerns currently focus on finance and the state.

The End of the Asian Century
War, Stagnation, and the Risks to the World's Most Dynamic Region
by Michael R. Auslin
Yale, 304 pp., $30

First, there are concerns that state-owned enterprises, with all their attendant nepotism and inefficiency, still dominate. While they are only a fifth of the economy by size, state players tend to distort legislation and deprive the private sector of growth opportunity in key industries such as transport and energy.

The lingering hand of the state affects finance. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development estimates that corporate debt has soared from 120 percent of GDP five years ago to over 160 percent today. In most emerging markets, it stands closer to 60 percent. Two-thirds of that debt belongs to state-owned enterprises, and much of it may be subject to write-downs. Nonperforming loans have risen fourfold in the last three years, particularly "special mention loans," offered on lenient terms.

Chinese banking statistics are opaque by Western standards, and nonperformance is thought to be underreported. But given that China's banking system is now the biggest in the world—and

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that even less accurate reporting exists of a shadow banking industry living off the largesse of state investments—the potential effects of a Chinese financial meltdown can only be imagined. The "regulatory windstorm" recently unleashed by China's banking regulator must be taken as a sign that Chinese authorities, too, are concerned about the systemic risk of defaults.

A final element of concern over China's financial system is that its capital controls are creating too high a surplus inside the economy—last year alone, Chinese households accumulated $5 trillion—instead of allowing that money to be invested overseas. This not only deprives other economies of growth; it puts all of China's eggs in one basket.

Second, there are fears of a housing bubble. House prices have surged by a staggering 10 percent of GDP in two years, yet entire cities' worth of real estate goes unsold and uninhabited because of overcapacity. A housing bubble would further undermine financial stability.

Third, the rising level of inequality goes unaddressed. The Communists can claim a victory against poverty in the countryside, but this has happened thanks to China's growth rather than redistribution. The IMF study reveals that what applies in capitalist economies largely applies under socialism as well: Less educated, older, and nonstate workers have been those most hurt most by the transition from a low-skilled, rural economy to a manufacturing economy.

Fourth, President Xi Jinping has chosen to uphold the standard Chinese policy of resisting political liberalization. Freedom House has tracked a sharp uptick in authoritarianism and a move away from civil freedoms. In the last year, Beijing has imposed strict supervision standards for NGOs, increased surveillance of people through the Internet, and imprisoned human-rights lawyers and their clients for months, or years, without charging them.

Given all this, there are justifiable concerns about whether the Chinese Communist party can competently manage a transition to slower growth and an aging population, as well as address risks such as corporate over-indebtedness, a looming real-estate bubble, and environmental degradation.

Here, Michael R. Auslin undertakes the ambitious task of revealing the potential for disruption in Asia by assessing the political, economic, demographic, and defense risks of not just China, but also India, Japan, Korea (north and south), Indochina, and the large archipelagic states of the western Pacific. This is an analytical carousel on the potential for armed conflict sparked by North Korea; the appalling poverty of India, where a third of the population still lacks electricity and literacy; gender inequality throughout southeast Asia, which leaves the talents of half the population outside the economy; the combination of reform gridlock and demographic decrepitude in Japan; and the general resistance to transparency, accountability, meritocracy, and democracy through much of the region—values that, in the West, have underpinned sustained economic and social development for two centuries.

The End of the Asian Century brings a great deal of knowledge, and two decades of experience, to the layreader. For the nonexpert on Asia, it is equivalent to a concentration of lectures, complete with references. For that alone, anyone interested in the geopolitical risks of the region and the global economy will find it worthy of their time.

Its quality as an Asian panopticon is both its strength and weakness, however. The problems of Vietnam, the Philippines, and Indonesia simply don't measure up to the magnitude of the risks in China. This lack of focus means that there is no overarching conclusion—for what conclusion can one draw from so disparate a set of nations?—and means that this study amounts to no more than the sum of its parts.

More important, *The End of the Asian Century* fails to prioritize its political preoccupations over the economic. The competitiveness of Asia, based as narrowly as it is on explosive population growth (followed by precipitous population drop), cheap labor, and willing buyers abroad, might truly be at risk in purely economic terms. But that is not what makes this book important to a Western reader: The real cause for concern is that the Chinese Communist party can apparently proceed unreformed—and in the process, attempt to rewrite the rules of the global economy.

The fact that despite the industry of its people, China's growth "remains driven by the state and private business sectors and not yet by consumers," or that "since the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989, the party has become ever more isolated from the citizenry and is seen as corrupt, inefficient, and often brutal . . . distrusted and disliked by the vast majority of the population," means that individual rights are set at zero for a large proportion of the world's population. Other dictators in the region, and as far away as Iran and Sudan, receive material and diplomatic succor from China's stance—people who "threaten their neighbors, oppress their people, or seek to destabilize the international order," as Auslin puts it.

This means that China, more potently than Russia, challenges the American and European worldview and international order. Even in Europe, China has launched the "16+1" forum of former Warsaw Pact countries in a direct challenge to the European Union. Not surprisingly, American influence in the Far East is now weighed against China's, where "smaller nations feel pressured to pick sides, when their greatest desire is to antagonize neither." Indeed, China's direct challenge to American power in the Pacific, now taking the tangible form of military runways on once-insignificant atolls, means that the United States will be called upon to shore up its security mantle.

Auslin omits to mention that China is flexing its soft power, too. Under the One Belt One Road initiative, launched in 2013, Beijing is to spend almost a trillion dollars building infrastructure around the world to extend the reach of its exports. This is, perhaps, the largest such spending program ever conceived, dwarfing even the Marshall Plan. And like the Marshall Plan, it will have political

ramifications, cultivating markets and fostering loyalties.

There is a further effect of China's strident defiance of the Western order. The fall of communism in Europe was oversold as a final victory for capitalism, that would in theory sow a middle class demanding democracy in former Communist states. This has not yet happened, and social scientists are divided about whether it will. The open society and international trade system America built after World War II appear to be insufficient to overthrow Evil Empires. Even worse, since the 2008 financial crisis, they appear unable to provide quality of life to this generation and equal opportunity to the next. The United States may be transitioning from the land of greatest economic and social opportunity to a country of increasingly entrenched privilege, growing inequality, and a falling labor force participation rate.

The sensible remedies Michael Auslin suggests for building leverage over authoritarian regimes in Asia are precisely the ones America cannot enact because of growing self-doubt. These would include using the Trans-Pacific Partnership to create a swirling vortex of trade among democracies—eventually, perhaps, luring China and other illiberal regimes into greater accountability and rule of law. They would also include raising the cap on H-1B visas for skilled workers to pre-9/11 levels, cultivating Western political values, and expanding State Department exchanges that target future business and political elites.

Unfortunately, these are precisely the patient, extrovert policies the Trump administration has declared void. The Trans-Pacific Partnership has gone by the board, and State Department budgets are earmarked for reduction. Many Americans seem to have forgotten that what made America great was its willingness to spend time and money building multilateral alliances that strengthened democracy and free trade.

And herein lies the greater threat: not that the combined pressures of Russia, China, and other illiberal regimes that find transatlantic hegemony has grown long in the tooth will overthrow it by force, but that American and European societies are losing confidence in the qualities that make them enviably different from China and Russia. Western societies are lured by the nationalist siren song that their liberal systems will not stand up to state capitalism and its alleged ability to make up for their waning qualities. This loss of confidence is evident in the fact that press freedom in the West has been falling for over a decade, while authoritarian leadership and nationalism are gaining currency, boosting partisanship and straining political systems to the point of distorting them.

The economic threats to Western capitalism from lack of reform in Asia are, indeed, real. But the political problems are homegrown. ♦

B&A

A Soldier's Word

Harsh truths, and merciful lies, about war.

BY JUDY BACHRACH

On January 26, 1945, this is what an American soldier in Belgium wrote home to his parents:

> I'm warm and comfortable now, and sitting here in front of a fire. And this is one of the times when I fall into sympathy with home.
>
> I don't think I ever realized or appreciated before how lucky I am. You know, the four of us make a grand family. There's nothing material we don't have that we could want. . . . I wish I could be aware of this when we're all together. I imagine you feel pretty much the same way, don't you? Well, maybe we will appreciate it after this.
>
> My thanks for being such grand parents, with my love.
>
> Be seeing you—Carl

In other words, Carl—the Ohio-born soldier Carl Lavin, 18 when he enlisted and a member of the 84th Infantry Division at the time he wrote this—was offering his distant parents back home in Canton an epistolary goodbye cloaked in the kindness of concealment and the remembrance of unstinting affection. It was possible—maybe probable, as the boy realized—that this 1945 letter written in the last year of World War II would be his last, and I don't know when I've ever been so moved—moved to tears, actually—by a bald white lie.

Home Front to Battlefront
An Ohio Teenager in World War II
by Frank Lavin
Ohio, 304 pp., $34.95

A month earlier, the Battle of the Bulge had begun through the Ardennes forest in eastern Belgium, a deadly conflict that caught Allied forces completely off guard thanks to an intelligence failure, and it would continue for yet another terrible month. By the time the salutary words "warm and comfortable" were penned, young Carl's platoon had lost 20 of its 40 members, and the frozen earth, insubstantial utensils, and bitter weather made the digging of foxholes by GIs especially brutal work. By the end of the battle, there were 100,000 German casualties, as well as 81,000 American casualties.

So, almost certainly, Carl Lavin was *not* seated by a cozy fire when his note was dispatched to the folk in Canton. But that's the way war then was: teenage boys growing old, careworn, and selfless overnight—old and selfless

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enough to airmail terrified parents back home that kind of fictive comfort, in part because the parents needed the lies, and in part because the military censors demanded them.

In Carl Lavin's old age, there would be a change, a reflective remorse over some of this forced narrative, as Frank Lavin, his son and compiler of the many letters that compose *Home Front to Battlefront*, points out. The censors "blocked off the heart and soul of our experiences," he told his son. "We were repeatedly reminded by our officers to give no details as to place, actions, casualties. . . . This was in case some mail would fall into the hands of the enemy."

There is, therefore, an occasional sameness in the contents of some of the letters contained in this volume of lovingly compiled war and postwar missives: constant pleas for candy and reading matter; references to a certain Edith, who (the soldier prophesizes, incorrectly) "I'm going to continue to love . . . for a long, long time." There are mentions of Sugardale, the family-owned meat products company in Ohio. But oddly, it is that very repetition that gives this compilation its compelling honesty. This is what soldiers write, especially when they are forbidden to write everything. Lovers, chocolates, home, siblings, and parents: These are what they think about and yearn for when they are tired and cold, anxious, scared, and uncertain about tomorrow.

It isn't only the letters themselves that win over the reader, however. Frank Lavin, a onetime Reagan White House political director and, later, ambassador to Singapore, fills in the martial and historical gaps his father was forbidden to provide. From the younger Lavin we learn, for instance, that because certain German soldiers were expert at infiltrating Allied lines, American units

> quickly adopted security measures, challenging other soldiers by asking them about popular culture, matters that the infiltrators would be unlikely to know. 'Who was Mickey Mouse's girlfriend?' became the challenge called out by Carl and his platoon. During the battle, it was deadly serious, a question that could get you shot if answered incorrectly.

But equally intriguing: *Who was Mickey Mouse's girlfriend?* ultimately got reduced to joke status by the very men it was designed to protect, although only when the fortunes of war improved for the Allies. In time, its sardonic revival became "a universal statement of meaninglessness," according to Lavin, a shorthand way for weary soldiers to describe the insanity of combat. In fact, many of the important revelations here occur decades after war's end: Carl's reflections on the one death of a German soldier he is certain he inflicted, for instance; his reminiscences of initial confusion about whether the enemy soldier was, in fact, really dead or just lying on the ground immobile; his initial reluctance (confided with stunning candor to his son) to ensure by firing yet another shot that the German was absolutely, and without question, dead.

"Do I really want to take a human life after having shot at him, and he's just lying there?" is how the elder Lavin recalls his wartime thoughts.

> I decided, well, this is a hell of a time to start to become a conscientious objector. I finally decided that yes, I would kill him. I'm ashamed to admit that the final reason was that this would be an opportunity to have the experience of positively killing someone and knowing that I'd killed. I wouldn't have to wonder anymore what it felt like to kill somebody. So I did. I just shot him. . . . He never moved. I've had a queasy experience about it ever since.

As the old man reveals to his son, the German soldier had been cut down by Carl Lavin's first shot. But to me, that's not the point. There aren't many men willing to tell the whole truth about a war—and not just about World War II—any war. Not to the reading public and, maybe above all, not to their own offspring. That's the thing about war: It kills not only soldiers and civilians, it often kills the truth. But Carl Lavin was willing to take his chances. As he points out, he came out of World War II whole—absolutely whole, even though only 15 percent of his company survived that way. The rest were killed or wounded.

"I was impossibly lucky," he tells his son. ♦

B&A

Magic Lantern

It's been a century since we met J. Alfred Prufrock.

BY WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

One of the quieter celebrations of a literary centennial may be the one for *Prufrock and Other Observations*, T.S. Eliot's first book of poems, published in 1917.

Eliot was then 29 years of age and had published a number of poems, essays on philosophic topics, and reviews. Married to Vivienne Haigh-Wood in 1915, he and his wife experienced a rocky marriage, to say the least—both of them frequently ill with minor complaints, even as her psychological state grew increasingly disturbed. Eliot taught at a couple of private schools and gave evening extension lectures to adults; but his financial situation was unsettled until, in March 1917, he went to work at Lloyd's Bank in London, in the colonial and financial department.

In the fall of the previous year, he had written to his brother Henry describing that year as "in some respects, the most awful nightmare of anxiety that the

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mind of man could conceive." At about the same time, Vivienne wrote to Eliot's mother describing (among other things) the state of her husband's underwear: "Still thick and in *fair* condition . . . but it needs *incessant darning.* Darning alone takes me hours out of the week." In the letter to his brother, Eliot had expressed worry that his poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," published two years previously, might be his "swan song." Working at the bank brought some alleviation to both financial and domestic troubles; he began to write poetry again, and in August 1917, *Prufrock and Other Observations* was published.

It was a slim yellow pamphlet brought out by the the *Egoist*, a small publisher of which Ezra Pound was the leading force, and consisted of 12 poems, beginning with "Prufrock" and ending with "La Figlia Che Piange." Pound had been instrumental in getting Harriet Monroe, editor of the American magazine *Poetry*, to publish "Prufrock" in 1915, after some forcible coaxing. (The "best poem I have yet had or seen from an American," Pound insisted.) Eliot, as well, thought it by far his best poem.

In the volume he followed it with "Portrait of a Lady," then two poems—"Preludes" and "Rhapsody on a Windy Night"—written earlier and under the influence of Jules Laforgue. There were a number of shorter poems, like "Morning at the Window," "Cousin Nancy," and "The Boston Evening Transcript" that could be thought of as illustrations of the observations of the book's title. Distinct from the other poems in the volume, "La Figlia Che Piange" was, and would continue to be, the purest expression of lyric Eliot. In his biography of the poet, Peter Ackroyd summed up the character of these poems: "Examples of dramatic virtuosity, conceived in terms of monologue and dialogue, 'scene' and character."

Yet this does little to suggest the originality—at least the oddity—of the poems taken singly and together. Evelyn Waugh's father, Arthur, was not taken by such originality, reviewing an anthology of 1915 in which "Prufrock" and other Eliot poems had appeared. What Eliot and these young poets in their eagerness to be clever had forgotten was that "the first essence of poetry is beauty," and that the "unmetrical, incoherent banalities" of such upstarts would eventually be corrected. Waugh concluded by alluding to a "classic custom in the family hall" in which a drunken slave was displayed by way of warning family members of the perils of unbridled self-expression. When Ezra Pound came to review *Prufrock and Other Observations* he mocked "a very old chap" (Arthur Waugh) for comparing the younger poets to "drunken helots," Pound providing words that weren't in the review.

In fact, the reviewers of the *Prufrock* volume were more indifferent to the poems than outraged by them, as Arthur

T. S. Eliot (1919)

Waugh had been. The anonymous reviewer in the *Times Literary Supplement* found them to be "untouched by any genuine rush of feeling," while the *Literary World* thought they were satiric teasings aimed at reviewers. Prufrock "was found to be neither witty nor amusing," and Eliot was advised that "he could do finer work on traditional lines."

"A keen eye as well as a sharp pen," declared the *New Statesman*, citing the appropriateness of *Observations* in the title to characterize the poems. The only significant reviews, aside from Pound's, were by the novelist May Sinclair and the American poet—and Eliot's Harvard friend—Conrad Aiken. Aiken praised the "psychological realism" of the poems and called Eliot an "exceptionally acute technician" (details unspecified). Sinclair countered the charge of obscurity by admitting that in these poems, Eliot's "thoughts move very rapidly and by astounding cuts," a fine summing-up of their technique. And that was it for the early reviews of T.S. Eliot's first book.

One hundred years later, what has survived from *Prufrock and Other Observations*? All the poems would be permanent in the Eliot canon; he was not—unlike, say, W.B. Yeats or W.H. Auden—to revise, much less to expunge, particular poems. With very minor exceptions, they stand in Eliot's *Collected Poems* (1962) as they stood at the beginning. An uncontroversial estimate of the poems that most count in this first book would single out three: "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," "Portrait of a Lady," and "La Figlia Che Piange."

My introduction to Eliot, in college, came by way of the subtle classroom presence of Reuben Brower, close reader extraordinaire. Brower began his classes on Eliot not with "Prufrock" but with "Portrait of a Lady," an easier poem partly because it has a more stable narrative presence. A young man visits an older lady (in Boston, say), then goes away (to Paris?), and comes back to a changed, unsatisfactory, guilt-tinged relationship. What made the poem memorable for me was Professor Brower's voicing aloud lines such as the following:

We have been, let us say, to hear the latest
Pole
Transmit the Preludes, through his hair
and finger-tips.
"So intimate, this Chopin, that I think
his soul
Should be resurrected only among friends
Some two or three, who will not touch the
bloom
That is rubbed and questioned in the
concert room."
—And so the conversation slips
Among velleities and carefully caught
regrets

Brower introduced me to the pleasure of reading the lines as they might be heard (Robert Frost called it "ear-reading"), and it is those accents that remain with me even as the "content" has disappeared. Of the three poems, "Portrait" may be categorized as a monologue with analogies to Laforgue and Robert

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Browning. Its overall apologetic note, diffident and uncertain, would not be heard for the last time in Eliot's work.

Eliot placed "La Figlia Che Piange" at the end of the volume for good reason: It is a beautiful instance of the lyric poet able (at least at the beginning) to catch an elusive, personal mode of feeling:

Stand on the highest pavement of the stair—
Lean on a garden urn—
Weave, weave, the sunlight in your hair—
Clasp your flowers to you with a pained surprise—
Fling them to the ground and turn
With a fugitive resentment in your eyes:
But weave, weave the sunlight in your hair.

The poem goes on to complicate itself by introducing an "I" who seems to be arranging a tableau for the woman of the first stanza and her putative lover. Not the least of complicating aspects are the irregular lines of the three "stanzas"—each slightly different from the others—and the unpredictable, but quite wonderful, rhyming. In her perceptive review of the Prufrock volume, May Sinclair called "La Figlia" no less than "a unique masterpiece."

But of course, the poem that counts most is "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock."

Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherized upon a table;
Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,
The muttering retreats
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:

It proceeds through various shifting rhythmical and emotional patterns, which project an overall eloquence of inadequacy that more than once pauses to consider itself:

It is impossible to say just what I mean!
But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen:

"Prufrock" threw the nerves in patterns that had not been seen or heard before in English poetry. It is impossible to say just what he or it means, because impossible to hold Prufrock as a character in a dependable frame that binds together the poem's constituent parts. One of those parts is Prufrock's disclaimer of Shakespearean gravity and weight: *No! I am not Prince Hamlet nor was meant to be*. When Harriet Monroe objected to this section as out of keeping with other parts of the poem, Pound wrote her that he, too, disliked it, but that it was an "early and cherished bit" that Eliot wanted to include, and would do the poem no harm. So much for the necessity of having a consistently dramatized speaker.

As noted in his review of *Prufrock*, Conrad Aiken called T. S. Eliot an exceptionally able "technician," but failed to hazard any remarks about that technique. One sympathizes with Aiken's silence on the subject, since Eliot himself was to write, in prefacing the second edition of his first book of essays, "We cannot define even the technique of verse; we cannot say at what point 'technique' begins or where it ends." Thus Eliot had to content himself with defining poetry as "excellent words in excellent arrangement and excellent metre."

A bit of a leg-pull here, surely. But the amount of words spilled about "Prufrock" in this and the preceding century suggests a never-ending effort to find adequate, or the least inadequate, words to describe it. Perhaps, for that reason, the poem, more than any other of Eliot's, has showed its continuing life to curious readers of poetry, many of them younger ones. Along with Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken," it is one of the few modern poems today's undergraduates have read, or at least heard about.

Its final six lines are presumably about the mermaids J. Alfred Prufrock has heard singing, but their words and word-music are such as to take us beyond any reference. In Denis Donoghue's excellent formulation: "We are not allowed to escape from the words into another place."

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
When the wind blows the water white and black.
We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

After a hundred years, "Prufrock" remains as fresh and unaccountable as it seemed to its first readers back then. ♦

B&A

Rested and Ready?

The American engine could use a tune-up.

BY JONATHAN MARKS

The Complacent Class
The Self-Defeating Quest for the American Dream
by Tyler Cowen
St. Martin's, 256 pp., $28.99

We will soon, TED talks promise, travel to the beach in driverless cars, where our artificial blood cells will enable us to stay underwater for hours. But we may prefer the virtual reality we will be able to inhabit thanks to direct brain implants, which will have replaced unfashionable headsets. As change proceeds exponentially, our biggest problem may be adjusting to all the dynamism.

That's one story. But Tyler Cowen, professor of economics at George Mason University and coauthor of the wonderful blog *Marginal Revolution*, has

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another. America is much less dynamic and progressive than most of us imagine. We think we are a start-up nation but new firms have been "declining since the 1980s." We think we are a mobile nation, but the "interstate migration rate has fallen 51 percent below its 1948 to 1971 average." We think that we are moving, however slowly, toward racial integration, but the "average black student attends a school that is about 8.3 percent white." We have been stalled, in many respects, for some time.

In *The Complacent Class*, Cowen considers the "social roots" of this stagnation. We cannot blame monopolists or white supremacists because, sadly, the "villain is us," the "growing number of people in our society" who accept or insist upon "resistance to things new, different, or challenging."

I wish Cowen had skipped the term "complacent class," because it describes a group that is neither altogether complacent nor exactly a class. It includes wealthy people who correctly "believe their lives are very good," middle-income people who have dug in, hoping to "hang onto . . . a pretty decent life, whatever its stresses," and low-income people, too disillusioned even to riot. Cowen, in any case, deals mainly with those who are pretty satisfied, who sometimes complain about social evils but lack a "sense of urgency" about them.

After the "rebellion of the 1960s and early 1970s," Cowen thinks, Americans sought calm and have, to a point, found it in "a lower crime rate, more safety for most of our kids," and other security gains. Today, not just security but contentment is within reach for many: "Matching" is the fruit of the one grand project of our recent past, the wiring of the world, which enables us to seek just the right music on Spotify, just the right doll on eBay, and just the right mate on Match.com. But matching can be an innovation-suppressing innovation and has "helped to cement in a lot of segregation, stasis, and complacency." When the savvy and resource-rich find it easy to marry each other, rather than the boy next door, and otherwise find it easier to acquire exactly what they want, "a world of . . . stable wealth and satisfied ownership" rather than "perpetual personal churn" emerges. Lives-matching makes it possible, for its best practitioners are good enough to cause a "decline of American restlessness."

Millennials, Cowen thinks, are mastering this new world. They are good at finding satisfaction in "having some of their niche preferences fulfilled for the sake of their own internally developed happiness." That is nice for them but bad for progress because millennials have "less interest in grand projects or topping previous records of achievement."

Tyler Cowen

Cowen predicts a "great reset," intimations of which may be found in the strange politics of our moment. The quest of the complacent class for greater security and contentment has led them to places like Park Slope and Ann Arbor, whose residents "would be horrified if you pointed it out [the segregation] in their neighborhoods" but find a way (thanks, artisanal cocktails!) to live with it. The country is increasingly characterized by "superclusters of cooperation among the quality cooperators and a fair amount of chaos and dysfunctionality elsewhere." The complacent class can no longer convince even themselves that we live in a dynamic society that will soon enough lift everyone who merits lifting. But "without a strong ideology and a strong belief in the future, the vacuum can be filled by other, worse ideas."

Cowen is probably right that American society is less dynamic than most of us think, and he may be right that a great reset is coming. But his story of why we find ourselves here is unconvincing. In particular, Cowen oversells the connection between restlessness and progress. Alexis de Tocqueville, who Cowen thinks may be "the primary theorist for the decline of American restlessness," helps us see the problem with Cowen's account. Cowen reads him as fearing that "American restlessness might contain the seeds of its own demise." Restlessness brings progress, which brings "sluggish satisfaction" and, eventually (in Tocqueville's words), "brutish indifference about the future." But that is not how Tocqueville sees it at all. Here is his account.

In aristocratic, immobile ages, nobles, because their taste for well-being is satisfied "without trouble," are free to apply themselves to "some more difficult and greater undertaking" than securing material goods. As for the people, they become "habituated to poverty" and their thoughts turn to otherworldly goods. The nobles are complacent, in Cowen's terms, but their complacency is coupled with the capacity to take on grand projects.

In mobile, democratic ages, however, the rich, the poor, and the middling can—and do—turn almost exclusively to a "search for material enjoyments." Where religion is not in a position to direct their gaze to the future, democratic peoples are "naturally brought to want to realize their least desires without delay." Under these conditions, one still has the restlessness, indeed the "tumult," of democracy; but that restlessness distracts us from everything but the present. This dynamic, not a decline in restlessness, could lead (as Tocqueville sees it) to "brutish indifference about the future." Alexis de Tocqueville's analysis, wherein restlessness is less a pioneer spirit than an attention deficit disorder, contradicts Tyler Cowen's.

Tocqueville's analysis also suggests a different picture than Cowen's of the state of modern souls. Tocqueville found a "singular melancholy" beneath

COURTESY OF TYLER COWEN

the surface of American dynamism and attributed it to, among other things, the "futility" of the quest for contentment, in which the possession of some goods is no impediment to the imagination of "a thousand others that death will prevent [us] from enjoying if [we do not] hasten." For this and other reasons, the democratic impulse leaves democratic peoples always restless, and sometimes surprisingly sad.

It would be simplistic to use this age-old account of the quest for contentment to explain our millennials. But I was surprised by Cowen's account of millennials as uncommonly good at finding internal contentment, an account at odds with other analyses that find them to be at least as materialistic, image-conscious, anxious, and depressed as prior generations. Cowen's mind is too fertile not to consider the possibility that information technology and matching provide an "illusion of security, stability, and control" rather than actual control over lives still led in the physical world. That the complacent class cannot have, in the long term, the security it seeks is one of Cowen's main contentions. But even in the short term, millennials, "the finest product" of the complacent class, may well be, for better or for worse, as restless as their predecessors. ♦

B&A

Object Lessons

For Henri Matisse, the outward appearance reflects an inner life. **BY DOMINIC GREEN**

Matisse in the Studio
Boston Museum of Fine Arts
through July 9

Boston

To endow Emma Bovary with his feelings, Gustave Flaubert endowed objects with her feelings. When Rodolphe reneges on his promise to elope, Emma is prostrated by "brain fever." The trappings of sainthood substitute for erotic satisfaction: "She bought rosaries and wore holy medals. She wished to have in her room, by the side of her bed, a reliquary set in emeralds that she might kiss it every evening."

"Take that table, for example," Henri Matisse (1869-1954) said to the American painter and writer Clara T. MacChesney in 1912. "I do not literally paint that table, but the emotion it produces upon me." Matisse's teacher, Gustave Moreau, had told him that he was destined to "simplify" painting. But condensing and clarifying brought new intensity and candor. Why, MacChesney asked, were Matisse's tomatoes blue? Why did he cherish a statuette of a "dwarf from Java" with a head too big for its body? How, we still ask, did he do it?

Matisse in the Studio is a study in the secret life of objects and the magical candor of Matisse's art. Curated by Helen Burnham of the Museum of Fine Arts, Ann Dumas of the Royal Academy, and Ellen McBreen of Wheaton College, the exhibition presents more than 80 artworks—paintings, drawings, bronzes, cut-outs, and prints—with 39 objects from Matisse's studio. Some of the paintings are held in private collections. Many of the objects are loans from the Musée Matisse in Nice and have never left France before. The five rooms of this magnificent exhibition reveal more about Matisse than a mountain of monographs.

"A good actor can have a part in 10 different plays," he said in 1951, "one object can play a role in 10 different pictures." The first room, "The Object as Actor," traces the career of a silver chocolate pot. The pot was a wedding gift from the painter Albert Marquet following Matisse's marriage in 1898 to Amélie Parayre. In the watercolor *Still Life and Heron Studies* (ca. 1900), never previously exhibited, Matisse gets to know his new companion: Miniature sketches of the pot are washed in yellows, brown, blue, and mauve—a kind of audition.

In the early oil *Still Life with a Chocolate Pot* (1902), the pot poses with an orange on a red book. The orange turns the globed belly of the pot dark red and green; the tonal resonance is so forceful that the pot and the orange seem to be held in a gravitational dance, like the sun and the moon. In *Dishes on a Table* (1902), the pot stands again on a red ground, this time a tablecloth. But without the orbiting orange, the pot turns racing green and silvery white.

In *Bouquet of Flowers in a Chocolate Pot* (1902), the pot is swollen and its wooden handle protrudes like a proboscis. Life is not still in a still life: It is as though the pot is eating the bouquet. Yet in *Interior with Young Girl Reading* (1905-06), the pot is a placid companion to Matisse's daughter Marguerite. Washed by soft pink in the bourgeois setting for which it was designed, the pot extends its neck gracefully and retracts its handle by turning its back.

In *Still Life With Blue Tablecloth* (1909), the pot is flaming red, as though combusting within. It turned out that Matisse was more faithful to the chocolate pot than to Amélie. She divorced him in 1939, but the pot, doughty with age, retains its fascination in *Still Life with Seashell on Black Marble* (1940).

Yet there are rivals for Matisse's affections, especially a pewter jug. In *Still Life with Lemons* (1914), the jug is a picture within a picture and a theoretical guide to the eye. As a black-on-white sketch on the wall, it is the flattest object and plane in a picture of flattened objects and planes. Again, when the *Woman on a High Stool* (1914) bobs uneasily in a sea of

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gray, the sketch of the jug anchors both composition and color. In *Vase of Anemones* (1918), the jug supports and amplifies the delicate vase, like a chaperone to an ingénue; but now the jug is ripely curved.

In reality, the side of the physical jug is entirely flat. Matisse has not imposed an abstract ideal of flatness but responded to its actual expression. This pattern recurs in the second room, "The Nude." Matisse collected African sculptures and ethnographic nude photographs because of their "broader meaning"—a sculptural language that broadened his visual response. In the oil *Standing Nude* (1906-07), a photograph from a French catalogue of poses, *Subject evoking the idea of surprise or modesty* (1906), acquires massive buttocks and shoulders and a mask-like face. In *Four Studies of a Nude* (1910), the abstraction develops from an *académie* (a representational Western nude), passes through a pair of figures with longer and more rigid lines, and then arrives at a self-contained, upright posture close to that of a Fang reliquary figure from Gabon or Equatorial Guinea.

That posture recurs in the primitivized brothel study *Seated Figure with Violet Stockings* (1914). As Matisse moves between forms and media—from European to non-European, sculpture to painting—the object comes to life. In the pagan Eden of *Bonheur de Vivre* (1905-06), Matisse posed a classical nude. She acquires a twisted torso and callipygous buttocks in the sculpture *Reclining Nude I* (1907); then she enters the oil *Blue Nude* (1907). She is now an odalisque with a face and a biography, and her subtitle, *Memories of Biskra*, and the palm trees behind her allude to her Algerian birthplace. In the reddish oil study *Bronze Figure* (1908), she is back in Matisse's studio, turning her head as the neck of a jug strokes her waist. In *Goldfish and Sculpture* (1912), Matisse completes Pygmalion's artifice and closes the historical circle, rendering her as a peach-toned nude.

The third and fourth rooms, "The Face" and "Studio as Theatre," contrast two methods of staging and characterization. "The Face" pairs African masks with Matisse's oil portraits and sculpted heads. In *Portrait of Madame Matisse* (1913), Henri paints Amélie as a white mask of blank-eyed, tight-lipped accusation. The formality of the mask exposes the "true character" of his subject; the "true character" requires the mask as an intermediary. Meanwhile, in *Self-Portrait* (1906), Matisse grants himself the expressed features of the European tradition.

'Goldfish and Sculpture' (1912)

When Emma Bovary falls into the clutches of the draper Lheureux—a handler of textiles whose surname promises happiness no deeper than the surface of his products—she becomes a northern odalisque: "She abandoned herself to this easy way of satisfying all of his whims." In his lifetime, Matisse was accused of shallow decorativeness and sensual pandering, especially after abandoning Paris in 1921. It was nice in Nice—all those bright mornings and languid afternoons—and nicer still to construct fantastical Arab interiors in his studio.

In "Studio as Theatre," perspective dissolves. Hanging *haitis* (pierced and appliquéd cotton textiles) from Egypt color the sunlight that filters through their fretwork. The "sympathy between objects" blends flesh, furniture, and fabric in a single decorative plane. In *Odalisque on a Turkish Chair* (1928), the brown frame of an octagonal chair takes on flesh tones so that the model's right arm appears to be joined at the elbow to one of the chair's spindles. In the drawing *Seated Odalisque and Sketch* (1931), the crook of the model's raised leg and the ripple of her stomach are echoed in the arcade opening between the chair's legs.

Flaubert's Bouvard and Pécuchet lack intrinsic qualities and create each other in costume: "They had put on smocks, like medical students in operating theaters, and by the light of three candles they were working on their bits of cardboard." The "emotion" that Henri Matisse seeks is not that of false appearances but accurate perceptions. To capture "the environment which the object creates" he creates an environment that places objects in tension. "I am afraid," he admitted to his son Pierre in 1940, "of getting down to work tête-à-tête with objects that I myself have to animate with feelings."

In 1946, Matisse gave a photograph to Louis Aragon. The photograph, taken by Hélène Adant, was one of several documenting the objects in Matisse's studio. His jugs, bowls, tables, and African sculptures line up before a curtain, as though taking a bow. On the back, Matisse wrote: "Objects which have been of use to me nearly all my life." In the cutouts in the final room, "Essential Forms," the house lights are up. The artist joins his objects in an encore. ♦

COURTESY OF THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS BOSTON

B&A

Uncompromised

An artist's vision for 'Twin Peaks: The Return.'

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

David Lynch has not made a movie or a television show in a decade. But his overwhelming talent—a talent all but unmatched in cinematic history—for transferring to the screen the jarring and unforgettable images (and sounds) that haunt his unconscious has not been dimmed by his absence. The first 4 hours of the 18-hour series he has just cowritten and directed for Showtime—*Twin Peaks: The Return*—make that clear. There are scenes here, moments here, flashes here, alternately shocking and dazzling and terrifying and repulsive and compelling, that you will remember for the rest of your life.

But these first four hours also make it sadly apparent that Lynch remains stubbornly determined to place his visions at the center of his work to the exclusion of all else. This determination lost him the mass audience he won for himself in the 1980s when he chose to leash his unique sensibility—a combination of surrealism and lurid psychosexual melodrama straight out of the most disturbing drugstore-paperback pulp—to conventional storytelling tropes. His commercially successful work was also his most artistically successful for precisely this reason. Alas, Lynch clearly resents that fact and has spent the last 25 years resisting it. And never more so, and never more pointedly, than in the new *Twin Peaks*.

Its nightmares and dreams and surreal sequences astonish, but they do not tell a story. If you are unfamiliar with the *Twin Peaks* series and movie Lynch made between 1990 and 1992, you may find watching this update like reading a book in Latin when you have little Latin. If you are familiar, it will more closely resemble reading a novel in pig Latin. And the parts that do involve telling a story—the story of what has happened to the hearty, soulful, mystical FBI Special Agent Dale Cooper in the 25 years since the events in the original *Twin Peaks*—are so wooden and uninvolving they suggest that Lynch is deliberately testing our patience with the goal of encouraging us to switch the thing off.

That goal makes a certain amount of sense if you consider Lynch's origins as a filmmaker. He began as an art student who made a hand-stitched nightmare of an art house movie called *Eraserhead* (a portrait of extreme parental anxiety), shown at midnight in the 1970s. *Eraserhead* is brilliant and profoundly punishing. The latter is par for the course for avant-garde work, which abjures the very idea of audience; the former far less so, given how lousy most avant-garde crap is. Shockingly, Lynch then transmuted himself into an Oscar-nominated A-list director with 1980's *The Elephant Man* and 1986's *Blue Velvet*. *The Elephant Man* is rooted in the prestige *Masterpiece Theatre* form, while *Blue Velvet* is built on the framework of a small-town film noir. Both are extraordinary, disturbing, and enduringly sad. And both feature Lynch giving full rein to his darkest imaginings while leading the us through a story with a beginning, middle, and end.

In 1990, Lynch's work as the primary creative force behind the original *Twin Peaks* series on ABC marked him as the unlikeliest impresario of addictive water-cooler TV ever to emerge in Hollywood. Its portrait of a small northwestern town coping with the murder of a high school Madonna/whore named Laura Palmer had both gut-wrenching emotional power and a surprising depth of humanity. Even more than its predecessors, the show leashed Lynch's astounding visual sense and hypnotic narrative storytelling both to the classic demands of a whodunit and the classic form of a TV cop buddy show, and the results were initially spectacular. The show's two-hour pilot, directed by Lynch, remains the high-water mark of network drama until the advent of the HBO era.

But the vertiginous rise of *Twin Peaks* in the national consciousness was followed, after the first season, by the show's stark creative and cultural collapse. Lynch blames the demand by the network that he and co-creator Mark Frost reveal the identity of Laura Palmer's killer in the second season. It was, he said, "a question we never really wanted to answer." Lynch felt that he had compromised too much with the demands of narrative, and thereafter he committed himself to filmmaking that would not require him to offer any answers.

With one exception, Lynch spent the following 15 years making a series of increasingly incomprehensible but indelibly evocative melodramas in which characters swap identities or literally transform into different people with no explanation. The best of these movies, 2001's *Mulholland Dr.*, is a berserk stunner that provides us absolutely no directorial assistance in figuring out that, for most of its running time, we are watching the desperately happy fantasy of a suicidal lesbian actress who has hired someone to murder the movie star who was once her beloved. The point is that there's no dismissing David Lynch: He's too remarkable, even when he drives you mad.

That open channel to his gorgeously purple right brain, and that stubborn commitment to his corkscrew vision of the world, marks Lynch as one of the few filmmakers who genuinely deserves to be called an "artist." The fact that Lynch got somewhere north of $100 million to make *Twin Peaks: The Return* exactly as he wished is some kind of divine reward for sticking to his guns, even though I'm pretty sure it would have been better for American culture itself if he had continued to work at finding the sweet spot between his internal obsessions and his audience's need to be told a tale. ♦

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

Dear Prof. McDonough,

After finishing the first assigned text for Fairy Tales as Literature, I have to tell you that "Snow White" is problematic. I've listed just a few of the offensive things in this story:

- ***Racism.*** Why is "skin as white as snow" considered more attractive than other skin tones? Dr. King taught us to judge people not on the color of their skin, but on the content of their character.
- ***Lookism.*** The queen's desire to be "the fairest of them all" is presented uncritically.
- ***Stigmatization of blended families.*** Of course the stepmother is "evil"—how predictable.
- ***Endorsement of violence against animals.*** The hunter goes so far as to murder(!) and remove the heart(!!!) from an innocent deer. Vegan students should skip this story entirely.
- ***Ableism.*** The seven differently heighted characters (the "d-word" is used throughout) are kept in a subordinate mineworker caste. Most of these characters suffer from undiagnosed illness: depression ("Grumpy"), narcolepsy ("Sleepy"), social-anxiety disorder ("Bashful"), gluten intolerance ("Sneezy"), etc. Naming them after their disabilities is essentialist and offensive.
- ***Unchecked racial privilege.*** Snow W**** blithely enters the home of the altitude-challenged characters, then eats their food and falls asleep in their bed. Can you imagine if a black man tried to do the same thing?
- ***Gender stereotypes.*** The seven nontraditionally statured characters force Snow W**** to become their maid. They sing "Hi ho, hi ho, it's off to work we go," which trivializes the plight of sex workers.
- ***Dehumanization of senior citizens.*** The queen disguises herself as an "ugly old crone." Have we learned nothing from *BuzzFeed*'s recent listicle "These 17 Elderly Marsupials Prove That Beauty Has No Age"?
- ***Fearmongering about organic food.*** The poison apple is particularly disturbing in light of all that we learned from Michelle Obama's healthy eating campaign.
- ***Gender stereotypes and classism.*** The so-called "prince" must rescue Snow W****. Why can't she rescue herself?
- ***Glamorization of sexual assault.*** Snow W****, in a comatose state, is plainly unable to consent to being kissed by the prince. Such behavior, if it happened on our campus, would prompt an immediate disciplinary board hearing.
- ***Ideologically incorrect ending.*** "And they lived happily ever after"? While structural racism remains unchecked? Give me a break!

Professor, I'm shocked that this story was once read to children. And I'm starting to wonder whether these Grimm people have ever even *heard* of intersectionality!

There is simply no way that I can continue taking this course, which has become very triggering for me (see the attached note from Dr. Melvin Feinberg). I shall be leading an academic boycott of the class for the rest of the semester. In fact, this whole ordeal has left me with no choice but to spend the next six weeks in the capable hands of Dr. Feinberg and his team at my family's house in the south of France.

For shame, sir. For shame.

Sincerely,

C. Heller

Caleb Heller

P.S. If I don't receive a passing grade for this class, you'll be hearing from my father's attorney!

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