

March 10, 2014

Charles Krauthammer on Putin's good luck.

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*He takes Crimea, and President Obama says it's not in Russia's interest, not even strategically clever. Indeed, it's a sign of weakness. ...*

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NY Post editors are scathing. Jimmy obama they call him.

*Vladimir Putin has taken the measure of Barack Obama. He's found Jimmy Carter.*

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*Like Jimmy Carter, who was rewarded by Leonid Brezhnev with a Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Putin has returned Obama's favor with a Russian invasion of Ukraine.*

*And just like Carter, who responded with what his staff called "a strong public statement," Obama responded with his own statement saying he is "deeply concerned" by Russia's military movement in Ukraine. ...*

"Shut up!" They said. Jonathan Tobin answers the administration's defenders who say we're not supposed to be critical of serial foreign policy disasters.

*Russia's aggression against Ukraine has led many Americans to re-evaluate President Obama's mockery of those Republicans like Mitt Romney and Sarah Palin's warnings about the geo-strategic threat that Vladimir Putin's regime posed to the West. It turns out that the administration's assumptions about not only Russia but also about the basic principles of U.S. foreign policy were mistaken. Not only did the magic of Barack Obama's personality fail to tame Putin, Iran, Syria or North Korea. As our Abe Greenwald noted yesterday, the administration's belief that America had transcended history and that the use of force was ineffective has again been thoroughly exploded.*

*But rather than prompt a far-reaching debate about the lessons to be drawn from this episode, many pundits, not all of whom are knee-jerk Obama defenders are calling for Americans to pipe down about whether the policies of the past five years are partly responsible for the mess in Eastern Europe as well as the fiasco in Syria, not to mention the ongoing administration attempt to forge a new détente with Iran. Instead, we are being told to be quiet and to let America speak with one voice, lest Putin or any other foe be encouraged by criticism of Obama. Not for the first time, Arthur Vandenberg's famous 1947 quote in which he chided Republican critics of President Harry Truman's foreign policy that "we must stop partisan politics at the water's edge" is being disinterred in order to give the 44th president some respite from the beating he has been taking from conservatives about his policies. Though, as Robert Lieber wrote last month in the Washington Post, Democrats have ignored that principle in the last decade, Joe Scarborough, MSNBC's token conservative is sounding that bipartisan theme both on "Morning Joe" and in a Politico op-ed. Scarborough argues that, "There is nothing more frightening to our enemies than a strong, unified American voice." That's true. But in the absence of leadership from the president and the administration, such a stance is impossible. Though loyalty to country must always trump partisanship, the effort to suppress a debate about foreign policy at a time when it is desperately needed is antithetical to the cause of creating that "strong, unified American voice."*

Abe Greenwald says hold on a minute to the progressives who say right wing folks are rooting for Putin. Greenwald reminds it was the last GOP presidential candidate who correctly identified the dangers coming from Russia.

*Americans occasionally indulge a certain progressive notion about world affairs: that humanity has become so enlightened and sophisticated as to have outgrown its brutal and tragic nature. The idea that we can transcend our blood-soaked past was behind the 1928 Kellogg-Briand Pact, which sought to outlaw war altogether. Eighty-five years and millions of war dead later, it's also behind Secretary of State John Kerry's recent comment that Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine was a "19th century act in the 21st century." Invasions, you see, belong to that buried thing called history. We're now in something else.*

*Unfortunately that something else doesn't look much better. A Russian strongman is gluing together the pieces of a smashed empire, underwriting biblical slaughter in the Middle East, and standing with a nuclear-aspirant, exterminationist regime. Doubtless, Putin took Kerry's characterization as a supreme compliment, an indication that he's a great man of history and a belated product of Russia's Golden Age.*

*Pointing out Putin's aspirations is becoming risky. There's been much talk lately of conservatives who idolize the Russian leader. But aside from a handful of marginalized eccentrics, the very opposite is the case. It was the last Republican presidential candidate who called Putin's Russia*

our “number-one political foe,” and it was the entire Democratic establishment that supported Obama’s five-year-long attempt to be more accommodating to Moscow. Reconciling these facts has been unpleasant for progressives who’ve only just discovered, via gay-rights activism, that Putin is an unapologetic human-rights abuser. One hopes that similar clarity on Iran is soon to follow. ...

Tired of hearing about foreign policy defeats? [Jonathan Tobin](#) posts on one in the Senate.

*Two days after a shocking defeat, liberals are still grouching about the Senate spiking the nomination of former NAACP Legal Fund Director Debo Adebile to be head of the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division. What really burns them up is not just that Republicans successfully filibustered one of President Obama’s choices for a government post but that six Democrats joined with them. But rather than take responsibility for putting forward a controversial figure who was sure to provoke bitter opposition from both sides of the aisle, liberals are reverting to form by blaming their defeat on conservative demagoguery and racism.*

*This is more than disingenuous. Adebile lost for one reason and one reason only and its name is Mumia Abu-Jamal, the radical who gunned down Philadelphia Policeman Daniel Faulkner in a cold-blooded murder in 1981. Under the leadership of Adebile, the NAACP Legal Fund worked on Abu-Jamal’s appeal. The White House and Adebile’s defenders in the press say blaming the lawyer for his client’s crime is both unfair and an assault on our judicial system. But contrary to this spin, Adebile and the NAACP were not a latter day version of patriot John Adams defending the British soldiers who perpetrated the Boston Massacre. Far from merely writing briefs on Constitutional issues involving Abu-Jamal’s conviction, Adebile’s lawyers were part of the propaganda campaign aimed at besmirching the victim and the Philadelphia Police Department and portraying a killer who was literally caught red-handed with the murder weapon as a heroic martyr. Under these circumstances, it’s little wonder that some Democrats wanted no part of the nomination, especially those like Pennsylvania’s Bob Casey, Jr. and Delaware’s Chris Coons voted against cloture for the nomination, whose constituents know the facts of the case and despicable work of Abu-Jamal’s cheerleaders. ...*

The Cartoonists have a good day.

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**Washington Post**

**[The wages of weakness](#)**

by Charles Krauthammer

Vladimir Putin is a lucky man. And he’s got three more years of luck to come.

He takes Crimea, and President Obama says it’s not in Russia’s interest, [not even strategically clever](#). Indeed, it’s a sign of weakness.

Really? Crimea belonged to Moscow for 200 years. Russia annexed it 20 years before Jefferson acquired Louisiana. Lost it in the humiliation of the 1990s. Putin got it back in about three days without firing a shot.

Now Russia looms over the rest of eastern and southern Ukraine. Putin can take that anytime he wants — if he wants. He has already destabilized the nationalist government in Kiev. Ukraine is now truncated and on the life support of [U.S. and European money](#) (much of which — cash for gas — will end up in Putin’s treasury anyway).

Obama says Putin is on the [wrong side of history](#), and Secretary of State [John Kerry says](#) Putin’s is “really 19th-century behavior in the 21st century.”

This must mean that seeking national power, territory, dominion — the driving impulse of nations since Thucydides — is obsolete. As if a calendar change caused a revolution in human nature that transformed the international arena from a Hobbesian struggle for power into a gentleman’s club where violations of territorial integrity just don’t happen.

“That is not 21st-century, G-8, major-nation behavior,” [says Kerry](#). Makes invasion sound like a breach of etiquette — like using the wrong fork at a Beacon Hill dinner party.

How to figure out Obama’s foreign policy? In his [first U.N. speech](#), he says: “No one nation can or should try to dominate another nation.” On what planet? Followed by the assertion that “alignments of nations rooted in the cleavages of a long-gone Cold War” — like NATO? — “make no sense in an interconnected world.”

Putin’s more cynical advisers might have thought such adolescent universalism to be a ruse. But Obama coupled these amazing words with even more amazing actions.

(1) Upon coming into office, he initiated [the famous “reset”](#) to undo the “drift” in relations that had occurred during the George W. Bush years. But that drift was largely due to the [freezing of relations](#) Bush imposed after Russia’s invasion of Georgia. Obama undid that pushback and wiped the slate clean — demanding nothing in return.

(2) [Canceled missile-defense agreements](#) with Poland and the Czech Republic. Without even consulting them. A huge concession to Putin’s threats — while again asking nothing in return. And sending a message that, while Eastern Europe may think it achieved post-Cold War independence, in reality it remains in play, subject to Russian influence and interests.

(3) In 2012, Obama assured Dmitry Medvedev that he would be [even more flexible](#) with Putin on missile defense as soon as he got past the election.

(4) [The Syria debacle](#). Obama painted himself into a corner on chemical weapons — threatening to bomb and then backing down — and allowed Putin to rescue him with a promise to get rid of Syria’s stockpiles. Obama hailed this as a great win-win, when both knew — or did Obama really not know? — that he had just conferred priceless legitimacy on Bashar al-Assad and made Russia the major regional arbiter for the first time in 40 years.

(5) Obama keeps cutting defense spending. His latest budget will reduce it to [3 percent of GDP](#) by 2016 and [cut the army](#) to pre-Pearl Harbor size — just as Russia is rebuilding, as Iran is going nuclear and as China announces yet another [12-plus percent increase in military spending](#).

Puzzling. There is no U.S. financial emergency, no budgetary collapse. Obama declares an end to austerity — for every government department except the military.

Can Putin be faulted for believing that if he bites off Crimea and threatens Kiev, Obama's response will be minimal and his ability to lead the Europeans even less so?

Would Putin have lunged for Ukraine if he didn't have such a clueless adversary? No one can say for sure. But it certainly made Putin's decision easier.

Russia will get kicked out of the G-8 — if Obama can get Angela Merkel to go along. Big deal. Putin does care about financial sanctions, but [the Europeans are already divided](#) and squabbling among themselves.

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**NY Post -- Editors**

[Jimmy Obama](#)



*Presidents Carter and Obama*

Vladimir Putin has taken the measure of Barack Obama. He's found Jimmy Carter.

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Like Jimmy Carter, who conveyed weakness when Iran took our embassy staff hostage, Obama confirmed his own weakness when he drew a red line in Syria and then backed down from enforcing it.

Like Jimmy Carter, who was rewarded by Leonid Brezhnev with a Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Putin has returned Obama's favor with a Russian invasion of Ukraine.

And just like Carter, who responded with what his staff called "a strong public statement," Obama responded with his own statement saying he is "deeply concerned" by Russia's military movement in Ukraine.

As in the Carter era, Obama-era defenders of inaction suggest there is little they can now do to get Russia out of Crimea. They are likely right.

Even so, Russia's invasion was invited by manifold acts of American weakness — from our failure in Benghazi to the dubious deal we're pursuing with Iran to denying our Eastern European friends missile defense to Obama's failure to enforce the red line he himself drew in Syria. When you don't resist aggression, you can't be surprised aggressors raise the stakes.

At the same time, it's simply not true that the United States has no options. Obama's Republican rival in 2008, Sen. John McCain, has noted some of them: boot Russia out of the G-8; reverse the Obama defense cuts; restore missile defense for Eastern Europe; sanction individual Russian officials, etc.

In a memo to Jimmy Carter three days after that Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, his national security adviser summed up well the problem of words bereft of action: "Since we have not always followed these verbal protests up with tangible responses, [the Russians] may be getting into the habit of disregarding our concern."

Memo to President Obama: Putin is disregarding you in Crimea for the same reason.

## Contentions

### [Why Politics Can't Stop At the Water's Edge](#)

by Jonathan S. Tobin

Russia's aggression against Ukraine has led many Americans to re-evaluate President Obama's mockery of those Republicans like Mitt Romney and Sarah Palin's warnings about the geo-strategic threat that Vladimir Putin's regime posed to the West. It turns out that the administration's assumptions about not only Russia but also about the basic principles of U.S. foreign policy were mistaken. Not only did the magic of Barack Obama's personality fail to tame Putin, Iran, Syria or North Korea. As [our Abe Greenwald noted yesterday](#), the administration's belief that America had transcended history and that the use of force was ineffective has again been thoroughly exploded.

But rather than prompt a far-reaching debate about the lessons to be drawn from this episode, many pundits, not all of whom are knee-jerk Obama defenders are calling for Americans to pipe down about whether the policies of the past five years are partly responsible for the mess in

Eastern Europe as well as the fiasco in Syria, not to mention the ongoing administration attempt to forge a new détente with Iran. Instead, we are being told to be quiet and to let America speak with one voice, lest Putin or any other foe be encouraged by criticism of Obama. Not for the first time, Arthur Vandenberg's famous 1947 quote in which he chided Republican critics of President Harry Truman's foreign policy that "we must stop partisan politics at the water's edge" is being disinterred in order to give the 44th president some respite from the beating he has been taking from conservatives about his policies. Though, [as Robert Lieber wrote last month](#) in the *Washington Post*, Democrats have ignored that principle in the last decade, Joe Scarborough, MSNBC's token conservative is sounding that bipartisan theme both on "Morning Joe" and [in a Politico op-ed](#). Scarborough argues that, "There is nothing more frightening to our enemies than a strong, unified American voice." That's true. But in the absence of leadership from the president and the administration, such a stance is impossible. Though loyalty to country must always trump partisanship, the effort to suppress a debate about foreign policy at a time when it is desperately needed is antithetical to the cause of creating that "strong, unified American voice."

Scarborough is right that "political broadsides" are out of place "when the tanks are rolling." But what's happening in the Ukraine is not a replay of the Cold War confrontation with the Soviets about Berlin or the Cuban Missile Crisis, let alone a crisis when U.S. troops are on the move. The point about what is happening in the Ukraine is that both America's friends and its foes take it for granted that the U.S. is out of the business of trying to defend freedom, whether in places where our military can make a difference or those, like in Ukraine, where we know it is not possible.

Given the hyper-partisan nature of our current political culture that is exacerbated by an equally divided media, it is hard to imagine the revival of the kind of bipartisanship that Vandenberg embodied under any circumstances. But in the absence of either strong leadership or an articulation of core American principles by the president it is impossible.

Were President Obama showing the kind of courage in standing up to Putin that other presidents of both political parties demonstrated in past disputes with the Russians, criticism of his foreign policy could and would be put off until later. But asking critics to be silent when no such effort to unify the country or to stand up for the interests of U.S. friends and allies is being put forward by the administration is itself mere partisan hogwash.

A debate about foreign policy is needed precisely because what we are witnessing is the product of a feckless foreign policy that primarily views geostrategic foes such as Russia and Iran as candidates for appeasement rather than dangerous enemies to be faced down with strength. For many liberals, Obama's weakness is an asset to be applauded as they support his vision of a world in which American exceptionalism is mere chauvinism. However, this unilateral moral disarmament has severe consequences. Putin doesn't need to listen to conservative criticisms of the president's foreign policy to understand that Obama's naïve conception of global politics to be encouraged to violate international law. He already came to that conclusion before he invaded the Ukraine.

Politics must now extend beyond the water's edge not because conservatives wish to cripple administration efforts to defend American interests — as was so often the case in the past when the left treated anti-American forces as victims to be sympathized with rather than enemies to be despised — but because they want Obama to start behaving like someone who believes in his nation's cause.

Far from undermining the president's ability to deal with Putin or Iran, a debate about his policies is the starting point for a recovery of American strength. What Putin expects, indeed, what he is counting on, is the kind of apathy about Obama's foreign policy that has allowed the president to evade accountability for stances that undermined allies and appeased foes for years. After years of being told, both by the left and some on the right that America can afford to retreat from the world stage, a vigorous discussion of foreign policy and the mistakes made by this administration isn't a political luxury; it's a necessity.

## Contentions

### [Back to the Confines of History](#)

by Abe Greenwald

Americans occasionally indulge a certain progressive notion about world affairs: that humanity has become so enlightened and sophisticated as to have outgrown its brutal and tragic nature. The idea that we can transcend our blood-soaked past was behind the 1928 Kellogg-Briand Pact, which sought to outlaw war altogether. Eighty-five years and millions of war dead later, it's also behind Secretary of State John Kerry's recent comment that Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine was a "19th century act in the 21st century." Invasions, you see, belong to that buried thing called history. We're now in something else.

Unfortunately that something else doesn't look much better. A Russian strongman is gluing together the pieces of a smashed empire, underwriting biblical slaughter in the Middle East, and standing with a nuclear-aspirant, exterminationist regime. Doubtless, Putin took Kerry's characterization as a supreme compliment, an indication that he's a great man of history and a belated product of Russia's Golden Age.

Pointing out Putin's aspirations is becoming risky. There's been much talk lately of conservatives who idolize the Russian leader. But aside from a handful of marginalized eccentrics, the very opposite is the case. It was the last Republican presidential candidate who called Putin's Russia our "number-one political foe," and it was the entire Democratic establishment that supported Obama's five-year-long attempt to be more accommodating to Moscow. Reconciling these facts has been unpleasant for progressives who've only just discovered, via gay-rights activism, that Putin is an unapologetic human-rights abuser. One hopes that similar clarity on Iran is soon to follow.

As Americans reacquaint themselves with living inside history and not beyond it, they'll head in one of two directions: They'll either accept the challenge of making the world a safer, freer place, or they'll decide that recommitting to the fight against brutality is too burdensome after all. I'm betting they take the challenge. For the idealism that led to post-historic fantasy cuts both ways. If we were idealistic enough to think we've moved beyond large-scale injustice then we're also idealistic enough to go out into the world and do something about the bad guys. That's why America and her allies are the planet's first defense against tyranny and oppression.

To be sure, there is much to shake off this time round: We're hobbled by the civilian-grade PTSD of the war on terror and by the keystroke complacency of Internet utopianism. We are also enervated by self-congratulation, first for having elected Barack Obama president and then for



embracing same-sex marriage. But if the growing, non-partisan disgust with Putinism is any indication, we are already well on our way to re-engaging the world on realistic terms.

Barack Obama often reassured us that we'd moved past "a long gone Cold War," but the world doesn't wait on his interpretation before shaping itself. And Obama may have finally realized as much. One strong indication of renewed clarity is the Defense Department's announcement on Wednesday that the United States will expand military cooperation with Baltic countries in light of Putin's aggression. This doesn't mean a "new Cold War" is upon us; it's just an overdue acknowledgment of whose side we're on in the continuous fight for liberty.

Contrary to most, I think Putin made an excellent point about American exceptionalism in his September 11 *New York Times* op-ed. He wrote, "It is extremely dangerous to encourage people to see themselves as exceptional." Quite right. It's time, once again, for us to be extremely dangerous to men like Vladimir Putin.

## Contentions

### Mumia, Adebile and the Rule of Law

by Jonathan S. Tobin

Two days after a shocking defeat, [liberals are still grouching](#) about the Senate spiking the nomination of former NAACP Legal Fund Director Debo Adebile to be head of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division. What really burns them up is not just that Republicans successfully filibustered one of President Obama's choices for a government post but that six Democrats joined with them. But rather than take responsibility for putting forward a controversial figure who was sure to provoke bitter opposition from both sides of the aisle, liberals are reverting to form by blaming their defeat on conservative demagoguery and racism.

This is more than disingenuous. Adebile lost for one reason and one reason only and its name is Mumia Abu-Jamal, the radical who gunned down Philadelphia Policeman Daniel Faulkner in a cold-blooded murder in 1981. Under the leadership of Adebile, the NAACP Legal Fund worked on Abu-Jamal's appeal. The White House and Adebile's defenders in the press say blaming the lawyer for his client's crime is both unfair and an assault on our judicial system. But contrary to this spin, Adebile and the NAACP were not a latter day version of patriot John Adams defending the British soldiers who perpetrated the Boston Massacre. Far from merely writing briefs on Constitutional issues involving Abu-Jamal's conviction, Adebile's lawyers were part of the propaganda campaign aimed at besmirching the victim and the Philadelphia Police Department and portraying a killer who was literally caught red-handed with the murder weapon as a heroic martyr. Under these circumstances, it's little wonder that some Democrats wanted no part of the nomination, especially those like Pennsylvania's Bob Casey, Jr. and Delaware's Chris Coons voted against cloture for the nomination, whose constituents know the facts of the case and despicable work of Abu-Jamal's cheerleaders.

This debacle can be partly explained by the White House's cluelessness in dealing with Congress. Reportedly, Majority Leader Harry Reid told the administration he didn't have the votes to push Adebile through but the president wouldn't budge and the result was what the *New York Times*

called “the highest-profile defeat of a nominee on the Senate floor in the Obama presidency.” But while those falsely alleging that this was the work of a conservative conspiracy against civil rights are blowing smoke, there is more to this story than just a case of Obama overreaching in an attempt to pack his administration with like-minded leftists. The reason why the president and Holder wanted Adebile so badly is because a believer in the Mumia myth fits in perfectly with their vision for using the Civil Rights Division as a political weapon to push their left-wing agenda.

While Adebile’s involvement with the Mumia travesty made him a political liability, that sort of radical take on the justice system is what recommended him to the administration. It must be understood that in the last five years, the Civil Rights Division is not so much about enforcing the laws against discrimination but employing the power of the federal government to pursue cases that bolstered the Democrats attempt to portray the GOP as racist. The division’s lawyers have been Obama’s legal shock troops seeking to invalidate voter ID laws on bogus charges of racism as well as a raft of other initiatives all designed to promote the idea that America was boiling over with racist crime and conspiracy at a time when both the president and the attorney general were African-American. But while continually portraying the country as a hotbed of racist oppression, this same division refused to prosecute a case against the New Black Panther Party for intimidating voters in Philadelphia. Just as the president thinks he can pick and choose what laws to enforce, so, too, does the DOJ use the same unconstitutional principle to undermine the rule of law.

Far from a distraction, the Mumia Abu-Jamal connection was actually quite germane to what is the animating spirit of federal civil rights lawyers under Democratic administrations. Instead of judicious applications of the statutes, what Obama wants for his Civil Rights Division are radicals like Adebile. His defeat is not, as Adam Serwer [wrote yesterday on MSNBC.com](#), part of a Republican war on civil rights but a rare defeat for liberals in their efforts to use the power of the Justice Department to gain victories in court they could never win at the ballot box. As such, the end of the Adebile nomination was a rare victory for the rule of law against a lawless Obama administration.



Vladimir, too, will have more flexibility



after your election.

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CALLING  
FOR THE  
FOREIGN  
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HE'S MORE FLEXIBLE THAN I THOUGHT.



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