

June 27, 2013

Last fall all the bien pensants made fun of Romney's characterization of Russia as our number one enemy. Now Foreign Policy magazine has a piece titled "Romney Was Right."

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A determined effort to understand Russian strategic thinking about the Syrian situation could pay real dividends in terms of pointing out Moscow's true geopolitical strength on the world stage. In my view, Russian reasoning and aims regarding Syria are nested -- in a manner somewhat like their many-in-one matryoshka dolls. The first layer of motivation must certainly be defined by a determination to avoid being snookered into giving even tacit permission -- as happened in the case of Libya -- for international military action against the Assad regime. Yet another concern must be about maintaining a naval toehold in the Mediterranean, as is provided for the Russians by the Syrian port of Tartous.

But in a larger strategic sense, Moscow may be looking at Syria as the western anchor of an anti-Sunni arc of friendly countries in what is -- the American pivot to the Pacific notwithstanding -- the most important region in the world. ...

"The Age of American Impotence" according to Bret Stephens.

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Which brings us back to the Snowden file. Speaking from India, Mr. Kerry offered a view on what it would mean for Russia to allow him to flee. "Disappointing," said our 68th secretary of state. He added "there would be without any question some effect and impact on the relationship and consequences."

Moscow must be trembling.

Peggy Noonan reminds us why the IRS scandal is not going away.

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Those are the questions that remain to be answered. That's what the investigations are about.

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Ron Fournier, mainstream liberal journalist, says a special prosecutor is needed. ... *The White House and its allies declared the scandal over. Said David Axelrod, one of Obama's longest-serving advisers, said on MSNBC's "Morning Joe" show: "I think the implication that this was some sort of scheme is falling apart."*

Don't buy it. Like Issa and the GOP, Democrats are jumping to convenient conclusions based on incomplete evidence and no credible investigation.

There is a hard truth that partisans won't admit: Until more is known, we can't implicate or exonerate anybody.

If forced to guess, I would say that the IRS and its White House masters are guilty of gross incompetence, but not corruption. I based that only on my personal knowledge of – and respect for – Obama and his team. But I shouldn't have to guess. More importantly, most Americans don't have a professional relationship with Obama and his team. Many don't respect or trust government. They deserve what Obama promised nearly six weeks ago – accountability. They need a thorough investigation conducted by somebody other than demagogic Republicans and White House allies.

Somebody like a special prosecutor. ...

Eliana Johnson from National Review has more.

The IRS's release on Monday of an 83-page report attempting to explain its targeting of tea-party groups, coupled with Ways and Means Committee ranking member Sander Levin's release of 14 "lookout lists" issued by the agency at various points between August 2010 and April of this year, have created an enormous amount of confusion about whether tea-party groups were in fact targeted, and, if so, whether progressive and liberal groups were targeted too.

The documents are revealing, but they have been misinterpreted by many reporters, who are using them to demonstrate that groups across the ideological spectrum were flagged by IRS screeners. That is not the case. Several outlets have reported that the terms "Occupy" and "Israel" appeared on lists. Having reviewed all the lists posted by Levin, I have yet to see those terms. (I welcome corrections.)

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Foreign Policy

Mitt Romney Was Right

Russia's our No. 1 enemy -- and Snowden's just the tip of the iceberg.

by John Arquilla



Back in the late 18th century, when Adam Smith wrote that "there is much ruin in a nation," he was referring generally to the resiliency of countries under conditions of great adversity. Today, his words seem especially well tailored to Russia. Its 20th century history was bookended by problematic social revolutions (the first destroyed the Russian Empire, the second dissolved the Soviet Union) and was replete with military defeats (to Japan in 1905, in World War I a decade later, and then again in Afghanistan in the 1980s). Forced collectivization of farms caused the starvation of millions in the 1930s, and even victory over the Nazis cost tens of millions more lives. It is a wonder that Russia has survived and even more astonishing that it thrives, both economically and as a key player in the high politics of world affairs.

Mitt Romney suffered much unfair criticism last fall when he called Russia "our number one geopolitical foe." Russia remains a country of vast natural resources, much military capability -- including parity with the United States in nuclear arms -- and human capital of the very highest quality. These classic geopolitical indicators of inherent strength aside, Romney noted, the leaders of Russia have also made it clear that their interests often do not coincide with American policy preferences. Though the current *furor* over Moscow's willingness to shelter the fugitive Edward Snowden is eye-catching, the resurgent rivalry is more evident, and more important, in the case of Syria, where Russia can derail any effort to obtain the blessing of the United Nations for military intervention and at the same time shore up the Assad regime with a wide range of weaponry.

A determined effort to understand Russian strategic thinking about the Syrian situation could pay real dividends in terms of pointing out Moscow's true geopolitical strength on the world stage. In my view, Russian reasoning and aims regarding Syria are nested -- in a manner somewhat like their many-in-one *matryoshka* dolls. The first layer of motivation must certainly be defined by a determination to avoid being snookered into giving even tacit permission -- as happened in the case of Libya -- for international military action against the Assad regime. Yet another concern must be about maintaining a naval toehold in the Mediterranean, as is provided for the Russians by the Syrian port of Tartous.

But in a larger strategic sense, Moscow may be looking at Syria as the western anchor of an anti-Sunni arc of friendly countries in what is -- the American pivot to the Pacific notwithstanding -- the most important region in the world. This point may do the most to explain both the importance to Moscow of avoiding an outright insurgent victory in Syria and steadfast Russian support for Iran in the current proliferation crisis. Of course, Tehran's influence with the Shiite-led government in Baghdad ensures that the eastern and western ends of this geostrategic arc of friendly states are connected, with Iraq serving as bridge between the two. And, as the Russians have keen insight into the ethnic fissures in the Muslim world, it is not at all surprising that Moscow is also sensitive to the needs and concerns of the sizeable Christian population of Syria -- some two million in number, most of them Orthodox.

Syria is thus something of a lens through which Russian strength, influence, and strategy can be gauged. From political pull in the United Nations to alliance-creation and clientelism among friendly states, and on to nuclear parity and a robust conventional military capability, Russia remains formidable. Moscow has engineered a strong position for itself in the Middle East just as the United States is talking openly about de-emphasizing the region in favor of focusing on the Far East. And the dismissive way in which President Obama's call for deep reductions in nuclear arms was treated by Russian leaders is yet another sure indication of Moscow's confidence in its standing in the world.

It is tempting to ask what Mitt Romney would do -- and I invite him to weigh in on this matter -- given that the concerns he expressed about Russian opposition to American interests during last fall's presidential campaign have been largely borne out. For my part, geostrategic thinking leads me to three pretty straightforward conclusions. First, there is the need to keep Russia from "winning" in Syria. This can be achieved either by escalating support for the anti-Assad insurgency or ratcheting up a peace process -- the aims of which are to put Syria on a path to a post-Assad, democratic future. Perhaps both approaches can be simultaneously pursued. Either way, Russian influence will wane, and the western linchpin of its anti-Sunni arc would become unhinged.

The second country of geostrategic importance in the region is Iraq, and any fruitful initiative here may require some truly perverse thinking. Basically, the implication is to support the Sunnis who are currently resisting Shiite, Tehran-friendly rule in Baghdad -- perverse given that this is an al Qaeda aim as well. But the end of Assad in Syria, something that the Obama administration has repeatedly demanded, also aligns us with al Qaeda's aims. Yes, refraining from toppling Saddam Hussein in the first place would have avoided this mess -- but that was then; this is now. And a consistent strategy, one that would thwart larger Russian geostrategic aims, means siding with the Sunnis in Iraq.

As for Iran, the third link in the Middle Eastern anti-Sunni arc, the solution is far simpler: Offer the mullahs a guarantee that the United States will not plump for regime change in return for

Tehran's absolutely verifiable abandonment of its nuclear weapons development program. This solution is quite like the deal that President John F. Kennedy cut with Fidel Castro and Nikita Khrushchev to end the Cuban Missile Crisis some 50 years ago.

Back then in the 1960s, and at least until the late 1980s, it was clear that most regional problems were nested in a global rivalry between Washington and Moscow. Today, however, there is a determined effort to view regional events as divorced from global power politics -- an odd formulation, given that almost all social and economic phenomena tend to be seen as linked to globalization-driven trends. Last fall, Mitt Romney performed a signal service in reminding us that, even decades after the Cold War, great geopolitical powers still matter. An awareness of this can inform and should guide grand strategy today. Ignorance of this simple truth is the path to costly ruin.

WSJ

The Age of American Impotence

As the Edward Snowden saga illustrates, the Obama administration is running out of foreign influence.

by Bret Stephens

At this writing, Edward J. Snowden, the fugitive National Security Agency contractor indicted on espionage charges, is in Moscow, where Vladimir Putin's spokesman insists his government is powerless to detain him. "We have nothing to do with this story," says Dmitri Peskov. "I don't approve or disapprove plane tickets."

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"The Hong Kong government didn't have much of a role," Albert Ho, a Hong Kong legislator, told Reuters. "Its role was to receive instructions to not stop him at the airport."

Now Mr. Snowden may be on his way to Havana, or Caracas, or Quito. It's been said often enough that this so-called transparency crusader remains free thanks to the cheek and indulgence of dictatorships and strongmen. It's also been said that his case illustrates how little has been achieved by President Obama's "reset" with Moscow, or with his California schmoozing of China's Xi Jinping earlier this month.

But however the Snowden episode turns out (and don't be surprised if the Russians wind up handing him over in exchange for an unspecified American favor), what it mainly illustrates is

that we are living in an age of American impotence. The Obama administration has decided it wants out from nettlesome foreign entanglements, and now finds itself surprised that it's running out of foreign influence.

That is the larger significance of last week's Afghan diplomatic debacle, in which the Taliban opened an office in Doha for the "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan"—the name Mullah Omar grandiloquently gave his regime in Kabul before its 2001 downfall. Afghan President Hamid Karzai responded by shutting down negotiations with the U.S. over post-2014 security cooperation.

Now the U.S. finds itself in an amazing position. Merely to get the Taliban to the table for a bogus peace process, the administration agreed at Pakistan's urging to let Mullah Omar come to the table on his own terms: no acceptance of the Afghan Constitution, no cease-fire with international forces, not even a formal pledge to never again allow Afghanistan to become a haven for international terrorism. The U.S. also agreed, according to Pakistani sources, to allow the terrorist Haqqani network—whose exploits include the 2011 siege of the U.S. Embassy in Kabul—a seat at the table.

Yet having legitimized Haqqani and given the Taliban everything it wanted in exchange for nothing, the U.S. finds itself being dumped by its own client government in Kabul, which can always turn to Iran as a substitute patron. Incredible: no peace, no peace process, no ally, no leverage and no moral standing, all in a single stroke. John Kerry is off to quite a start.

What's happening in Afghanistan is of a piece with the larger pattern of U.S. diplomacy. Iraq? The administration made the complete withdrawal of our troops a cornerstone of its first-term foreign policy, and now finds itself surprised that Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki won't lift a finger to prevent Iranian cargo planes from overflying his airspace en route to resupplying Bashar Assad's military. Syria? President Obama spent two years giving the country's civil war the widest berth, creating the power vacuum in which Iran, Hezbollah and Russia may soon achieve their strategic goals.

And Iran: In 2003, Tehran briefly halted its secret nuclear-weapons work and agreed to suspend its enrichment activities, at least for a few months. Yet since then, every U.S. effort to persuade Iran to alter its nuclear course has failed. Is it because the Obama administration was insufficiently solicitous, patient, or eager for a deal? Or is it that Tehran believes that treating this administration with contempt carries little cost?

"America can't do a damn thing against us" was a maxim of the Iranian revolution in its early days when America meant Jimmy Carter. Under President Obama, the new maxim could well be "America won't do a damn thing."

Which brings us back to the Snowden file. Speaking from India, Mr. Kerry offered a view on what it would mean for Russia to allow him to flee. "Disappointing," said our 68th secretary of state. He added "there would be without any question some effect and impact on the relationship and consequences."

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WSJ

Case Closed? Far From It

The FBI seems blasé about the IRS investigation, so it's crucial Congress make it a priority.

by Peggy Noonan

Right now the IRS story looks stalled and confused. Congressional investigators are asking for documents—"The IRS is being a little slow," said a staffer—and interviewing workers. Pieces of testimony are being released and leaked, which has allowed one congressman, Democrat Elijah Cummings, to claim there's actually no need for an investigation, the story's over, the mystery solved.

When the scandal broke in early May, the Obama administration vowed to get to the bottom of it with an FBI investigation. Many of us were skeptical. There's a sign we were right.

On June 13, FBI Robert Director [Robert Mueller](#) testified before the House Judiciary Committee and was questioned by Rep. Jim Jordan (R., Ohio) about former tax-exempt office chief Lois Lerner's claim that the targeting of conservative groups was due to the incompetence of workers in the Cincinnati office.

Jordan: "What can you tell us—I mean you started a month ago, what can you tell us about this, have you found . . . the now-infamous two rogue agents, have you discovered who those people are?"

Mueller: "Needless to say, because it is under investigation, I can't give out any of the details."

Jordan: "Can you tell me . . . how many agents, investigators you've assigned to the case?"

Mueller: "Ah, may be able to do that, but I'd have to get back to you."

Jordan: "Can you tell me who the lead investigator is?"

Mueller: "Off the top of my head, no."

Jordan: "This is the most important issue in front of the country in the last six weeks, you don't know who's heading up the case, who the lead investigator is?"

Mueller: "Ah, at this juncture, no. . . . I have not had a recent briefing on it."

Jordan: "Do you know if you've talked to any of the victims—have you talked to any of the groups who were targeted by their government—have you met with any of the tea-party folks since May 14, 2013?"

Mueller: "I don't know what the status of the interviews are by the team that's on it."

Wow. He'd probably know something about the FBI's investigation of the IRS if he cared about it, if it had some priority or importance within his agency. This week an embarrassed Mr. Mueller was ready for questions from senators. There is an investigation, he said, and "over a dozen" agents have been assigned. Well, better than nothing.

Attorneys for the best-known of the targeted groups confirm that they've heard nothing. From the American Center for Law and Justice: "None of our clients have been contacted or interviewed by the FBI." From lawyer Clea Mitchell: "I hear from people around the country, and no one has been contacted." All of which is strange. If the FBI were investigating a series of muggings, you'd hope they'd start by interviewing the people who'd been mugged.

Meanwhile a CNN poll shows the number of people who believe the targeting program was directed by the White House is up 10 points the past month, to 47%.

So things have gotten pretty confused, maybe because it's in the interest of a lot of people to confuse it.

Again, what is historic about this scandal, what makes it unique and uniquely dangerous, is that it is different *in kind* from previous IRS scandals. In the past it was always elite versus elite, power guys using the agency against other power guys. This scandal is different because it's the elite versus the people. It is an entrenched and fearsome power versus regular citizens.

The scandal broke, of course, when Lois Lerner deviously planted a question at a Washington conference. She was trying to get out ahead of a forthcoming inspector general's report that would reveal the targeting. She said that "our line people in Cincinnati who handled the applications" used "wrong" methods. Also "in some cases, cases sat around for a while." The Cincinnati workers "sent some letters out that were far too broad," in some cases even asking for contributors' names. "That's not appropriate."

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But then the information cascade began. The Washington Post interviewed Cincinnati IRS workers who said everything came from the top. The Wall Street Journal reported congressional investigators had been told by the workers that they had been directed from Washington. Word came that one applicant group, after receiving lengthy and intrusive requests for additional information, including donor names, received yet another letter asking for even more information—signed by Lois Lerner.

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Those are the questions that remain to be answered. That's what the investigations are about.

Rep. Cummings, having declared the mystery solved, this week released the entire 205-page transcript of an interview between congressional investigators and a frontline manager in the Cincinnati office. The manager, a self-described conservative Republican, was asked: "Do you have any reason to believe that anyone in the White House was involved in the decision to screen Tea Party cases?" The answer: "I have no reason to believe that."

There, said Mr. Cummings, case closed. But that testimony settles nothing. Nobody imagines the White House picked up a phone to tell IRS workers in Cincinnati to target their enemies. That, as they say, is not how it's done.

The frontline manager also said, in his interview, "I'll say my realm was so low down, and after the initial review of a case, which was, you know, within three days after assignment, I became less and less aware of what happened above me." He said he didn't do any targeting, but "I'm not in a position to discuss anybody else's intention but my own."

What investigators have to do now is follow the trail through the IRS in Washington, including political appointees.

Questions: Do the investigators have a list of everyone who worked in the executive office of the IRS commissioner? Have they contacted those people and asked when they learned of the targeting? What did they do when they learned? Who, if anyone, thwarted any attempts to stop it? And what about those bonuses the IRS is reportedly about to award its employees? How does that figure in?

Congress, including both its battling investigative committees, must get the answers to these questions.

The House speaker should make sure it's a priority. There's no sign the FBI will.

National Journal

Why the IRS Scandal Needs a Special Prosecutor

Neither Democratic or Republican cherry-picked findings will restore the public's trust.

by Ron Fournier

You're being spun, America. On the vital question of whether the Internal Revenue Service incompetently or corruptly targeted conservative groups, both the White House and GOP are rushing to judgment – and they want you to follow like lemmings.

Don't do it.

Nearly six weeks ago, President Obama responded to an inspector general's report detailing the targeting, which had been long denied by the IRS. "The misconduct that it uncovered is inexcusable. It's inexcusable, and Americans are right to be angry about it, and I am angry about it," Obama [said](#), vowing to "hold the responsible parties accountable."

The IG report was based on a cursory audit. It was not a full-fledged investigation. And yet Democrats disingenuously claimed that it *exonerated* the Obama administration and the president's re-election campaign from any involvement in IRS targeting.

To truly "hold the responsible parties accountable," Obama still needed a thorough and impartial inquiry led by investigators who would question witnesses under oath, and would subpoena the White House and his own re-election campaign for related emails and other documents.

He did not ask for that.

Smelling blood, the GOP-controlled House launched an investigation led by Rep. Darrell Issa of California. Never mistaken for an impartial investigator, Issa quickly declared that IRS targeting was "ordered from Washington" – a thinly veiled indictment of the White House. His evidence? A few cherry-picked interviews with IRS officials and an Orwellian subtext: "We're getting to proving it," Issa said. On June 3 [I wrote](#) of Issa: "Meet the best friend of a controversy-plagued Democratic White House: a demagogic Republican."

Meanwhile, Obama backed his strong words with middling action, transferring political ally Danny Werfel from the Office of Management and Budget to the IRS, where as acting commissioner Werfel would investigate his own administration.

Werfel may be a stand-up guy with a solid reputation in Washington. But the public doesn't know him. The public also doesn't trust the federal government. And the public doesn't like the IRS.

Why, after the agency's massive breach of trust, would Obama think a Werfel-led investigation will restore the public's faith?

Werfel announced Monday that instructions used by the IRS to look for applicants seeking tax-exempt status with "Tea Party" and "Patriots" in their title also included groups whose names included the word "Progressive" and "Occupy." Jonathon Weisman of *The New York Times* [reported](#), "The documents appeared to back up contentions by IRS officials and some Democrats that the agency did not intend to single out conservative groups for special scrutiny."

The White House and its allies declared the scandal over. Said David Axelrod, one of Obama's longest-serving advisers, said on MSNBC's "Morning Joe" show: "I think the implication that this was some sort of scheme is falling apart."

Don't buy it. Like Issa and the GOP, Democrats are jumping to convenient conclusions based on incomplete evidence and no credible investigation.

There is a hard truth that partisans won't admit: Until more is known, we can't implicate or exonerate anybody.

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need a thorough investigation conducted by somebody other than demagogic Republicans and White House allies.

Somebody like a [*special prosecutor*](#). Those words are hard for me to type two decades after an innocent land deal I covered in Arkansas turned into the runaway Whitewater investigation.

But Obama was right to be angry about the IG audit. He knows how important it is for Americans to trust the IRS, an agency that keeps our secrets, that collects taxes to run government, and that will soon implement Obama's own health care program.

What the IRS did, Obama said less than six weeks ago, was "inexcusable." That's a good word to describe what Republicans and Democrats in Washington are doing now -- cherry-picking evidence from partisan and cursory inquiries, treating Americans like lemmings and the truth like a leper.

National Review

[What Really Happened With the IRS's 'Lookout Lists'](#)

by Eliana Johnson

The IRS's release on Monday of an 83-page report attempting to explain its targeting of tea-party groups, coupled with Ways and Means Committee ranking member Sander Levin's release of 14 "lookout lists" issued by the agency at various points between August 2010 and April of this year, have created an enormous amount of confusion about whether tea-party groups were in fact targeted, and, if so, whether progressive and liberal groups were targeted too.

The documents are revealing, but they have been misinterpreted by many reporters, who are using them to demonstrate that groups across the ideological spectrum were flagged by IRS screeners. That is not the case. Several outlets have reported that the terms "Occupy" and "Israel" appeared on lists. Having reviewed all the lists posted by Levin, I have yet to see those terms. (I welcome corrections.)

The treatment of progressive groups cannot be equated to that of tea-party groups. The term "progressive" was flagged in a general warning to agency screeners — one that remained on the list throughout the time in question — that the applications of progressive organizations may not merit 501(c)(3) designation, which prohibits groups from engaging in political activity. That warning, according to an IRS source familiar with the review process, did not prevent first-line screeners from recommending an application be approved.

The same lists, between August 2010 and February 2012, directed screeners by default to send tea-party applications to a special group for further review and for coordination with lawyers in Washington, D.C. "They are different," says the agency source of the designations made for progressive and tea-party groups.

Several of the lookout lists also indicate that the terms used to flag tea-party groups evolved. Between February 2 and February 8 of 2012, the tea-party listing was changed from

“organizations involved with the Tea Party movement applying for exemption under 501(c)(3) or 501(c)(4) status” to a general listing under “Current Political Issues” that included organizations “involved in limiting/expanding government, educating on the constitution and bill of rights, social economic reform/movement.”

The Treasury Department inspector general’s report issued in mid-May took note of this change, which reportedly took place after the IRS’s former director of Exempt Organizations, Lois Lerner, had directed that any objectionable language be removed from the list, and without her approval: “The team of specialists [handling tea-party applications] subsequently changed the criteria in January 2012 without executive approval because they believed the . . . criteria were too broad.” This is puzzling, first because the BOLOs indicate that the change took place in February, and also because it appears to broaden rather than restrict the criteria.

According to the TIGTA report, another change to the list took place in May 2012. That change is reflected in the June 15, 2012, version of the list, which entirely sanitizes the way in which political issues are flagged, instructing screeners to send along for special processing applications from organizations with “indicators of significant amounts of political campaign intervention.” Nothing objectionable about that. The words “tea party” do not appear on any lookout list issued after May 2012.

But we know their applications continued to be — and, in some cases, continue to be — caught up in the IRS bureaucracy. Could this answer the question? A month after the “political issues” listing was sanitized, in July 2012, an entirely new group of cases was added to the list: organizations formed to “pay down the national debt.” IRS screeners were told to elevate them for further scrutiny to the same group processing tea-party cases, where, the chart indicates, they were being coordinated with the same set of lawyers in Washington, D.C. Those groups remained on the IRS’s lookout list until IRS acting commissioner Werfel recently issued agency-wide orders to do away with such lists entirely. (On the most recent list released by Representative Levin, dated April 19, 2013, screeners are told to flag these organizations.)

Whether groups devoted to paying down the debt served as a proxy for tea-party cases is unclear. What is clear is that, if anything, the lookout lists released on Monday, if anything, substantiate the claims of tea-party groups that they were subject to unequal treatment by the IRS, and that until at least May 2012 their applications for tax-exemption were treated differently from those of their political opponents.



THIS IS REALLY EMBARRASSING FOR US...



...BUT SNOWDEN NEEDS TO BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE. YOU SHOULD DO THE RIGHT THING AND SEND HIM BACK.

YOU'RE RIGHT...



...THIS MUST BE REALLY EMBARRASSING FOR YOU.





STARRING



Edward Snowden



Barack Obama

A clueless president ...

A traitor on the run ...

And the evil Russian who won't give him up!

Vladimir Putin as himself

CZAR WARS

Haven't we seen this movie before?

PAGES 4-5



WEINER TOP BANANA IN NEW POLL **PAGE 3**

