

March 2, 2014

**Niall Ferguson** writes on our country's global retreat.

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*For it is not only U.S. monetary policy that is being tapered. Even more significant is the "geopolitical taper." By this I mean the fundamental shift we are witnessing in the national-security strategy of the U.S.—and like the Fed's tapering, this one also means big repercussions for the world. To see the geopolitical taper at work, consider President Obama's comment Wednesday on the horrific killings of protesters in the Ukrainian capital, Kiev. The president said: "There will be consequences if people step over the line."*

*No one took that warning seriously—Ukrainian government snipers kept on killing people in Independence Square regardless. The world remembers the red line that Mr. Obama once drew over the use of chemical weapons in Syria . . . and then ignored once the line had been crossed. The compromise deal reached on Friday in Ukraine calling for early elections and a coalition government may or may not spell the end of the crisis. In any case, the negotiations were conducted without concern for Mr. Obama. . .*

**Power Line** with a picture of what can happen when diplomacy fails.

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**Craig Pirrong** has added president "uncontested arrival" to the lexicon of president bystander, president news cycle, etc., etc. . . .

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*Why do I say that? The White House told CNN that the Russian takeover of Ukraine isn't an invasion. Get this: It's an "uncontested arrival."*

*You know, just like the Rhineland, the Anschluss, the Sudetenland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, etc.*

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**“Political language is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind. ” ...**

More on Ukraine from Prof. Pirrong.

*... Why is Putin moving so quickly? I think this is overdetermined. A mixture of personal/subjective and objective/pragmatic considerations.*

*First, as I said from the very early days of this blog, Putin is a man in a hurry: it is part of his nature. His impatience was no doubt increased by the burning desire to revenge what he views as a personal humiliation inflicted on him by the Ukrainian revolutionaries at the climax of his Olympic extravaganza.*

*Second, Ukraine is in a chaotic state, as is every government in the immediate aftermath of a revolution. The military is no doubt reeling and riven by dissent and rivalry. The government has little idea of which units and commanders it can rely on. There is no experienced competent authority in place, especially in the defense and interior ministries. There cannot be a unity of command in such circumstances. Moreover, parts of the country are ripe for putsches by fifth columns supported and guided by Moscow. (During the Cold War, Soviet operational plans for an invasion of Europe included extensive provisions for sowing chaos in rear areas, including by fomenting civil unrest.) A disorganized, chaotic polity is much easier picking than would be the case in a few months, or even a few weeks, when it has had time to get its feet under it.*

*Third, Putin has taken the measure of his opponents in the West, and found them lacking. Note the timing. Within mere hours of Obama's craven and empty warning, Putin moves to war. He knows he has nothing to fear from Obama. Obama's warning turned out to be less of a deterrent, and more of an invitation. ...*

*... A couple of other points must be made.*

*First, this has to be the most complete public humiliation inflicted on any American president ever. Obama gave what he thought was a stern warning, and within hours Putin defied it with relish. Such defiance is a sign of complete disrespect. ...*

Remember when Sarah Palin was mocked during the 2008 campaign for saying obama's evident weakness of character would tempt Putin to invade Ukraine? Breitbart remembered.

Palin said then:

*"After the Russian Army invaded the nation of Georgia, Senator Obama's reaction was one of indecision and moral equivalence, the kind of response that would only encourage Russia's Putin to invade Ukraine next."*

*For those comments, she was mocked by the high-brow Foreign Policy magazine and its editor Blake Hounshell, who now is one of the editors of Politico magazine.*

*In light of recent events in Ukraine and concerns that Russia is getting its troops ready to cross the border into the neighboring nation, nobody seems to be laughing at or dismissing those comments now. ...*

**John Lott** who was roundly abused by Piers Morgan gets to pen the send-off.  
*Sunday's announcement that Piers Morgan had lost his show at CNN was hardly unexpected.*

*The ratings for the coveted 9 p.m. time slot were abysmal, dropping last week to just 270,000 viewers — about one-eighth of what Fox News's Megyn Kelly got in the same time slot.*

*Some, such as Variety magazine, have speculated that the low ratings are due to Morgan's single-minded push for gun control. That might have something to do with it, but much more is going on.*

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*For instance, he yelled at Larry Pratt of Gun Owners of America: "You're an unbelievably stupid man, aren't you?"*

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**WSJ**

### **America's Global Retreat**

***Never mind the Fed's taper, it's the U.S. geopolitical taper that is stirring world anxiety. From Ukraine to Syria to the Pacific, a hands-off foreign policy invites more trouble.***

by Niall Ferguson

Since former Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke uttered the word "taper" in June 2013, emerging-market stocks and currencies have taken a beating. It is not clear why talk of (thus far)

modest reductions in the Fed's large-scale asset-purchase program should have had such big repercussions outside the United States. The best economic explanation is that capital has been flowing out of emerging markets in anticipation of future rises in U.S. interest rates, of which the taper is a harbinger. While plausible, that cannot be the whole story.

For it is not only U.S. monetary policy that is being tapered. Even more significant is the "geopolitical [taper](#)." By this I mean the fundamental shift we are witnessing in the national-security strategy of the U.S.—and like the Fed's tapering, this one also means big repercussions for the world. To see the geopolitical taper at work, consider President Obama's comment Wednesday on the horrific killings of protesters in the Ukrainian capital, Kiev. The president said: "There will be consequences if people step over the line."

No one took that warning seriously—Ukrainian government snipers kept on killing people in Independence Square regardless. The world remembers the red line that Mr. Obama once drew over the use of chemical weapons in Syria . . . and then ignored once the line had been crossed. The compromise deal reached on Friday in Ukraine calling for early elections and a coalition government may or may not spell the end of the crisis. In any case, the negotiations were conducted without concern for Mr. Obama.



*Collection of Neophytes*

The origins of America's geopolitical taper as a strategy can be traced to the confused foreign-policy decisions of the president's first term. The easy part to understand was that Mr. Obama wanted out of Iraq and to leave behind the minimum of U.S. commitments. Less easy to understand was his policy in Afghanistan. After an internal administration struggle, the result in 2009 was a classic bureaucratic compromise: There was a "surge" of additional troops,

accompanied by a commitment to begin withdrawing before the last of these troops had even arrived.

Having passively watched when the Iranian people rose up against their theocratic rulers beginning in 2009, the president was caught off balance by the misnamed "Arab Spring." The vague blandishments of his Cairo speech that year offered no hint of how he would respond when crowds thronged Tahrir Square in 2011 calling for the ouster of a longtime U.S. ally, the Egyptian dictator [Hosni Mubarak](#).

Mr. Obama backed the government led by Mohammed Morsi, after the Muslim Brotherhood won the 2012 elections. Then the president backed the military coup against Mr. Morsi last year. On Libya, Mr. Obama took a back seat in an international effort to oust Moammar Gadhafi in 2011, but was apparently not in the vehicle at all when the American mission at Benghazi came under fatal attack in 2012.

Syria has been one of the great fiascos of post-World War II American foreign policy. When President Obama might have intervened effectively, he hesitated. When he did intervene, it was ineffectual. The Free Syrian Army of rebels fighting against the regime of Bashar Assad has not been given sufficient assistance to hold together, much less to defeat the forces loyal to Assad. The president's non-threat to launch airstrikes—if Congress agreed—handed the initiative to Russia. Last year's Russian-brokered agreement to get Assad to hand over his chemical weapons is being honored only in the breach, as Secretary of State [John Kerry](#) admitted last week.

The result of this U.S. inaction is a disaster. At a minimum, 130,000 Syrian civilians have been killed and nine million driven from their homes by forces loyal to the tyrant. At least 11,000 people have been tortured to death. Hundreds of thousands are besieged, their supplies of food and medicine cut off, as bombs and shells rain down.

Worse, the Syrian civil war has escalated into a sectarian proxy war between Sunni and Shiite Muslims, with jihadist groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria and the Nusra Front fighting against Assad, while the Shiite Hezbollah and the Iranian Quds Force fight for him. Meanwhile, a flood of refugees from Syria and the free movement of militants is helping to destabilize neighboring states like Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. The situation in Iraq is especially dire. Violence is escalating, especially in Anbar province. According to Iraq Body Count, a British-based nongovernmental organization, 9,475 Iraqi civilians were killed in 2013, compared with 10,130 in 2008.

The scale of the strategic U.S. failure is best seen in the statistics for total fatalities in the region the [Bush](#) administration called the "Greater Middle East"—essentially the swath of mainly Muslim countries stretching from Morocco to Pakistan. In 2013, according to the International Institute of Strategic Studies, more than 75,000 people died as a result of armed conflict in this region or as a result of terrorism originating there, the highest number since the IISS Armed Conflict database began in 1998. Back then, the Greater Middle East accounted for 38% of conflict-related deaths in the world; last year it was 78%.

Mr. Obama's supporters like nothing better than to portray him as the peacemaker to George W. Bush's warmonger. But it is now almost certain that more people have died violent deaths in the Greater Middle East during this presidency than during the last one.

In a January interview with the *New Yorker* magazine, the president said something truly stunning. "I don't really even need George Kennan right now," he asserted, referring to the late American diplomat and historian whose insights informed the foreign policy of presidents from Franklin Roosevelt on. Yet what Mr. Obama went on to say about his self-assembled strategy for the Middle East makes it clear that a George Kennan is exactly what he needs: someone with the regional expertise and experience to craft a credible strategy for the U.S., as Kennan did when he proposed the "containment" of the Soviet Union in the late 1940s.

So what exactly is the president's strategy? "It would be profoundly in the interest of citizens throughout the region if Sunnis and Shiites weren't intent on killing each other," the president explained in the *New Yorker*. "And although it would not solve the entire problem, if we were able to get Iran to operate in a responsible fashion . . . you could see an equilibrium developing between Sunni, or predominantly Sunni, Gulf states and Iran."

Moreover, he continued, if only "the Palestinian issue" could be "unwound," then another "new equilibrium" could be created, allowing Israel to "enter into even an informal alliance with at least normalized diplomatic relations" with the Sunni states. The president has evidently been reading up about international relations and has reached the chapter on the "balance of power." The trouble with his analysis is that it does not explain why any of the interested parties should sign up for his balancing act.

As Nixon-era Secretary of State [Henry Kissinger](#) argued more than half a century ago in his book "A World Restored," balance is not a naturally occurring phenomenon. "The balance of power only limits the scope of aggression but does not prevent it," Dr. Kissinger wrote. "The balance of power is the classic expression of the lesson of history that no order is safe without physical safeguards against aggression."

What that implied in the 19th century was that Britain was the "balancer"—the superpower that retained the option to intervene in Europe to preserve balance. The problem with the current U.S. geopolitical taper is that President Obama is not willing to play that role in the Middle East today. In his ignominious call to inaction on Syria in September, he explicitly said it: "America is not the world's policeman."

But balance without an enforcer is almost inconceivable. Iran remains a revolutionary power; it has no serious intention of giving up its nuclear-arms program; the talks in Vienna are a sham. Both sides in the escalating regional "Clash of Sects"—Shiite and Sunni—have an incentive to increase their aggression because they see hegemony in a post-American Middle East as an attainable goal.

The geopolitical taper is a multifaceted phenomenon. For domestic political as well as fiscal reasons, this administration is presiding over deep cuts in military spending. No doubt the Pentagon's budget is in many respects bloated. But, as Philip Zelikow has recently argued, the cuts are taking place without any clear agreement on what the country's future military needs are.

Thus far, the U.S. "pivot" from the Middle East to the Asia Pacific region, announced in 2012, is the nearest this administration has come to a grand strategy. But such a shift of resources makes no sense if it leaves the former region ablaze and merely adds to tension in the latter. A serious strategy would surely make some attempt to establish linkage between the Far East and the Middle East. It is the Chinese, not the Americans, who are becoming increasingly dependent on



Middle Eastern oil. Yet all the pivot achieved was to arouse suspicion in Beijing that some kind of "containment" of China is being contemplated.

Maybe, on reflection, it is not a Kennan that Mr. Obama needs, but a Kissinger. "The attainment of peace is not as easy as the desire for it," Dr. Kissinger once observed. "Those ages which in retrospect seem most peaceful were least in search of peace. Those whose quest for it seems unending appear least able to achieve tranquillity. Whenever peace—conceived as the avoidance of war—has been the primary objective . . . the international system has been at the mercy of [its] most ruthless member."

Those are words this president, at a time when there is much ruthlessness abroad in the world, would do well to ponder.

*Mr. Ferguson is a history professor at Harvard and a senior fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution. His most recent book is "The Great Degeneration" (Penguin Press, 2013).*

## **Power Line**

### **[Photo of the Day: The Catastrophe in Syria](#)**

by John Hinderaker

The Obama administration's Syria policy has been a fiasco. I don't think anyone seriously tries to defend it. That said, the humanitarian tragedy that is unfolding in that country is not the responsibility of the U.S. government. It is the fault of Bashar Assad and his minions, and al Qaeda and other radical Muslims who have forcibly taken over the opposition to Assad. The human catastrophe in Syria is almost beyond reckoning. You can look up the numbers, but what stunned me was this photograph, taken late last month. The scene is Yarmouk, a district of Damascus that is populated largely by Palestinian "refugees" and has been the scene of heavy fighting. The U.N. gained access to Yarmouk and passed out food there. These people are hoping to get something to eat.



## Streetwise Professor

### [I'm Sorry, But "Feckless" Just Isn't Insulting Enough](#)

by Craig Pirrong

I have repeatedly called the administration's policies in Syria and vis a vis Russia "feckless." This was intended to be a damning insult. But it just isn't insulting enough.

Why do I say that? The White House told CNN that the Russian takeover of Ukraine isn't an invasion. Get this: It's an "[uncontested arrival](#)."

You know, just like the Rhineland, the Anschluss, the Sudetenland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, etc.

Only Orwell can do justice to such a monstrous formulation:



“Political language is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind.”

This administration will stop at nothing to avoid confronting Putin in any way, shape, or form.

Reading such Orwellian formulations as “uncontested arrival,” Putin will conclude that the US will not even put a speed bump in his path, which will only encourage him. In Ukraine, definitely. But maybe not just there. He also itches to settle the Baltics’ hash.

This is very dangerous. Eventually political pressure or a Jimmy Carter circa December, 1979-like realization will compel Obama to do something, as much as he rebels against the very idea. This is exactly the way things can spin out of control. Far better to be stalwart upfront, then reactive later on.

But hey. Who am I to harsh The One’s [happy hour](#)?

## **Streetwise Professor**

### **Putin Digs Into the Main Course, Served Up by the Ignominious Failure in the WH**

by Craig Pirrong

As I said yesterday, the appetite comes with the eating, and Putin would snap up the rest of Ukraine. Having finished up the appetizer of Crimea, he is now digging into the main course.

Today the upper chamber of the Russian trained seal show, aka its parliament, approved Putin’s request for authorization to send Russian military forces into Ukraine. Not Crimea. All of Ukraine.

It was sure a cliffhanger following the debate and vote on Twitter. The issue was in doubt to the very last vote.

Sorry. In times like these one needs to find humor where one can, and black humor and sarcasm are about all that work.

Putin’s “request” for authorization included all of the elements laid out by Medvedev and Lavrov and others in the Russian hierarchy in the immediate aftermath of Yanukovich’s fall. Like I said, they were building the justification for intervention in Ukraine. This was in the works from the very beginning of the crisis.

Why is Putin moving so quickly? I think this is overdetermined. A mixture of personal/subjective and objective/pragmatic considerations.

First, as I said from the very early days of this blog, Putin is a man in a hurry: it is part of his nature. His impatience was no doubt increased by the burning desire to revenge what he views as a personal humiliation inflicted on him by the Ukrainian revolutionaries at the climax of his Olympic extravaganza.

Second, Ukraine is in a chaotic state, as is every government in the immediate aftermath of a revolution. The military is no doubt reeling and riven by dissent and rivalry. The government has

little idea of which units and commanders it can rely on. There is no experienced competent authority in place, especially in the defense and interior ministries. There cannot be a unity of command in such circumstances. Moreover, parts of the country are ripe for putsches by fifth columns supported and guided by Moscow. (During the Cold War, Soviet operational plans for an invasion of Europe included extensive provisions for sowing chaos in rear areas, including by fomenting civil unrest.) A disorganized, chaotic polity is much easier picking than would be the case in a few months, or even a few weeks, when it has had time to get its feet under it.

Third, Putin has taken the measure of his opponents in the West, and found them lacking. Note the timing. Within mere hours of Obama's craven and empty warning, Putin moves to war. He knows he has nothing to fear from Obama. Obama's warning turned out to be less of a deterrent, and more of an invitation. Obama's pre-gala dinner act had pretty much the same effect on Putin as Dean Acheson's neglect to mention that South Korea was in the US security perimeter had on Stalin. And you know that Putin has nothing but scorn for the Euros.

Fourth, knowing the dithering nature of the Western leadership, he wants to get inside their slow decision loop (I don't call it an OODA loop because there is considerable doubt whether any "Act" would be involved). By moving fast, he can present them with facts on the ground that will be virtually impossible to reverse. Possession is nine-tenths of the law.

So here we are.

A couple of other points must be made.

First, this has to be the most complete public humiliation inflicted on any American president ever. Obama gave what he thought was a stern warning, and within hours Putin defied it with relish. Such defiance is a sign of complete disrespect.

Second, this represents another utter and abject failure of US intelligence, which evidently had concluded that Putin would not invade. In this, they were at one with the *bien pensant* set, epitomized by [Dmitri Trenin](#), but which sadly in this instance included [Mark Galeotti](#), who is usually more wise to Putin's thuggery.

If I had to guess at a diagnosis, I would say that this is a case of projection and mirror imaging. Rather than seeing Putin as he is, the intelligence community assumed that Putin is a rational actor not really different from any Western leader. Putin is a rational actor, perhaps, but his premises, goals, and interests are far different. By failing to understand him, the IC completely miscalculated and misunderstood.

Then there is one other aspect to this. Was it an analytical failure only? Or was there an information failure? Indulging in some speculation, I wonder if it is possible that information obtained from Snowden allowed the Russians to identify and plug some vulnerabilities in their communications that deprived us of vital information precisely when it was needed.

Regardless. This whole episode is an utterly ignominious failure by the US and European "leadership."

Somewhere Chamberlain is smiling. He has company.

## Breitbart

### Palin Mocked in 2008 for Warning Putin May Invade Ukraine if Obama Elected

by Tony Lee

Palin [said](#) then:

After the Russian Army invaded the nation of Georgia, Senator Obama's reaction was one of indecision and moral equivalence, the kind of response that would only encourage Russia's Putin to invade Ukraine next.

For those comments, she was mocked by the high-brow *Foreign Policy* magazine and its editor Blake Hounshell, who now is one of the editors of *Politico* magazine.

In light of recent events in Ukraine and concerns that Russia is getting its troops ready to cross the border into the neighboring nation, nobody seems to be laughing at or dismissing those comments now.

Hounshell [wrote then](#) that Palin's comments were "strange" and "this is an extremely far-fetched scenario."

"And given how Russia has been able to unsettle Ukraine's pro-Western government without firing a shot, I don't see why violence would be necessary to bring Kiev to heel," Hounshell dismissively wrote.

Palin made her remarks on the stump after Obama's running mate Joe Biden warned Obama supporters to "gird your loins" if Obama is elected because international leaders may test or try to take advantage of him.

## National Review

### Piers Morgan's Revealing Rancor

***Some people realized he only needed to be as rude as he was to me if he was wrong.***

by John R. Lott, Jr.

Sunday's announcement that Piers Morgan had lost his show at CNN was hardly unexpected.

The ratings for the coveted 9 p.m. time slot were abysmal, dropping last week to just 270,000 viewers — about one-eighth of what Fox News's Megyn Kelly got in the same time slot.

Some, such as [Variety magazine](#), have speculated that the low ratings are due to Morgan's single-minded push for gun control. That might have something to do with it, but much more is going on.

In all the thousands of television and radio interviews that I have done over the years, my appearances on Morgan's show have generated more immediate e-mails than any other show that I have ever been on.

The response made one thing immediately obvious: Only the most diehard gun-control advocates watched his show. But even some of them were unwilling to listen to his abuse.

Americans like a lively debate, but Morgan failed one basic rule: to debate the issue itself rather than make everything personal.

For instance, he yelled at Larry Pratt of Gun Owners of America: "You're an unbelievably stupid man, aren't you?"

He has referred to me as a "liar" and a "clown" and attacked the shape of my "weird pointy bushy eyebrows" that are deformed because of surgery that I had as a kid to remove a tumor. He has encouraged guests such as Alan Dershowitz to make such bizarrely false claims as the idea that my "conclusions are paid for and financed by the National Rifle Association" or that my work "is junk science at its worst. Paid for and financed by the National Rifle Association."

Among my various appearances, Morgan invited me on his very first shows after the Aurora, Colo., movie-theater shooting, the Newtown massacre, and the Navy Yard shooting. But with emotions running high after these tragedies, his strategy was clearly to inflame emotions still further, not attempt to solve the problems.

The *Washington Post's* Erik Wemple described Piers's interviewing style this way:

Morgan interrupted Lott enough times to short-circuit the Erik Wemple Blog Interrupto-Meter.

- He interrupted Lott when Lott was trying to make a point about mass shooting tallies;
- He interrupted Lott when Lott was trying to make a point about weapons types;
- He interrupted Lott when Lott was trying to make a point about evidence for the effectiveness of weapons bans;
- He interrupted Lott several times when Lott was trying to make a point about mass shootings overseas.

And then he interrupted Lott when Lott complained that he was being interrupted. "I'm going to keep talking, so I suggest you keep quiet," Morgan said, determined, apparently, to win this face-off not on the merits but via verbal thuggery.

Many others reacted negatively to Morgan's heavy-handedness. While hundreds of the e-mails that I received from his viewers would engage in long diatribes filled with swear words, threats, and claims that I was guilty of murder, there were also a lot of sensible e-mails, such as this one:

Dear Dr Lott,

I am rather liberal, and, with no real knowledge or facts, am a proponent of gun laws.



I was very interested in hearing what you had to say this evening on Piers Morgan. Unfortunately, that did not happen because of Mr. Morgan's near childish behavior and disrespect he showed you this evening. You should be extremely proud of the composure you demonstrated on his show. In my opinion, you were by far the better man this evening.

As noble as he thought he was, Piers did a disservice to his cause. I will buy your book and read it, and if I find your conclusions credible by my own standards, I will write Mr. Morgan and let him know.

I may end up disagreeing with you, but tonight, you have certainly won my respect.

During one show I joked that Piers had an unusual interviewing style, where he would ask the questions and then answer them himself. When several of the camera crew started laughing out loud while we were still on the air, Piers shot them an incredibly angry look and they stopped laughing.

So why keep appearing on his show? I kept at it in part because of e-mails such as the one above. Morgan's yelling was doing far more damage to himself than he did to his guests. And while Piers might have been doing 80 to 90 percent of the talking, such a diehard gun-control audience would possibly hear a couple of facts during my appearance that they had never heard before.

Support for gun control has been plummeting, reaching its lowest level since such poll questions began. Part of it is that Americans are realizing gun control doesn't work and may actually make things worse. But Piers Morgan did his part too: Americans know that the better argument doesn't require his behavior.

*John R. Lott Jr. is the president of the Crime Prevention Research Center and the author of More Guns, Less Crime (University of Chicago Press, 2010, 3rd edition).*



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AND IN LIGHTER NEWS...  
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Gary Varvel  
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2 out of 3 LIKE a *Minimum Wage* HIKE

I GOT A  
RAISE!



I GOT A  
RAISE!



MY BOSS FIRED  
ME TO PAY FOR  
THEIR RAISE.



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**Thanks, Daddy!**



**This is way better than a Barbie doll!**