

March 5, 2014

Before we return to the Ukrainian disaster, we'll pause for an item by [Joel Kotkin](#), our favorite geographer, who says no matter what the media types say, the Sunbelt is booming and the coasts are toast.

Ever since the Great Recession ripped through the economies of the Sunbelt, America's coastal pundit class has been giddily predicting its demise. Strangled by high-energy prices, cooked by global warming, rejected by a new generation of urban-centric millennials, this vast southern was doomed to become, in the words of the Atlantic, where the "American dream" has gone to die. If the doomsayers are right, Americans must be the ultimate masochists. After a brief hiatus, people seem to, once again, be streaming towards the expanse of warm-weather states extending from the southeastern seaboard to Phoenix.

Since 2010, according to an American Community Survey by demographer Wendell Cox, over one million people have moved to the Sunbelt mostly from the Northeast and Midwest.

Any guesses for the states that have gained the most domestic migrants since 2010? The Sunbelt dominates the top three: Texas, Florida and Arizona. And who's losing the most people? Generally the states dearest to the current ruling class: New York, Illinois, California and New Jersey. Some assert this reflects the loss of poorer, working class folks to areas while the "smart" types continue to move to the big cities of Northeast and California. Yet, according to American Community Survey Data for 2007 to 2011, the biggest gainers of college graduates, according to Cox, have been Texas, Arizona and Florida; the biggest losers are in the Northeast (New York), the Midwest (Illinois and Michigan)

For the most part, notes demographer Cox, this is not a movement to Tombstone or Mayberry, although many small towns in the south are doing well, it's is a movement to Sunbelt cities. Indeed, of the ten fastest growing big metros areas in America in 2012, nine were in the Sunbelt. These included not only the big four Texas cities—Austin, Houston, Dallas-Ft. Worth, San Antonio—but also Orlando, Raleigh, Phoenix, and Charlotte.

Perhaps the biggest sign of a Sunbelt turnaround is the resurgence of Phoenix, a region devastated by the housing bust and widely regarded by contemporary urbanists as the "least sustainable" of American cities. The recovery of Phoenix, appropriately named the Valley of the Sun, is strong evidence that even the most impacted Sunbelt regions are on the way back. ...

Roger Simon says Putin and the president have something in common, but more differences.

With Vladimir Putin giving Barack Obama the back of his gloved hand in the Crimea, it's easy to forget what the two leaders have in common. Neither of them likes democracy very much.

In Putin's case that couldn't be more obvious, but Obama has given more than his share of signals to that effect in recent days, informing a complaisant Congress during the State of the Union that he was going to override them and take the law into his own hands by executive fiat if they didn't go along with his policies. His number one consigliere, Valerie Jarrett, repeated essentially the same thing during a recent interview on The O'Reilly Factor.

Unfortunately, that's about it in the similarity department (except they both seem to like sports). In two other major categories, the dissimilarities are striking. Putin is one tough dude and a patriot for his country. Obama is neither of these. In evidence I offer one five-letter word: Syria. I could offer a lot more, but I don't want to bore you.

The point is, as Putin threatens Ukraine and who knows what else, China moves on the Japanese islands, the Iranian mullahs jaw on while moving ever closer to nuclear capability, the already nuclear North Koreans improve their ballistics while starving their people, Venezuela approaches civil war, al-Qaeda and its myriad cousins metastasize across North Africa, the Levant, and beyond, the West has at its helm someone who is not only a documented liar ("if you like your plan," etc., etc.) but who is also essentially a blowhard. Even worse, and ultimately even more dangerous to our health and/or survival, our president is a monumentally poor judge of character. He is clueless. ...

We know our friends don't think much of the prez, but now liberals see the failure. From [Slate](#) we learn Romney got it right and you know who got it wrong.

... Here's Obama.

Governor Romney, I'm glad that you recognize that Al Qaida is a threat, because a few months ago when you were asked what's the biggest geopolitical threat facing America, you said Russia, not Al Qaida; you said Russia, in the 1980s, they're now calling to ask for their foreign policy back because, you know, the Cold War's been over for 20 years.

But Governor, when it comes to our foreign policy, you seem to want to import the foreign policies of the 1980s, just like the social policies of the 1950s and the economic policies of the 1920s.

And here's Romney:

Russia I indicated is a geopolitical foe... and I said in the same -- in the same paragraph I said, and Iran is the greatest national security threat we face. Russia does continue to battle us in the U.N. time and time again. I have clear eyes on this. I'm not going to wear rose-colored glasses when it comes to Russia, or Mr. Putin. And I'm certainly not going to say to him, I'll give you more flexibility after the election. After the election, he'll get more backbone.

Romney was right. Why was Obama wrong? Because, I think, he was willfully blurring the distinction between "geopolitical" and other sorts of threats. He was playing to the cheap seats. Voters do not fear Russia, or particularly care about its movements in its sad, cold sphere of influence. They do care a lot about terrorism. And Obama would use any chance he had, in 2012, to remind voters that he was president when Osama Bin Laden was killed.

So you see the politics—they reveal Obama as the player of a cheap trick. ...

Here's a blogger from the leftist [New Republic](#).

In the course of the last presidential campaign, Mitt Romney made a comment about America's number one "geopolitical foe," which Romney claimed was Russia. He was mocked by the

president and many liberal commentators. Here are Romney's remarks, in their full context, which came during a conversation with Wolf Blitzer:

ROMNEY: Russia...is, without question, our number one geopolitical foe. They fight every cause for the world's worst actors.

BLITZER: But you think Russia is a bigger foe right now than, let's say, Iran or China or North Korea? Is that—is that what you're suggesting, Governor?

ROMNEY: Well, I'm saying in terms of a geopolitical opponent, the nation that lines up with the world's worst actors. Of course, the greatest threat that the world faces is a nuclear Iran. A nuclear North Korea is already troubling enough.

But when these—these terrible actors pursue their course in the world and we go to the United Nations looking for ways to stop them, when—when Assad, for instance, is murdering his own people, we go—we go to the United Nations, and who is it that always stands up for the world's worst actors? It is always Russia, typically with China alongside.

And—and so in terms of a geopolitical foe, a nation that's on the Security Council, that has the heft of the Security Council and is, of course, a—a massive nuclear power, Russia is the—the geopolitical foe.

This all seems...exactly right.

Another **New Republic** contributor is tired of the administration clichés.

Everyone's giving President Obama advice about how to handle Vladimir Putin's adventure into the Crimea. But I want to issue a broader critique, because there's something that he and his people will need to do to be more effective in this case and in future foreign policy crises: They'll need to change their rhetoric.

In talking about Putin, as when trying to express disapproval towards other world leaders in the past, administration officials have resorted to language that comes across as either patronizing or out of touch. Let's examine a couple of the administration's favorite rhetorical tropes.

1. They are not acting in their own interest. They are only harming themselves.

Secretary of State John Kerry was all over the airwaves this weekend with versions of this line. "He is not going to gain by this," Kerry told David Gregory on "Meet the Press." "Russia is going to lose. The Russian people are going to lose."

Over the years, Obama and his aides have offered similar versions of this line in talking about other foreign leaders who had done or were about to do something of which the administration disapproved: in Syria, for example, or Egypt or Qaddafi's Libya. And guess what? It's a useless line of attack. Putin makes his own calculations of what is in his interest. If he believed that sending troops onto Ukrainian soil was a bad idea, he wouldn't have done it. Bashar al-Assad also makes his own calculations. He's worried that if he loses to the rebels, he and many of the people around him will be killed. It's enough of a full-time responsibility for Obama and Kerry to define what's in

America's own interests without making grand proclamations of what's in the best interest of other countries or their leaders. ...

Back to our friends, Peter Wehner traces the president's journey from arrogance to incompetence.

... When he ran for the presidency, it was Barack Obama who never put limits on his criticisms of others. He spoke as if the problems of the world would disappear with two events: the removal from office of his predecessor and his arrival as president of the United States. Even in a profession not known for attracting modest individuals, Mr. Obama's arrogance set him apart.

In 2008 his campaign aides referred to him as the "black Jesus." He told congressional Democrats during the 2008 campaign, "I have become a symbol of the possibility of America returning to our best traditions." During that campaign, while still a one-term senator, Obama decided he wanted to give a speech in Germany— and he wanted to deliver it at the Brandenburg Gate.

"I think that I'm a better speechwriter than my speechwriters," Mr. Obama told Patrick Gaspard, his political director, at the start of the 2008 campaign, according to The New Yorker. "I know more about policies on any particular issue than my policy directors. And I'll tell you right now that I'm going to think I'm a better political director than my political director." A convention speech wasn't enough for Mr. Obama; Greek columns needed to be added. During an interview with "60 Minutes," Obama said, "I would put our legislative and foreign policy accomplishments in our first two years against any president — with the possible exceptions of Johnson, FDR, and Lincoln." (The use of the word "possible" is priceless.) Mr. Obama has compared himself to LeBron James; his aides compared him to Michael Jordan. He clearly conceived of himself as a world-historical figure. Nothing, it seemed, was beyond his power. (If you think I'm exaggerating, I'd urge you to watch this 30-second clip from an Obama speech in 2008.) ...

Daily Beast

[Forget What the Pundits Tell You, Coastal Cities are Old News - it's the Sunbelt that's Booming](#)

While traditional big cities are struggling, the Sunbelt cities like Houston and Phoenix are booming. If trends continue, the Sunbelt will keep growing as the coasts decline.

by Joel Kotkin

Ever since the Great Recession ripped through the economies of the Sunbelt, America's coastal pundit class has been giddily predicting its demise. Strangled by high-energy prices, cooked by global warming, rejected by a new generation of urban-centric millennials, this vast southern was doomed to become, in the words of the Atlantic, where the "American dream" has gone to die. If the doomsayers are right, Americans must be the ultimate masochists. After a brief hiatus, people seem to, once again, be streaming towards the expanse of warm-weather states extending from the southeastern seaboard to Phoenix.

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Any guesses for the states that have gained the most domestic migrants since 2010? The Sunbelt dominates the top three: Texas, Florida and Arizona. And who's losing the most people? Generally the states dearest to the current ruling class: New York, Illinois, California and New Jersey. Some assert this reflects the loss of poorer, working class folks to areas while the "smart" types continue to move to the big cities of Northeast and California. Yet, according to American Community Survey Data for 2007 to 2011, the biggest gainers of college graduates, according to Cox, have been Texas, Arizona and Florida; the biggest losers are in the Northeast (New York), the Midwest (Illinois and Michigan)

For the most part, notes demographer Cox, this is not a movement to Tombstone or Mayberry, although many small towns in the south are doing well, it's is a movement to Sunbelt cities. Indeed, of the ten fastest growing big metros areas in America in 2012, [nine](#) were in the Sunbelt. These included not only the big four Texas cities—Austin, Houston, Dallas-Ft. Worth, San Antonio—but also Orlando, Raleigh, Phoenix, and Charlotte.

Perhaps the biggest sign of a Sunbelt turnaround is the resurgence of Phoenix, a region devastated by the housing bust and widely regarded by contemporary urbanists as the "[least sustainable](#)" of American cities. The recovery of Phoenix, appropriately named the Valley of the Sun, is strong evidence that even the most impacted Sunbelt regions are on the way back.

A look at the numbers on domestic migration undermines the claim that most Americans prefer, like the pundit class, to live in and near the dense Northeastern urban cores. People simply continue to vote with their feet. Since 2000, more than 300,000 people have moved to Atlanta, Dallas, Houston, and Charlotte; in contrast a net over two million left New York and 1.4 million have deserted the LA area while over 600,000 net departed Chicago and almost as many left the San Francisco Bay region. These trends were slowed, but not reversed, by the Great Recession.

The Sunbelt's recovery seems likely to continue in the future. Immigrants, who account for a rising proportion of our population growth, are increasingly heading there. New York remains the immigrant leader, with the foreign-born population increasing by 600,000 since 2000 but second place Houston, a relative newcomer for immigrants, gained 400,000, more than Chicago and the Bay Area combined. The regions experiencing the highest rate of newcomers were largely in the south; Charlotte and Nashville saw their foreign-born populations double as immigrants increasingly beat a path to the Sunbelt cities.

The final demographic coup for the Sunbelt lies in its attraction for families. Eight of the eleven top fastest growing populations under 14, notes Cox, are found in the Sunbelt with New Orleans leading the pack. Generally speaking, roughly twenty percent or more of the population of Sunbelt metros are under 14, far above the levels seen in the rustbelt, the Left Coast, or in the Northeast.

This all suggests that the Sunbelt is cementing, not losing, its grip on America's demographic future. By 2012 and 2017, according to a [survey by the manufacturing company Pitney Bowes](#) nine of the ten leading regions in terms of household growth will be in the Sunbelt.

If the population growth rates [predicted](#) by the US Conference of Mayors continue, Dallas-Ft. Worth will push Chicago out of third place among American metropolitan areas in 2043, with

Houston passing the Windy City eight years later. Now seventh place Atlanta would move up to sixth place and Phoenix to 8th. Of America's largest cities then, five would be located in the Sunbelt, and all are expected to grow much faster than New York, Los Angeles or the San Francisco area. Overall, the South would account for over half the growth in our major metropolitan areas in 2042, compared to barely 3.6 percent for the Northeast and 8.7 percent in the Midwest.

What drives the change? Not just the sun, but the economy, stupidos!

From the beginning of the Sunbelt ascendancy, sunshine and warm weather have been important lures and this may even be more true in the near future. But the key forces driving people to the Sunbelt are largely economic—notably job creation, lower housing prices and lower costs relative to incomes.

Until the housing bust, states like Arizona, Nevada and Florida were typically among the leaders in creating new jobs but their performance fell off with the decline of construction. But other Sunbelt locales, notably Texas, Louisiana and Oklahoma have picked up much of the slack. This resurgence has been centered in Texas, which created nearly a million new jobs between 2007 and 2013. In contrast, arch-rival California has lost a half a million.

Many other Sunbelt states have yet to recover jobs lost from the recession, but most of their big metros have shown strong signs of recovery. Since 2007 [five of the seven fastest growing jobs markets](#) among the twenty largest cities were in Sunbelt states. Looking forward, recent estimates of job growth between 2013 and 2017, according to [Forbes and Moody's](#) project employment to grow fastest in Arizona, followed by Texas. Also among the top ten are several states hit hard by the Recession, notably Florida, Georgia and Nevada. No Northeastern state appeared anywhere on the list; nor did California.

For all its shortcomings, including what some may consider the overuse of tax breaks and incentives, the much-dissed Sunbelt development model continues to reap some significant gains. The area's history of lagging economically has long spurred Sunbelt economic developers to utilize a policy of light regulation, low taxes and lack of unions to lure businesses to their area. Sunbelt states—Texas, Florida, the Carolinas, Tennessee, Arizona—dominate the ranks of the most business friendly states in the union, [notes Chief Executive magazine](#), findings they often cite when courting footloose businesses.

The clear economic capital of the Sunbelt is now Houston, with some stiff competition from Dallas-Ft. Worth. Houston, [the energy capital](#), now ranks second only to New York in new office construction and is the overall number one for corporate expansions. There are fifty new office buildings going up in the city, including Exxon Mobil's campus, the country's second largest office complex under construction (after New York's Freedom Tower). Chevron, once Standard Oil of California, has announced [plans](#) to construct a second tower for its downtown Houston campus while Occidental Petroleum, founded more than fifty years ago in Los Angeles, is [moving](#) its headquarters to Houston.

Houston's ascendance epitomizes the shift in the geographic and economic center of the Sunbelt. The "original in the Xerox machine" for Sunbelt style growth, Los Angeles' rise was powered by new industries like entertainment and aerospace and oil, ever expanding sprawl and a strong, tightly knit business elite. Pleasant weather and Hollywood glitz still inform the image of Los Angeles, but under a regime dominated by government employee unions, greens and developers

of dense housing, it suffers unemployment almost four points higher than Houston . Nine million square feet of space is currently being built in Houston, compared to just over one million in Los Angeles-Orange which has more than twice the population. It is not in the rising Sunbelt but in places like Southern California, where [jobs lag amidst high costs](#), that the American dream now seems most likely to die.

Movin' on Up

In Houston particularly but throughout the Sunbelt, job growth critically is not tied to cheap labor, but to industries like energy which pay roughly \$20,000 more than those in the information sector. According to [EMSI](#), a company that models labor market data, energy has generated some 200,000 new jobs in Texas alone over the past decade. Although Houston is the primary beneficiary, the American energy boom is also sparking strong growth in other cities, notably Dallas-Ft. Worth, San Antonio, and Oklahoma City.

Once dependent on low-wage industries such as textiles and furniture, the energy boom is pacing a Sunbelt move towards generally better paying heavy manufacturing. Texas and Louisiana already lead the nation in large new projects, many of them in petrochemicals and other oil-related production. Of the biggest non-energy investments, three of the top four, according to the Ernst and Young Investment Monitor, are in Tennessee, Alabama and South Carolina, which are becoming the new heartland of American heavy manufacturing, notably in automobiles and steel. Since 2010, Birmingham, Houston, Nashville and Oklahoma city all have enjoyed double digit growth in high paying industrial jobs that used to be the near exclusive province of the Great Lakes, California and the Northeast.

The Sunbelt resurgence is important in part because it offers some hope to millions of Americans who may not have gone to Harvard or Stanford, but have work skills and ambition. The region's growth in what might be called "middle skilled jobs" that pay \$60,000 or above has been impressive.

It may come as a surprise to some, but the Sunbelt is also pulling ahead in high tech jobs. In a recent [analysis of STEM \(science, technology, engineering and mathematics\) job growth for Forbes](#) we found that out of out of the 52 largest regions, the four most rapid growers over the past decade were Austin, Raleigh, Houston and Nashville, with Jacksonville, Phoenix and Dallas also in the top fifteen. In contrast New York ranked #36th out of 52 and Los Angeles, a long-time tech superpower, now a mediocre #38.

In another example of how much things are changing, when college students in the South now graduate, noted a recent University of [Alabama study](#), they do go to the "big city" but their top four choices outside the state are in the Sunbelt—Atlanta, Houston, Nashville, Tenn., and Dallas—and followed then by New York. The biggest net gains in people with BAs and higher are primarily in the sunbelt, led by Phoenix, Houston, Dallas-Ft. Worth, Austin, Houston and San Antonio; the biggest losers, according to Cox's calculations, have been New York, Los Angeles, Chicago and, surprisingly given its reputation, Boston.

These trends may become more pronounced as the current millennial generation starts settling down into family life. Housing costs could prove a decisive factor. In terms of the median multiple, median housing cost as share of median household income, Sunbelt cities tend to be about half as expensive as New York, Boston or Los Angeles, and one third of the Bay Area.

To be sure, many of the “best and brightest” will continue to flock to New York, the Bay Area or Los Angeles, but many more—particularly those without Ivy degrees or wealthy parents—may migrate to those places where their paycheck stretches the furthest. The Sunbelt, with its job growth, strong middle class wages and low housing costs, is a good bet for the future.

What will the future bring?

Prosperity, Herodotus reminded us, “never abides long in one place.” Certainly the Sunbelt economy could lose its current momentum but fortunately, having been schooled by the housing bust, many Sunbelt communities are increasingly focused on improving their basic economy—jobs, income growth, and skills-based education. Tennessee and Louisiana, for example, have led the way on expanding working training, and some of the most ambitious education reform is taking place in New Orleans and Houston.

Yet, there are many threats to continued growth, both internal and external. Given his penchant for executive orders and his close ties to wealthy green donors, President Obama could take steps—for example clamping down on fossil fuel development—that could reverse the steady growth along the Gulf Coast. Any draconian shift on climate change policies would be most detrimental to the energy sector Sunbelt states.

But President Obama will not be in office forever. In the long run, the biggest threat to the Sunbelt ascendancy is internal. Some fear that as more easterners and Californians flock to the area, they will bring with them a taste for the very regulatory and tax policies that have stifled growth in the states they left behind. Most worryingly, so called “smart growth” regulations could drive housing costs up, as occurred in Florida and several other states in the last decade, and erode some of the Sunbelt’s competitive advantage.

Perhaps the most immediate threat comes from the angry, reactionary elements on the right, who tend to be more powerful in the sunbelt than elsewhere. These groups, sometimes including the Tea Party, have taken positions on issues like immigration and gay rights that local business leaders fear could deprive their regions of energetic and often entrepreneurial newcomers. Equally important, the right’s anti-tax orthodoxy, although perhaps not as devastating as the huge burdens placed on middle class individuals in the North and California, could delay critical outlays in transportation, parks and other essential infrastructure in regions that are growing rapidly. This is particularly true of education, a field in which most Sunbelt cities, while gaining ground, remain below the national average.

Whatever one thinks of the motivations of the green clerisy, there are clearly environmental measures, particularly in the Sunbelt’s western regions, that these cities need to enact to protect future growth. This includes reducing the amount of concrete that creates “[heat islands](#),” expanding parks, and shifting to more drought resistant plants.

Fortunately, many leaders throughout the Sunbelt, particularly in its cities, are aware of these challenges, and are looking for ways to tackle them. This is driven not by the doomsday environmentalism common in California and Northeast, but grows instead out of a practical concern with stewarding critical resources and creating the right amenities to foster continued growth.

Combined with basics like lower housing costs and taxes, it's a common optimism about the future that really underlies the resurgence now occurring from Phoenix to Tampa. The long-term shifts in American power and influence that have been underway since the 1950s have not been halted by the housing bust. Disdained by urban aesthetes, hated by much of the punditry, and largely ignored except for their failings in the media, the Sunbelt seems likely to enjoy the last laugh when it comes to shaping the American future.

Roger L. Simon

What Putin and Obama Do and Don't Have in Common

With Vladimir Putin giving Barack Obama the back of his gloved hand in the Crimea, it's easy to forget what the two leaders have in common. Neither of them likes democracy very much.

In Putin's case that couldn't be more obvious, but Obama has given more than his share of signals to that effect in recent days, informing a complaisant Congress during the State of the Union that he was going to override them and take the law into his own hands by executive fiat if they didn't go along with his policies. His number one *consigliere*, Valerie Jarrett, repeated essentially the same thing during a recent interview on *The O'Reilly Factor*.

Unfortunately, that's about it in the similarity department (except they both seem to like sports). In two other major categories, the dissimilarities are striking. Putin is one tough dude and a patriot for his country. Obama is neither of these. In evidence I offer one five-letter word: Syria. I could offer a lot more, but I don't want to bore you.

The point is, as Putin threatens Ukraine and who knows what else, China moves on the Japanese islands, the Iranian mullahs jaw on while moving ever closer to nuclear capability, the already nuclear North Koreans improve their ballistics while starving their people, Venezuela approaches civil war, al-Qaeda and its myriad cousins metastasize across North Africa, the Levant, and beyond, the West has at its helm someone who is not only a documented liar ("if you like your plan," etc., etc.) but who is also essentially a blowhard. Even worse, and ultimately even more dangerous to our health and/or survival, our president is a monumentally poor judge of character. He is clueless.

Consider this: Obama preferred the company of Egypt's vile Islamist Morsi and Turkey's equally vile Islamist Erdogan (not to mention Putin himself, whom many recall Obama reassured, via Medvedev, of his coming "flexibility" with the Russian president after Obama's own reelection) to Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu. Talk about not knowing who your friends really are.

Well, scratch that. Maybe those really *are* his friends, which makes the situation yet more horrifying. (Only the editors of the *L.A. Times* know for sure — and they won't release the [Khalidi tape](#).)

Speaking of which, much like a schoolyard bully when another bully is about to beat him up, [Obama turned on Netanyahu](#) (just before the DC arrival of the PM of the smaller nation for the AIPAC conference) by playing the "boycott card." He warned the Israeli PM, in an interview with Jeffrey Goldberg of Bloomberg News, that he'd better make a deal with the Palestinians — I

suppose to Obama's liking — or his country would become a pariah. Worse yet, Obama implied he wouldn't help the Jewish state if it did have to stand on its own.

Is that really "worse yet"? I leave that for you to decide. Nevertheless, it was interesting watching C-SPAN today as the coverage flipped between the United Nations Security Council, where Russia was being excoriated for invading Ukraine, and the AIPAC conference where, [as PJM's Bridget Johnson reported](#), Treasury Secretary Jack Lew, himself an Orthodox Jew, received a stony reception. As Bridget wrote, John Kerry didn't fare much better with the audience.

One could assume it would have been the same for Vladimir Putin had he, although it would have been extraordinarily unlikely, been invited to address AIPAC. But one can also assume that people would have paid a lot more attention to him than to Kerry, Lew or anyone else from the Obama administration. No one listens to them anymore — locally or globally.

Slate

[Why Obama Got Russia Wrong \(and Romney Got It Right\)](#)

by David Weigel

To peer into the conservative media and blogosphere as it [covers Russia's invasion](#) of Crimea is to risk a fatal dose of schadenfreude. There are reports about how Sarah Palin totally [called](#) that Putin would invade Ukraine (she will be on Fox News tonight to remind us), about how Mitt Romney was unfairly mocked for calling Russia the greatest "geopolitical threat" to the United States, about Hillary Clinton's "reset button" gaffe. Even the Liberal *New Republic* (tm) [has admitted that Mitt Romney](#) was right about the Russians and their ambitions.

And he was. Why did Barack Obama blow it? Let's [revisit](#) the final 2012 presidential debate, the moment Romney explained himself and the president went for the lulz.

Here's Obama.

Governor Romney, I'm glad that you recognize that Al Qaida is a threat, because a few months ago when you were asked what's the biggest geopolitical threat facing America, you said Russia, not Al Qaida; you said Russia, in the 1980s, they're now calling to ask for their foreign policy back because, you know, the Cold War's been over for 20 years.

But Governor, when it comes to our foreign policy, you seem to want to import the foreign policies of the 1980s, just like the social policies of the 1950s and the economic policies of the 1920s.

And here's Romney:

Russia I indicated is a geopolitical foe... and I said in the same -- in the same paragraph I said, and Iran is the greatest national security threat we face. Russia does continue to battle us in the U.N. time and time again. I have clear eyes on this. I'm not going to wear rose-colored glasses when it comes to Russia, or Mr. Putin. And I'm certainly not going to say to him, I'll give you more flexibility after the election. After the election, he'll get more backbone.

Romney was right. Why was Obama wrong? Because, I think, he was willfully blurring the distinction between "geopolitical" and other sorts of threats. He was playing to the cheap seats. Voters do not fear Russia, or [particularly care](#) about its movements in its sad, cold sphere of influence. They do care a lot about terrorism. And Obama would use any chance he had, in 2012, to remind voters that he was president when Osama Bin Laden was killed.

So you see the politics—they reveal Obama as the player of a cheap trick. Of course al-Qaida isn't a "geopolitical threat" to the United States. It's a terrorist organization, untethered to states or geography. Obama himself (like George W. Bush before him) repeatedly claimed that the organization was on the run. How could al-Qaida be the greatest threat to America and a pathetic coalition of losers? It couldn't. Obama was spinning, hopefully faster than Romney could un-spin.

But I don't want to spin for Obama. Romney really did maintain a more cynical long-run view of Russia than Obama did. Obama [saw Russia](#) as a declining power that he could do business with, as he did with the New START treaty. Romney, as he laid out in his pre-campaign book [No Apology](#), saw Russia as a recovering power. Its "rediscovered ambition for superpower status," he wrote, "is fueled by its massive energy reserves." This wasn't as sustainable as China's free-enterprise empire strategy, but it was an empire strategy, and that was enough to get spooked about.

David Weigel is a Slate political reporter.

The New Republic

[Mitt Romney Was Right About Russia](#)

by Issac Chotiner

In the course of the last presidential campaign, Mitt Romney made a comment about America's number one "geopolitical foe," which Romney claimed was Russia. He was mocked by the president and many liberal commentators. [Here](#) are Romney's remarks, in their full context, which came during a conversation with Wolf Blitzer:

ROMNEY: Russia...is, without question, our number one geopolitical foe. They fight every cause for the world's worst actors.

BLITZER: But you think Russia is a bigger foe right now than, let's say, Iran or China or North Korea? Is that—is that what you're suggesting, Governor?

ROMNEY: Well, I'm saying in terms of a geopolitical opponent, the nation that lines up with the world's worst actors. Of course, the greatest threat that the world faces is a nuclear Iran. A nuclear North Korea is already troubling enough.

But when these—these terrible actors pursue their course in the world and we go to the United Nations looking for ways to stop them, when—when Assad, for instance, is murdering his own

people, we go—we go to the United Nations, and who is it that always stands up for the world's worst actors? It is always Russia, typically with China alongside.

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The New Republic **Enough With the Clichés Already**

The Obama administration's rhetoric on Russia is accomplishing nothing

by James Mann

Everyone's giving President Obama advice about how to handle Vladimir Putin's adventure into the Crimea. But I want to issue a broader critique, because there's something that he and his people will need to do to be more effective in this case and in future foreign policy crises: They'll need to change their rhetoric.

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1. They are not acting in their own interest. They are only harming themselves.

Secretary of State John Kerry was all over the airwaves this weekend with versions of this line. "He is not going to gain by this," Kerry told David Gregory on "Meet the Press." "Russia is going to lose. The Russian people are going to lose."

Over the years, Obama and his aides have offered similar versions of this line in talking about other foreign leaders who had done or were about to do something of which the administration disapproved: in Syria, for example, or Egypt or Qaddafi's Libya. And guess what? It's a useless line of attack. Putin makes his own calculations of what is in his interest. If he believed that sending troops onto Ukrainian soil was a bad idea, he wouldn't have done it. Bashar al-Assad also makes his own calculations. He's worried that if he loses to the rebels, he and many of the people around him will be killed. It's enough of a full-time responsibility for Obama and Kerry to define what's in America's own interests without making grand proclamations of what's in the best interest of other countries or their leaders.

2. They're displaying nineteenth century behavior. They need to join the twenty-first century.

The administration loves to brand actions it doesn't like as relics of the past. "It's really nineteenth century behavior in the twenty-first century," Kerry said of Putin's Crimean gambit. A senior administration official who sounded like either National Security Advisor Susan Rice or Ben

Rhodes told reporters on background, “What we see here are distinctly nineteenth- and twenty-first century decisions made by President Putin to address problems.”

Well, to start with, by definition Putin’s decisions are taking place in the twenty-first century. The administration here seems to be using the centuries like a teacher handing out a grade: twenty-first century is an A, twentieth century is a C, nineteenth century is an F. More importantly, talking this way raises an uncomfortable question: Does the reality of the twenty-first century conform to what Obama administration officials think it is? China, for example, is undeniably a force in the twenty-first century—yet its power-oriented approach to the Asia-Pacific region is of the sort that the Obama administration would mistakenly pigeonhole as “nineteenth century” behavior. Really, the Obama team is using “nineteenth-century” as an empty epithet to talk about modern-day behaviors it doesn’t like. And that logically brings us to:

3. They need to understand ideas like interdependence and win-win solutions. This is not a zero-sum game.

The same senior official told reporters that Putin “needs to understand that, in terms of his economy, he lives in ... an interdependent world.” This is one of the core concepts in the worldview of the Obamians, dating back to the earliest days of the 2008 presidential campaign, when Rice and Rhodes were trying to put words on what Obama believed as opposed to, say, Hillary Clinton or George W. Bush or John McCain. Then and ever since, the Obama team has repeatedly invoked the concept of interdependence – and, in a related fashion, has claimed that it is outmoded to believe that in modern-day foreign policy conflicts, there can be winners and losers.

The main problem is that “interdependence” is just a buzzword, not a prescription for policy. Putin understands the concept of interdependence as well as anyone in Washington—he’s just applying the facts in a different way. He knows, for example, that Ukraine and much of Western Europe are dependent on natural gas from Russia, and that this fact impinges on their calculations.

It would much be so much better for the Obama administration to leave the grand rhetoric aside. Instead, it should invoke democratic ideals, condemn what Putin has done, then shut up. Silence has its own strategic power, and the actions of America and its allies can speak for themselves.

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Contentions

[Obama’s Journey from Arrogance to Incompetence](#)

by Peter Wehner

In [a post last week](#), I wrote that near the end of his autobiography, the great French journalist and intellectual Raymond Aron, in a chapter on the tenure of Secretary of State Kissinger, wrote, “For a half century, I have limited my freedom of criticism by asking the question; in his place, what would I do?”

Aron's overall point is that governing is harder than criticizing those attempting to govern and therefore ought to temper a bit one's denunciations of those in power. This applies to those of us who are critics of President Obama.

But this, too, needs to be said. When he ran for the presidency, it was Barack Obama who never put limits on his criticisms of others. He spoke as if the problems of the world would disappear with two events: the removal from office of his predecessor and his arrival as president of the United States. Even in a profession not known for attracting modest individuals, Mr. Obama's arrogance set him apart.

In 2008 his campaign aides referred to him as the "black Jesus." He told congressional Democrats during the 2008 campaign, "I have become a symbol of the possibility of America returning to our best traditions." During that campaign, while still a one-term senator, Obama decided he wanted to give a speech in Germany— and he wanted to deliver it at the Brandenburg Gate.

"I think that I'm a better speechwriter than my speechwriters," Mr. Obama [told](#) Patrick Gaspard, his political director, at the start of the 2008 campaign, according to The New Yorker. "I know more about policies on any particular issue than my policy directors. And I'll tell you right now that I'm going to think I'm a better political director than my political director." A convention speech wasn't enough for Mr. Obama; Greek columns needed to be added. During an interview with "60 Minutes," Obama [said](#), "I would put our legislative and foreign policy accomplishments in our first two years against any president — with the possible exceptions of Johnson, FDR, and Lincoln." (The use of the word "possible" is priceless.) Mr. Obama has compared himself to LeBron James; his aides compared him to Michael Jordan. He clearly conceived of himself as a world-historical figure. Nothing, it seemed, was beyond his power. (If you think I'm exaggerating, I'd urge you to watch this [30-second clip](#) from an Obama speech in 2008.)

In foreign policy, Obama would wage a successful war in Afghanistan. He would convince dictators and adversaries why they should bow to his wishes. He would solve decades-long conflicts. American prestige would rise in all corners of the globe. "Instead of retreating from the world," Obama [said](#), "I will personally lead a new chapter of American engagement." There would be the "reset" with Russia, the "new beginning" in the Middle East, the end of Iran's quest for nuclear weapons and so much more. Mr. Obama would practice "smart diplomacy." After all, he understood things the rest of us did not. And if you didn't accept his view of the world, you weren't simply mistaken; you were an ideologue, a hyper-partisan, a dullard, perhaps a fool, and/or someone whose thinking belonged to bygone era. [Watch](#) the contemptuous way the president dismissed Mitt Romney in a presidential debate on the topic of Russia — despite the fact that events have proven Romney right and Obama wrong.

And that's the point, isn't it? Our relations with nation after nation — from Afghanistan and Iraq to Russia and China, from Turkey, Jordan and Pakistan to Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, from Japan, Taiwan and South Korea to India and Australia, from Honduras to Brazil, from Poland and the Czech Republic to Germany, Great Britain, Canada and more — are worse now than they were when Mr. Obama was sworn in as president in 2009. I'm not asking people to measure Mr. Obama against a standard of perfection; I'm asking them to measure him against his own promises, his own speeches, his own words.

Having been president for more than five years, we can now render some reasonable and informed judgments about Mr. Obama, including this one: he is an amateur on par with Jimmy Carter. And to see the crude and brutish Putin run circles around Obama—on negotiations over

nuclear weapons, on granting asylum to Edward Snowden, on convincing Obama to undercut our allies in Poland and the Czech Republic, on establishing ties with Egypt, on strengthening the murderous Syrian regime, and now invading Crimea and threatening the rest of Ukraine—is painful for any American to witness. As House Intelligence Committee Chairman Mike Rogers [put it](#), “Putin is playing chess and I think we are playing marbles, and I don’t think it’s even close.”

Governing is harder than Barack Obama ever imagined. But it isn’t that much harder.







100 YEARS A SLAVE



