

December 15, 2013

We enter the week with a downbeat. Norman Podhoretz calls for a strike on Iran's nuclear capabilities. Since president ostrich will do nothing, it falls on Israel to defend civilization.

Not too many years ago, hardly anyone disagreed with John McCain when he first said that "the only thing worse than bombing Iran is letting Iran get the bomb." Today hardly anyone disagrees with those who say that the only thing worse than letting Iran get the bomb is bombing Iran. And in this reversal hangs a tale.

The old consensus was shaped by three considerations, all of which seemed indisputable at the time.

The first was that Iran was lying when it denied that its nuclear facilities were working to build a bomb. After all, with its vast reserves of oil and gas, the country had no need for nuclear energy. Even according to the liberal Federation of American Scientists a decade ago, the work being done at the Iranian nuclear facilities was easily "applicable to a nuclear weapons development program." Surprisingly, a similar judgment was made by Mohamed ElBaradei, the very dovish director of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

The second consideration was that the prospect of being annihilated in a retaliatory nuclear strike, which had successfully deterred the Soviets and the Chinese from unleashing their own nuclear weapons during the Cold War, would be ineffective against an Iran ruled by fanatical Shiite mullahs. As Bernard Lewis, the leading contemporary authority on Islam, put it in 2007, to these fanatics "mutual assured destruction is not a deterrent, it is an inducement. ...

... Given how very unlikely it is that President Obama, despite his all-options-on-the-table protestations to the contrary, would ever take military action, the only hope rests with Israel. If, then, Israel fails to strike now, Iran will get the bomb. And when it does, the Israelis will be forced to decide whether to wait for a nuclear attack and then to retaliate out of the rubble, or to pre-empt with a nuclear strike of their own. But the Iranians will be faced with the same dilemma. Under these unprecedentedly hair-trigger circumstances, it will take no time before one of them tries to beat the other to the punch.

And so my counsel to proponents of the new consensus is to consider the unspeakable horrors that would then be visited not just on Israel and Iran but on the entire region and beyond. The destruction would be far worse than any imaginable consequences of an Israeli conventional strike today when there is still a chance to put at least a temporary halt, and conceivably even a permanent one, to the relentless Iranian quest for the bomb.

Speaking of the slow learner, Charles Krauthammer says president bystander was really president oblivious.

In explaining the disastrous rollout of Obamacare, President Obama told Chris Matthews he had discovered that "we have these big agencies, some of which are outdated, some of which are not designed properly."

An interesting discovery to make after having consigned the vast universe of American medicine, one-sixth of the U.S. economy, to the tender mercies of the agency bureaucrats at the Department of Health and Human Services and the Internal Revenue Service.

Most people become aware of the hopeless inefficiency of sclerotic government by, oh, age 17 at the department of motor vehicles. Obama's late discovery is especially remarkable considering that he built his entire political philosophy on the rock of Big Government, on the fervent belief in the state as the very engine of collective action and the ultimate source of national greatness. (Indeed, of individual success as well, as in "If you've got a business — you didn't build that. Somebody else made that happen.")

This blinding revelation of the ponderous incompetence of bureaucratic government came just a few weeks after Obama confessed that "what we're also discovering is that insurance is complicated to buy." Another light bulb goes off, this one three years after passing a law designed to force millions of Americans to shop for new health plans via the maze of untried, untested, insecure, unreliable online "exchanges."

This discovery joins a long list that includes Obama's rueful admission that there really are no shovel-ready jobs. That one came after having passed his monstrous \$830 billion stimulus on the argument that the weakened economy would be "jump-started" by a massive infusion of shovel-ready jobs. Now known to be fictional. ...

Similar thoughts from George Will.

The education of Barack Obama is a protracted process as he repeatedly alights upon the obvious with a sense of original discovery. In a recent MSNBC interview, he restocked his pantry of excuses for his disappointing results, announcing that "we have these big agencies, some of which are outdated, some of which are not designed properly":

"We've got, for example, 16 different agencies that have some responsibility to help businesses, large and small, in all kinds of ways, whether it's helping to finance them, helping them to export. .So, we've proposed, let's consolidate a bunch of that stuff. The challenge we've got is that that requires a law to pass. And, frankly, there are a lot of members of Congress who are chairmen of a particular committee. And they don't want necessarily consolidations where they would lose jurisdiction over certain aspects of certain policies."

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Streetwise Professor noticed a White House tweet suggesting getting covered by the healthcare act will give your mother piece of mind.

The Fascism With A Smile campaign to fool suckers into signing up for Obamacare is in full swing. The White House is engaged in a flood-the-zone campaign to get people to Get Covered.

What a concept! Imagine if they had, I dunno, a website where people could sign up, send their information to an insurance company, pay their premium. That would be amazing!

But today this campaign surpassed the ability of even a Swift to satirize. The White House posted this on Twitter.

Peace. Piece. I know. I always have such a hard time knowing when to use which.

Perhaps this is a Freudian slip. The administration knows that the success of Obamacare depends on a lobotomized population. People who have lost a piece of their minds, if they had any to begin with. Or maybe it's just that the creator of this propaganda has issues with Mom.

S/he wants to give her a piece of her/his mind. But what about the "quality control"? The "editing" process? Does everyone at the WH have Mom issues?

Isn't it grand? Turning over control of 1/6th of the US economy to people who don't know the difference between "piece" and "peace", or who don't care enough to make the distinction when producing propaganda intended to gull the great unwashed.

The next challenge for the administration: to grasp the subtle differences between "there", "their", and "they're".

We are so screwed.

And **Power Line** is taking to calling her Queen Seeb since she appears to be writing laws on the fly. Can't write code, but an edict without bothering with that congress thingy is no problem.

Bloomberg View columnist Megan McArdle summarizes the conference call for journalists yesterday afternoon with Kathleen Sebelius and other members of the Obamacare team in which the powers-that-be announced further decrees and encouragements to smooth the pending implementation of Obamacare on January 1:

- Insurers will be required to accept payment for policies beginning Jan. 1 as late as Dec. 31, and they will be "encouraged" to accept payment after that. In response to a question, HHS says that at least one insurer, Aetna Inc., has agreed to take payments as late as Jan. 8.*
- The high-risk pools that were established to cover people with pre-existing conditions in the transition will be extended through the end of January for people who haven't already selected a plan.*
- Insurers are being "strongly encouraged" to treat out-of-network doctors as in-network doctors for acute-care episodes, or if the provider was listed in the plan's provider directory when the patient enrolled.*
- Insurers are also being "strongly encouraged" to refill prescriptions in the month of January, even if they aren't covered under the new plan, if they were covered under the patient's old plan.*

The Hill's Jonathan Easley also reports on the call [here](#). HHS has posted an update [here](#) on what it modestly describes as its "steps to ensure Americans signing up through the Marketplace have coverage and access to the care they need on January 1."

The times seem to call for resumption of my "[Adventures in administrative law](#)" series of posts, but I think I would be over my head. [To borrow a phrase](#), this is banana republic stuff.

A Pickings reader wrote last week complaining about the lack of sick Mandela jokes. [Mark Steyn](#) found a good one by Neil Phillips from the English town of Rugeley. Ignoring, of course, that whole joke in South Africa.

Alas, far from the face-pulling selfies, Mandela jokes are no laughing matter. Simon Amstell (who appears to be a comedian in the same sense that Thamsanqa Jantjie is a sign-language interpreter) visited BBC Radio and quipped that "it's so white in here Mandela would not approve." Shortly thereafter, the host apologized on air lest anyone was offended. Which they were, because Mr. Amstell himself subsequently apologized on Twitter. Neil Phillips did not get off so lightly. During the final stages of the African leader's slowly deteriorating health, Mr. Phillips, who runs the Crumbs sandwich shop in the English town of Rugeley, had gone online and complained: "My PC takes so long to shut down I've decided to call it Nelson Mandela." The Staffordshire Constabulary arrested him, seized his computers, and, in the course of an eight-hour detention, fingerprinted and DNA-swabbed him.

"There are no jokes in Islam," Ayatollah Khomeini sternly warned, and that's true even for its "moderate" redoubts, where Shez Cassim, a U.S. citizen from Minnesota, has languished in a Dubai jail cell since April for making a video mildly parodic of United Arab Emirates youth. But, as Mr. Phillips discovered, there are fewer jokes outside Islam, too. Once upon a time, it was the communist Eastern Europe that policed gags, as captured in Milan Kundera's first great novel. Now even in free societies an infelicitous jest can lead to a rap sheet. In such a world, we should treasure the hilarity of the Mandela service. "Nelson Mandela stood for freedom," his successor Jacob Zuma said. "He wanted everyone to be free." Unfortunately, some of the crowd booed Zuma, so he's now having them investigated for embarrassing him.

Still, let's take Zuma at his word: Mandela wanted everyone to be free. Free to sign-translate the U.N. secretary-general's speech into total codswallop. Free to cop a feel from the Danish prime minister. And free, for all the loftiness of the forgettable rhetoric, to relish the low comedy all around it.

[Power Line](#) posts on the famous selfie.

There is a reason why the infamous selfie photo is the only significant news story to emerge from Nelson Mandela's funeral. The shot, and the story, resonate with people because they express what we already knew about Barack Obama: he is a narcissist. [Michael Ramirez](#) puts the selfie into historical context:

How a man as temperamentally unsuited to any leadership position as Barack Obama managed to become President of the United States is a question that historians will debate for many years to come.

WSJ

Strike Iran Now to Avert Disaster Later

A conventional-weapons attack is preferable to the nuclear war sure to come.

by Norman Podhoretz

Not too many years ago, hardly anyone disagreed with John McCain when he first said that "the only thing worse than bombing Iran is letting Iran get the bomb." Today hardly anyone disagrees with those who say that the only thing worse than letting Iran get the bomb is bombing Iran. And in this reversal hangs a tale.

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The first was that Iran was lying when it denied that its nuclear facilities were working to build a bomb. After all, with its vast reserves of oil and gas, the country had no need for nuclear energy. Even according to the liberal Federation of American Scientists a decade ago, the work being done at the Iranian nuclear facilities was easily "applicable to a nuclear weapons development program." Surprisingly, a similar judgment was made by Mohamed ElBaradei, the very dovish director of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

The second consideration was that the prospect of being annihilated in a retaliatory nuclear strike, which had successfully deterred the Soviets and the Chinese from unleashing their own nuclear weapons during the Cold War, would be ineffective against an Iran ruled by fanatical Shiite mullahs. As Bernard Lewis, the leading contemporary authority on Islam, put it in 2007, to these fanatics "mutual assured destruction is not a deterrent, it is an inducement. We know already [from the Iran-Iraq war] that they do not give a damn about killing their own people in great numbers. . . . They are giving them a quick free pass to heaven and all its delights."

Nor were the rulers of Iran deterred by the fear that their country would be destroyed in a nuclear war. In the words of the Ayatollah Khomeini, who brought the Islamist revolution to Iran in 1979: "We do not worship Iran, we worship Allah. . . . I say let this land [Iran] go up in smoke, provided Islam emerges triumphant in the rest of the world." (The quote appeared in a 1981 Iranian collection of the ayatollah's speeches. In later editions, that line and others were deleted as Iran tried to stir up nationalistic fervor amid the war with Iraq.)

And here, speaking in particular of a nuclear exchange with Israel—that "cancer" which the mullahs were and are solemnly pledged to wipe off the map—is the famous "moderate" Hashemi Rafsanjani, in an Al-Quds Day sermon at Tehran University on Dec. 14, 2001: "Application of an atomic bomb would not leave anything in Israel, but the same thing would just

produce damages in the Muslim world." Mr. Rafsanjani, an earlier president of Iran, is the sponsor and mentor of its current president, that other celebrated "moderate," Hasan Rouhani.

The third consideration behind the old consensus was the conviction that even if the mullahs could be deterred, their acquisition of a nuclear capability would inevitably trigger a nuclear-arms race in the Middle East. Because the Sunni regimes in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and elsewhere throughout the region were all terrified at the prospect of being lorded over and held hostage by an Iran ruled by their ancestral enemies the Shiites, those regimes would rush to equip themselves with their own nuclear arsenals.

Such an arms race would vastly increase the danger that these weapons might go off, if not by design then by accident. Retired Col. Ken Allard, a former dean of the National War College, explained why last week in the Washington Times: "Even with the steady injection of technology, U.S. and Soviet permissive-action links and fail-safe systems still needed a fair amount of luck to avoid an accidental detonation. What about Iranian, Saudi or even Egyptian nuclear forces? If they build such weapons, will they also invest in the technologies and practice the unforgiving disciplines needed to avoid the worst of all man-made calamities?"

Just as almost everyone agreed that Iran must be prevented from acquiring a nuclear capability, there was a similarly broad agreement that this could be done through a judicious combination of diplomacy and sanctions. To be sure, there were those—myself emphatically included—who argued that nothing short of military action could do the trick. But we were far outweighed by the proponents of peaceful means who, however, willingly acknowledged that the threat of military action was necessary to the success of their strategy.

Yet as the years wore on, it became clear, even to the believers in this strategy, that the Iranians would not be stopped either by increasingly harsh sanctions—or by endless negotiations. One might have expected the strategy's proponents to conclude, if with all due reluctance, that the only recourse left was to make good on the threat of military action. Yet while they continued to insist that "all options are on the table," it also became increasingly clear that for Western political leaders as well as the mainstream think tanks and the punditocracy, the stomach for the military option was no longer there, if indeed it had ever been.

And so began the process of what Col. Allard calls "learning to love the Iranian bomb." The first step was to raise serious doubts about the old consensus. Yes, the Iranians were determined to build a bomb, and, yes, the mullahs were Islamist fanatics, but on further reflection there was good reason to think that they were not really as suicidal as the likes of Bernard Lewis persuaded us. That being the case, there was also good reason to drop the idea that it would be impossible to deter and contain them, as we had done even with the far more powerful Soviets and Chinese.

It was the new consensus shaped by such thinking that prepared the way for the accord reached by six major powers with Iran in Geneva last month. The Obama administration tells us that the interim agreement puts Iran on a track that will lead to the abandonment of its quest for a nuclear arsenal. But the Iranians are jubilant because they know that the only abandonment going on is of our own effort to keep them from getting the bomb.

Adherents of the new consensus would have us believe that only two choices remain: a war to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons or containment of a nuclear Iran—with

containment the only responsible option. Yet as an unregenerate upholder of the old consensus, I remain convinced that containment is impossible, from which it follows that the two choices before us are not war vs. containment but a conventional war now or a nuclear war later.

Given how very unlikely it is that President Obama, despite his all-options-on-the-table protestations to the contrary, would ever take military action, the only hope rests with Israel. If, then, Israel fails to strike now, Iran will get the bomb. And when it does, the Israelis will be forced to decide whether to wait for a nuclear attack and then to retaliate out of the rubble, or to pre-empt with a nuclear strike of their own. But the Iranians will be faced with the same dilemma. Under these unprecedentedly hair-trigger circumstances, it will take no time before one of them tries to beat the other to the punch.

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Mr. Podhoretz was the editor of Commentary from 1960-95. His most recent book is "Why Are Jews Liberals?" (Doubleday, 2009).

Washington Post

[Obama the oblivious](#)

by Charles Krauthammer

In explaining the disastrous rollout of Obamacare, [President Obama told Chris Matthews](#) he had discovered that “we have these big agencies, some of which are outdated, some of which are not designed properly.”

An interesting discovery to make *after* having consigned the vast universe of American medicine, one-sixth of the U.S. economy, to the tender mercies of the agency bureaucrats at the Department of Health and Human Services and the Internal Revenue Service.

Most people become aware of the hopeless inefficiency of sclerotic government by, oh, age 17 at the department of motor vehicles. Obama’s late discovery is especially remarkable considering that he built his entire political philosophy on the rock of Big Government, on the fervent belief in the state as the very engine of collective action and the ultimate source of national greatness. (Indeed, of individual success as well, as in [“If you’ve got a business — you didn’t build that. Somebody else made that happen.”](#))

This blinding revelation of the ponderous incompetence of bureaucratic government came just a few weeks after [Obama confessed](#) that “what we’re also discovering is that insurance is complicated to buy.” Another light bulb goes off, this one three years after passing a law *designed* to force millions of Americans to shop for new health plans via the maze of untried, untested, insecure, unreliable online “exchanges.”

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Barack Obama is not just late to discover the most elementary workings of government. With alarming regularity, he professes obliviousness to the workings of his own government. He claims, for example, to have known nothing about the [IRS targeting scandal](#), the [AP phone records scandal](#), the [NSA tapping](#) of Angela Merkel. And had not a clue that the centerpiece of his signature legislative achievement — the online Obamacare exchange, three years in the making — would fail catastrophically upon launch. Or that Obamacare would cause millions of Americans to lose their private health plans.

Hence the odd spectacle of a president expressing surprise and disappointment in the federal government — as if he's not the one running it. Hence the repeated no-one-is-more-upset-than-me posture upon deploring the nonfunctioning Web site, the IRS outrage, the AP intrusions and any number of scandals from which Obama tries to create safe distance by posing as an observer. He gives the impression of a man on a West Wing tour trying out the desk in the Oval Office, only to be told that he is president of the United States.

The paradox of this presidency is that this most passive bystander president is at the same time the most ideologically ambitious in decades. The sweep and scope of his health-care legislation alone are unprecedented. He's spent billions of tax money attempting to create, by fiat and ex nihilo, a new green economy. His (failed) cap-and-trade bill would have given him regulatory control of the energy economy. He wants universal preschool and has just announced his unwavering commitment to slaying the dragon of [economic inequality](#), which, like the poor, has always been with us.

Obama's discovery that government bureaucracies don't do things very well creates a breathtaking disconnect between his transformative ambitions and his detachment from the job itself. How does his Olympian vision coexist with the lassitude of his actual governance, a passivity that verges on absenteeism?

What bridges that gap is rhetoric. Barack Obama is a master rhetorician. It's allowed him to move crowds, rise inexorably and twice win the most glittering prize of all. Rhetoric has changed his reality. For Obama, it can change the country's. Hope and change, after all, is a rhetorical device. Of the kind Obama has always imagined can move mountains.

That's why his reaction to the Obamacare Web site's crash-on-takeoff is so telling. His remedy? A cross-country campaign-style speaking tour. As if rhetoric could repeal *that* reality.

Managing, governing, negotiating, cajoling, crafting legislation, forging compromise. For these — this stuff of governance — Obama has shown little aptitude and even less interest. Perhaps, as [Valerie Jarrett has suggested](#), he is simply too easily bored to invest his greatness in such mundanity.

["I don't write code,"](#) said Obama in reaction to the Web site crash. Nor is he expected to. He is, however, expected to run an administration that can.

Washington Post

Obama's tardy epiphany about government's flaws

by George F. Will

The education of Barack Obama is a protracted process as he repeatedly alights upon the obvious with a sense of original discovery. [In a recent MSNBC interview](#), he restocked his pantry of excuses for his disappointing results, announcing that “we have these big agencies, some of which are outdated, some of which are not designed properly”:

“We’ve got, for example, 16 different agencies that have some responsibility to help businesses, large and small, in all kinds of ways, whether it’s helping to finance them, helping them to export. . . . So, we’ve proposed, let’s consolidate a bunch of that stuff. The challenge we’ve got is that that requires a law to pass. And, frankly, there are a lot of members of Congress who are chairmen of a particular committee. And they don’t want necessarily consolidations where they would lose jurisdiction over certain aspects of certain policies.”

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Big government is indeed big, and like another big creature, the [sauropod dinosaur](#), government has a primitive nervous system: The fact of an injury to the tail could take nearly a minute to be [communicated to the sauropod brain](#).

Obama, of whose vast erudition we have been assured, seems unfamiliar with [Mancur Olson](#)’s seminal “[The Rise and Decline of Nations](#),” which explains how free societies become sclerotic. Their governments become encrusted with interest groups that preserve, like a fly in amber, an increasingly stultifying status quo. This impedes dynamism by protecting arrangements that have worked well for those powerful enough to put the arrangements in place. This blocks upward mobility for those less wired to power.

Obama, startled that components of government behave as interest groups, seems utterly unfamiliar with [public choice theory](#). It demystifies and de-romanticizes politics by applying economic analysis — how incentives influence behavior — to government. It shows how elected officials and bureaucrats pursue personal aggrandizement as much as people do in the private sector. In the public sector’s profit motive, profit is measured by power rather than money.

Obama’s tardy epiphanies do not temper his enthusiasm for giving sauropod government ever-deeper penetration into society. He thinks this serves equality. Actually, big government *inevitably* drives an upward distribution of wealth to those whose wealth, confidence and sophistication enable them to manipulate government.

The day before Obama shared with MSNBC his conclusion that big government defends its irrationalities but is insufficiently big, his [speech du jour](#) deplored today’s [increasing inequality and distrust of government](#). He seems oblivious to the mutual causations at work.

Of course Americans distrust one another more as more and more factions fight one another for preferential treatment by government. *Of course* government becomes drained of dignity, and becomes corrosive of social cohesion, as it becomes a bigger dispenser of inequality through benefits to those sufficiently clever and connected to work its levers.

[Obama correctly says](#) that not only do we “tend to trust our institutions less,” we also “tend to trust each other less.” *Of course* there are parallel increases in distrust: Government’s dignity diminishes as government grows to serve factions of those sophisticated at manipulating its allocation of preferences. Social solidarity is a casualty of government grown big because it recognizes no limits to its dispensing of favors.

Obama’s speech denounced “trickle-down ideology” and deplored growth that “has flowed to a fortunate few.” But the monetary policy he favors — [very low interest rates](#), driving money into equities [in search of higher yields](#) — is a powerful engine of inequality. Since the [Dow closed at 7,949 on Inauguration Day 2009](#), it has [doubled](#), benefiting the [10 percent who hold 80 percent of directly owned stocks](#). The hope is that some of this wealth will trickle down.

Suppose there were not 16 government agencies “to help businesses, large and small, in all kinds of ways.” Suppose there were none. Such barnacles on big government institutionalize the scramble for government favors; these agencies are a standing incitement to bend public power for private advantage. Hence they increase distrust of government, diminish social solidarity and aggravate the most indefensible inequality — that driven by government dispensations.

Obama’s solution to the problem of the 16 is to “consolidate” them, replacing 16 small subtractions from good governance with one big one. Progressives consider this progress.

Streetwise Professor

[We Are In the Best of Hands. The Very Bestest.](#)

by Craig Pirrong

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Power Line

[Queen Seeb approximately](#)

by Scott Johnson

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McArdle also notes this:

When I read the HHS memo on the call I thought the administration was worried about people who had insurance losing their coverage or finding out that the doctors and treatments they use aren't covered under their new plans. And indeed, the first question came from Bloomberg's own Alex Wayne, who asked whether it was now possible that the net coverage numbers would be lower in January 2014 than they were this year. HHS hemmed and hawed. Wayne pressed them, asking whether they were confident that coverage was going to increase. Julie Bataille finally answered that they were confident millions more people were going to have access to affordable coverage — not have it, mind you, just have access to it, in the same way that I have access to a sousaphone and a week on the beach in Maui.

Hey, it only hurts when I laugh.

Orange County Register

Low comedy amid soaring rhetoric

by Mark Steyn

"I don't want to be emotional but this is one of the greatest moments of my life," declared Nelson Mandela upon meeting the Spice Girls in 1997. So I like to think he would have appreciated the livelier aspects of his funeral observances. The Prince of Wales, who was also present on that occasion in Johannesburg, agreed with Mandela on the significance of their summit with the girls: "It is the second greatest moment in my life," he said. "The greatest was when I met them the first time." His Royal Highness and at least two Spice Girls (reports are unclear) attended this week's service in Soweto, and I'm sure it was at least the third-greatest moment in all of their lives. Don't ask me where the other Spice Girls were. It is a melancholy reflection that the Spice Girls' delegation was half the size of Canada's, which flew in no fewer than four Canadian prime ministers, which is rather more Canadian prime ministers than one normally needs to make the party go with a swing.

But the star of the show was undoubtedly Thamsanqa Jantjie, the sign-language interpreter who stood alongside the world's leaders and translated their eulogies for the deaf. Unfortunately, he translated them into total gibberish, reduced by the time of President Obama's appearance to making random hand gestures, as who has not felt the urge to do during the great man's speeches. Mr. Jantjie has now pleaded in mitigation that he was having a sudden hallucination because he is a violent schizophrenic. It has not been established whether he is, in fact, a violent schizophrenic, or, as with his claim to be a sign-language interpreter, merely purporting to be one. Asked how often he has been violent, he replied, somewhat cryptically, "A lot."

Still, South African officials are furiously pointing fingers (appropriately enough) to account for how he wound up on stage. "I do not think he was just picked up off the street. He was from a school for the deaf," Hendrietta Bogopane-Zulu, the Deputy Minister for Persons with Disability, assured the press. But the Deaf Federation of South Africa said it had previously complained about his nonsensical signing after an event last year. Mr. Jantjie was paid a grand total of \$85 for his simultaneous translation of the speeches of the U.N. secretary-general, six presidents, the head of the African Union and a dozen other dignitaries. Ms. Bogopane-Zulu notes that the going rate for signing in South Africa is \$125 to \$165. So she thinks a junior official may simply have awarded the contract to the lowest bid.

That would never happen in Washington, of course. But how heartening, as one watches the viral video of Obama droning on while, a mere foot-and-a-half away, Mr. Jantjie rubs his belly and tickles his ear, to think that the White House's usual money-no-object security operation went to the trouble of flying in Air Force One, plus the "decoy" Air Force One, plus support aircraft, plus the 120-vehicle motorcade or whatever it's up to by now, plus a bazillion Secret Service agents with reflector shades and telephone wire dangling from their ears, to shepherd POTUS into the secured venue and then stand him on stage next to an \$85-a-day violent schizophrenic. In the movie version – "In The Sign Of Fire" – grizzled maverick Clint Eastwood will be the only guy to figure it out at the last minute and hurl himself at John Malkovich, as they roll into the orchestra pit with Malkovich furiously signing "Ow!" and "Eek!" But in real life I expect they'll just double the motorcade to 240 vehicles and order up even more expensive reflector shades.

Also pondering security issues was Archbishop Desmond Tutu. He returned home from the service to find that, while he'd been out hailing Mandela as the father of the new South Africa, his house had been burgled. One suspects that Mr. Mandela, for whom a little of the garrulous archbishop went an awful long way, would have enjoyed this rather more than he ought. Speaking of enjoying themselves, back in the VIP seats President Obama, Danish Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt and British Prime Minister David Cameron carried on like Harry, Hermione and Ron, snogging in the back row during the Hogwarts Quidditch Cup presentation. As the three leaders demonstrated their hands-on approach, Michelle Obama glowered straight ahead, as stony and merciless as the 15-foot statue of apartheid architect Dr. Hendrik Verwoerd that once stood guard outside the government offices of the Orange Free State. Eventually, weary of the trilateral smooching, the First Lady switched seats and inserted herself between Barack and the vivacious Helle. How poignant that, on a day to celebrate the post-racial South Africa, the handsome young black man should have to be forcibly segregated from the cool Aryan blonde. For all the progress, as Obama himself pointed out, "our work is not yet done."

Amidst all the jollity, one man was taking things awfully seriously. Ted Cruz ducked out of the service when Raul Castro rose to speak. I confess I'm not quite sure about the etiquette of walking out during a funeral. Unlike Sen. Cruz, whom I doubt Mandela had even heard of, the Castros were old friends. It seems a little churlish to show up at the funeral of a longtime communist and complain that they've booked the president of Cuba. It would be like attending Obama's funeral and complaining that the Rev. Jeremiah Wright is officiating, and Bill Ayers is singing "How Great Thou Art." Surely, Cruz could have done what Obama and Cameron did during the longueurs and found a Scandinavian prime minister to make out with.

Alas, far from the face-pulling selfies, Mandela jokes are no laughing matter. Simon Amstell (who appears to be a comedian in the same sense that Thamsanqa Jantjie is a sign-language interpreter) visited BBC Radio and quipped that "it's so white in here Mandela would not approve." Shortly thereafter, the host apologized on air lest anyone was offended. Which they were, because Mr. Amstell himself subsequently apologized on Twitter. Neil Phillips did not get off so lightly. During the final stages of the African leader's slowly deteriorating health, Mr. Phillips, who runs the Crumbs sandwich shop in the English town of Rugeley, had gone online and complained: "My PC takes so long to shut down I've decided to call it Nelson Mandela." The Staffordshire Constabulary arrested him, seized his computers, and, in the course of an eight-hour detention, fingerprinted and DNA-swabbed him.

“There are no jokes in Islam,” Ayatollah Khomeini sternly warned, and that’s true even for its “moderate” redoubts, where Shez Cassim, a U.S. citizen from Minnesota, has languished in a Dubai jail cell since April for making a video mildly parodic of United Arab Emirates youth. But, as Mr. Phillips discovered, there are fewer jokes outside Islam, too. Once upon a time, it was the communist Eastern Europe that policed gags, as captured in Milan Kundera’s first great novel. Now even in free societies an infelicitous jest can lead to a rap sheet. In such a world, we should treasure the hilarity of the Mandela service. “Nelson Mandela stood for freedom,” his successor Jacob Zuma said. “He wanted everyone to be free.” Unfortunately, some of the crowd booed Zuma, so he’s now having them investigated for embarrassing him.

Still, let’s take Zuma at his word: Mandela wanted everyone to be free. Free to sign-translate the U.N. secretary-general’s speech into total codswallop. Free to cop a feel from the Danish prime minister. And free, for all the loftiness of the forgettable rhetoric, to relish the low comedy all around it.

Power Line

The Selfie President

by John Hinderaker

There is a reason why the infamous selfie photo is the only significant news story to emerge from Nelson Mandela’s funeral. The shot, and the story, resonate with people because they express what we already knew about Barack Obama: he is a narcissist. [Michael Ramirez](#) puts the selfie into historical context:



How a man as temperamentally unsuited to any leadership position as Barack Obama managed to become President of the United States is a question that historians will debate for many years to come.

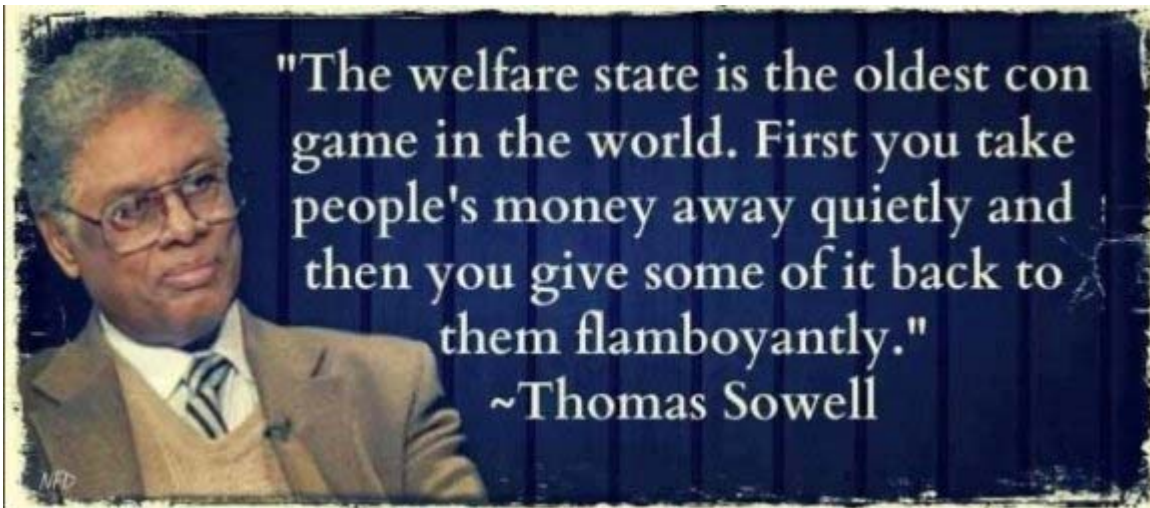


President Narcissus in action.

LEADERSHIP



Even the dog is better at it.



"The welfare state is the oldest con game in the world. First you take people's money away quietly and then you give some of it back to them flamboyantly."

~Thomas Sowell