

October 27, 2013

It's "smart diplomacy day" first with [Daniel Henninger](#) writing on the president's disappearing credibility.

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... Bluntly, Mr. Obama's partners are concluding that they cannot do business with him. They don't trust him. Whether it's the Saudis, the Syrian rebels, the French, the Iraqis, the unpivoted Asians or the congressional Republicans, they've all had their fill of coming up on the short end with so mercurial a U.S. president. And when that happens, the world's important business doesn't get done. It sits in a dangerous and volatile vacuum.

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OK, so Henninger is from the Journal. How does [David Ignatius from WaPo](#) look at the US/Saudi crackup?

... What should worry the Obama administration is that Saudi concern about U.S. policy in the Middle East is shared by the four other traditional U.S. allies in the region: Egypt, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates and Israel. They argue (mostly privately) that Obama has shredded U.S. influence by dumping President Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, backing the Muslim Brotherhood's Mohamed Morsi, opposing the coup that toppled Morsi, vacillating in its Syria policy, and now embarking on negotiations with Iran — all without consulting close Arab allies.

Saudi King Abdullah privately voiced his frustration with U.S. policy in a lunch in Riyadh Monday with King Abdullah of Jordan and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed of the U.A.E., according to a knowledgeable Arab official. The Saudi monarch "is convinced the U.S. is unreliable," this official said. "I don't see a genuine desire to fix it" on either side, he added.

The Saudis' pique, in turn, has reinforced the White House's frustration that Riyadh is an ungrateful and sometimes petulant ally. When Secretary of State John Kerry was in the region a few weeks ago, he asked to visit Bandar. The Saudi prince is said to have responded that he

was on his way out of the kingdom, but that Kerry could meet him at the airport. This response struck U.S. officials as high-handed.

Saudi Arabia obviously wants attention, but what's surprising is the White House's inability to convey the desired reassurances over the past two years. The problem was clear in the fall of 2011, when I was told by Saudi officials in Riyadh that they increasingly regarded the U.S. as unreliable and would look elsewhere for their security. Obama's reaction to these reports was to be peeved that the Saudis didn't recognize all that the U.S. was doing to help their security, behind the scenes. ...

Karen Elliot House former publisher of the WSJ was moved to come out of retirement for a comment on our feckless foreign policy.

... To understand the U.S.-Saudi rift, it is essential to realize that from the capital in Riyadh the world looks more threatening than at any time since the founding of modern Saudi Arabia in 1932. There have been other menacing times. Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser in the 1960s sought to destabilize the Al Saud by fomenting trouble in neighboring Yemen. In 1979, religious fanatics took over the Grand Mosque in Mecca and had to be ousted by military action. The Saudis feared, in 1990, that their kingdom was next after Iraq's Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. In all those troubled moments, the U.S. was either a trusted if silent supporter of the Saudis or an active defender, as in the 1990 Gulf War.

Today, the Saudis find themselves alone regarding Syria, trapped in a proxy war with Iran, their religious (Sunni Saudi Arabia vs. Shiite Iran) and political enemy. The Saudis had sought and expected U.S. help in arming the rebels against Syrian ruler Bashar Assad, but the military aid never materialized. Instead, last month at the United Nations General Assembly gathering, President Obama eagerly sought a private meeting with Iran's new president, Hasan Rouhani, to discuss its nuclear program. Mr. Obama seemed desperately grateful merely to get him on the phone.

A few days later, the Saudi foreign minister abruptly canceled his own speech to the General Assembly. Then last week, Saudi Arabia took the extraordinary step of turning down a Security Council seat it had long sought. According to a Reuters report this week, Saudi Prince Bandar bin Sultan, head of the kingdom's intelligence and national security operations, told European diplomats that both moves at the U.N. were intended as a blunt message to the Obama administration.

Only a year ago, Saudi officials expressed great confidence that Assad would be ousted from Syria by this fall. Instead, the Saudis now find themselves trapped with their foot on the snake Assad: They can't step away, lest the snake strike, but lacking American help, they don't have the means to kill the snake either. ...

John Hinderaker of Power Line posts on the Saudi king's opinion of the president.

... Heh. Welcome to the club, Your Highness. Anyone looking for honesty, consistency, loyalty or even common sense will have to seek out someone other than Barack Obama.

Still, the administration's falling out with the Saudis is shocking. My opinion of the administration's foreign policy is very low, but I never imagined they could destroy our relationship with our most important Gulf Arab ally.

And how are things in Europe you ask? [Michael Rubin](#) has answers.

... The situation with Europe is no better. Obama bent over backwards to insult Great Britain, presumably acting upon a grudge based on its treatment of his Kenyan grandfather. Yesterday, the White House sought to assuage German Chancellor Angela Merkel, but its carefully parsed words did not deny that the US government had previously tapped the phone of a woman who grew up under the Stasi.

What Obama—and so many of his realist mentors—never understood is that calculating interests is not a sterile endeavor. His advisors counseled him to view the world through the filter of short-term interests, and he obliged. When it came to understanding alleged allied anger, he took his echo chamber seriously, and conflated polemic and truth.

Cultivating allies is like paying a mortgage: The reward comes years later, and it would be silly to walk away 29 years into a 30 year mortgage just because it's hard to balance that last payment with the reboot image and buy a new car. In effect, Obama ignored the value of alliance and friendship paved over decades by predecessors.

*Alliances have value, and so do reputations. The two Bush's, Clinton, and Reagan each understood the importance of standing with friends, and prioritizing long-term interests over short-term gain. By embracing stark realism, however, Obama has demonstrated so many realists' failures to calculate the value of friendship, and to understand how investment in allies pays dividends over time. Alas, Obama did not. **Now, far from being the president who would repair America's image, Obama has become its soiler-in-chief, and it will take years if not decades to restore the trust of those which Obama has treated so cavalierly.***

More on our European disaster from The [NY Times' Roger Cohen](#).

Germany, of course, has already concocted a compound word for it: Handyüberwachung. That would be spying on cellphone calls.

The U.S. surveillance in question targeted the phone of Chancellor Angela Merkel. Or at least she was convinced enough of this to call President Obama, express outrage at a “serious breach of trust” and declare such conduct between allies “completely unacceptable.”

The White House's assurance to her that the United States “is not” and “will not” monitor her communications was tantamount to confirmation through omission that in the past it has.

Merkel is measured. For her to lift the phone and go public with her criticism leaves no doubt she is livid. As she said last July, “Not everything which is technically doable should be done.” This, on the now ample evidence provided by the former National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden, is not the view of the N.S.A., whose dragnet eavesdropping has prompted fury from Paris to Brasília.

Obama, in his cool detachment, is not big on diplomacy through personal relations, but Merkel is as close to a trusted friend as he has in Europe. To infuriate her, and touch the most sensitive nerve of Stasi-marked Germans, amounts to sloppy bungling that hurts American soft power in lasting ways. Pivot to Asia was not supposed to mean leave all Europe peeved.

But all Europe is. ...

WSJ

[Obama's Credibility Is Melting](#)

Here and abroad, Obama's partners are concluding they cannot trust him.

by Daniel Henninger

The collapse of [ObamaCare](#) is the tip of the iceberg for the magical [Obama](#) presidency.

From the moment he emerged in the public eye with his 2004 speech at the Democratic Convention and through his astonishing defeat of the Clintons in 2008, Barack Obama's calling card has been credibility. He speaks, and enough of the world believes to keep his presidency afloat. Or used to.

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"This notion that they're going to get in a room and negotiate a deal with the president on immigration," Sen. Rubio said Sunday on Fox News, "is much more difficult to do" after the shutdown negotiations of the past three weeks.

Sen. Rubio said he and other reform participants, such as Idaho's Rep. Raul Labrador, are afraid that if they cut an immigration deal with the White House—say, offering a path to citizenship in return for strong enforcement of any new law—Mr. Obama will desert them by reneging on the enforcement.

When belief in the average politician's word diminishes, the political world marks him down and moves away. With the president of the United States, especially one in his second term, the costs of the credibility markdown become immeasurably greater. Ask the Saudis.

Last weekend the diplomatic world was agog at the refusal of Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah to accept a seat on the U.N. Security Council. Global disbelief gave way fast to clear understanding: The Saudis have decided that the United States is no longer a reliable partner in Middle Eastern affairs.

The Saudi king, who supported Syria's anti-Assad rebels early, before Islamic jihadists polluted the coalition, watched Mr. Obama's red line over Assad's use of chemical weapons disappear into an about-face deal with Vladimir Putin. The next time King Abdullah looked up, Mr. Obama was hanging the Saudis out to dry yet again by phoning up Iran's President Hasan Rouhani, Assad's primary banker and armorer, to chase a deal on nuclear weapons. Within days, Saudi Arabia's intelligence chief, Prince Bandar, let it be known that the Saudis intend to distance themselves from the U.S.

What is at issue here is not some sacred moral value, such as "In God We Trust." Domestic politics or the affairs of nations are not an avocation for angels. But the coin of this imperfect realm is credibility. Sydney Greenstreet's Kasper Gutman explained the terms of trade in "The Maltese Falcon": "I must tell you what I know, but you won't tell me what you know. That is hardly equitable, sir. I don't think we can do business along those lines."

Bluntly, Mr. Obama's partners are concluding that they cannot do business with him. They don't trust him. Whether it's the Saudis, the Syrian rebels, the French, the Iraqis, the unpivoted Asians or the congressional Republicans, they've all had their fill of coming up on the short end with so mercurial a U.S. president. And when that happens, the world's important business doesn't get done. It sits in a dangerous and volatile vacuum.

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Then there is Mr. Obama's bond with the American people, which is diminishing with the failed rollout of the [Affordable Care Act](#). [ObamaCare](#) is the central processing unit of the Obama presidency's belief system. Now the believers are wondering why the administration suppressed knowledge of the huge program's problems when hundreds of tech workers for the project had to know this mess would happen Oct. 1.

Rather than level with the public, the government's most senior health-care official, Kathleen Sebelius, spent days spewing ludicrous and incredible happy talk about the failure, while refusing to provide basic information about its cause.

Voters don't normally accord politicians unworldly levels of belief, but it has been Barack Obama's gift to transform mere support into victorious credulousness. Now that is crumbling, at great cost. If here and abroad, politicians, the public and the press conclude that Mr. Obama can't play it straight, his second-term accomplishments will lie only in doing business with the world's most cynical, untrustworthy partners. The American people are the ones who will end up on the short end of those deals.

Washington Post

[The U.S.-Saudi crackup reaches a dramatic tipping point](#)

by David Ignatius

The strange thing about the crackup in U.S.-Saudi relations is that it has been on the way for more than two years, like a slow-motion car wreck, but nobody in Riyadh or Washington has done anything decisive to avert it.

The breach became dramatic over the past week. Last Friday, [Saudi Arabia refused to take its seat on the United Nations Security Council](#), in what Prince Bandar bin Sultan, the Saudi intelligence chief, described as "a message for the U.S., not the U.N," [according to the Wall Street Journal](#). On Tuesday, Prince Turki al-Faisal, a former head of Saudi intelligence, voiced

“a high level of disappointment in the U.S. government’s dealings” on Syria and the Palestinian issue, [in an interview with Al-Monitor](#).

What should worry the Obama administration is that Saudi concern about U.S. policy in the Middle East is shared by the four other traditional U.S. allies in the region: Egypt, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates and Israel. They argue (mostly privately) that Obama has shredded U.S. influence by dumping President Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, backing the Muslim Brotherhood’s Mohamed Morsi, opposing the coup that toppled Morsi, vacillating in its Syria policy, and now embarking on negotiations with Iran — all without consulting close Arab allies.

Saudi King Abdullah privately voiced his frustration with U.S. policy in a lunch in Riyadh Monday with King Abdullah of Jordan and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed of the U.A.E., according to a knowledgeable Arab official. The Saudi monarch “is convinced the U.S. is unreliable,” this official said. “I don’t see a genuine desire to fix it” on either side, he added.

The Saudis’ pique, in turn, has reinforced the White House’s frustration that Riyadh is an ungrateful and sometimes petulant ally. When Secretary of State John Kerry was in the region a few weeks ago, he asked to visit Bandar. The Saudi prince is said to have responded that he was on his way out of the kingdom, but that Kerry could meet him at the airport. This response struck U.S. officials as high-handed.

Saudi Arabia obviously wants attention, but what’s surprising is the White House’s inability to convey the desired reassurances over the past two years. The problem was clear in the fall of 2011, when I was told by Saudi officials in Riyadh that [they increasingly regarded the U.S. as unreliable and would look elsewhere for their security](#). Obama’s reaction to these reports was to be peeved that the Saudis didn’t recognize all that the U.S. was doing to help their security, behind the scenes. The president was right on the facts but wrong on the atmospherics.

The bad feeling that developed after Mubarak’s ouster deepened month by month: The U.S. supported Morsi’s election as president; opposed a crackdown by the monarchy in Bahrain against Shiites protesters; cut aid to the Egyptian military after it toppled Morsi and crushed the Brotherhood; promised covert aid to the Syrian rebels it never delivered; threatened to bomb Syria and then allied with Russia, instead; and finally embarked on a diplomatic opening to Iran, Saudi Arabia’s deadly rival in the Gulf.

The policies were upsetting; but the deeper damage resulted from the Saudi feeling that they were being ignored — and even, in their minds, double crossed. In the traditional Gulf societies, any such sense of betrayal can do lasting damage, yet the administration let the problems fester.

“Somebody needs to get on an airplane right now and go see the king,” said a former top U.S. official who knows the Saudis well. The Saudi king is “very tribal,” in his outlook, this official noted, and in his mind, “your word is your bond.” It’s that sense of trust that has been damaged in the kingdom’s dealings with Obama. One good emissary would be John Brennan, the CIA director, who was station chief in Riyadh in the late 1990s and had a good relationship with the Saudi monarch. Another would be George Tenet, former CIA director, who visited the kingdom often and also developed a trusting relationship with Abdullah.

For much of the past two years, the closest thing the U.S. had to a back channel with Saudi Arabia was Tom Donilon, the national security adviser until last June. He traveled to the kingdom occasionally to pass private messages to Abdullah; those meetings didn't heal the wounds, but they at least staunched the bleeding. But Susan Rice, Donilon's successor, has not played a similar bridging role.

The administration's lack of communication with the Saudis and other Arab allies is mystifying at a time when the U.S. is exploring new policy initiatives, such as working with the Russians on dismantling chemical weapons in Syria and negotiating a possible nuclear deal with Iran. Those U.S. policy initiatives are sound, in the view of many analysts (including me), but they worry the Saudis and others—making close consultation all the more important.

WSJ

Behind the Saudi-U.S. Breakup

Furious over Obama's Mideast policy, the Saudis are shifting away from the U.S.—but where else will they turn?

by Karen Elliot House

When Saudi Arabia this week rebuked the United States, using media leaks to send a message to the kingdom's longtime ally, the episode was no petty fit of pique. It reflected a calculated decision by the Al Saud rulers that their own survival requires distancing themselves from the very country that has protected the [royal family](#) for more than half a century.

In a tribal society like Saudi Arabia's, it is well understood that weakness breeds contempt and invites aggression. To the Al Saud, the Obama administration's retreat from its red-line ultimatum on Syria's use of chemical weapons and the administration's unseemly rush to negotiate with Iran over its nuclear program are simply the latest evidence of such weakness. It diminishes U.S. influence in the region while offending and endangering America's allies. Already facing social tensions inside the kingdom and confronting growing instability throughout the Mideast, the ruling Al Saud have concluded that they can no longer risk being seen holding hands with a timorous great power.

Sadly for the Saudis, there is no alternative protector, which means the two countries will continue to share an interest, however strained, in combating terrorism and securing stability in the Persian Gulf. The kingdom has courted Russia and China in recent years, but they won't protect the Saudis from the primary threat of Iran. Indeed, they support the regime in Tehran. This reality makes Saudi Arabia's distancing itself from the U.S. all the more startling.

To understand the U.S.-Saudi rift, it is essential to realize that from the capital in Riyadh the world looks more threatening than at any time since the founding of modern Saudi Arabia in 1932. There have been other menacing times. Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser in the 1960s sought to destabilize the Al Saud by fomenting trouble in neighboring Yemen. In 1979, religious fanatics took over the Grand Mosque in Mecca and had to be ousted by military action. The Saudis feared, in 1990, that their kingdom was next after Iraq's Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. In all those troubled moments, the U.S. was either a trusted if silent supporter of the Saudis or an active defender, as in the 1990 Gulf War.

Today, the Saudis find themselves alone regarding Syria, trapped in a proxy war with Iran, their religious (Sunni Saudi Arabia vs. Shiite Iran) and political enemy. The Saudis had sought and expected U.S. help in arming the rebels against Syrian ruler Bashar Assad, but the military aid never materialized. Instead, last month at the United Nations General Assembly gathering, President Obama eagerly sought a private meeting with Iran's new president, Hasan Rouhani, to discuss its nuclear program. Mr. Obama seemed desperately grateful merely to get him on the phone.

A few days later, the Saudi foreign minister abruptly canceled his own speech to the General Assembly. Then last week, Saudi Arabia took the extraordinary step of turning down a Security Council seat it had long sought. According to a Reuters report this week, Saudi Prince Bandar bin Sultan, head of the kingdom's intelligence and national security operations, told European diplomats that both moves at the U.N. were intended as a blunt message to the Obama administration.

Only a year ago, Saudi officials expressed great confidence that Assad would be ousted from Syria by this fall. Instead, the Saudis now find themselves trapped with their foot on the snake Assad: They can't step away, lest the snake strike, but lacking American help, they don't have the means to kill the snake either.

The kingdom's relationship with the rebels is similarly precarious. The longer the Saudis supply them with arms, the longer the war drags on, and the greater the risk that the rebels—whose ranks already include at least 500 Saudi jihadists—will grow more radical and eventually return home to fight the regime that funded them.

Worst of all for the Saudis is the new U.S. dialogue with Iran. The Saudis, much like the Israelis, fear the sort of deal likely to result from a weak and naïve U.S. administration eager to avoid a military confrontation. Such a deal, the Saudis worry, would paper over Tehran's nuclear ambitions while boosting Iran's prestige and influence at the expense of Saudi Arabia. If Iran can convince the U.S.—the country that Tehran still calls the Great Satan—to lift economic sanctions without first obtaining ironclad evidence that Iran has abandoned its nuclear program, in Mideast eyes Iran would be the clear winner.

The Saudi nightmare doesn't end there. Iran, supported by Russia and China, is seen by the Saudis as a direct threat to their oil exports, the lifeblood that keeps the ruling Al Saud in power by providing the billions of dollars annually that allow the regime to buy, bribe and, when it deems necessary, brutally repress its citizens.

Meanwhile, with U.S. oil and gas production soaring, Americans may increasingly question the wisdom of spending billions on a military presence to protect the Persian Gulf through which Saudi oil exports flow—increasingly to China. When President Obama briefly threatened to strike Syria for using chemical weapons on its citizens, Saudi Arabia understandably sought a larger U.S. naval presence in the Persian Gulf to protect against a potential Iranian counter-strike. The U.S. told Riyadh it lacked the ships to meet the request, another shock to the Saudis.

These external challenges come at a time when senior members of the Saudi [royal family](#) are consumed with a generational succession. A geriatric band of brothers has ruled the kingdom since the death in 1953 of their father, Abdulaziz Ibn Saud, the country's founder. Power soon will have to go to a son of one of those three-dozen brothers.

But who? Each brother feels one of his own sons deserves the crown—which would keep his family's branch in line for royal succession and likely shut out the others. There are hundreds of these grandsons of the founder. Managing royal family politics must be a daunting task for the 90-year-old King Abdullah, already weakened by three back surgeries in four years.

Prince Bandar is among the many contenders who could be crowned, but he is not widely considered a future king because his mother wasn't a member of the royal family. He is nonetheless a powerful presence. A pilot and colorful raconteur, he spent nearly a quarter-century as the kingdom's ambassador to the U.S., a post he left in 2005.

The savvy diplomat was close to the administrations of Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush, but since his emergence last year as head of intelligence—and the kingdom's point man for securing U.S. cooperation in Syria—he has had little influence on the Obama administration. He hasn't taken kindly to the personal affront, and now he seems to be speaking for the Al Saud ruler in telling European diplomats of Saudi Arabia's anger with the U.S.

Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al Faisal is fond of saying that the U.S. and Saudi Arabia no longer have a Catholic marriage but rather a Muslim one. This is a clever way of saying that Saudi Arabia and the U.S. are not faithful to each other. In the absence of any major-power alternative to the U.S., for the Saudis in this Muslim marriage the U.S. may well remain Wife No. 1. Even if she is not about to be divorced, however, the Saudis are clearly declaring a trial separation.

Ms. House, a former publisher of The Wall Street Journal who won a Pulitzer Prize as a reporter for her coverage of the Middle East, is the author of "On Saudi Arabia: Its People, Past, Religion, Fault Lines—and Future" (Knopf, 2012).

American.com

Obama and realism's ignorance

by Michael Rubin

President Obama came into office promising to purge American foreign policy of the idealism that colored George W. Bush's foreign policy. In 2008, Obama explained his vision to sympathetic pundit Fareed Zakaria, and [recalled](#) how, "tough, thoughtful, realistic diplomacy used to be a bipartisan hallmark of US foreign policy." Obama then spelled out his goals:

And one of the things that I want to do, if I have the honor of being president, is to try to bring back the kind of foreign policy that characterized the Truman administration with Marshall and Acheson and Kennan. But also characterized to a large degree — the first President Bush — with people like Scowcroft and Powell and Baker, who I think had a fairly clear-eyed view of how the world works...We need to show leadership through consensus and through pulling people together wherever we can. There are going to be times where we have to act unilaterally to protect our interests. And I always reserve the right to do that, should I be commander in chief.

In 2009, Washington Post columnist E.J. Dionne [characterized](#) Obama as a traditional realist. "On the whole," he explained, "Obama is simply paying heed to Reinhold Niebuhr, a thinker admired both by the president and by conservatives. Niebuhr warned that some of 'the greatest perils to democracy arise from the fanaticism of moral idealists who are not conscious of the corruption of self-interest.'"

Obama had promised to repair relations and “reboot America’s image around the world.” Five years on, let’s take stock. The [American reputation in the Middle East](#) is in tatters: The US-Saudi relationship, a pillar of American policy in the Middle East is in tatters. So too is America’s carefully cultivated relationship with Egypt. Israel—which has been far more of a boon to American interests than a liability—[no longer trusts](#) the United States. Nor does the United Arab Emirates.

The situation with Europe is no better. Obama bent over backwards to [insult Great Britain](#), presumably acting upon a grudge based on its treatment of his Kenyan grandfather. Yesterday, the White House sought to assuage German Chancellor Angela Merkel, but its carefully parsed words did not deny that the US government had previously tapped the phone of a woman who grew up under the Stasi.

What Obama—and so many of his realist mentors—never understood is that calculating interests is not a sterile endeavor. His advisors counseled him to view the world through the filter of short-term interests, and he obliged. When it came to understanding alleged allied anger, he took his echo chamber seriously, and conflated polemic and truth.

Cultivating allies is like paying a mortgage: The reward comes years later, and it would be silly to walk away 29 years into a 30 year mortgage just because it’s hard to balance that last payment with the reboot image and buy a new car. In effect, Obama ignored the value of alliance and friendship paved over decades by predecessors.

Alliances have value, and so do reputations. The two Bush’s, Clinton, and Reagan each understood the importance of standing with friends, and prioritizing long-term interests over short-term gain. By embracing stark realism, however, Obama has demonstrated so many realists’ failures to calculate the value of friendship, and to understand how investment in allies pays dividends over time. Alas, Obama did not. Now, far from being the president who would repair America’s image, Obama has become its soiler-in-chief, and it will take years if not decades to restore the trust of those which Obama has treated so cavalierly.

Power Line

[Saudi Arabia: Worst Obama Foreign Policy Disaster Ever?](#)

by John Hinderaker

The news from Saudi Arabia is simply stunning: the kingdom, one of America’s traditional Gulf allies, has refused to take a seat on the United Nations’ Security Council. Its head of intelligence describes the king’s refusal as “a message for the U.S., not the U.N.” The Washington Post’s [David Ignatius](#) explains how disastrous the Obama administration’s policies have been, in the eyes of the Saudis:

Saudi concern about U.S. policy in the Middle East is shared by the four other traditional U.S. allies in the region: Egypt, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates and Israel. They argue (mostly privately) that Obama has shredded U.S. influence by dumping President Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, backing the Muslim Brotherhood’s Mohamed Morsi, opposing the coup that toppled Morsi, vacillating in its Syria policy, and now embarking on negotiations with Iran — all without consulting close Arab allies.

We and many others, of course, have long argued the same thing.

The Saudi monarch “is convinced the U.S. is unreliable,” [a knowledgeable Arab] official said. ...

The problem was clear in the fall of 2011, when I was told by Saudi officials in Riyadh that they increasingly regarded the U.S. as unreliable and would look elsewhere for their security. ...

The bad feeling that developed after Mubarak’s ouster deepened month by month: The U.S. supported Morsi’s election as president; opposed a crackdown by the monarchy in Bahrain against Shiites protesters; cut aid to the Egyptian military after it toppled Morsi and crushed the Brotherhood; promised covert aid to the Syrian rebels it never delivered; threatened to bomb Syria and then allied with Russia, instead; and finally embarked on a diplomatic opening to Iran, Saudi Arabia’s deadly rival in the Gulf.

The policies were upsetting; but the deeper damage resulted from the Saudi feeling that they were being ignored — and even, in their minds, double crossed.

Gosh, why would they think that?

The Saudi king is “very tribal,” in his outlook, [a former top U.S.] official noted, and in his mind, “your word is your bond.” It’s that sense of trust that has been damaged in the kingdom’s dealings with Obama.

Heh. Welcome to the club, Your Highness. Anyone looking for honesty, consistency, loyalty or even common sense will have to seek out someone other than Barack Obama.

Still, the administration’s falling out with the Saudis is shocking. My opinion of the administration’s foreign policy is very low, but I never imagined they could destroy our relationship with our most important Gulf Arab ally.

NY Times

[The Handyüberwachung Disaster](#)

by Roger Cohen

BERLIN — Germany, of course, has already concocted a compound word for it: Handyüberwachung. That would be spying on cellphone calls.

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Merkel is measured. For her to lift the phone and go public with her criticism leaves no doubt she is livid. As she said last July, “Not everything which is technically doable should be done.” This, on the now ample evidence provided by the former National Security Agency contractor

Edward Snowden, is not the view of the N.S.A., whose dragnet eavesdropping has prompted fury from Paris to Brasília.

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But all Europe is. The perception here is of a United States where security has trumped liberty, intelligence agencies run amok (vacuuming up data of friend and foe alike), and the once-admired “checks and balances” built into American governance and studied by European schoolchildren have become, at best, secret reviews of secret activities where opposing arguments get no hearing.

The disquiet of Snowden that turned him into a whistle-blower now encounters overwhelming sympathy. Impatience is high with statements from the Obama administration that surveillance is under review. A backlash could see Europe limit its sharing of financial and other data with the United States or impose heavy fines on American telecommunications companies that pass on European user details. The word “ally” is beginning to feel like a 20th-century idea that has lost its relevance.

None of this serves U.S. interests. Intelligence, counterterrorism and military cooperation with Germany and France, the two nations most outraged by recent disclosures, is critical. The relative power of the United States and Europe is declining, so cooperation is doubly important. Of course it will continue, but Obama faces a crisis of confidence in trans-Atlantic relations that vague promises about seeking the right balance between freedom and security will not allay. Merkel wants specifics; she is not alone.

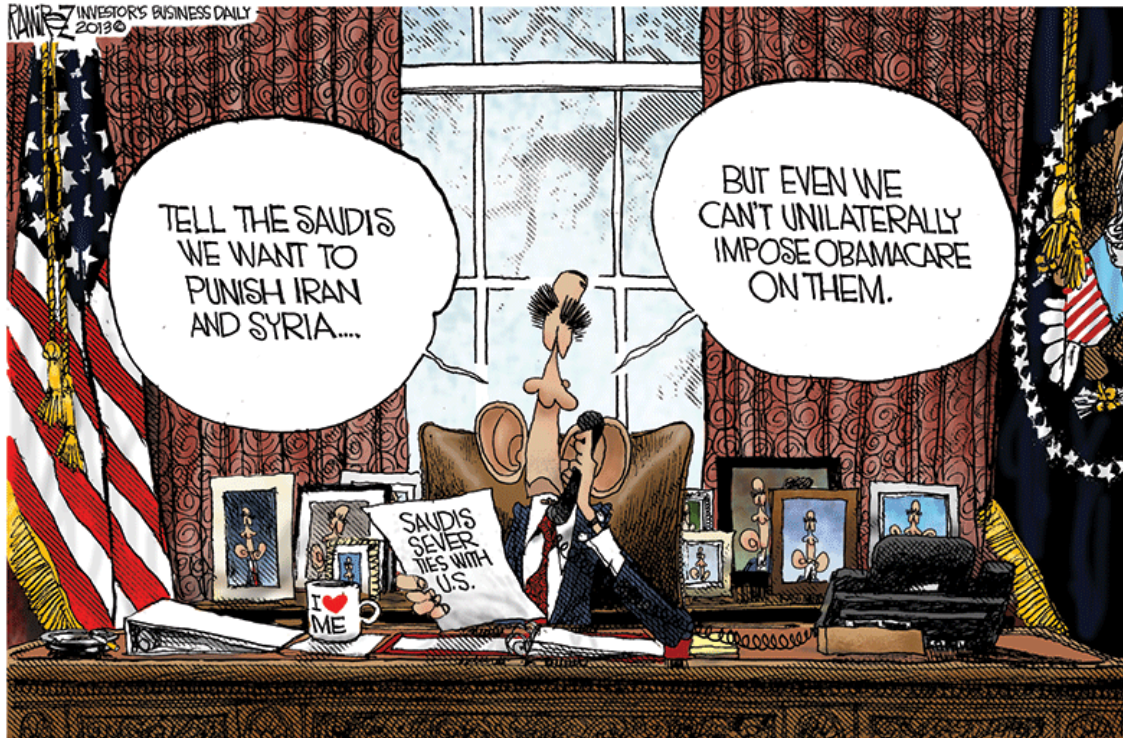
Even before this furor, Germany was incensed by what it has perceived as a dismissive U.S. attitude. A senior official close to Merkel recently took me through the “very painful” saga of the Obama administration’s response to Syrian use of chemical weapons. It began with Susan Rice, the national security adviser, telling the Chancellery on Aug. 24 that the United States had the intelligence proving President Bashar al-Assad’s use of chemical weapons, that it would have to intervene and that it would be a matter of days. German pleas to wait for a United Nations report and to remember Iraq fell on deaf ears. Six days later, on Friday Aug. 30, Germany heard from France that the military strike on Syria was on and would happen that weekend — only for Obama to change tack the next day and say he would go to Congress.

Things got worse at the G-20 St. Petersburg summit meeting the next week. Again, Germany found the United States curtly dismissive. It wanted Germany’s signature at once on the joint statement on Syria; Germany wanted to wait a day until a joint European Union statement was ready and so declined. “The sense from Rice was that we are not interested in your view and not interested in the E.U. view,” the official said. “We left Petersburg very offended. This is not what you want your best partner to look like.”

Germany found the atmosphere at the summit terrible. Vladimir Putin, the Russian president, insisted the Syrian opposition was behind the use of chemical weapons. He compared this to the Nazis burning of the Reichstag in 1933 in order to blame and crush their opponents (the fire’s origin is disputed). Putin, to the Germans, appeared much more powerful than Obama. His

strengthened international standing after America's Syrian back-and-forth worries a Germany focused on bringing East European nations like Ukraine and Moldova into association accords with the E.U. This European rapprochement is strongly resisted by Putin, who wants a Eurasian Union that bears an eerie likeness to the old Soviet Union.

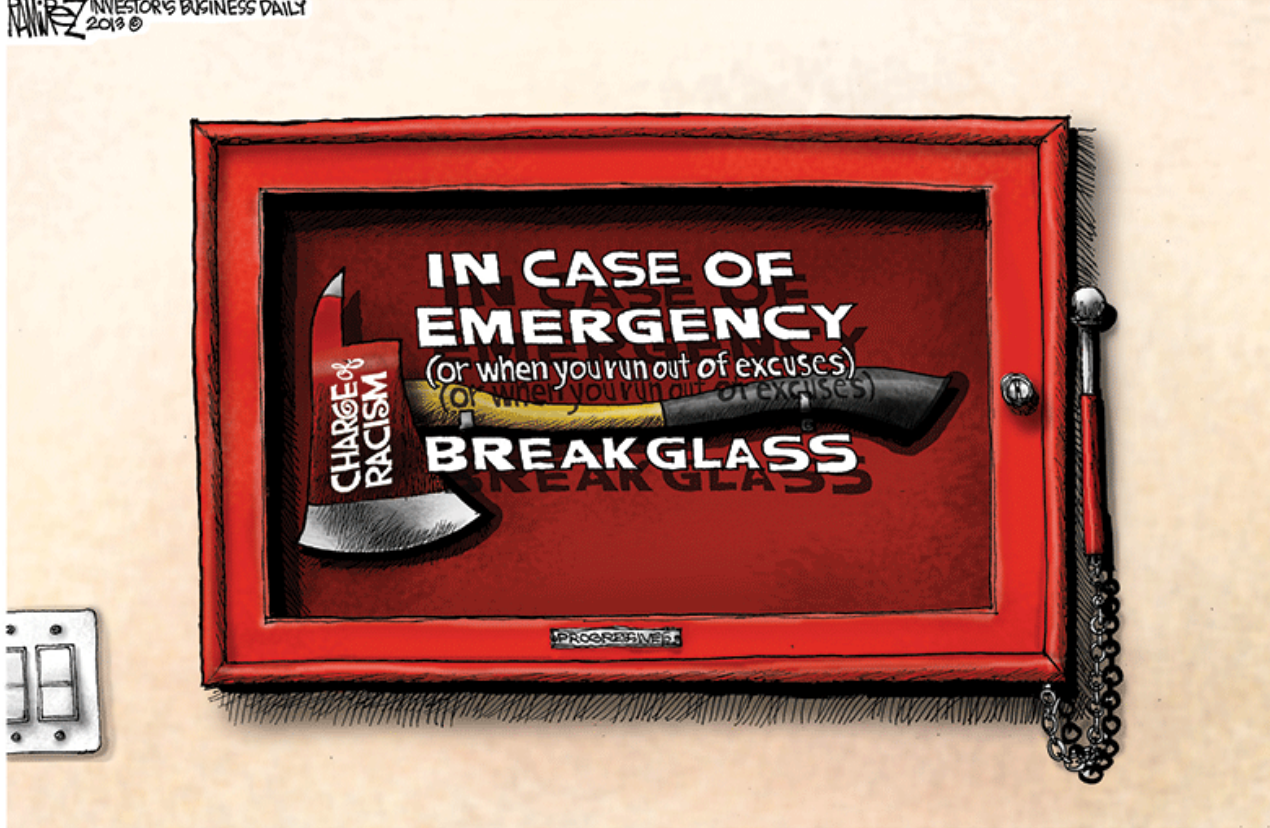
Geopolitics on this continent is not dead. A re-pivot to Europe is in order, as is an internal U.S. security-freedom rebalancing. Handyüberwachung on Europe's most powerful leader is the last thing America needs.



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JEFFERSON

*I want to FUNDAMENTALLY
TRANSFORM AMERICA.*



WHO is the EXTREMIST?