

January 8, 2014

Here's Don Imus as he opened his show this morning,

"And now Bob Gates, former secretary of defense, has a book that would give you an erection. He drops a safe on the president. ... This guy is the worst president, I can't even think of a worse president." The new Gates book will be in the news so we have a little bit today and then more starting next week. [Paul Mirengoff](#) of Power Line says this just confirms what we all thought about cynical Dem politicians.

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More from [Steve Hayward](#).

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Last on this subject for now from Seth Mandel.

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*But, remember this is Hillary Clinton we are talking about. And, the criticism that has always haunted her is that everything she does is infused with politics — that there is no core set of beliefs within her but rather just political calculation massed upon political calculation. Remember that she began slipping in the 2008 Democratic primary when her opponents seized on an overly political answer on giving drivers' licenses to illegal immigrants during a debate in late 2007.*

*Gates's version of why Clinton opposed the surge fits perfectly into this existing good-politics-makes-good-policy narrative about the former secretary of state. And that's what makes it dangerous for her — and why you can be sure she (or her people) will (and must) dispute Gates's recollection quickly and definitively.*

*Whether it hurts Clinton might depend largely on who runs against her in the Democratic primary. But he's right that the reputation of both Clintons has always been not to say a single word that hasn't been focus-grouped into the ground. If Clinton was hoping her time as secretary of state would temper that reputation, the Gates memoir is yet another example of how difficult it can be for a politician to shake an entrenched narrative, especially one, like this, that is accurate.*

*The Post story isn't kind to Biden either. (It's brutal toward the Obama White House in general, but Obama has no more presidential elections ahead of him.) ...*

Larry Sabato launched his column at Politico with the teasing thought the GOP could win both houses next November.

*Another midterm election beckons, and over the next 10 months we'll see headlines about a thousand supposedly critical developments—the "game changers" and the "tipping points." But we all know there aren't a thousand powerful drivers of the vote. I'd argue that three factors are paramount: the president, the economy and the election playing field. And, at least preliminarily, those three factors seem to be pointing toward Republican gains in both houses in the 2014 midterms. ...*

*... But Obama's popularity has sagged badly in his fifth year. While some unforeseen event in 2014 might add some points to his job approval average, the odds are against a full restoration; it's just as likely Obama's polling average, currently in the low 40s, will decline further—though Obama may have a relatively high floor because of consistent backing from minority voters and other elements of the Democratic base.*

*As 2014 begins, the environment for the Democrats in this election year is not good. The botched, chaotic rollout of the Affordable Care Act is the obvious cause, but it is broader than that: the typical sixth-year unease that produces a “send-them-a-message” election. Fortunately for Democrats, the GOP-initiated shutdown of the federal government in October has tempered the public’s desire for a shift to the Republican side, too. “None of the above” might win a few races in November if voters had the choice. ...*

**Walter Russell Mead** posts on the 10 biggest winners of 2013. One thing the winners have in common is they are arrayed against president bystander. Meaning they have little competition.

*Looking back at 2013, some actors on the international scene, both state and non-state, notched up significant achievements and advances. Others didn’t do as well. In developing our list of the world’s biggest winners and losers in 2013, AI didn’t make moral judgments. This is a realist calculation, looking at who gained power during the year and who lost.*

### **1. President Vladimir Putin and Russia**

*The champagne corks were popping in the Kremlin after a banner 2013. With Edward Snowden ensconced in Moscow, Putin can celebrate Russia’s biggest embarrassment of the United States since the fall of the Soviet Union. But that’s only the beginning. Russia’s client Assad defied bloodcurdling White House threats of bombing raids and demands that “Assad must go” in Russia’s biggest geopolitical victory over the United States since Brezhnev was in power. As icing on the cake, a desperate, fumbling White House had to accept a Russian proposal to escape from the trap President Obama built for himself. Russian foreign policy makers hadn’t had this much fun since the Bay of Pigs. Finally, to complete the Kremlin’s annus mirabilis, a clueless European Union lost out to Russia in a battle to bring Ukraine into a trade association with the rich western bloc. What makes this string of impressive victories even more impressive is that President Putin is playing with a weak hand. His economy is in trouble, his army is rife with corruption, his population is in decline, and his country faces a growing Chinese superpower to the east and a growing threat from terrorists in the south. Underfunded, underequipped, and underrespected, Vladimir Putin danced rings around Barack Obama, John Kerry and Angela Merkel this year. Western stupidity is his chief strategic asset, and in 2013 at least, there was a lot of that going around.*

### **2. Iran**

*Close behind Vladimir Putin as the biggest winner of 2013 comes the Islamic Republic of Iran. ...*

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## Power Line

### Democrats' criminally cynical handling of war and peace issues confirmed

by Paul Mirengoff

Robert Gates, Secretary of Defense under Presidents Bush and Obama, has written a memoir. According to [Bob Woodward](#), Gates says that by early 2010 he (Gates) had concluded that the president “doesn’t believe in his own strategy, and doesn’t consider the war to be his. For him, it’s all about getting out.”

Gates adds that Obama didn’t just have doubts about the policy he had implemented, under which a significant number of American forces were sent to fight (and inevitably) die in Afghanistan. Obama was “skeptical if not outright convinced [his strategy] would fail.”

Gates never doubted Obama’s support for the troops; “only his support for their mission.” But it was Obama who gave them that mission.

Woodward describes Gates’ report as one of the more serious charges that a defense secretary could make against a commander in chief sending forces into combat. That’s an understatement. Expending American blood on behalf of a strategy one has devised but doesn’t believe in is despicable, if not criminal.

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Gates reveals other similarly despicable behavior by both Obama and Hillary Clinton. He writes:

Hillary told [Obama] that her opposition to the [2007] surge in Iraq had been political because she was facing him in the Iowa primary. . . . The president conceded vaguely that opposition to the Iraq surge had been political.

Gates was surprised when he heard this conversation. But the only surprising thing is that Obama and Clinton had it with Gates present. Modern Democrats consistently make decisions about war and peace based on political calculation, rather than on what’s best for America.

Bill Clinton set the tone when he [said](#), in response to a question about how he would have voted on the First Gulf War, that he would have voted with the majority [i.e., in favor of going to war] if the vote was close, but that he agreed with the arguments the minority made.

There was a time, I’m pretty sure, when votes on matters of war and peace — the most important ones a legislator ever casts — were based solely on the merits. But for modern Democrats, that notion is hopelessly outdated.

Flash forward to the vote on authorizing the second war with Iraq. Hillary Clinton, John Kerry, and many other Democrats voted in favor. Was this because they believed the U.S. should spend blood and treasure to oust Saddam Hussein? Don’t be silly. The vote was politically

motivated. Public support for going to war was high, as was the probability of success. So prospective presidential candidates like Clinton and Kerry weren't willing to say "no."

Barack Obama said no, but he was in an entirely different political position. Obama was plotting his rise in Illinois Democratic politics, a decidedly left-wing affair. It was in his interest at that time to take an antiwar position. Later, when the war initially went well, he backed away from that stance, only to re-embrace it when things went south. Peter Wehner has [documented this](#).

## **Power Line** **[The Hell of Gates](#)** by Steve Hayward

So the first of what has become a pastime of recent two-term presidencies is out today: a critical memoir from a senior cabinet official. Former defense secretary Bob Gates has a memoir coming out that looks to be very hard on Obama, but perhaps even harder on Obama's would-be successors Joe Biden and Hillary.

Of Slow-Joe Biden, [Gates writes](#) that "I think he has been wrong on nearly every major foreign policy and national security issue over the past four decades," and that he nearly resigned in 2009 over Obama's dithering over Afghanistan.

As usual, Bob Woodward seems to have [the inside track](#) on Gates's forthcoming book, noting that the book "reflects outright contempt for Vice President Joe Biden and many of Obama's top aides."

The most shocking part of Woodward's report is this passage, buried well down in the piece:

"Hillary told the president that her opposition to the [2007] surge in Iraq had been political because she was facing him in the Iowa primary. . . . The president conceded vaguely that opposition to the Iraq surge had been political. To hear the two of them making these admissions, and in front of me, was as surprising as it was dismaying."

Not that we needed more evidence that liberals are about politics over principle and the national interest.

The *Wall Street Journal* is out with [an excerpt](#) from the book.

## **Contentions** **[Bob Gates vs. the White House](#)** by Seth Mandel

After publishing the latest in its series of stories that seemed designed to help burnish Hillary Clinton's reputation ahead of the 2016 election, the *New York Times's* effort had become so transparent, and it had been called out so noticeably, that editorial page editor Andrew

Rosenthal felt compelled to deny it. He [wrote](#), “let me be clear: We have not chosen Mrs. Clinton.”

Noted. But Vice President Joe Biden might be among those stifling a laugh at Rosenthal’s assertion. Today both the [Washington Post](#) and [New York Times](#) published revelations from former Secretary of Defense Bob Gates’s forthcoming memoir. The *Post*’s account, written by Bob Woodward, notes that Clinton apparently admitted to President Obama that her opposition to the “surge” was pure politics, since Obama was opposed to the surge and they were in competition at the time. Picking up from that, Woodward’s *Post* colleague Chris Cillizza [speculates](#) on how the excerpt could harm Clinton’s prospects:

But, remember this is Hillary Clinton we are talking about. And, the criticism that has always haunted her is that everything she does is infused with politics — that there is no core set of beliefs within her but rather just political calculation massed upon political calculation. Remember that she began slipping in the 2008 Democratic primary when her opponents seized on an [overly political answer on giving drivers’ licenses to illegal immigrants during a debate in late 2007](#).

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The *Post* story isn’t kind to Biden either. (It’s brutal toward the Obama White House in general, but Obama has no more presidential elections ahead of him.) Gates accuses Biden of “poisoning the well” against the military, and when Biden and Donilon tried to order Gates around, he apparently responded: “The last time I checked, neither of you are in the chain of command.” The Obama administration was notoriously insular and incurious about the world outside them. But quotes like this, coming from a former defense secretary, still sting:

It got so bad during internal debates over whether to intervene in Libya in 2011 that Gates says he felt compelled to deliver a “rant” because the White House staff was “talking about military options with the president without Defense being involved.”

Gates says his instructions to the Pentagon were: “Don’t give the White House staff and [national security staff] too much information on the military options. They don’t understand it, and ‘experts’ like Samantha Power will decide when we should move militarily.”

The *Times*, however, goes easier on Clinton and tougher on Biden with its quotes, including this uppercut:

Mr. Gates calls Mr. Biden “a man of integrity,” but he questions the vice president’s judgment. “I think he has been wrong on nearly every major foreign policy and national security issue over the past four decades,” Mr. Gates writes.

I suppose it can be argued that the *Post*’s lack of interest in examining how these revelations might derail a Biden presidential candidacy is its own sort of pro-Clinton tilt. The implication is that only one of those candidates has prospects worth protecting (or derailing), and it isn’t Biden.

Unless the reporters who read advance copies of the book missed something juicier, nothing in Gates’s memoir seems likely to spoil anyone’s presidential aspirations, and I doubt Gates has any interest in doing so anyway. Picking out excerpts and anecdotes can easily skew the perception of the book, especially before the public has had a chance to read it. But the splash being made by these (mostly unsurprising) insider claims is a testament to the credibility Gates has earned over his distinguished career, and suggests the considerable authority his account of these last few years will carry.

## Politico

### [Republicans Really Could Win It All This Year](#)

*A definitive guide to the 2014 elections from our new columnist.*

by Larry J. Sabato

Another midterm election beckons, and over the next 10 months we’ll see headlines about a thousand supposedly critical developments—the “game changers” and the “tipping points.” But we all know there aren’t a thousand powerful drivers of the vote. I’d argue that three factors are paramount: the president, the economy and the election playing field. And, at least preliminarily, those three factors seem to be pointing toward Republican gains in both houses in the 2014 midterms.

Why?

**1. The president.** His job approval numbers are perhaps the best indicator of the public’s overall political orientation at any given time, a kind of summary statistic that takes everything at the national level into account. In a large majority of cases, the president’s party does poorly in midterms, especially the second midterm of a two-term administration. It’s a rare president who doesn’t make enough mistakes by his sixth year to generate a disproportionate turnout among his opponents—thus producing a political correction at the polls. Presidents Dwight Eisenhower in 1958, Lyndon Johnson in 1966, Richard Nixon/Gerald Ford in 1974, Ronald Reagan in 1986 and George W. Bush in 2006 all experienced significant corrections in their sixth-year elections.

Still, this doesn’t always happen. Presidents Franklin Roosevelt in 1934 and Bush in 2002 managed to gain a few House seats, but this was in their first midterm. The Democrats lost no Senate seats and actually picked up a few in the House in 1998, President Bill Clinton’s second midterm.

President Barack Obama might take some heart from the Clinton example, but only up to a point. Like Clinton in 1994, Obama was unpopular enough by 2010 that Democrats lost the House in a landslide. That and partisan redistricting—a tactic engaged in by both parties but currently tilted to the GOP—reduces Republican chances for a House seat sweep in 2014 because there simply aren't many additional seats available for Republicans, barring a tidal wave of voter anger even larger than 2010.

But Obama's popularity has sagged badly in his fifth year. While some unforeseen event in 2014 might add some points to his job approval average, the odds are against a full restoration; it's just as likely Obama's polling average, currently in the low 40s, will decline further—though Obama may have a relatively high floor because of consistent backing from minority voters and other elements of the Democratic base.

As 2014 begins, the environment for the Democrats in this election year is not good. The botched, chaotic rollout of the Affordable Care Act is the obvious cause, but it is broader than that: the typical sixth-year unease that produces a “send-them-a-message” election. Fortunately for Democrats, the GOP-initiated shutdown of the federal government in October has tempered the public's desire for a shift to the Republican side, too. “None of the above” might win a few races in November if voters had the choice.

**2. The economy, but mainly if it's bad.** Eisenhower's 57 percent approval rating couldn't prevent Republicans from losing 47 House seats and 13 Senate seats in 1958 because of a shaky economy. GDP growth had contracted by an astounding 10.4 percent in the first quarter of that year, though it rebounded later in the year. More recently, there was the 2006 election; while most analysts thought the Democratic takeover of Congress that year was mainly about Bush's war in Iraq, the economy wasn't performing on all cylinders. GDP growth in the second and third quarters of 2006 was an anemic 1.6 percent and 0.1 percent, respectively. The economy, still reeling from the 2008 economic near-collapse, was also the root cause of the Democrats' 2010 debacle.

## **Midterm Madness**

As a general rule, the president's party does poorly in midterm elections. Especially the second midterm of a two-term administration.

MIDTERM	PRESIDENT	HOUSE	SENATE
1946	Truman	-55	-12
1950	Truman	-29	-6
1954	Eisenhower	-18	-1
1958	Eisenhower	-47	-13
1962	Kennedy	-5	3
1966	Johnson	-47	-4
1970	Nixon	-12	3
1974	Ford	-48	-5
1978	Carter	-15	-3
1982	Reagan	-26	1
1986	Reagan	-5	-8
1990	G.H.W. Bush	-7	-1
1994	Clinton	-54	-10
1998	Clinton	4	0
2002	G.W. Bush	8	1
2006	G.W. Bush	-30	-6
2010	Obama	-63	-6

But in politics the converse does not always prove the rule; in fact, a *good* economy doesn't seem to help the president's party much in many midterm elections, with 1950, 1966 and 1986 being strong examples. So while economic hard times are likely to hit a president's party hardest, it may be that restless voters shift their concerns and unhappiness about a president to other topics in the absence of economic woes. So even if the economy continues to improve, Obama and the Democrats might not reap an electoral benefit.

**3. The electoral playing field.** How many vulnerable seats are there in the House for the president's party? This is mainly a result of prior elections. A presidential victory with coattails (think 1936, 1948, 1964 and 2008) results in a party winning lots of vulnerable seats that can be swept away when the tides change in subsequent midterms. The Democrats lost their weaker members in 2010 and failed to add many seats in 2012; these disappointments protect them from drastic House losses this coming November.

The Senate is a different story. There is no such thing as a typical Senate election. These high-profile contests are idiosyncratic, driven by distinctive circumstances, sometimes quirky candidates and massive spending. A hidden determinant is the division of the Senate into three classes—one-third is elected every two years, making the combination of competitive Senate seats unpredictable and ever shifting, unlike in the heavily gerrymandered House. One party is

usually favored to gain seats from the outset, thanks to the pattern of retirements as well as the structure of the Senate class on the ballot.

So: How many Democratic Blue or Republican Red seats are there in an election year? How many incumbents are running, and did any senators holding seats in states favoring the opposite party step aside? How strong has the candidate recruitment been in both parties? Generally speaking, this year's Senate slate strongly favors the Republicans.

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**At this early stage**, the combination of these three factors suggests a good election year for the GOP. The president is a Democrat and his approval is weak. The economy may be improving, based on GDP growth ([4.1 percent in the third quarter](#)), but voters [still don't believe](#) their *personal* economy, at least, has picked up much. Instead, the major national issue of the moment is Obamacare, which at this point is a loser for Democrats. The structure of the election in the House and Senate also bends in the GOP direction.

Let's translate that general outlook into concrete totals for 2014.

**The House:** In 35 of the 38 midterms conducted since the start of the Civil War, the president's party has lost ground in the U.S. House, and never has a president's party netted anywhere close to the 17 seats the Democrats would need to win the House this year. History alone argues that the Democrats' attempt to take back the House is effectively without precedent.

Other metrics also suggest that the Democrats are a long shot. Averages of the House generic ballot—the poll question that measures whether voters support a Republican or a Democrat in their House district—show essentially a tie ([RealClearPolitics](#)) or Republicans up slightly ([HuffPost Pollster](#)). A [model by Emory University's Alan Abramowitz](#) projects that Democrats will need an enormous generic-ballot polling lead—possibly as much as 13 percent—to win House control in 2014. With the current polling, Abramowitz's model estimates a gain of roughly five to 10 seats for the Republicans.

Despite House retirements that have disproportionately gone the Democrats' way and made some fairly safe GOP seats very competitive, a smallish Republican gain seems the likeliest outcome in the House, and in few if any conceivable scenarios could the Democrats score a 17-seat net gain. The GOP will have to try mightily to kick away their House majority. It takes some imagination to conjure up something more foolish than the October shutdown for harming Republican interests, but that's what would be required, and then some.

Perhaps more interesting to the House long term is whether Democrats can capture a few generally Republican but now open suburban/exurban seats in northern Virginia, central New Jersey and greater Tampa. With much of Appalachia and the South apparently closed to Democrats at the moment, these seats are probably necessary pieces of a future Democratic House majority.

**The Senate:** Democrats are quick to admit, at least privately, that 2014's lineup is a terrible Senate map for them. These Senate seats were last on the ballot in 2008, when the winds were at the Democrats' backs and Republicans were demoralized by President George W. Bush's unpopularity and the economic crisis. Conditions are quite different now. President Obama's

average percentage of the two-party 2012 vote in these states was just 46.6 percent, [worst among the three Senate classes](#). Democratic senators currently represent seven states that Mitt Romney won: Alaska, Arkansas, Louisiana, Montana, North Carolina, South Dakota and West Virginia. Meanwhile, the only Republican who represents an Obama state on the 2014 list is the virtually unbeatable Sen. Susan Collins of Maine.

In 2014 the Senate map unmistakably favors Republicans—although they have recent experience in throwing away their inherent advantages. The GOP almost automatically inherits the Democratic seats held by Sens. Tim Johnson and Jay Rockefeller in the red states of South Dakota and West Virginia, with a better-than-even chance for the Montana seat of Max Baucus (and his probable appointed Democratic successor, Lt. Gov. John Walsh). At the moment, the most competitive Senate general election races involving incumbents are in GOP-leaning states. Sens. Mark Begich (D-Alaska), Mark Pryor (D-Ark.), Mary Landrieu (D-La.) and Kay Hagan (D-N.C.) are all hard pressed as they seek to win another term.

Of course it is possible Republican seats in Georgia (open) and Kentucky (Sen. Mitch McConnell) could become competitive, but it is about as likely that one or more of the Democratic seats in Colorado, Iowa, Michigan and New Hampshire could produce tight contests.

When a party faces a difficult map, it often suffers even when national conditions favor it. For instance, President Ronald Reagan went into the 1986 midterms with a 63 percent approval rating, and GDP grew at a solid 3.9 percent in the third quarter of that year. The Iran-Contra scandal had not yet surfaced. Still, the Republicans lost eight seats and control of the Senate, partly because they were overextended on that year's map. Six years earlier, Reagan's ample margin over President Jimmy Carter had added a dozen new GOP senators, some of whom were too politically weak to stand on their own.

Ultimately, the 2014 battle for the Senate, which Democrats now hold 55-45, is close. It will be an enormous shock if Republicans do not gain seats and at least reduce the margin of Democratic control. If the GOP can restrain its cannibalistic instincts and tendency to nominate flawed candidates, then to retake the Senate it need only match the post-World War II average gain of six seats for the party out of power in the White House in the sixth year of two-term administrations. At this point, I'd set the over/under on Republican gains in the Senate at 3.5, and I'd take the over—meaning a net gain of four or more Senate seats for the GOP. If Republicans end up dipping under, they will have had their third consecutive underperformance in Senate contests. On the contrary, if even a modest-sized wave develops for Republicans next fall, the third time could be the charm for the GOP's goal of a Senate takeover.

The ebb and flow of politics is one of the few constants throughout American history, and 2014 will be no exception. The GOP fared well in 2002 and 2004, then it was the Democrats' turn in 2006 and 2008. Since then, the back-and-forth cycle has speeded up, with Republicans winning handsomely in 2010 and Democrats in 2012. In the quick "surge and decline" politics of our highly polarized era, the early bet has to be on Republicans to do well in 2014—despite themselves.

*Larry J. Sabato is university professor of politics and director of the University of Virginia Center for Politics, which publishes the online, free Crystal Ball politics [newsletter](#) every Thursday, and a regular columnist for Politico Magazine.*

## American Interest

### The 10 Biggest Winners of 2013

by Walter Russell Mead

Looking back at 2013, some actors on the international scene, both state and non-state, notched up significant achievements and advances. Others didn't do as well. In developing our list of the world's biggest winners and losers in 2013, AI didn't make moral judgments. This is a realist calculation, looking at who gained power during the year and who lost.

#### **1. President Vladimir Putin and Russia**

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#### **2. Iran**

Close behind Vladimir Putin as the biggest winner of 2013 comes the Islamic Republic of Iran. While western diplomats spun fantasies to themselves that the regime was 'crippled' by sanctions, the Iranians managed to extend their hold on the Fertile Crescent and by year's end appeared to have trapped the United States into a negotiation that, from a US point of view, would at best leave Iran as a threshold nuclear state in exchange for tacit US recognition of Iran's new dominant position in the Middle East. Spending billions of dollars to prop up its protégés in Damascus and Lebanon, Iran strengthened its presence in Iraq, and used the chaos of the Syrian war to give Hezbollah sophisticated new weapons that could change the military balance on Israel's northern frontier. This would have been achievement enough for any revisionist power, but Iran took it one step further. At the same time that its actual policy became increasingly aggressive and assertive, Iran brilliantly deployed theatrical lighting to paint itself as an increasingly moderate and conciliatory state. It's like taking the Sudetenland and getting the Nobel Peace Prize in the same year.

#### **3. Bashar Assad and his Damascus Regime**

The year's third biggest winner was the man President Obama said must go and then threatened to bomb. Unbombed and unbowed, Bashar Assad has turned the tide of war in Syria and may yet end up with American support as Al Qaeda linked groups take over what is left of the forces opposing him. The victory wasn't perfect; President Assad has had to let Iran's Revolutionary Guard into what was once his closely held private preserve of a country, and it's unclear just how much freedom of action he has. But 2013 could have been much, much worse for the world's most famous chemical warrior; he's saved his skin for yet another year and turned the President of the United States into a paper tiger.

#### **4. Japan**

Number four on the list of countries who visibly enhanced their position in the international horse race last year was Japan. Once widely hailed as the next superpower whose technical prowess and economic might would pound poor America into the sand, Japan has had to endure a generation of decline and neglect as neighboring China replaced it as the coming thing in Asia. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe didn't manage to recapture all of Japan's old moxie in 2013, but few leaders have increased their nation's profile so much in one year. What Abe understood, and what so many pinstriped oracles of conventional wisdom on the Davos circuit missed, is that Japan's technological prowess is an increasingly important tool of power in an era in which drones, robots and cyberattacks will be more important than 17 year old infantry grunts. China has more kids than Japan, but Japan has more and shinier toys than China—and could well keep that edge going forward. While Chinese nationalists want the big story in Asia to be the end of China's "Century of Humiliation" and the Return of the Middle Kingdom, Japanese nationalists think they out-teched China in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and they can out-tech it again. Nobody knows how this will work out, but in 2013 Japan made China and the world sit up and take notice of its ambitions.

#### **5. Al Qaeda and Violent Sunni Jihad**

Rounding out the top five on our global winner's list is the increasingly loose but increasingly effective constellation of jihadi groups that were on the rise ideologically, financially and militarily during 2013. The eruption of a Sunni-Shia war across the Middle East gave the jihadis new respectability and allies. While the Sunnis overall lost ground in Syria during the year, the radical jihadis won the power struggle inside the rebel movement even as their colleagues re-emerged as a serious political and military force in Iraq. Win or lose in Syria and Lebanon, the jihadis look set to emerge from the war with much tighter links to big money in the Gulf along with new legitimacy in much of the Arab (and Pakistani) world. Meanwhile, shrewdly exploiting the aftermath of the profoundly ill-advised western adventure in Libya, jihadi groups, often rooted in local and tribal politics but benefitting from access to an international network of training, funds, ideas and arms, made significant gains across Sub-Saharan Africa. Weak and poorly trained as many of these groups are, the states opposing them are so fragile that in many cases only French and sometimes American intervention has been able to contain them. Add the Afghan Taliban's ability to withstand the Obama surge, and the picture of jihadi gains becomes clear. Not since the days when Al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia was widely (if erroneously) believed to have the United States on the run in Iraq have things looked so bright for the bombers and fighters of radical Sunni jihad.

#### **6. Climate Skeptics**

Like Al-Qaeda and its fellow travelers, rivals and associates in the world of radical jihad, the next big winners of 2013 are a loosely organized group of non-state actors. Climate skeptics, those who either disbelieve in what they call AGW ('Anthropogenic Global Warming') or oppose efforts for a global climate treaty, had much to celebrate in 2013 as the hopes of climate activists for effective global action continued to fade. The once-ballyhooed UN effort to negotiate a climate treaty has largely faded from view. The prospect that the US Senate would ratify any meaningful climate treaty was never high; it has largely disappeared. European governments struggling with austerity have lost much of their enthusiasm to raise electricity prices as a way of reducing carbon emissions, and while China and India want to increase energy efficiency and reduce the use of coal for perfectly sensible, non-climate related reasons, there is no sign that either country will sacrifice its development objectives for the sake of carbon control. Climate skeptics don't have the money, the media firepower or the government backing that climate activists can muster, but they have a secret weapon that more than evens the odds: inertia. It is very hard to get the international system to do the things most climate activists want done, and unless the climate change movement can develop another kind of policy agenda, climate skeptics look set to have another good year in 2014.

## **7. Saudi Arabia**

Saudi Arabia had a mixed year, but enough international issues broke Riyadh's way to give it a place among the winners of 2013. It was a bad year generally for Sunni Muslims in the wars of religion convulsing much of the Middle East, but even as the Sunni cause globally sustained some serious setbacks, the Saudis managed to strengthen their position in and around the Gulf. While 2014 will see an extended showdown with Iran and the Saudi position in that rivalry suffers from some serious weaknesses, in 2013 the Saudis went a long way to elbowing rivals aside. Three big wins in particular helped Saudi Arabia make it into the winners' circle this year. First, the Saudis worked with the Egyptian military to frustrate both the Muslim Brotherhood and the United States. The Egyptian coup (facilitated by Saudi promises of cash to offset any reductions in US or IMF funds) was a serious setback to any efforts to democratize the Arab world, and the Saudis can now count on a friendly neighbor across the Red Sea. Qatar, a smaller petro-state on the Gulf which had aggressively backed the Muslim Brotherhood, was forced to back down as well. And finally, Turkey, where the AK Party of Prime Minister Erdogan sees itself as a rival to the Wahabi Saudis as the leader of the Sunni world, ended the year in frustration and confusion. At the end of the year, the Saudis could congratulate themselves on their success in seeing off any state rivals in the Sunni world and turn their attention to what many in the kingdom believe is a life and death struggle with Shia Iran.

## **8. Germany**

The eighth biggest winner of the year also had a mixed record in 2013. When Russia snatched Ukraine out of the EU's grasp, German prestige and power suffered a significant setback. But that loss must be set against some significant wins. Overall, it was a very good year for the European Union's leading economic power and its redoubtable Chancellor. Germany's greatest success in 2013 was simple: it managed the euro catastrophe without spending too much money, kept its economy on an even keel, and strengthened its power in the EU even as the austerity policies it championed unleashed massive social pain across the Club Med countries from Portugal to Cyprus and Greece. Three of 2013's winners enhanced their position inside a declining alliance; Al-Qaeda affiliates grew stronger in Syria even as the rebels as a whole weakened, the Saudis gained power while the Sunni world lost ground, and Germany gained

power within a weakening EU. It is getting harder to figure out a way forward for Europe, but Germany will have more say than ever in where Europe goes.

## **9. The Egyptian Military**

The Egyptian military also had a good year, seeing off the Muslim Brotherhood and reasserting ultimate power. While conditions in Egypt continue to deteriorate, and the outlook seems cloudy at best, the years since the 'revolution' that overthrew President Mubarak have reaffirmed the military's role as the guardian and final arbiter of Egyptian stability. The 'revolution' allowed the military to slough off the dreams of the Mubarak inner circle to create a dynasty by having the aging President's son replace his father. Then the liberals fell to the Muslim Brotherhood as elections revealed their lack of support among voters, and finally the Muslim Brotherhood government became so unpopular that the military was able to brush it aside. 2013 ends with the military firmly back in the saddle, and with the ability of liberal foreign powers to influence Egyptian events significantly reduced. Whether 2014 will be another successful year for Egypt's generals remains unclear; crushing Islamist opponents in the name of nationalism has been the Egyptian military's core competence since the Nasser era, but economic dysfunction and a dangerous regional environment make the old tricks harder to pull off.

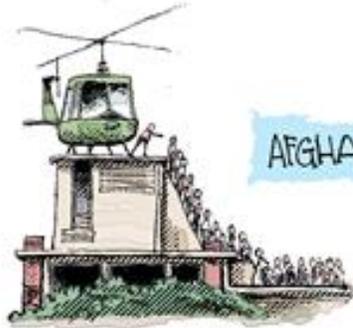
## **10. The UK**

Rounding out the list of the biggest ten winners of 2013 is the United Kingdom. Britain, like some of the other 2013 winners, faces an uncertain future. The 2014 Scottish referendum and the growing difficulties attending British membership in the EU mean that there is rough sailing ahead. Nevertheless, in 2013 Britain's position improved as skepticism about the ever-growing powers of the EU bureaucracy (and the high pay of European bureaucrats) grew in an increasingly populist Europe. It remains difficult to see how the coalition government can negotiate enough of the right EU changes so that a looser and more flexible union emerges, but in a typically chaotic and indirect way, opinion on a number of issues in Europe is slowly moving Britain's way.

Tomorrow: a look at the year's biggest losers.



VIETNAM

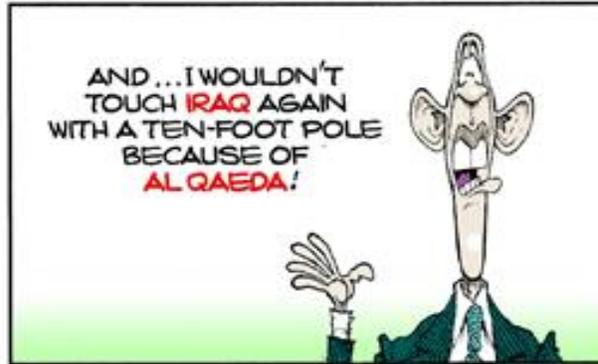
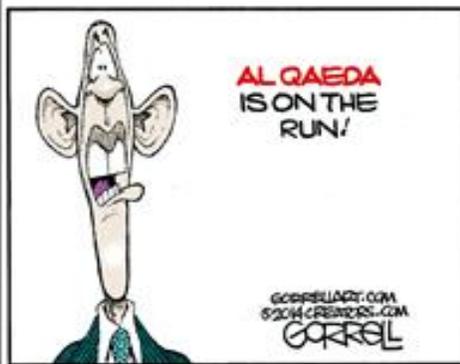
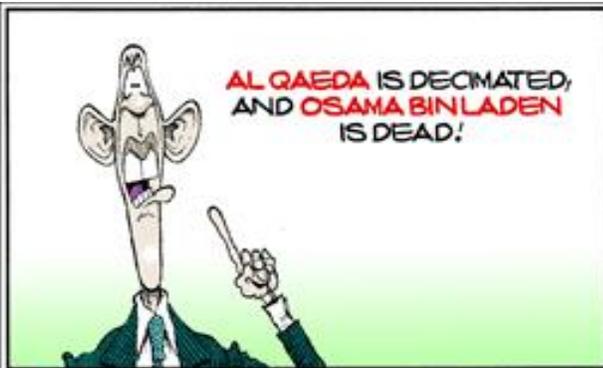


AFGHANISTAN



IRAQ

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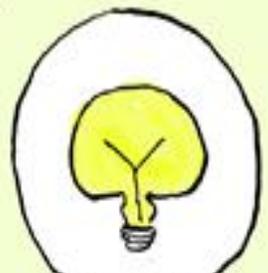
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