

August 4, 2013

Marc Thiessen says the president has a nice partner in Russia.

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How’s that reset working out for you, Mr. President?

Ok, maybe it was too much to ask for Russia to stop backing Syrian dictator Bashar Assad as he slaughters tens of thousands, or to help put pressure on Iran to stop its pursuit of nuclear weapons.

But surely our relations with Russia were “reset” enough that Vladimir Putin would not poke Obama in the eye by granting asylum to fugitive NSA leaker Edward Snowden.

Apparently not.

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Win-win.

The big test: will Snowden continue leaking from his Russian refuge? ...

Andrew Malcolm thinks it might be time to reset the reset.

Impressive!

President Obama's policy reset with Russia is working out as well as his economic stimulus, Guantanamo closing, spending cutbacks, green energy investments, debt discipline, Benghazi investigation, Egyptian fallout, midterm campaigning, Syrian dictator-ousting, Bush-blaming, Libya-calming, Iran-isolating, job approval, budget-passing, Kim Jong-un-taming, ObamaCare implementation and Muslim-outreaching.

American presidents have done naive things in the past. Few if any have been so totally and embarrassingly fruitless as this Democrat's self-imposed suck-up to Russian President Vladimir

Putin. And yet this Democrat remains hopeful and stubbornly continues them despite the absolute absence of any encouraging returns. You'd think Obama was a Cubs fan.

In fact, Obama has just endured another diplomatic slap, with Putin's government granting NSA leaker Edward Snowden a year's asylum, despite pleas from Obama, John Kerry and none other than the administration's Where's Waldo press secretary Jay Carney.

The former head of the KGB may not realize who he's messing with. On Thursday Carney really let the aspiring dictator have it:

"We are extremely disappointed that the Russian government would take this step, despite our very clear and lawful requests in public and in private to have Mr. Snowden expelled to the United States to face the charges against him."

Not only those tough words, but Carney also warned that Obama was -- are you sitting down? -- reevaluating a private meeting with Putin at the upcoming G-Whatever Summit in Russia. They just met in Ireland. They just talked on the phone--about Snowden. That phony Crayola doesn't even work on Senate Democrats anymore, let alone a divorced Russian spymaster. ...

More on this from [Streetwise Professor](#) who looks into the future for Eddie Snowden.

... The idea that Snowden could just fly into Moscow without the knowledge, and indeed, the connivance, of the Russian security forces is beyond risible. There is some question of when Russian security forces took control of Snowden. Some (like Catherine Fitzpatrick, I believe) suspect that Snowden was (wittingly or unwittingly) a Russian asset while in Hawaii. I am not of that view, but now I have little doubt that once he boarded that Aeroflot plane bound for Moscow from Hong Kong, he was little more than a fly caught in Putin's web.

And he will remain in that web for, well, pretty much forever. If he had returned to the US, Snowden's sentence would have been measured in years. Once he chose Russia, the sentence is life.

[Charles Krauthammer](#) doesn't think the GOP is in bad shape, unless they do something foolish with the budget or the debt limit.

A combination of early presidential maneuvering and internal policy debate is feeding yet another iteration of that media perennial: the great Republican crackup. This time it's tea party insurgents vs. get-along establishment fogies fighting principally over two things: (a) national security and (b) Obamacare.

(a) National security

[Gov. Chris Christie recently challenged Sen. Rand Paul](#) over his opposition to the National Security Agency (NSA) metadata program. [Paul has also tangled with Sen. John McCain](#) and other internationalists over drone warfare, democracy promotion and, more generally, intervention abroad.

So what else is new? The return of the most venerable strain of conservative foreign policy — isolationism — was utterly predictable. Isolationists dominated the party until Pearl Harbor and then acquiesced to an activist internationalism during the Cold War because of a fierce detestation of communism.

With communism gone, the conservative coalition should have fractured long ago. This was delayed by Sept. 11 and the rise of radical Islam. But now, 12 years into that era — after Afghanistan and Iraq, after drone wars and the NSA revelations — the natural tension between isolationist and internationalist tendencies has resurfaced.

In fact, both parties are internally split on domestic surveillance, as reflected in the very close recent House vote on curbing the NSA. This is not civil war. It's a healthy debate that helps recalibrate the delicate line between safety and security as conditions (threat level and surveillance technology, for example) change. ...

Mickey Kaus has an interesting column on obama's five disconnects.

Pivot or Divot? *On one level, President Obama achieved admirable transparency in his recent Knox College address. He succinctly described most of the forces that have helped increase income inequality over the past three decades, primarily trade (many unskilled jobs are now performed overseas) and technology (which arguably increases the value of both education and “star” job performance). That these trends were obvious over a decade ago, when Bill Clinton was running for office—or that Obama himself has talked about them for years—doesn't make them less real. They provide the context of contemporary politics.*

On another level, the speech was stunningly dishonest ... OK, maybe that's harsh. Put it this way—it exposed some big disconnects. At least four of them, actually. Here they are, in order of increasing significance:

Disconnect 1: Between what Obama says he's doing and what he's been doing.

*“Washington's taken its eye off the ball. And I'm here to say this needs to stop. ... **Our focus has to be on the basic economic issues** that the matter most to you — the people we represent. (Applause.) That's what we have to spend our time on and our energy on and our focus on.*

... [R]educing poverty, reducing inequality, growing opportunity. That's what we need. (Cheers, applause.) That's what we need. That's what we need right now. (Cheers, applause.)

That's what we need to be focused on.” [E.A.]

*You would almost think it was Republicans who had spent the past few months focusing on first, gun control and second, immigration—two topics Obama himself classifies as “other key priorities,” not “basic economic issues.” **Shorter Obama: 'Washington must stop being distracted by the off-point initiatives that I and my staff have been pushing.' ...***

Slate reports on the most dangerous volcano in North America.

When you live in Mexico, you get used to people in other countries thinking you are in a war-zone sort of apocalypse state. If it's not narcos, it's earthquakes, kidnappers, or chupacabras. These days, the thing for Americans to fear in Mexico is the volcano Popocatepetl, lovingly called Popo, which is chucking ash all over the place. Notice that many reports find it necessary to give Mexico City's population alongside reports that it's active. As if that number might drop significantly, very soon.

Now, for those who live here, it all seems silly. I didn't even notice the ash—though some of these reports make you think it is piling up on the sidewalks. I have noticed the air quality is a little off for the middle of the rainy season (when afternoon showers clean the skies). But all in all, the rumbling of our hulking neighbor hasn't affected me. Far more annoying is the whole since-you-live-in-Mexico-you'll-probably-be-dead-tomorrow attitude from friends and family. ...

... I asked White what is the most dangerous volcano in North America. He thought for a minute and then listed Mount Shasta in California and Mount Hood in Oregon, which are unpredictable but too remote to cause much harm.

"But the one that probably keeps me up at night the most is ...

American.com

[So much for the Russian reset](#)

by Marc Thiessen

Remember when Barack Obama came to office and immediately threw our allies Poland and the Czech Republic under the bus — canceling our missile defense agreements with them in an effort to “reset” our relations with Russia?

How's that reset working out for you, Mr. President?

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The White House is so angry that officials are reportedly considering canceling a planned Moscow Summit with Putin later this year. That is probably making virtue out of necessity. In his June speech in Berlin, Obama made reaching a new agreement with Moscow on nuclear weapons reductions the centerpiece of his address. But there has been little or no progress on

an agreement since then, and the odds of there being a treaty signing in Moscow were slim to none.

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The big test: will Snowden continue leaking from his Russian refuge? A few weeks ago, Putin declared, "If he wants to stay here there is one condition. He must cease his work aimed at inflicting damage to our American partners, as strange as it may sound from my lips."

But even if Snowden suspends his illegal revelations while in Moscow, one wonders what the price of his refugee status will be. It is unclear what Snowden has provided the FSB so far — knowingly or unknowingly, voluntarily or involuntarily. Suffice it to say that any communications Snowden has with journalists and his WikiLeaks handlers will be closely monitored.

Keeping Snowden in Russia is an intelligence bonanza for Russia — one that Putin clearly valued more than his relationship with Barack Obama.

Investor's Business Daily

[Way past time to reset Obama's Russia reset](#)

by Andrew Malcolm



Obama's pretend Russian friend.

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Remember Obama's outstretched-hand line. Not toward elected Republicans just up the street. But about resetting diplomacy with the world's intransigent, rogue regimes? It sounds super in a hot-air campaign before adoring fans or during a high school pretend United Nations.

However, in the world of realpolitik, nice guys get taken.

So, in 2009 without advance notice to our Eastern European allies, who'd defied their Russian neighbor, Obama unilaterally canceled the anti-missile defense network planned to take down Iranian intercontinental missiles someday.

Russia did not like the missile shield idea, much as John F. Kennedy did not like Russian missiles in Cuba way back when. Obama figured if he offered that sop for free, he'd get Russian help at least stalling Iran's nuclear weapon program. Obama didn't even get a thank you.

Seventeen months ago Obama was caught on tape pleading with then-Russian President Dmitri Medvedev for understanding during the U.S. presidential campaign and offering, again gratis, more "flexibility" after his final election.



Obama overheard offering more flexibility to Russian leader, March 2012.

From that exchange came the historic quote: "I will transmit this information to Vladimir." I have the T-shirt of that line.

Then Obama, a [Chicago Democrat who knows something about fraudulent elections](#), telephoned Putin to ignore the Russian's growing arrests of opponents and congratulate him on his fraudulent election victory.

The next month [Joe "I Like Amtrak" Biden and Hillary "What Difference at This Point Does it Make?" Clinton suggested Republican White House contender Mitt Romney](#) was naïve for *not* trusting Russia. Seriously.

Obama telephoned again -- we're not kidding here -- to congratulate the leader of the war-time Nazi ally on its Victory in Europe Day. And to invite Putin to the private presidential retreat at Camp David. [Putin said he was too busy](#).

Obama took out a Libyan dictator over his mere threat of killing innocent civilians. Now that Syria's Assad regime has slaughtered some 100,000 of its own people, thanks in large part to Russian technology and arms, Obama dawdles arming rebels because they're not certified al Qaeda-free.

You may remember Putin's security people tipped U.S. counterparts to those two dangerous Chechen brothers. The F.B.I. couldn't see any danger there. So the pair bombed the Boston Marathon.

Now, like China having copied all the secret stuff in Snowden's carry-on, Russia will let him stay at least a year, allegedly while he seeks asylum elsewhere. The U.S. had promised Russia if it would just hand the geek over, America would not do what Russia always does to traitors: Terminate him.

That U.S. offer didn't work, like all the others. So, surely Obama will try more.

Streetwise Professor

Kuchenera, Cuckaracha, Whatever

by Craig Pirrong

Snowden's "lawyer" Anatoly Kuchenera is a mouthpiece in the true mafia tradition. His alleged principal, Snowden, is silent. Kuchenera does all the talking. (Actually, Putin is the real principal here.)

For some reason, whenever I read Kuchenera's name, the song "La Cuckaracha" pops into my head. Go figure.

Since he is the only source of information about Snowden, and since reporters will slant their coverage to ensure access to the sole source, Kuchenera has received very little critical scrutiny. There are idiotic pieces like this one: ["Kuchenera Suspected of Links to Kremlin."](#)

Suspected? Who knew?

The NYT reporter credulously regurgitates pearls like this:

"This is in the realm of big politics," Kuchenera said. He added, though, that Snowden's appeal was a purely legal matter that would prevail on the merits.

"I am a lawyer. I don't want to be involved in big politics," he added.

Tell us another one. Yeah. Purely legal matter. Politics have nothing to do with it. Kuchenera doesn't do politics. Uh-huh. He's clearly a made man in Russian politics.

Kuchenera has played his part in this drama with aplomb. Case in point. He has made a big deal out of his claim that Snowden hasn't had a change of clothes in over a month. All to perpetuate the fantasy that he has been holed up in SVO, and completely on his own, all this time.

[This is about the only article that calls bullshit on the charade being played out in Russia.](#) It quotes Andrei Soldatov, a journalist who has written extensively about the "New Nobility"-the *siloviki* who have restored the Russian security state, and made themselves rich and powerful in the process.

Soldatov knows intimately the ways of the FSB and GRU, and describes the reality of the Snowden situation exactly:

The asylum decision gives Russia cover to depict itself as a defender of human rights, pointing a finger to deflect criticism of its own poor record on rights including free speech. But the secrecy that surrounded Snowden's time at the Moscow airport and his unwillingness so far to talk to the press indicates he is being controlled by Russian intelligence, Andrei Soldatov, a Russian journalist who co-authored a book on the Russian intelligence services said.

"Does he have independent sources of information and communication? My impression is that he has none, which means he's not his own master," Soldatov said.

He said Kuchenera's statements about concerns for Snowden's safety do not hold water.

"We are all perfectly aware that Snowden, who has just received asylum, does not face any danger in Russia," Soldatov said. "American intelligence does not kidnap or assassinate people in Russia, that's a fact. This is a just a pretext."

One of the reasons for keeping Snowden isolated may be to prevent him from speaking about the people he met and what really happened to him during the 39 days he spent in the airport's transit zone, Soldatov said. For the same reason, Soldatov said he expected Russian authorities to find a job for Snowden that will prevent him from having contacts with journalists.

All absolutely true. Especially calling bull on Kuchenera.

Another pointed clue, this one from Kuchenera himself, showing that Russia has decided to keep Snowden under its tight control:

It was Kuchenera who counselled Snowden to abandon his appeals for political asylum in more than 20 other countries, arguing that they had no legal standing while he remained on Russian soil.

"No legal standing." More bullshit-and in exact contradiction to what Putin was saying ("he should go") through most of the SVO kabuki theater. Instead, Snowden was told fuggedaboutit. You're staying here, boy. Kuchenera was the messenger. Perhaps he "persuaded" Snowden through legal legedermain. But if that had failed, harsher persuasive methods would have been employed. The point being that the decision was not Snowden's to make. (Providing support for my argument that the US should have called Putin's bluff and said that Snowden was free to travel to Venezuela. Now there is sufficient ambiguity that the credulous will be gulled by the Russians.)

Kuchenera has willing accomplices in the West, notably at outlets like the Guardian and various [German media](#). [This Guardian piece is especially egregious](#), claiming Putin had no choice but to offer Snowden asylum. The writer-a Russian-American who talks about "my government" in critical tones and about Russia's in soft, sympathetic ones-makes it sound like Snowden was some valuable piece of flotsam that washed up on Russian shores, to be discovered by beachcomber Vova, who is just playing finders-keepers, and is compelled to protect Snowden. Because it was the "moral thing" to do:

With Snowden, the Kremlin did the moral thing – and the moral thing also happened to be the only thing the Kremlin could do in this instance. Essentially denied safe passage to Latin America, Snowden was marooned, and letting him languish in Sheremetyevo indefinitely would have dented the Kremlin's credibility at home and abroad

Yeah. Putin puts morality first. Spare me.

And please. The idea that Snowden could just fly into Moscow without the knowledge, and indeed, the connivance, of the Russian security forces is beyond risible. There is some question of when Russian security forces took control of Snowden. Some (like Catherine Fitzpatrick, I believe) suspect that Snowden was (wittingly or unwittingly) a Russian asset while

in Hawaii. I am not of that view, but now I have little doubt that once he boarded that Aeroflot plane bound for Moscow from Hong Kong, he was little more than a fly caught in Putin's web.

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Washington Post

How fractured is the GOP?

by Charles Krauthammer

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(a) *National security*

Gov. Chris Christie recently challenged Sen. Rand Paul over his opposition to the National Security Agency (NSA) metadata program. Paul has also tangled with Sen. John McCain and other internationalists over drone warfare, democracy promotion and, more generally, intervention abroad.

So what else is new? The return of the most venerable strain of conservative foreign policy — isolationism — was utterly predictable. Isolationists dominated the party until Pearl Harbor and then acquiesced to an activist internationalism during the Cold War because of a fierce detestation of communism.

With communism gone, the conservative coalition should have fractured long ago. This was delayed by Sept. 11 and the rise of radical Islam. But now, 12 years into that era — after Afghanistan and Iraq, after drone wars and the NSA revelations — the natural tension between isolationist and internationalist tendencies has resurfaced.

In fact, both parties are internally split on domestic surveillance, as reflected in the very close recent House vote on curbing the NSA. This is not civil war. It's a healthy debate that helps recalibrate the delicate line between safety and security as conditions (threat level and surveillance technology, for example) change.

The more fundamental GOP divide is over foreign aid and other manifestations of our role as the world's leading power. The Paulites, pining for the splendid isolation of the 19th century, want to leave the world alone on the assumption that it will then leave us alone.

Which rests on the further assumption that international stability — open sea lanes, free commerce, relative tranquillity — comes naturally, like the air we breathe. If only that were true. Unfortunately, stability is not a matter of grace. It comes about only by Great Power exertion.

In the 19th century, that meant the British navy, behind whose protection the United States thrived. Today, alas, Britannia rules no waves. World order is maintained by American power and American will. Take that away and you don't get tranquillity. You get chaos.

That's the Christie-McCain position. They figure that the country doesn't need two parties of retreat. [Paul's views](#), more measured and moderate than his fringy father's, are still in the minority among conservatives, but gathering strength. Which is why Christie's stroke — defending and thus seizing the party's more traditional internationalist consensus — was a signal moment in the run-up to the 2016 campaign. The battle lines are drawn.

(b) *Obamacare*

The other battle is about [defunding Obamacare](#). Led by Sens. Mike Lee and Ted Cruz, the GOP insurgents are threatening to shut down the government on Oct. 1 if the stopgap funding bill contains money for Obamacare.

This is nuts. The president will never sign a bill defunding the singular achievement of his presidency. Especially when he has control of the Senate. Especially when, though a narrow 51 percent majority of [Americans disapproves of Obamacare](#), only 36 percent [favors repeal](#). President Obama so knows he'll win any shutdown showdown that he's practically [goading the Republicans into trying](#).

Never make a threat on which you are not prepared to deliver. Every fiscal showdown has redounded against the Republicans. The first, in 1995, effectively marked the [end of the Gingrich revolution](#). The latest, last December, led to a [last-minute Republican cave](#) that humiliated the GOP and did nothing to stop the tax hike it so strongly opposed.

Those who fancy themselves tea party patriots fighting a sold-out cocktail-swilling establishment are demanding yet another cliff dive as a show of principle and manliness.

But there's no principle at stake here. This is about tactics. If I thought this would work, I would support it. But I don't fancy suicide. It has a tendency to be fatal.

As for manliness, the real question here is sanity. Nothing could better revive the fortunes of a failing, flailing, fading Democratic administration than a government shutdown where the president is portrayed as standing up to the GOP on honoring our debts and paying our soldiers in the field.

How many times must we learn the lesson? You can't govern from one house of Congress. You need to win back the Senate and then the presidency. Shutting down the government is the worst possible way to get there. Indeed, it's Obama's fondest hope for a Democratic recovery.

Daily Caller

Obama's Five Disconnects

by Mickey Kaus

Pivot or Divot? On one level, President Obama achieved admirable transparency in his [recent Knox College address](#). He succinctly described most of the forces that have helped increase income inequality over the past three decades, primarily trade (many unskilled jobs are now performed overseas) and technology (which arguably increases the value of both education and “star” job performance). That these trends were obvious over a decade ago, when Bill Clinton was running for office—or that Obama himself has talked about them for years—doesn’t make them less real. They provide the context of contemporary politics.

On another level, the speech was stunningly dishonest ... OK, maybe that’s harsh. Put it this way—it exposed some big disconnects. At least four of them, actually. Here they are, in order of increasing significance:

Disconnect 1: Between what Obama says he’s doing and what he’s been doing.

“Washington’s taken its eye off the ball. And I’m here to say this needs to stop. ... **Our focus has to be on the basic economic issues** that the matter most to you — the people we represent. (Applause.) That’s what we have to spend our time on and our energy on and our focus on.

... [R]educing poverty, reducing inequality, growing opportunity. That’s what we need. (Cheers, applause.) That’s what we need. That’s what we need right now. (Cheers, applause.)

That’s what we need to be focused on.” [E.A.]

You would almost think it was *Republicans* who had spent the past few months focusing on first, gun control and second, immigration—two topics Obama himself classifies as “other key priorities,” not “basic economic issues.” *Shorter Obama*: ‘Washington must stop being distracted by the off-point initiatives that I and my staff have been pushing.’

Disconnect 2: Between what Obama says he wants to do and what his organizing arm, OFA, is doing.

“Reversing these trends” [to “growing inequality”] has to be Washington’s highest priority. It’s certainly my highest priority.”

But it’s not the highest priority of Organizing for America, the [potentially transformative](#), slightly Chavez-y extra-party grassroots lobbying group Obama established after the 2012 campaign. As *Daily Caller*’s Patrick Howley [reports](#), OFA will spend August promoting an agenda of

Obamacare (August 4), immigration reform (August 5), [climate change](#) (August 13), gun control (August 21), and immigration reform again (August 31).

Of these, only the first is arguably one of the “cornerstones of what it means to be middle-class in America” that are Obama’s “highest priority.”

Disconnect 3: Between what Obama says the problem is and the policies he pushes to cure it. The trends toward income inequality are the results of tectonic global shifts in capitalism. It's not easy to figure out what actual government policies might "reverse" them—kind of like trying to "reverse" an earthquake. I don't think even **a)** Swedish-level effective tax rates at the top, **b)** a shocking revival of unionism and **c)** a massively subsidized retraining program would do the job. (When I looked at this in 1992, for example, it would have taken an effective tax rate of somewhere around 57 % on the top one percent to get their share of after tax income back to where it was in 1977. The rich [have only gotten richer since then](#), while the effective federal tax rate on the top 1%, even after Obama's recent hike, is [only around 36%](#).)

But Obama isn't going to out-Sweden Sweden on taxes, and unionism isn't going to surge back..

What's certain, instead, is that nothing the President is currently promoting comes even close to reversing "the forces that have conspired against the middle class for decades." Here's my rough, Umberto-Eco-esque list of the policy prescriptions from Obama's Knox speech:

Tax changes to encourage manufacturing jobs in the U.S.

Green jobs

"manufacturing innovation institutes"

Infrastructure

Universal "high-quality preschool"

Connecting high schools to the internet

"New efforts to train workers"—e.g. in community colleges

"New ways" to lower college costs

Less red tape for "responsible families" denied mortgages by banks

Tax "reform" that "makes it easier for workers to put money away"

Implementing Obamacare

"Partnerships" to rebuild "run-down neighborhoods" and "hardest hit towns"

Raising the minimum wage

Do you see any new game-changers? I don't. Some ("partnerships" "green jobs") have the familiar wishful smell of doom. All but a few biggies—like Obamacare—seem unlikely to have a non-trivial impact on inequality. That's especially true if you worry that money disparities are now also the product of [divergent affluent and poor cultures](#) and—the great unspoken fear—intergenerational stratification of smarts (including "IQ").

Disconnect 4: Obama's biggest domestic policy push would almost certainly make his "highest priority" problem worse. Obama recalls the glory days after World War II when

[w]hether you owned a company or **swept its floors** or worked anywhere in between, this country offered you a basic bargain, a sense that your hard work would be rewarded with fair wages and decent benefits, the chance to buy a home, to save for retirement and — and most of all, a chance to hand down a better life for your kids. [E.A.]

Sweeping floors is basic unskilled work. What could help Americans doing this work get a better bargain and 'be rewarded with fair wages and decent benefits.' Well, one thing that helped was the tight labor market of the late 90s. employers had to pay more just to get people to show up. These were ["the best period of wage growth at the bottom in the last 30 years,"](#) according the Harvard economist Lawrence. Katz,. (These were also the [best years Black America has had](#) in recent decades.)

Unfortunately, the "immigration reform" bill championed by Obama—the biggest item on his domestic legislative agenda—would make sure this tight labor market never returns. Indeed, that is part of its [appeal to business](#). First, it would legalize 8 million or so previously undocumented immigrants who are now living here but aren't now free to compete in every field of employment. Second, it would encourage many more foreign workers, mostly unskilled. to cross the border illegally—after all, those that went before were legalized in order to appeal to Latinos, and there will be more Latino voters in 2020 than today. Third it would explicitly expand the legal unskilled immigrant and temporary workforce by several million ([increasing by 10 million the number of U.S. residents](#), excluding the legalized illegals). .

Put all these together and you have an unskilled labor pool flooded with newcomers. in which wages for those who sweep floors will predictably fall. Economists heatedly debate whether, overall, unskilled workers might benefit by, say, supervising the work of cheap foreign floor-sweepers. But there's little debate that the [least skilled unskilled workers](#)—e.g. those who remain floor sweepers—[will fall further behind](#). Meanwhile, the profits for those who hire them, who tend to be at the top of the income pile, should be healthy.

Income inequality, in short, will rise. **Obama's "legacy" achievement would make the trend he wants to "reverse" worse.** Even jobs that can't be "outsourced" will be subject to newly "insourced" foreign labor competition. Call it Bringing Globalization Home.

Which brings us to a **possible Fifth Disconnect**. Does Obama recognize that his initiatives have a weak connection, and even perverse connection, with actually achieving his goal? I hope [his biographer, Jonathan Alter](#), will tell me. But either way, there's a **vacuum between his speechmaking and governing**. Is that unusual? After all, Democrats have campaigned for years by arguing that Republican policies benefit the rich—think of all the distributional tables Democrats distributed to fight Reagan's budgets-without ever saying how much inequality, exactly, they'd be willing to tolerate.

But Obama isn't vague or incoherent. He's quite precise about where he wants to go—namely back to something like what we had three decades ago. If his means don't come close to matching his ends, if they even subvert them, that seems a more troubling, almost pathological mismatch, in which **liberalism becomes a sort of cargo cult** whose mechanisms have zero hope of achieving the desired results.

[*What would you do instead?*-ed Stop playing the money equalizing game. Boost wages at the bottom, in part through the simple expedient of having a border. Stop worrying so much about the riches at the top. Focus instead on building the common institutions in which we participate as equals--most obviously by [preventing Obamacare from becoming ruthlessly stratified by income](#) like everything else (including baseball games and now [theme parks](#)). We can also talk about national service and residential desegregation (by income class) and maybe throwing a wrench or two into the meritocratic centrifuge. More [here](#).]

Slate

[The Most Dangerous Volcano in North America](#)

Family, friends, trust me: Not everything in Mexico is scary.

by Erik Vance



Smoke rises from Popocatepetl as it spews incandescent volcanic material near Puebla, Mexico, on July 4, 2013.

MEXICO CITY—When you live in Mexico, you get used to people in other countries thinking you are in a war-zone sort of apocalypse state. If it's not narcotics, it's earthquakes, kidnappers, or chupacabras. These days, the thing for Americans to fear in Mexico is the volcano Popocatepetl, lovingly called Popo, which is [chucking ash all over the place](#). Notice that [many reports](#) find it necessary to give Mexico City's population alongside reports that it's active. As if that number might drop significantly, very soon.

Now, for those who live here, it all seems silly. I didn't even notice the ash—though some of [these reports](#) make you think it is piling up on the sidewalks. I have noticed the air quality is a little off for the middle of the rainy season (when afternoon showers clean the skies). But all in

all, the rumbling of our hulking neighbor hasn't affected me. Far more annoying is the whole since-you-live-in-Mexico-you'll-probably-be-dead-tomorrow attitude from friends and family.

It's really terrible and borderline racist. But that's not to say I won't use it to get a story. The last time Popo was spewing ash, I decided it was a great chance to write a story tentatively called "Popo: The Most Dangerous Volcano in North America." The story came out of a drunken conversation with a geologist at a Bob Dylan concert near the heart of the city. A few beers in, he gave me the impression Popo was about to level the city.

So I called up [Robin Lloyd](#) at *Scientific American* and told her I had a story for her.

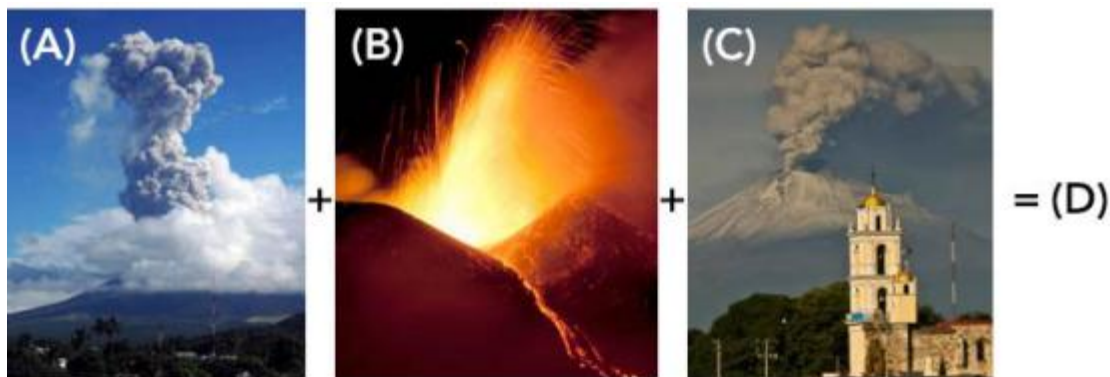
"Great," she said. "I'll take it, presuming it works out as you say it will."

"What do you mean?" I said.

"Well, I mean, *is* Popocatépetl the most dangerous volcano in North America?"

"What kind of question is that?" I thought. Of course it is. It's in Mexico, and everything in Mexico is dangerous. Popo will blow, and millions of people will die. Cut. Print.

Just to be sure though, I called up Randy White, a volcano expert and part of the Volcano Disaster Assistance Program, which monitors volcanoes on the continent and around the globe for U.S. Geological Survey. White tells me that a volcano's danger is related to a) how likely it is to explode, b) what kind of explosion it will create, and c) how many people live nearby. This can be expressed mathematically in the following equation (careful, it's a little technical).



Contrary to what many news reports would have you assume, Popo is 40 miles away, not near enough to threaten Mexico City. (Unless lava runs uphill—it doesn't, right?) However, it is close to Puebla, the country's fourth-largest city. And certainly it's a little erupt-happy. So Popo is still North America's most dangerous volcano, right?

"Popocatépetl is *not* North America's most dangerous volcano," White says. "It doesn't even make the list of top five. Maybe top 10, since Puebla's right there. But really I'm not terribly worried about it."

Great. So now my story is "Popo: Probably Among the Pretty Dangerous Volcanoes in North America. Maybe." It seems that Popo is just too predictable to be considered a properly dangerous volcano. Like me playing poker, it's easy to tell what Popo is about to do. Plus, it

vents off all its gas rather than storing it up, waiting to explode (like a Coke bottle that slowly leaks out as opposed to a sealed one that's all shook up). If it were to stop rumbling for 20 years or so, then White says he *might* start to worry.

In fact, Popo is such an easy read that there's evidence people living in Mexica (or Aztec) times actually knew when it was going to erupt, moved off the slopes of the mountain, then came back and resettled after it had calmed. Also, there's the type of explosion. Generally speaking, thicker, more silicon-rich lava causes volcanoes to explode violently. Runnier stuff makes for impressive lava squirts, as in Iceland or Hawaii, but it doesn't tend to blanket the continent in ash like Mount St. Helens did. And Popo is on the runnier side.

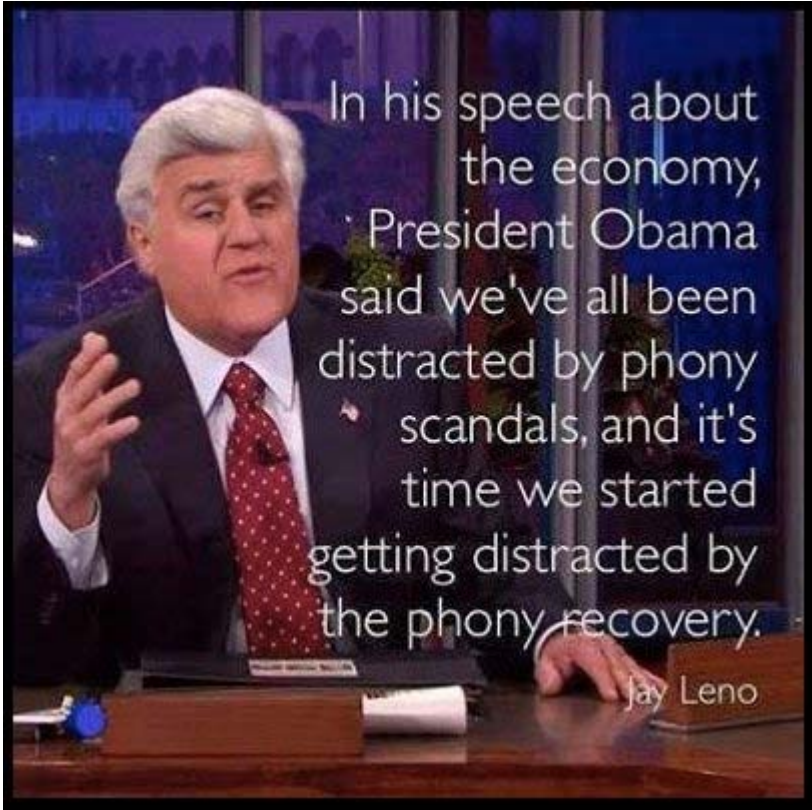
So I ended the conversation deflated. My Mexico (Danger! Danger!) Volcano Killing the World story was dead. But before I hung up, though, I asked White what *is* the most dangerous volcano in North America. He thought for a minute and then listed Mount Shasta in California and Mount Hood in Oregon, which are unpredictable but too remote to cause much harm.



Downtown Seattle with Mt. Rainier in the distance in 2009

“But the one that probably keeps me up at night the most is Mount Rainier,” he finally says. It seems that not only is Rainier far more mysterious than Popo, but its chemistry points to a more viscous, explosive eruption. Plus, it hasn't erupted in more than 100 years, sitting, building up pressure. And, of course, Tacoma, Wash., is right there at its foot. If it decides to get nasty, the first thing it will do is melt its snowcap, thus creating destructive landslides of slushy mud, called lahars.

So there you have it. If you like to play it safe and avoid dangerous places and you live in Tacoma, think about relocating to Mexico City. Our volcanoes are more friendly.



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FAMOUS METROPOLITAN DISASTERS





WE HAVE TO
PASS THE BILL
SO THAT YOU CAN
FIND OUT WHAT
IS IN IT.



WE
DID
WHAT?!

