

January 27, 2014

You would think after a series of train wrecks involving tank cars carrying Canadian crude oil, even someone as dense as the president could see the efficacy of building the Keystone XL pipeline. In addition, as Charles Krauthammer points out today we are treating Canada like Obama treats all traditional allies of our country - rudely. *Fixated as we Americans are on Canada's three most attention-getting exports — polar vortexes, Alberta clippers and the antics of Toronto's addled mayor — we've somewhat overlooked a major feature of Canada's current relations with the United States: extreme annoyance.*

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More on this from Andrew Malcolm.

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Back a few days, [Pickings](#) noted the Israeli defense minister had committed the faux pas of telling the truth. [Caroline Click](#) has more on the administration's failed Mid-East policies.

*... The only parties whose lot is improved by the Obama administration's Middle East policies are Iran, the PLO and the Muslim Brotherhood. But none of them will praise those policies, because they all hold the US in contempt.*

*This is why the Palestinian leadership continues to incite against Israel and reject the Jewish state even as the US is acting as their surrogate in talks with Israel.*

*This is why the Iranians mock the US, even though the White House just cleared the way for Iran to develop nuclear weapons, and develop its economy and has allowed it to take over Iraq and Lebanon, and defend its puppet regime in Syria.*

*This is why the Muslim Brotherhood condemns the US even as the Obama administration upended the US alliance with Egypt in order to support the Muslim Brotherhood.*

*The Obama administration has responded to these demonstrations of contempt and bad faith with extreme reticence. Either it issues written, general condemnations, or it claims, as in the case of Palestinian incitement, that it doesn't believe it is productive to publicly criticize the Palestinians.*

*Given this behavior, the Obama administration's response to Yediot Aharonot's publication of Ya'alon's private statements can be fairly describe as apoplectic. It was also mean-spirited.*

*Shortly after Yediot published his private remarks, the administration launched a full-bore public attack on Ya'alon, and by implication, the government. As White House spokesman Jay Carney put it, "The remarks of the Israeli defense minister, if accurate, are offensive and inappropriate, especially in light of everything that the United States is doing to support Israel's security needs."*

*In other words, the Obama administration just accused Israel of ingratitude.*

*But there is nothing ungrateful about Israel's treatment of the US.*

*Americans are getting the same message from allies throughout the Middle East. Under Obama, America's regional policies are so counterproductive that the US has come to be seen as the foreign policy equivalent of a drunk driver.*

*As the US's strongest ally, and also as a country that has depended for decades on US support, Israel is a passenger in the back seat of the car. On the one hand, we are happy for the ride. On the other hand, the administration's driving is endangering our survival.*

*It is only because our leaders are grateful to the US for its support that the government is going along with Kerry's ridiculous peace-processing.*

*More important, what is gratitude, exactly? Is it shutting up and watching your closest friend drive both of you over a cliff? Of course not. ...*

**Washington Examiner OpEd** focuses on the men who are dropping out of economic life.

*As a binge-TV watcher, I've relished devouring serial dramas in advertising-free gulps. But "Breaking Bad" — the story about a cancer-stricken chemistry teacher turned clandestine meth-cooking badass — didn't appeal.*

*Then Anthony Hopkins declared it an "epic work" with "the best actors I've ever seen."*

*Midway through season two, I understand why Walter White is heroic. As men increasingly check out of work, marriage, and fatherhood, it's hard not to root for a man fiercely determined to secure his family's future before dying — despite his morally abhorrent methods.*

*That there are dramatically fewer men willing and able to safeguard family prosperity is perhaps America's greatest — and most unrecognized — problem.*

*Consider Sunday's "Shattering the Glass Ceiling" discussion on ABC's "This Week." Lamenting unrealized opportunities and unsolved problems when "women aren't fully utilized," businesswoman Carly Fiorina and co-panelists were oblivious about two key facts.*

*First, two times more men than women aged 25-34 languish in their parents' basement far below the glass ceiling, according to U.S. Census data. Second, women now outperform men in nearly every measure of social, academic and vocational well-being.*

*Rather than apply Band-Aids to the cancer of chronic unemployment — like unemployment-insurance extensions and minimum-wage hikes — political elites must focus on the real problem:*

*Millions of males, especially less-educated men, are "unhitched from the engine of growth," according to a 2011 Brookings Institution report.*

*Women gained all 74,000 jobs added to payrolls in December, and among the world's seven biggest economies, America is last in the share of "prime age" males working — just behind Italy.*

*Why isn't widespread male worklessness a priority for policymakers, given the massive economic, fiscal and social costs? ...*

**Mental Floss** with background on the threats in Sochi.

*As we approach the 2014 Sochi Olympics, law enforcement officials and security experts are concerned about the prospect of so-called "black widow" terrorists, a group of female suicide bombers. But who are they? Where did they come from? How did they get such a terrifying moniker?*

*First, a bit of geography. Sochi is one of Russia's southernmost cities. Because of its subtropical climate and vast, beautiful beaches along the Black Sea, the city is a popular destination for Russians on summer vacation. Think of it as their Fort Lauderdale. And wouldn't the Winter Olympics be fun in Fort Lauderdale?*

*Sochi is located near the Caucasus Mountains. There's been war or insurgency in the Caucasus region (which stretches from the Black Sea to the Caspian Sea) for nearly three decades now, and the region has seen some of the most shocking terrorist attacks in modern history.*

*The political, economic, and cultural forces at work in the region are extremely complicated, but here are the broad strokes of the last several years. East of Sochi is Chechnya. After the Soviet Union collapsed, Chechnya declared itself a sovereign nation. This didn't go over well in Moscow, which had organized a federation of republics and constituent entities. The Russian Federation argued that Chechnya couldn't just willy-nilly throw together a government and invent a country, and refused to accept any such effort. Meanwhile, the legacy of Soviet control and a general exodus of non-ethnic-Chechens left Chechnya socially and economically crippled.*

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## **Washington Post** **[Stop jerking Canada around](#)**

by Charles Krauthammer

Fixated as we Americans are on Canada's three most attention-getting exports — polar vortexes, Alberta clippers and [the antics of Toronto's addled mayor](#) — we've somewhat overlooked a major feature of Canada's current relations with the United States: extreme annoyance.

Last week, speaking to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, [Canada's foreign minister](#) calmly but pointedly complained that the United States owes Canada a response on the Keystone XL pipeline. "We can't continue in this state of limbo," he sort of complained, in what for a placid, imperturbable Canadian passes for an explosion of volcanic rage.

Canadians may be preternaturally measured and polite, but they simply can't believe how they've been treated by President Obama — left hanging humiliatingly on an issue whose merits were settled years ago.

Canada, the Saudi Arabia of oil sands, [is committed to developing this priceless resource](#). Its natural export partner is the United States. But crossing the border requires State Department approval, which means the president decides yes or no.

After *three* years of review, the State Department found [no significant environmental risk to Keystone](#). Nonetheless, [the original route was changed](#) to assuage concerns regarding the Ogallala Aquifer. Obama withheld approval through the 2012 election. [To this day he has issued no decision](#).

The Canadians are beside themselves. After five years of manufactured delay, they need a decision one way or the other because if denied a pipeline south, they could build a pipeline west to the Pacific. China would buy their oil in a New York minute.

Yet Secretary of State [John Kerry fumblingly says](#) he is awaiting yet another environmental report. He offered no decision date.

If Obama wants to cave to his environmental left, fine. But why keep Canada in limbo? It's a show of supreme and undeserved disrespect for yet another ally. It seems not enough to have given the back of the hand to Britain, Israel, Poland and the Czech Republic, and to have [so enraged the Saudis](#) that they actually rejected a U.N. Security Council seat — disgusted as they were with this administration's remarkable combination of fecklessness and highhandedness. Must we crown this run of diplomatic malpractice with gratuitous injury to Canada, our most reliable, most congenial friend in the world?

And for what? This is not a close call. The Keystone case is almost absurdly open and shut.

Even if you swallow everything the environmentalists tell you about oil sands, the idea that blocking Keystone would prevent their development by Canada is ridiculous. Canada sees its oil sands as a natural bounty and key strategic asset. Canada will not leave it in the ground.

Where's the environmental gain in blocking Keystone? The oil will be produced and the oil will be burned. If it goes to China, the Pacific pipeline will carry the same environmental risks as a U.S. pipeline.

And Alberta oil can still go to the United States, [if not by pipeline then by rail](#), which requires no State Department approval. That would result in far more greenhouse gas emissions — exactly the opposite of what the environmentalists are seeking.

Moreover, rail can be exceedingly dangerous. Last year [a tanker train derailed and exploded](#) en route through Quebec. The fireball [destroyed half of downtown Lac-Mégantic](#), killing 47, many incinerated beyond recognition.

This isn't theoretical environmentalism. This is not a decrease in the snail darter population. This is 47 dead human beings. More recently, we've had [two rail-oil accidents](#) within the United States, one near Philadelphia and one in North Dakota.

Add to this the slam-dunk strategic case for Keystone: Canadian oil reduces our dependence on the volatile Middle East, shifting petroleum power from OPEC and the killing zones of the Middle East to North America. What more reliable source of oil could we possibly have than Canada?

Keystone has left Canada very upset, though characteristically relatively quiet. Canadians may have succeeded in sublimating every ounce of normal human hostility and unpleasantness by way of hockey fights, but that doesn't mean we should take advantage of their good manners.

The only rationale for denying the pipeline is political — to appease Obama's more extreme environmentalists. For [a president who claims not to be ideological](#), the irony is striking: Here is an easily available piece of infrastructure — privately built, costing government not a penny, creating thousands of jobs and, yes, shovel-ready — and yet the president, who's been incessantly [pushing new "infrastructure"](#) as a fundamental economic necessity, can't say yes.

Well then, Mr. President, say *something*. You owe Canada at least that. Up or down. Five years is long enough.

## **Investor's Business Daily**

### **Obama angers U.S. friends, but his bid to ruin relations with Canada is doomed**

by Andrew Malcolm

Barack Obama has achieved acrimony among numerous sectors of Americans now fighting with each other bitterly. His ongoing efforts to screw up relations with America's closest allies have enjoyed some success during these 1,830 endless days of his reign.

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But Obama's bid to ruin the U.S.-Canadian relationship is doomed to failure. Like Obama's 2000 challenge of Rep. Bobby Rush back home.

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Last week Secretary of State John "I Was for a Strike on Syria Before I Realized the President Changed My Mind" Kerry said the study is coming along.

Meanwhile, Canada, where trade makes up 45% of GDP, has twice studied and approved an alternate route to export the oil from British Columbia to China so the carbon emissions can drift back over the Pacific to the U.S.

The economic and political logic of constructing Keystone is overpowering. Let's see, build a stronger, secure, self-contained North American energy market and pay Canada or trust long treacherous sea lanes past Iran and ship billions more to shady sheikhs?

The problem is the North American route would make oil and gas energy cheaper for American consumers, the opposite of Obama's professed green goal. And it would delay the day that every American vehicle would carry its own windmill.

This week the southern portion of the Keystone pipeline, which crosses no international border and thus needs no federal approval, actually began pumping crude from overflowing storage facilities in Oklahoma to Texas. An existing pipeline leg already moves crude from Alberta to Illinois.

The international ignorance of Harvard grad Obama (no, sir, Austrians do not speak Austrian), was actually foretold during a Democrat primary debate in Chicago during the fall of 2007.

Obama, trying to suck up to union members, vowed that one of his very first acts in the White House would be to demand renegotiation of trade agreements with the president of Canada.

Which, of course, has no president. But it's OK because that Obama promise was as empty as his vow to close Guantanamo and fund millions of shovel-ready jobs and pore over every budget line-by-line and bridge the partisan divide in Washington and.....

Here's what Obama's up against in his effort to rile our North American community neighbor, or neighbour:

Yes, Canada is 10% larger than the United States with about one-tenth the population. But the two countries are each other's largest commercial partner by far, doing about \$2 billion of business every single day. Just the trade across Detroit's Ambassador Bridge to and from Windsor exceeds the total value of every shipload exchanged with all of Japan.

Contrary to popular belief, America's largest imports from Canada are not singers and NHL players. It's energy and vehicles. New England would be far darker these winter nights without a vast river of Canadian hydroelectricity. Going the other way, it's vehicles and machinery.

Canada trade and investments are responsible for more than seven million U.S. jobs, with California (832,000) and Texas (522,000) the largest beneficiaries. Even Obama's favorite BlackBerry and sport are Canadian inventions.

All these ties and friendliness will be forgotten briefly next month if, as is quite possible, the two countries' hockey teams meet again in the Gold Medal Olympic game. Obama won't be there, naturally.

Obama could fly overnight from Washington to Copenhagen to plead (unsuccessfully) for Chicago to get the 2016 Summer Olympics. But the same man could not be bothered to travel 20 miles outside the U.S. when its best friend and trading partner hosted the Winter Olympics four years ago in Vancouver. That sure showed 'em something.

## Jerusalem Post

### The truth hurts

***The only parties whose lot is improved by the Obama administration's Middle East policies are Iran, the PLO and the Muslim Brotherhood.***

by Caroline Glick

To hear it from the White House, and from Israel's leftist media, Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon is a major liability. As half the planet now knows, Ya'alon is harshly critical of US Secretary of State John Kerry's persistent efforts to force Israel to surrender its land and ability to defend itself to the PLO.

In a private conversation that Ya'alon did not expect to be made public, he criticized Kerry's so-called security plan that offers Israel advanced technology in exchange for PLO control over its eastern border. Ya'alon also rejected the notion that the PLO is interested in making peace. And he stated the inconvenient fact that PLO chief Mahmoud Abbas is only in power because Israel has security control over Judea and Samaria.

Ya'alon also said, again in a private conversation, that Kerry's razor-sharp focus on Israel and the PLO owes to an "incomprehensible obsession," and that by neurotically pushing for a deal that has no chance of being concluded or achieving peace, Kerry is exhibiting "messianic" character traits.

Ya'alon's private statements about Kerry were no harsher than public statements that the Saudis have made regarding the Obama administration's regional policies. Last November, journalist Jeffrey Goldberg interviewed Saudi Prince Alaweed bin Talal. According to Goldberg, the Saudi royal attacked US President Barack Obama "with a directness that would make Benjamin Netanyahu blush."

Among other things, Alaweed said, "There's no confidence in the Obama administration doing the right thing with Iran. We're really concerned – Israel, Saudi Arabia, the Middle Eastern countries about this."

Alaweed questioned Obama's motives in negotiating with Iran, saying the president is "wounded," and appeasing Iran in order to win back the support of Democratic lawmakers who oppose Obamacare. In his words, "Thirty-nine members of his own party in the House have already moved away from him on Obamacare. That's scary for him."

It is hard to think of harsher criticism than Alaweed's. And yet, the administration had nothing to say about it. Neither he, nor his fellow Saudi prince Bandar Bin Sultan al-Saud, the Saudi



intelligence chief who said last month that he is scaling back intelligence cooperation with the US, was personally attacked by the administration.

No umbrage was taken at their statements.

And again, their public statements were no less harsh than what Ya'alon said in a private conversation about Kerry.

Neither the Israeli people, nor the US's traditional Sunni Arab allies support Obama's policies in the region. They believe Obama's policies are dangerous for them, and antithetical to US interests.

Indeed, Ya'alon's assessments of the administration are not only in line with regional opinion, the vast majority of Israelis share his views.

According to a poll published last week by Makor Rishon, 80 percent of Israelis think that Kerry's peace plan has no chance of bringing peace. Seventy-three percent oppose his security plan for the Jordan Valley. And 53% object to the entire premise of his talks – that Israel should surrender almost all of Judea and Samaria to the PLO.

Moreover, the average man on the Israeli street sees the destruction wreaked by the Obama administration's policy throughout the Middle East, and he cannot figure out what Kerry wants with us.

Syria is a humanitarian and geopolitical nightmare with global implications.

Rather than do everything possible to strengthen moderate forces in Syria, like the Kurds, and cultivate, train and arm regime opponents who can fight both the Assad regime and al-Qaida rebels, Kerry has devoted himself to demanding that Israel release more Palestinian terrorist murderers from prison.

Rather than protect Lebanon from the predations of Iran and Syria to ensure its independence, Kerry is holding marathon meetings with Netanyahu to try to coerce him into helping the PLO build another Jew-free terrorist state in Judea, Samaria and Jerusalem.

Rather than try to blunt the growing power of Hezbollah – Iran's terrorist army – in Syria, the US's policy is inviting Iran, the party most responsible for the war, to join the phony peacemakers club at Geneva.

As for the rest of the region, from Tunisia to Bahrain, from Egypt and Libya to Iraq, and Yemen, Kerry and the Obama administration as a whole are content to watch on the sidelines as al-Qaida reemerges as a significant force, and as Iran undermines stability in country after country.

Then of course, there is Iran itself, and its nuclear weapons program.

After the six-party nuclear deal with Iran was concluded on Monday, Iran's leaders declared victory over the US. They boasted that the most dangerous components of their nuclear weapons program are unaffected by the deal they just concluded with the Americans. They laid a wreath on the grave of Hezbollah arch-terrorist Imad Mughniyeh, who masterminded the 1983 bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut that killed 243 US servicemen. And they forced

Lebanon's Sunnis to accept a Hezbollah-dominated government.

For its part, the Obama administration continues to insist that the greatest threat to peace is the US Congress, because its members wish to pass an additional sanctions bill against Iran that would only come into force in a year if the Iranians do not abide by the agreement.

The only parties whose lot is improved by the Obama administration's Middle East policies are Iran, the PLO and the Muslim Brotherhood. But none of them will praise those policies, because they all hold the US in contempt.

This is why the Palestinian leadership continues to incite against Israel and reject the Jewish state even as the US is acting as their surrogate in talks with Israel.

This is why the Iranians mock the US, even though the White House just cleared the way for Iran to develop nuclear weapons, and develop its economy and has allowed it to take over Iraq and Lebanon, and defend its puppet regime in Syria.

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The Obama administration has responded to these demonstrations of contempt and bad faith with extreme reticence. Either it issues written, general condemnations, or it claims, as in the case of Palestinian incitement, that it doesn't believe it is productive to publicly criticize the Palestinians.

Given this behavior, the Obama administration's response to Yediot Aharonot's publication of Ya'alon's private statements can be fairly describe as apoplectic. It was also mean-spirited.

Shortly after Yediot published his private remarks, the administration launched a full-bore public attack on Ya'alon, and by implication, the government. As White House spokesman Jay Carney put it, "The remarks of the Israeli defense minister, if accurate, are offensive and inappropriate, especially in light of everything that the United States is doing to support Israel's security needs."

In other words, the Obama administration just accused Israel of ingratitude.

But there is nothing ungrateful about Israel's treatment of the US.

Americans are getting the same message from allies throughout the Middle East. Under Obama, America's regional policies are so counterproductive that the US has come to be seen as the foreign policy equivalent of a drunk driver.

As the US's strongest ally, and also as a country that has depended for decades on US support, Israel is a passenger in the back seat of the car. On the one hand, we are happy for the ride. On the other hand, the administration's driving is endangering our survival.

It is only because our leaders are grateful to the US for its support that the government is going along with Kerry's ridiculous peace-processing.

More important, what is gratitude, exactly? Is it shutting up and watching your closest friend

drive both of you over a cliff? Of course not.

To be a good ally – and a grateful one – requires you to warn your ally when his actions are ill-advised and dangerous. And that is precisely what Israel has done. Israel's behavior is the definition of proper behavior.

Aside from being dead wrong, the anti-Semitic undertones of the administration's castigation of the Jewish state as ungrateful are hard to miss.

State Department spokeswoman Jennifer Psaki lashed out at Ya'alon saying, "Secretary Kerry and his team, including General John Allen, have been working day and night to try and promote a secure peace for Israel, because of the secretary's deep concern for Israel's future."

These words, and nearly identical ones intoned by Carney, play into the anti-Jewish stereotype according to which Jews are quarrelsome but hapless wretches.

The flipside of this stereotype is the all-powerful Jewish conspiracy that manipulates non-Jews into doing its dirty work. That slur reverberated strongly in the administration's condemnations of Netanyahu and US Jewish groups for advocating the passage of additional sanctions against Iran.

In both cases, the White House's message is the same. Unlike other groups critical of US policies, Israel and supporters of the Jewish state have no right to speak.

Presumably the administration's resort to these anti-Jewish tropes is inadvertent, but the fact that they have been used repeatedly is deeply disconcerting, and bespeaks, at a minimum, alarming insensitivity.

Under tremendous pressure from the administration, Ya'alon apologized for his leaked remarks and Netanyahu took to the Knesset podium to praise Israel's ties to the US and thank the US for its support for Israel.

But this was not enough for the Obama administration.

They want Netanyahu disavow Ya'alon's thoughts and withdraw the defense minister from the negotiations.

According to AFP, a senior State Department official said, "We expect the prime minister to put this right by expressing publicly his disagreement with the statements against Secretary Kerry, the negotiations with the Palestinians and Kerry's commitment to Israel's security."

For his part, Kerry said he will only speak to Israeli leaders who agree with him. In his words, "I will work with the willing participants who are committed to peace and to this process."

In other words, the Obama administration is using Ya'alon's private remarks, leaked by an unidentified source to a newspaper with an anti-Netanyahu editorial agenda, as a means to neutralize the most powerful voice opposing Kerry's obsessive, messianic behavior in the Israeli government. They want to use American umbrage at the tone of Ya'alon's private statements to upend Israeli policy and force Israel to embrace the substance of the Obama administration's delusional and destructive actions. And to advance this goal, they are using anti-Semitic signals

to castigate Israel and deny it the right to speak on its own behalf.

Israelis love America. And for that reason, it is compelled to do what anyone strapped into the back seat of a car driven by a drunk would do: try to convince him to stop driving. As a grateful ally of the United States, Israel should publicly tell the Obama administration that what Ya'alon said in private is the truth.

And yes, sometimes the truth hurts.

## Examiner

### On masculinity and the War on Poverty

by Melanie Sturm

As a binge-TV watcher, I've relished devouring serial dramas in advertising-free gulps. But "Breaking Bad" — the story about a cancer-stricken chemistry teacher turned clandestine meth-cooking badass — didn't appeal.

Then Anthony Hopkins declared it an "epic work" with "the best actors I've ever seen."

Midway through season two, I understand why Walter White is heroic. As men increasingly check out of work, marriage, and fatherhood, it's hard not to root for a man fiercely determined to secure his family's future before dying — despite his morally abhorrent methods.

That there are dramatically fewer men willing and able to safeguard family prosperity is perhaps America's greatest — and most unrecognized — problem.

Consider Sunday's "Shattering the Glass Ceiling" discussion on ABC's "This Week." Lamenting unrealized opportunities and unsolved problems when "women aren't fully utilized," businesswoman Carly Fiorina and co-panelists were oblivious about two key facts.

First, two times more men than women aged 25-34 languish in their parents' basement far below the glass ceiling, according to U.S. Census data. Second, women now outperform men in nearly every measure of social, academic and vocational well-being.

Rather than apply Band-Aids to the cancer of chronic unemployment — like unemployment-insurance extensions and minimum-wage hikes — political elites must focus on the real problem:

Millions of males, especially less-educated men, are "unhitched from the engine of growth," according to a 2011 Brookings Institution report.

Women gained all 74,000 jobs added to payrolls in December, and among the world's seven biggest economies, America is last in the share of "prime age" males working — just behind Italy.

Why isn't widespread male worklessness a priority for policymakers, given the massive economic, fiscal and social costs?

Fifty years after President Johnson declared the War on Poverty “to give our fellow citizens a fair chance to develop their own capacities,” we’ve spent an inflation-adjusted \$20.7 trillion on 80-plus welfare programs — \$916 billion, or \$9,000 per beneficiary, in 2012.

Yet 2013 ended with rates of government dependency and chronic joblessness near 50-year highs. Meanwhile, though inflation-adjusted GDP-per-capita has more than doubled since 1969, men’s median annual earnings dropped 27 percent, according to Brookings.

Since 1960, the percentage of married Americans plunged from 72 percent to 51 percent, while the rate of unwed motherhood skyrocketed from 4 percent to 41 percent, causing 24 million boys to be raised in fatherless homes — ominous trends considering children of single mothers experience less economic mobility.

As the New York Times explained, the ensuing vicious cycle means less successful men “are less attractive as partners, so some women are choosing to raise children by themselves, in turn often producing sons who are less successful and attractive as partners.”

Two recent books, both “cries-de-coeur” in support of men, chronicle the male achievement gap and propose remedies — *The War Against Boys*, by American Enterprise Institute scholar Christina Hoff Sommers, and *Men on Strike*, by psychologist Helen Smith.

Citing myriad studies, Sommers details how educational reforms and ideologies that deny gender differences have created hostile environments for rough-and-tumble boys, causing a serious academic achievement gap.

Out: structured, competitive, teacher-directed classrooms that best support boys’ learning and outlets for natural rambunctiousness, including conflict-oriented play like “Cops and Robbers.” Last year, 7-year-old Coloradan Alex Smith was suspended for throwing an imaginary grenade at “bad guys.”

In: behavior-modifying drugs designed to make boys attentive and controlled.

Distressingly, boy-enthraling, job-directed schools — like Aviation High School in New York, which specializes in teaching and graduating at-risk kids — are under assault because females are under-represented.

Sommers laments that “male-specific interventions” — including masculine readings, single-sex learning opportunities, and teachers trained in boy-friendly pedagogy — “invites passionate and organized opposition” from feminist groups.

As young men disengage from school, alarming numbers are opting-out of post-secondary education, considered by Sommers the “passport to the American Dream.”

Women disproportionately possess these passports, having earned post-secondary degrees in the following percentages: associate’s (62), bachelor’s (58), master’s (60), doctorates (52).

Expanding on Sommers’ argument, Smith taps into her counseling experience to explain that by opting-out of family life, risk-averse men are responding rationally to social institutions that offer fewer rewards and more costs.

The pendulum has swung too far, Smith argues, when male victims of statutory rape and paternity fraud are made liable for child support, or when collegiate men are assumed sexual predators before proven innocent (see the Duke lacrosse case).

America's young men aren't "Breaking Bad" drug dealers, but they are suffering bad breaks in a society rife with misguided policies.

The answer is not to "raise boys like we raise girls," as Gloria Steinem suggested, but to recognize that, while the sexes are equal, they're naturally different — and that's beautiful.

Every human being arrives on earth with unique gifts, and our short life's mission is to realize them. Shouldn't society's goal be to enable this process?

After all, isn't closing the gender gap the true definition of feminism?

*Melanie Sturm is an opinion columnist with the Aspen Times.*

## **Mental Floss**

### **Who Are the "Black Widows" Threatening the Olympics?**

by D. B. Grady

As we approach the 2014 Sochi Olympics, law enforcement officials and security experts are concerned about the prospect of so-called "black widow" terrorists, a group of female suicide bombers. But who are they? Where did they come from? How did they get such a terrifying moniker?

First, a bit of geography. Sochi is one of Russia's southernmost cities. Because of its subtropical climate and vast, beautiful beaches along the Black Sea, the city is a popular destination for Russians on summer vacation. Think of it as their Fort Lauderdale. And wouldn't the Winter Olympics be fun in Fort Lauderdale?

Sochi is located near the Caucasus Mountains. There's been war or insurgency in the Caucasus region (which stretches from the Black Sea to the Caspian Sea) for nearly three decades now, and the region has seen some of the most shocking terrorist attacks in modern history.

The political, economic, and cultural forces at work in the region are extremely complicated, but here are the broad strokes of the last several years. East of Sochi is Chechnya. After the Soviet Union collapsed, Chechnya declared itself a sovereign nation. This didn't go over well in Moscow, which had organized a federation of republics and constituent entities. The Russian Federation argued that Chechnya couldn't just willy-nilly throw together a government and invent a country, and refused to accept any such effort. Meanwhile, the legacy of Soviet control and a general exodus of non-ethnic-Chechens left Chechnya socially and economically crippled.

The whole thing resulted in the First Chechen War, which Chechnya more or less "won," except for its tens of thousands of casualties and its obliterated infrastructure. In the war's aftermath, the vaguely independent Chechnya became a lawless zone of kidnapping rings and gunrunning. All the while, Islamic fundamentalism there flourished. After Chechen separatists killed hundreds

of people in a series of terrorist attacks on apartment buildings and a shopping mall, Russia said enough is enough and mounted an invasion. So began the Second Chechen War.

After bitter fighting, Grozny, the capital of Chechnya, was ground into dust. Meanwhile, Russia bombed the hell out of nearby mountain ranges with thermobaric weapons. After a decade of fighting and thousands of casualties on both sides, Russia won.

The insurgency has not stopped, however, and has bled into nearby Dagestan. The brutality of insurgents can reach an unimaginable scale. For example, in 2004, on the first day of school—called Knowledge Day—a group of extremist Islamic separatists using paramilitary tactics took control of a school in the small Russian town of Beslan in North Ossetia. The details are too horrific to recount here. Eleven hundred people were taken hostage, including nearly 800 children. Three days later 186 of the children were dead, 330 hostages total. Nearly everyone sustained injury. Chechen terrorists don't play around, and everyone understands this—especially those responsible for security in Sochi, which is uncomfortably close to the violence (about 250 miles).

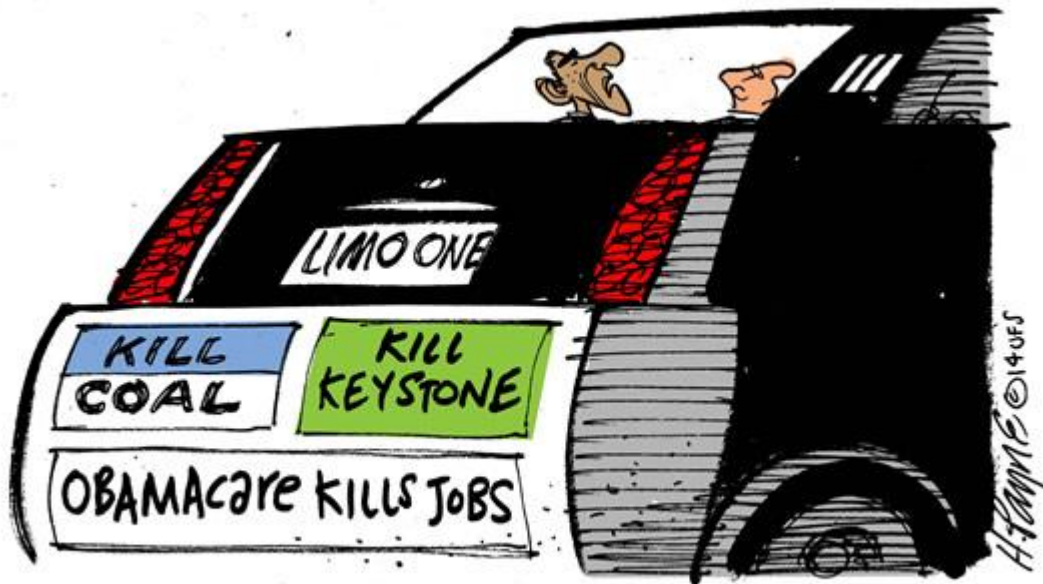
Three weeks ago, suicide bombers went on a tear in the city of Volgograd, with one detonating on a bus and one at a train station, killing 34. Following the attacks, a video was posted on an extremist website in which the bombers offer this warning: "We've prepared a present for you and all tourists who come [to Sochi]... If you will hold the Olympics, you'll get a present from us for the Muslim blood that's been spilled."

This is where we get to the black widows. While the details vary, the general consensus is that militant groups recruit widows of men killed by the Russians in the two brutal Chechen Wars, and in battles elsewhere in the Caucasus region. The widows are trained as suicide bombers and sent into areas to seek their revenge. Because they don't fit the young, male stereotype that security experts have come to expect of a terrorist, black widows are more effectively able to blend into a crowd and infiltrate an area. (By way of makeup and fashion, women also have a greater advantage when it comes to disguising themselves.) The first known black widow struck in 2000.



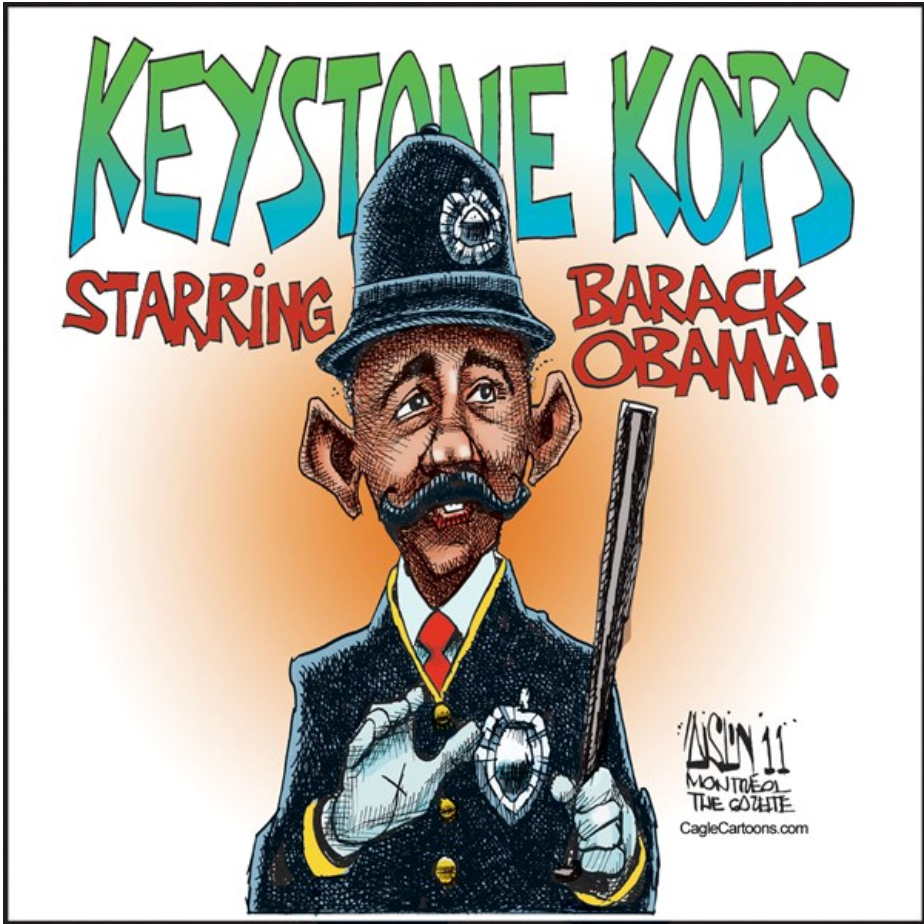
This week, Russia's federal security service released wanted posters of four black widows thought to be involved in a plot to disrupt the torch relay or the Olympic Games. Likewise, posters of the plot masterminds have been distributed. Though Russia has promised a "ring of steel" around Sochi that consists of 40,000 security personnel, the wanted posters suggest a fear that the ring has been breached. Because Russian spies have reportedly had little luck penetrating small, regional terrorist cells, the Volgograd video warning is not to be lightly dismissed.

Somewhere in the throngs of the biggest event in the world, there are four black widows, each acting independently, each driven by revenge. If there is sound intelligence behind those wanted posters, four versus 40,000 present perilous odds indeed.



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