

March 6, 2014

Apparently the administration doesn't think it has done enough damage in foreign affairs, so on the eve of Netanyahu's visit to our country the president insults Israel yet again. [John Podhoretz](#) posts on the president's interview with Bloomberg's Jeffrey Goldberg.

*In an extraordinary—and I don't use the word in a complimentary way—[interview with Jeffrey Goldberg](#) of Bloomberg, President Obama follows his secretary of state in warning Israel and its leader that a failure to “make peace” now with the Palestinians will have terrible consequences. Israel is “more isolated internationally,” and will become more so; there will be more Palestinians and Israeli Arabs as time goes on, not fewer, so Israel had better move now; and not to move now is to create the conditions for a “permanent Israeli occupation of the West Bank....there comes a point when you cannot manage this anymore.”*

*The wild logical contradictions in his remarks expose the degree to which the American approach in the Kerry peace talks is to haunt Israel with the dire nightmare it will face should the talks fail; Palestinian rejectionism plays almost no role in the Obaman calculus here.*

*The Palestinians, in Obama's view, do not actually need to make changes; astonishingly, he says, they're ready for peace. “The Palestinians,” the president says, overlooking every piece of polling data we have about the opinions of the Palestinians, “would still prefer peace. They would still prefer a country of their own that allows them to find a job, send their kids to school, travel overseas, go back and forth to work without feeling as if they are restricted or constrained as a people. And they recognize that Israel is not going anywhere.”*

*Ah. So that 2011 poll that says 60 percent of the Palestinians reject a two-state solution is bunk—a poll whose findings have not been contradicted since. If Palestinians refuse to accept a two-state solution, they do not “recognize that Israel is not going anywhere.” Rather, they are still engaging in a pseudo-national fantasy about Israel's disappearance or destruction. And they are so eager for peace and coexistence with Israel that they remain the only significant Muslim population that still has a favorable view of suicide bombings, according to a Pew survey. ...*

[Evelyn Gordon](#) corrects the fact-challenged president.

*Since [John Podhoretz](#), [Elliott Abrams](#) and [Jonathan Tobin](#) have all written excellent takedowns of the fallacies, outright lies and destructive consequences of President Barack Obama's [interview with Jeffrey Goldberg](#) on Sunday, you might think there's nothing left to say. But there are some additional points that merit consideration, and I'd like to focus on one: settlement construction. Because on this issue, Obama's “facts” are flat-out wrong – and this particular untruth have some very important implications.*

*According to Obama, “we have seen more aggressive settlement construction over the last couple years than we've seen in a very long time.” But in reality, as a simple glance at the annual data published by Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics reveals, there has been less settlement construction during Benjamin Netanyahu's five years as Israeli premier (2009-13) than under any of his recent predecessors.*

*During those five years, housing starts in the settlements averaged 1,443 a year (all data is from the charts [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#) plus this [news report](#)). That's less than the 1,702 a year they averaged under Ehud Olmert in 2006-08, who is nevertheless internationally acclaimed as a peacemaker (having made the Palestinians an offer so generous that then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice [couldn't believe](#) she was hearing it). It's also less than the 1,652 per year they averaged under Ariel Sharon in 2001-05, who is similarly lauded internationally as a peacemaker (for having left Gaza); the fact that even Sharon out-built Netanyahu is particularly remarkable, because his term coincided with the second intifada, when demand for housing in the settlements plummeted. ...*

**Jonathan Tobin** says Netanyahu's decision not to engage the president shows Bibi's strength and Barry's weakness.

*The last time President Obama ambushed Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, the Israeli gave as good as he got. This time he turned the other cheek. The reason for this turnabout by the normally combative prime minister tells us everything we need to know about the relative strength of the positions of these two leaders.*

*While the assumption on the part of most pundits was that Obama has Netanyahu in a corner, the latter's reaction to the assault the president launched at him in [an interview with Bloomberg's Jeffrey Goldberg this past weekend](#) shows us this isn't true. Though Netanyahu had to be infuriated by the president's single-minded determination to blame Israel for the lack of peace as well as his obtuse praise for Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas, he felt no need to publicly respond to it. Far from feeling threatened by Obama's tirade, Netanyahu's decision to ignore the president's attack shows that he understands the dynamics of both the peace process and U.S. foreign policy actually give him the upper hand over the weak and increasingly out-of-touch lame duck in the White House. ...*

*... Though Obama's attacks did real damage to Israel's position, the prime minister is right to refuse to take the bait. Netanyahu cannot have failed to see that, far from offering him the opportunity to effectively pressure the Israelis, the president is floundering in his second term especially on foreign policy. The most effective answer to Obama's taunts is patience since events will soon overtake the president's positions on both the Palestinian and Iranian fronts, as well as in other debacles around the globe that have popped up because of Obama's weak leadership. Though the disparity in the relative power of their positions inevitably means Netanyahu must worry about Obama's barbs, the bottom line here is that it is the president and not the prime minister who is in big trouble.*

**Jennifer Rubin** posts on the controversy.

*Just as Republicans are on the same side as the majority of Americans in the Obamacare, they find themselves lock-step with voters on Israel, Iran and foreign policy more generally. This is a complete reversal from 2006 when Democrats capitalized on the Iraq war to take the House and rack up big Senate wins.*

*Rep. Tom Cotton (R-Ark.) spoke for virtually all Republicans when he bashed the president for his remarks on Israel. Cotton told Right Turn today: "Yet again, President Obama displays incredible naiveté and cynicism about the world at the same time. Israel isn't the obstacle to peace;*

*Palestinian rejectionism is. When the Palestinians accept Israel as a Jewish state, there will be peace.” He added, “President Obama’s ominous predictions to the contrary should trouble every pro-Israel American, as well as our Israeli allies.” And that is especially true in a state with so many military (active and reserve) and so many religious voters who support the Jewish state. “Arkansans’ support for Israel remains unshakable, and I will continue to work with my colleagues in both parties to preserve and strengthen the U.S.-Israel alliance,” he said.*

*But as we have heard from speakers and attendees at the American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee, criticism is not limited to Republicans. Longtime Democrat and former AIPAC spokesman Josh Block (who now heads the Israel Project) commented to me, “The president’s interview quite peculiar and disappointing. Not only does it betray a deeply flawed approach to how one should treat allies, but it is riddled with basic factual errors. It also makes one wonder if the president is getting accurate information from his staff, or if he has deep personal beliefs that supersede reality and cloud his perspective.” ...*

*“She loves blood, this Russian land.” - Russian poet Anna Akhmatova sends us back to the problems in Ukraine. A Russian historian once said the first and second world wars could easily be called the first and second Ukrainian wars. Tragedy lives in that country. Yale historian [Timothy Snyder, author of Bloodlands](#) wrote “Hitler vs. Stalin: Who Was Worse?” for the New York Review of Books. We have it here. It is long, but as we’re wont to do at the end of the week, we will run a little over. Also from Akhmatova - “It was a time when only the dead smiled, happy in their peace.”  
... we might ask: who was worse, Hitler or Stalin?*

*In the second half of the twentieth century, Americans were taught to see both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union as the greatest of evils. Hitler was worse, because his regime propagated the unprecedented horror of the Holocaust, the attempt to eradicate an entire people on racial grounds. Yet Stalin was also worse, because his regime killed far, far more people—tens of millions, it was often claimed—in the endless wastes of the Gulag. For decades, and even today, this confidence about the difference between the two regimes—quality versus quantity—has set the ground rules for the politics of memory. Even historians of the Holocaust generally take for granted that Stalin killed more people than Hitler, thus placing themselves under greater pressure to stress the special character of the Holocaust, since this is what made the Nazi regime worse than the Stalinist one.*

*Discussion of numbers can blunt our sense of the horrific personal character of each killing and the irreducible tragedy of each death. As anyone who has lost a loved one knows, the difference between zero and one is an infinity. Though we have a harder time grasping this, the same is true for the difference between, say, 780,862 and 780,863—which happens to be the best estimate of the number of people murdered at Treblinka. Large numbers matter because they are an accumulation of small numbers: that is, precious individual lives. Today, after two decades of access to Eastern European archives, and thanks to the work of German, Russian, Israeli, and other scholars, we can resolve the question of numbers. The total number of noncombatants killed by the Germans—about 11 million—is roughly what we had thought. The total number of civilians killed by the Soviets, however, is considerably less than we had believed. We know now that the Germans killed more people than the Soviets did. That said, the issue of quality is more complex*

*than was once thought. Mass murder in the Soviet Union sometimes involved motivations, especially national and ethnic ones, that can be disconcertingly close to Nazi motivations. ...*

*... Given that the Nazis and the Stalinists tended to kill in the same places, in the lands between Berlin and Moscow, and given that they were, at different times, rivals, allies, and enemies, we must take seriously the possibility that some of the death and destruction wrought in the lands between was their mutual responsibility. What can we make of the fact, for example, that the lands that suffered most during the war were those occupied not once or twice but three times: by the Soviets in 1939, the Germans in 1941, and the Soviets again in 1944?*

*The Holocaust began when the Germans provoked pogroms in June and July 1941, in which some 24,000 Jews were killed, on territories in Poland annexed by the Soviets less than two years before. The Nazis planned to eliminate the Jews in any case, but the prior killings by the NKVD certainly made it easier for local gentiles to justify their own participation in such campaigns. As I have written in [Bloodlands](#), where all of the major Nazi and Soviet atrocities are discussed, we see, even during the German-Soviet war, episodes of belligerent complicity in which one side killed more because provoked or in some sense aided by the other. Germans took so many Soviet prisoners of war in part because Stalin ordered his generals not to retreat. The Germans shot so many civilians in part because Soviet partisans deliberately provoked reprisals. The Germans shot more than a hundred thousand civilians in Warsaw in 1944 after the Soviets urged the locals to rise up and then declined to help them. In Stalin's Gulag some 516,543 people died between 1941 and 1943, sentenced by the Soviets to labor, but deprived of food by the German invasion.*

*Were these people victims of Stalin or of Hitler? Or both?*

Late night humor from [Andy Malcolm](#).

*Seth Meyers: Although Ukraine has been all over the news for weeks, a survey finds 64% of U.S. students still can't find Ukraine on a map. Said Vladimir Putin, "Soon, nobody will."*

*Fallon: A new survey has found that almost half of dog owners admit to spending more money on their dogs than on their significant others. I tried to ask my wife if that's true, but she and our dog were out to dinner.*

*Conan: Newsweek magazine is returning, and this time it will be more expensive. This should work, since everyone's main complaint with Newsweek magazine before was, "Too affordable."*

*Conan: In France, a woman won the right to marry her dead fiancé. Just when he thought he'd gotten out of it.*

---

---

---

## Contentions

### The President's Prophetic Threats to Israel

by John Podhoretz

In an extraordinary—and I don't use the word in a complimentary way—[interview with Jeffrey Goldberg](#) of Bloomberg, President Obama follows his secretary of state in warning Israel and its leader that a failure to “make peace” now with the Palestinians will have terrible consequences. Israel is “more isolated internationally,” and will become more so; there will be more Palestinians and Israeli Arabs as time goes on, not fewer, so Israel had better move now; and not to move now is to create the conditions for a “permanent Israeli occupation of the West Bank....there comes a point when you cannot manage this anymore.”

The wild logical contradictions in his remarks expose the degree to which the American approach in the Kerry peace talks is to haunt Israel with the dire nightmare it will face should the talks fail; Palestinian rejectionism plays almost no role in the Obaman calculus here.

The Palestinians, in Obama's view, do not actually need to make changes; astonishingly, he says, they're ready for peace. “The Palestinians,” the president says, overlooking every piece of polling data we have about the opinions of the Palestinians, “would still prefer peace. They would still prefer a country of their own that allows them to find a job, send their kids to school, travel overseas, go back and forth to work without feeling as if they are restricted or constrained as a people. And they recognize that Israel is not going anywhere.”

Ah. So [that 2011 poll that says 60 percent of the Palestinians reject a two-state solution](#) is bunk—a poll whose findings have not been contradicted since. If Palestinians refuse to accept a two-state solution, they do not “recognize that Israel is not going anywhere.” Rather, they are still engaging in a pseudo-national fantasy about Israel's disappearance or destruction. And they are so eager for peace and coexistence with Israel that [they remain the only significant Muslim population that still has a favorable view of suicide bombings](#), according to a Pew survey.

“The voices for peace within the Palestinian community will be stronger with a framework agreement,” the president says. But why would the “voices for peace” need to be “stronger” if they reflect the actual views of the Palestinian people? They should be more than strong enough on their own now. Indeed, if they are so strong, we would not be hearing [repeated denunciations of the “framework” process from Palestinian negotiators](#).

The president's fantasies about the Palestinians also involve Mahmoud Abbas, president of the Palestinian Authority. “I think,” he says, “nobody would dispute that whatever disagreements you may have with him, he has proven himself to be somebody who has been committed to nonviolence and diplomatic efforts to resolve this issue.” *Nobody would dispute?* In 2008, offered a peace deal by then-Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert that involved Abbas actually drawing a new West Bank map giving the Palestinians something between 92 and 95 percent of the territory, [Abbas basically fled the table and didn't return](#). Granted, he didn't do what Yasser Arafat did after a similar deal at Camp David in 2000 and begin the second intifada, but this hardly demonstrates a commitment to a diplomatic effort—except for one that fails.

So the Palestinians, in the president's view, are all in. It's really quite wonderful, in fact: “You've got a partner on the other side who is prepared to negotiate seriously, who does not engage in some of the wild rhetoric that so often you see in the Arab world when it comes to Israel, who has shown

himself committed to maintaining order within the West Bank and the Palestinian Authority and to cooperate with Israelis around their security concerns — for us to not seize this moment I think would be a great mistake.”

Yes, the PA is such a partner for peace that even with negotiations going on, it celebrates acts of violence against Israel on a constant basis, [as this report details](#).

Not to mention the little wrinkle that Abbas doesn't speak in any way for half of the Palestinian polity, the half living under the terrorist group Hamas in Gaza. Ah, but that's no problem, in the president's view. "There would still be huge questions about what happens in Gaza," the president says, "but I actually think Hamas would be greatly damaged by the prospect of real peace." Really! Unlike Abbas, who has not faced Palestinian voters since 2004, Hamas actually won a free election in the past decade and its unquestioned commitment to Israel's destruction is clearly shared by the people who live under its aegis. *They do not want peace.*

All of this is folderol, anyway, because the president clearly thinks peace is solely Israel's to make, and basically, Binyamin Netanyahu should listen to Obama's mother and rip off the band-aid: "One of the things my mom always used to tell me and I didn't always observe, but as I get older I agree with — is if there's something you know you have to do, even if it's difficult or unpleasant, you might as well just go ahead and do it, because waiting isn't going to help. When I have a conversation with Bibi, that's the essence of my conversation: If not now, when? And if not you, Mr. Prime Minister, then who?"

Now that's some chutzpah right there, because of course the president is invoking the words of Hillel, the ancient Jewish sage, as a rhetorical tool against the Israeli prime minister. Of course, Obama leaves out the key words of Hillel's famed platitude, which are: "If I am not for myself, then who will be for me?" Israel must be for itself, because there is almost no country left in the world that will be for it; while the president says the American commitment to Israel is "rock-solid," clearly he does not believe it will necessarily be so in the future...*nor should it be.*

Says the president of Netanyahu, "if he does not believe that a peace deal with the Palestinians is the right thing to do for Israel, then he needs to articulate an alternative approach. And as I said before, it's hard to come up with one that's plausible." That's ridiculous. A peace deal with the Palestinians is of course the right thing to do for Israel. But if there can be no peace deal, or can be no peace deal that does not pose a severe danger to Israel's survival, then it is not the right thing to do.

The only "plausible" thing to do is to challenge the Palestinians to cure themselves of their psychotic political culture and become a rational actor with whom a true peace can be made. Is that a tragedy? It sure is. Sometimes there are tragedies, and they must be faced realistically, not wished away.

One thing that cannot be wished away is the president's insistence on placing the burdens on Israel. This is something else his apologists can no longer wish away.

## Contentions

### Obama's Settlement Construction Lie

by Evelyn Gordon

Since [John Podhoretz](#), [Elliott Abrams](#) and [Jonathan Tobin](#) have all written excellent takedowns of the fallacies, outright lies and destructive consequences of President Barack Obama's [interview](#) with Jeffrey Goldberg on Sunday, you might think there's nothing left to say. But there are some additional points that merit consideration, and I'd like to focus on one: settlement construction. Because on this issue, Obama's "facts" are flat-out wrong – and this particular untruth have some very important implications.

According to Obama, "we have seen more aggressive settlement construction over the last couple years than we've seen in a very long time." But in reality, as a simple glance at the annual data published by Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics reveals, there has been less settlement construction during Benjamin Netanyahu's five years as Israeli premier (2009-13) than under any of his recent predecessors.

During those five years, housing starts in the settlements averaged 1,443 a year (all data is from the charts [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#) plus this [news report](#)). That's less than the 1,702 a year they averaged under Ehud Olmert in 2006-08, who is nevertheless internationally acclaimed as a peacemaker (having made the Palestinians an offer so generous that then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice [couldn't believe](#) she was hearing it). It's also less than the 1,652 per year they averaged under Ariel Sharon in 2001-05, who is similarly lauded internationally as a peacemaker (for having left Gaza); the fact that even Sharon out-built Netanyahu is particularly remarkable, because his term coincided with the second intifada, when demand for housing in the settlements plummeted. And it's far less than under Ehud Barak, who is also internationally acclaimed as a peacemaker (for his generous offer at Camp David in 2000): One single year under Barak, 2000, produced more housing starts in the settlements (4,683) than the entire first four years of Netanyahu's term (4,679).

It's true that settlement construction more than doubled last year; otherwise, Netanyahu's average would have been even lower. But it doubled from such a low base that the absolute number of housing starts, 2,534, is not only far less than Barak's record one-year high; it's only slightly larger than the 1995 total of 2,430 – when the prime minister was Yitzhak Rabin, signatory of the Oslo Accords and patron saint of the peace process. In previous years, housing starts under Netanyahu were only a third to a half of those in 1995.

In short, if settlement construction were really the death blow to the peace process that Obama and his European counterparts like to claim, Netanyahu ought to be their favorite Israeli prime minister ever instead of the most hated, because never has settlement construction been as low as it has under him. The obvious conclusion is that all the talk about settlement construction is just a smokescreen, and what really makes Western leaders loathe Netanyahu is something else entirely: the fact that unlike Rabin, Barak, Sharon and Olmert, he has so far refused to offer the kind of sweeping territorial concessions that, every time they were tried, have resulted in massive waves of anti-Israel terror.

But it doesn't sound good to say they hate Netanyahu because of his reluctance to endanger the country he was elected to serve. So instead, Western leaders prefer to harp on settlement construction, secure in the knowledge that no journalist will ever bother to check their "facts."

## Contentions

### Netanyahu Doesn't Take Obama's Bait

by Jonathan S. Tobin

The last time President Obama ambushed Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, the Israeli gave as good as he got. This time he turned the other cheek. The reason for this turnabout by the normally combative prime minister tells us everything we need to know about the relative strength of the positions of these two leaders.

While the assumption on the part of most pundits was that Obama has Netanyahu in a corner, the latter's reaction to the assault the president launched at him in [an interview with Bloomberg's Jeffrey Goldberg this past weekend](#) shows us this isn't true. Though Netanyahu had to be infuriated by the president's single-minded determination to blame Israel for the lack of peace as well as his obtuse praise for Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas, he felt no need to publicly respond to it. Far from feeling threatened by Obama's tirade, Netanyahu's decision to ignore the president's attack shows that he understands the dynamics of both the peace process and U.S. foreign policy actually give him the upper hand over the weak and increasingly out-of-touch lame duck in the White House.

Obama's decision to give his faithful admirer Goldberg an interview in which he blasted Israel was odd since it came at a time when the Israelis have shown their willingness to accept Secretary of State John Kerry's framework for Middle East peace negotiations and the Palestinians have publicly declared the same document to be unacceptable. More than that, the fact that he chose this particular moment to get in another shot at his least favorite foreign leader just when the world was focused on Russia's seizure of the Crimea and awaiting an American response to this aggression can only be considered bizarre. Not only did this make his attack on Netanyahu seem both petty and personal, it also guaranteed that the international media that might have otherwise have jumped on the story was distracted elsewhere and diminished its impact. But Netanyahu's seeming dismissal of this broadside shows that Obama is not in as strong a position vis-à-vis Netanyahu as he thinks.

Back in May 2011, Obama chose to give a speech attacking Israel's stand on the peace process and demanding that it accept the 1967 borders as the starting point for negotiations just as before Netanyahu arrived in Washington. Obama had picked fights with Israel in 2009 and 2010 over Jerusalem and settlements but this was a direct attack on the prime minister. Netanyahu's response was just as direct. When he met with Obama in the White House, he launched into a lengthy lecture to the president about Israeli security that made it clear to the president that he would not take the insult lying down. Netanyahu doubled down on that the next day when he received more cheers while addressing a joint meeting of Congress than the president had ever gotten.

But this time, Netanyahu chose to ignore the president's slights. There were no public or even off-the-record remarks from his party expressing anger. [And in his speech to AIPAC today](#), Netanyahu barely mentioned the president.



Though Israel has been squabbling with the U.S. over the direction of the Iran nuclear talks, Netanyahu broke no new ground on the issue in his speech. He restated his concerns about Tehran continuing uranium enrichment during the nuclear talks. But he did not allude to the fact that the U.S. was letting this happen. While he repeated his vow to do anything necessary to defend Israeli security — a veiled threat to attack Iran's nuclear facilities — he kept his disagreements to a minimum and emphasized the joint concerns of the U.S. and Israel.

With regard to the topic on which Obama had been most critical — the peace process with the Palestinians — there was also no allusion to disagreement with Washington. To the contrary, Netanyahu spoke more about his desire for peace; his willingness to continue engaging in talks with the Palestinians and the advantages that peace would bring to Israel and the entire Middle East. Far from harping on the points where he and Obama disagree about the terms of a theoretical agreement, Netanyahu emphasized a key point where the U.S. had accepted Israel's position: the need for the Palestinians to recognize Israel as a Jewish state, thus signaling their willingness to end the conflict rather than merely pausing it.

While Netanyahu went on to denounce the BDS (boycott, divest, sanction) movement against as both immoral and anti-Semitic, the key here was a disinclination to use his speech to engage in a tit-for-tat battle with the administration. Why was that?

Some Obama loyalists may claim that this shows that Netanyahu got the message from the president. It's likely that Israel's future participation in Kerry's talks will be cited by some in this group as evidence that Obama's spanking of the prime minister worked. But this is nonsense. Given that Israel had already signaled that it will accept Kerry's framework for more talks, that explanation won't hold water.

A better reason for Netanyahu's decision to turn the other cheek is that, unlike the president, the prime minister has been paying attention to the currents currently roiling Palestinian politics and knows that Abbas' inability to rally his people behind a peace agreement renders any potential U.S.-Israeli arguments moot.

It should be remembered that the net results of the 2011 dustup between the two men was pointless. Despite Obama's best efforts to tilt the diplomatic playing field in the direction of the Palestinians, Abbas still wouldn't budge enough to even negotiate, let alone agree to peace terms. The same dynamic is unfolding today with Israel reportedly offering massive territorial withdrawals of up to 90 percent of the West Bank in the secret talks with the PA while the Palestinians are still tying themselves up in knots explaining why they can't recognize Israel as a Jewish state or give up the right of return.

Far from needing to defend himself on the American stage as he felt it important to do in 2011, Netanyahu now understands that forbearance is the best way to respond to Obama's provocations. Try as he might to put the onus for the lack of peace on the Jewish state, Netanyahu knows it will always be the Palestinians who say "no" to peace, not the Israelis.

Similarly, as much as he must have been itching to directly take on Obama's appeasement of Tehran, Netanyahu realizes that it is Iran's lust for a nuclear weapon that will do more to undermine the administration's negotiating tactics than anything he can say.

By eschewing any desire to pressure the Palestinians to make peace, the president more or less guaranteed that Kerry must ultimately fail. And by knuckling under the Iranians in the interim agreement signed by Kerry last November, President Obama has also embarked on a path that cannot lead him to the achievement of his stated goals in the current round of talks.

Though Obama's attacks did real damage to Israel's position, the prime minister is right to refuse to take the bait. Netanyahu cannot have failed to see that, far from offering him the opportunity to effectively pressure the Israelis, the president is floundering in his second term especially on foreign policy. The most effective answer to Obama's taunts is patience since events will soon overtake the president's positions on both the Palestinian and Iranian fronts, as well as in other debacles around the globe that have popped up because of Obama's weak leadership. Though the disparity in the relative power of their positions inevitably means Netanyahu must worry about Obama's barbs, the bottom line here is that it is the president and not the prime minister who is in big trouble.

## Right Turn

### Israel is popular with voters; Obama is not

by Jennifer Rubin

Just as Republicans are on the same side as the majority of Americans in the Obamacare, they find themselves lock-step with voters on Israel, Iran and foreign policy more generally. This is a complete reversal from 2006 when Democrats capitalized on the Iraq war to take the House and rack up big Senate wins.

Rep. Tom Cotton (R-Ark.) spoke for virtually all Republicans when he bashed the president for his remarks on Israel. Cotton told Right Turn today: "Yet again, President Obama displays incredible naiveté and cynicism about the world at the same time. Israel isn't the obstacle to peace; Palestinian rejectionism is. When the Palestinians accept Israel as a Jewish state, there will be peace." He added, "President Obama's ominous predictions to the contrary should trouble every pro-Israel American, as well as our Israeli allies." And that is especially true in a state with so many military (active and reserve) and so many religious voters who support the Jewish state. "Arkansans' support for Israel remains unshakable, and I will continue to work with my colleagues in both parties to preserve and strengthen the U.S.-Israel alliance," he said.

But as we have heard from speakers and attendees at the American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee, criticism is not limited to Republicans. Longtime Democrat and former AIPAC spokesman Josh Block (who now heads the Israel Project) commented to me, "The president's interview quite peculiar and disappointing. Not only does it betray a deeply flawed approach to how one should treat allies, but it is riddled with basic factual errors. It also makes one wonder if the president is getting accurate information from his staff, or if he has deep personal beliefs that supersede reality and cloud his perspective." His concern, like many pro-Israel Democrats, is especially acute with regard to Iran. Block notes, "It's never reassuring to see a president engaging in 'magical thinking' when it comes to something like the threat posed by Iran. Their charm offensive may have failed with the American people, but the president seems quite captivated.

Does he know [Iranian President Hassan] Rouhani doesn't really matter and the supreme leader runs that theocratic dictatorship?"

Democratic political operatives and leaders bristle when Israel is raised in the context of a campaign, but like any significant topic lawmakers on the ballot have to be held accountable for their votes. A GOP operative says bluntly, "Senate Democrats running in these states have supported Obama an astounding 95, 96, 97% of the time – they own the failure of the president's policies at home and they certainly own this Jimmy Carter-like weakness abroad." He adds, "Appeasing our enemies and treating our strongest allies, like Israel, with apathy is a problem for Obama, for Senate Democrats and for our national security and leadership position in the world."

There is much debate as to whether AIPAC matters as much as it once did. In [Lee Smith's view](#), "Sure, legislators will come down on AIPAC's side when it's cost-free. But because AIPAC cannot, or will not, punish its enemies, there's no risk in defying the lobbying group, either." Voters, however, are a different matter. A look at the polls shows that there are few issues on which voters are as united as they are on Israel. *That* has an impact on lawmakers. As Block puts it, "It is heartening to see and hear strong support for Israel and increased pressure on Iran from so many members of Congress and senators who see the world as it is."

Israel need not be a partisan issue, but it most certainly is an electoral issue. Those whose votes and words take issue with the president's distorted view will earn, especially in red states, praise from voters. Those who've shuffled along in lemming-like passivity while the president takes a wrecking ball to the U.S.-Israel relationship will be assessed as well. They might look at the polls and get on the right side of voters before it's too late.

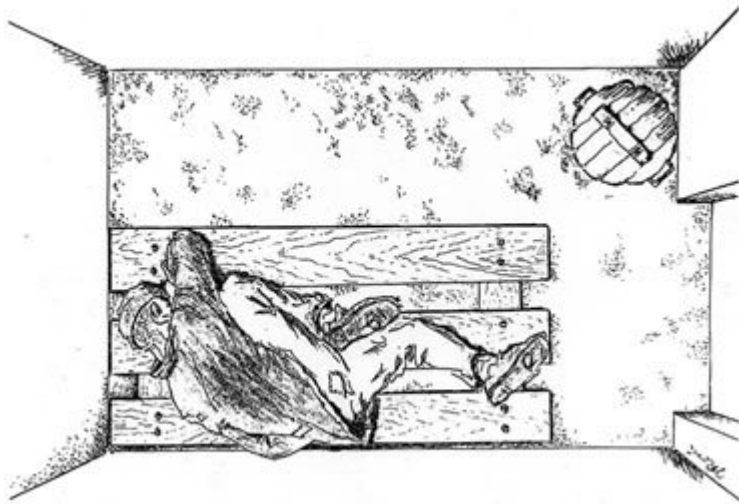
## **New York Review of Books** **[Hitler vs. Stalin: Who Was Worse?](#)** by Timothy Snyder

As we recall the Red Army's liberation of Auschwitz on January 27, 1945, sixty-six years ago today, we might ask: who was worse, Hitler or Stalin?

In the second half of the twentieth century, Americans were taught to see both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union as the greatest of evils. Hitler was worse, because his regime propagated the unprecedented horror of the Holocaust, the attempt to eradicate an entire people on racial grounds. Yet Stalin was also worse, because his regime killed far, far more people—tens of millions, it was often claimed—in the endless wastes of the Gulag. For decades, and even today, this confidence about the difference between the two regimes—quality versus quantity—has set the ground rules for the politics of memory. Even historians of the Holocaust generally take for granted that Stalin killed more people than Hitler, thus placing themselves under greater pressure to stress the special character of the Holocaust, since this is what made the Nazi regime worse than the Stalinist one.

Discussion of numbers can blunt our sense of the horrific personal character of each killing and the irreducible tragedy of each death. As anyone who has lost a loved one knows, the difference between zero and one is an infinity. Though we have a harder time grasping this, the same is true

for the difference between, say, 780,862 and 780,863—which happens to be the best estimate of the number of people murdered at Treblinka. Large numbers matter because they are an accumulation of small numbers: that is, precious individual lives. Today, after two decades of access to Eastern European archives, and thanks to the work of German, Russian, Israeli, and other scholars, we can resolve the question of numbers. The total number of noncombatants killed by the Germans—about 11 million—is roughly what we had thought. The total number of civilians killed by the Soviets, however, is considerably less than we had believed. We know now that the Germans killed more people than the Soviets did. That said, the issue of quality is more complex than was once thought. Mass murder in the Soviet Union sometimes involved motivations, especially national and ethnic ones, that can be disconcertingly close to Nazi motivations.



*Drawing of a solitary confinement cell by artist Jacques Rossi, who spent nineteen years in the Gulag after he was arrested in the Stalin purges of 1936–1937*

It turns out that, with the exception of the war years, a very large majority of people who entered the Gulag left alive. Judging from the Soviet records we now have, the number of people who died in the Gulag between 1933 and 1945, while both Stalin and Hitler were in power, was on the order of a million, perhaps a bit more. The total figure for the entire Stalinist period is likely between two million and three million. The Great Terror and other shooting actions killed no more than a million people, probably a bit less. The largest human catastrophe of Stalinism was the famine of 1930–1933, in which more than five million people starved.

Of those who starved, the 3.3 million or so inhabitants of Soviet Ukraine who died in 1932 and 1933 were victims of a deliberate killing policy related to nationality. In early 1930, Stalin had announced his intention to “liquidate” prosperous peasants (“kulaks”) as a class so that the state could control agriculture and use capital extracted from the countryside to build industry. Tens of thousands of people were shot by Soviet state police and hundreds of thousands deported. Those who remained lost their land and often went hungry as the state requisitioned food for export. The first victims of starvation were the nomads of Soviet Kazakhstan, where about 1.3 million people died. The famine spread to Soviet Russia and peaked in Soviet Ukraine. Stalin requisitioned grain in Soviet Ukraine knowing that such a policy would kill millions. Blaming Ukrainians for the failure of his own policy, he ordered a series of measures—such as sealing the borders of that Soviet republic—that ensured mass death.



*A poster from 1930. The text reads,  
"We will smite the kulak who agitates for reducing cultivated acreage."*

In 1937, as his vision of modernization faltered, Stalin ordered the Great Terror. Because we now have the killing orders and the death quotas, inaccessible so long as the Soviet Union existed, we now know that the number of victims was not in the millions. We also know that, as in the early 1930s, the main victims were the peasants, many of them survivors of hunger and of concentration camps. The highest Soviet authorities ordered 386,798 people shot in the "Kulak Operation" of 1937–1938. The other major "enemies" during these years were people belonging to national minorities who could be associated with states bordering the Soviet Union: some 247,157 Soviet citizens were killed by the NKVD in ethnic shooting actions.

In the largest of these, the "Polish Operation" that began in August 1937, 111,091 people accused of espionage for Poland were shot. In all, 682,691 people were killed during the Great Terror, to which might be added a few hundred thousand more Soviet citizens shot in smaller actions. The total figure of civilians deliberately killed under Stalinism, around six million, is of course horribly high. But it is far lower than the estimates of twenty million or more made before we had access to Soviet sources. At the same time, we see that the motives of these killing actions were sometimes far more often national, or even ethnic, than we had assumed. Indeed it was Stalin, not Hitler, who initiated the first ethnic killing campaigns in interwar Europe.

Until World War II, Stalin's regime was by far the more murderous of the two. Nazi Germany began to kill on the Soviet scale only after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in the summer of 1939 and the joint German-Soviet invasion of Poland that September. About 200,000 Polish civilians were killed between 1939 and 1941, with each regime responsible for about half of those deaths. This figure includes about 50,000 Polish citizens shot by German security police and soldiers in the fall of 1939, the 21,892 Polish citizens shot by the Soviet NKVD in the Katyn massacres of spring 1940, and the 9,817 Polish citizens shot in June 1941 in a hasty NKVD operation after Hitler betrayed Stalin and Germany attacked the USSR. Under cover of the war and the occupation of Poland, the Nazi regime also killed the handicapped and others deemed unfit in a large-scale "euthanasia" program that accounts for 200,000 deaths. It was this policy that brought asphyxiation by carbon monoxide to the fore as a killing technique.

Beyond the numbers killed remains the question of intent. Most of the Soviet killing took place in times of peace, and was related more or less distantly to an ideologically-informed vision of modernization. Germany bears the chief responsibility for the war, and killed civilians almost exclusively in connection with the practice of racial imperialism. Germany invaded the Soviet Union with elaborate colonization plans. Thirty million Soviet citizens were to starve, and tens of millions more were to be shot, deported, enslaved, or assimilated. Such plans, though unfulfilled, provided the rationale for the bloodiest occupation in the history of the world. The Germans placed Soviet prisoners of war in starvation camps, where 2.6 million perished from hunger and another half million (disproportionately Soviet Jews) were shot. A million Soviet citizens also starved during the siege of Leningrad. In "reprisals" for partisan action, the Germans killed about 700,000 civilians in grotesque mass executions, most of them Belarusians and Poles. At the war's end the Soviets killed tens of thousands of people in their own "reprisals," especially in the Baltic states, Belarus, and Ukraine. Some 363,000 German soldiers died in Soviet captivity.



*Suitcases that belonged to people deported to the Auschwitz camp. This photograph was taken after Soviet forces liberated the camp. Auschwitz, Poland, after January 1945*

Hitler came to power with the intention of eliminating the Jews from Europe; the war in the east showed that this could be achieved by mass killing. Within weeks of the attack by Germany (and its Finnish, Romanian, Hungarian, Italian, and other allies) on the USSR, Germans, with local help, were exterminating entire Jewish communities. By December 1941, when it appears that Hitler communicated his wish that all Jews be murdered, perhaps a million Jews were already dead in the occupied Soviet Union. Most had been shot over pits, but thousands were asphyxiated in gas vans. From 1942, carbon monoxide was used at the death factories Chełmno, Bełżec, Sobibór, and Treblinka to kill Polish and some other European Jews. As the Holocaust spread to the rest of occupied Europe, other Jews were gassed by hydrogen cyanide at Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Overall, the Germans, with much local assistance, deliberately murdered about 5.4 million Jews, roughly 2.6 million by shooting and 2.8 million by gassing (about a million at Auschwitz, 780,863 at Treblinka, 434,508 at Bełżec, about 180,000 at Sobibór, 150,000 at Chełmno, 59,000 at Majdanek, and many of the rest in gas vans in occupied Serbia and the occupied Soviet Union). A few hundred thousand more Jews died during deportations to ghettos or of hunger or disease in ghettos. Another 300,000 Jews were murdered by Germany's ally Romania. Most Holocaust victims had been Polish or Soviet citizens before the war (3.2 million and 1 million respectively). The Germans also killed more than a hundred thousand Roma.

All in all, the Germans deliberately killed about 11 million noncombatants, a figure that rises to more than 12 million if foreseeable deaths from deportation, hunger, and sentences in concentration camps are included. For the Soviets during the Stalin period, the analogous figures are approximately six million and nine million. These figures are of course subject to revision, but it is very unlikely that the consensus will change again as radically as it has since the opening of Eastern European archives in the 1990s. Since the Germans killed chiefly in lands that later fell behind the Iron Curtain, access to Eastern European sources has been almost as important to our new understanding of Nazi Germany as it has been to research on the Soviet Union itself. (The Nazi regime killed approximately 165,000 German Jews.)

Apart from the inaccessibility of archives, why were our earlier assumptions so wrong? One explanation is the cold war. Our wartime and postwar European alliances, after all, required a certain amount of moral and thus historical flexibility. In 1939 Germany and the Soviet Union were military allies. By the end of 1941, after the Germans had attacked the Soviet Union and Japan the United States, Moscow in effect had traded Berlin for Washington. By 1949, the alliances had switched again, with the United States and the Federal Republic of Germany together in NATO, facing off against the Soviet Union and its Eastern European allies, including the smaller German Democratic Republic. During the cold war, it was sometimes hard for Americans to see clearly the particular evils of Nazis and Soviets. Hitler had brought about a Holocaust: but Germans were now our allies. Stalin too had killed millions of people: but some of the worst episodes, taking place as they had before the war, had already been downplayed in wartime US propaganda, when we were on the same side.

We formed an alliance with Stalin right at the end of the most murderous years of Stalinism, and then allied with a West German state a few years after the Holocaust. It was perhaps not surprising that in this intellectual environment a certain compromise position about the evils of Hitler and Stalin—that both, in effect, were worse—emerged and became the conventional wisdom.

New understandings of numbers, of course, are only a part of any comparison, and in themselves pose new questions of both quantity and quality. How to count the battlefield casualties of World War II in Europe, not considered here? It was a war that Hitler wanted, and so German

responsibility must predominate; but in the event it began with a German-Soviet alliance and a cooperative invasion of Poland in 1939. Somewhere near the Stalinist ledger must belong the [thirty million or more Chinese starved](#) during the Great Leap Forward, as Mao followed Stalin's [model of collectivization](#). The special quality of Nazi racism is not diluted by the historical observation that Stalin's motivations were sometimes national or ethnic. The pool of evil simply grows deeper.

The most fundamental proximity of the two regimes, in my view, is not ideological but geographical. Given that the Nazis and the Stalinists tended to kill in the same places, in the lands between Berlin and Moscow, and given that they were, at different times, rivals, allies, and enemies, we must take seriously the possibility that some of the death and destruction wrought in the lands between was their mutual responsibility. What can we make of the fact, for example, that the lands that suffered most during the war were those occupied not once or twice but three times: by the Soviets in 1939, the Germans in 1941, and the Soviets again in 1944?

The Holocaust began when the Germans provoked pogroms in June and July 1941, in which some 24,000 Jews were killed, on territories in Poland annexed by the Soviets less than two years before. The Nazis planned to eliminate the Jews in any case, but the prior killings by the NKVD certainly made it easier for local gentiles to justify their own participation in such campaigns. As I have written in [Bloodlands](#), where all of the major Nazi and Soviet atrocities are discussed, we see, even during the German-Soviet war, episodes of belligerent complicity in which one side killed more because provoked or in some sense aided by the other. Germans took so many Soviet prisoners of war in part because Stalin ordered his generals not to retreat. The Germans shot so many civilians in part because Soviet partisans deliberately provoked reprisals. The Germans shot more than a hundred thousand civilians in Warsaw in 1944 after the Soviets urged the locals to rise up and then declined to help them. In Stalin's Gulag some 516,543 people died between 1941 and 1943, sentenced by the Soviets to labor, but deprived of food by the German invasion.

Were these people victims of Stalin or of Hitler? Or both?

## IBD

### [Late Night Humor](#)

by Andrew Malcolm

Conan: I'm excited tonight because I won the office Oscar Pool. I guessed "Too Long."

Fallon: The Oscars were last night! When celebrities dress their best, so they can be judged by people at home in sweatpants. "Oh, she looks just terrible!"

Fallon: The FDA approves a camera to be swallowed so doctors can see inside patients' bodies. So, yes, selfies *CAN* get worse.

Conan: North Korea's Kim Jong Un and his wife are expecting their second child. They don't care if it's a boy or a girl, just as long as it's crazy.

Conan: This was the second year people could vote for Oscars online. That explains why the two big contenders for Best Picture were "Minesweeper" and "Porn."



Letterman: So much snow in New York City this year. They're running out of salt to clear the streets. Crews are out now scraping salt off every pretzel they can find.

Conan: New study reveals men and women "friends with benefits" can maintain their friendship even after the benefits end. The study refers to these arrangements as "marriage."

Fallon: A little San Francisco girl set up a table and sold Girl Scout cookies at a medical marijuana clinic. Which is why today she bought a mansion and retired.

Conan: Uganda is being hit over imposing prison sentences for homosexuality. The new bill was drafted by Uganda's "Committee On Not Understanding What Goes on in Prison."

Conan: Alec Baldwin says he's leaving the media spotlight and public life. Alec said, "I'm doing on purpose what my brothers did by accident."

Fallon: Embarrassing. A Missouri spelling bee shut down the other day because it ran out of words. Organizers said, "You know, someone should publish a big book with all the words in it."

Fallon: McDonald's is considering serving breakfast after 10:30 am. In other words, McDonald's finally figured out how hangovers work.

Letterman: The Daytona 500 was delayed six hours by rain last week. 200,000 people! Real NASCAR fans. First, the track ran out of beer. Then, Daytona Beach drunk dry. Then, Florida. And finally Georgia sold out.

Letterman: The bad news is the Sochi Olympics are over. The good news is the Sochi hotels are ready.

Letterman: Russia ended the Sochi Olympics with 33 medals. But only six were stolen by Putin.

Letterman: A moving end to the Olympics. Did you see it? The flame was extinguished by a pack of wild Sochi dogs. And I also thought Tina Fey and Amy Poehler did a great job.

Letterman: They arrested El Chapo Guzman, world's biggest cocaine supplier. When arrested, he was catering Charlie Sheen's wedding.

Conan: Mark Zuckerberg says he doesn't think he overpaid when he wrote a \$19 billion check for the instant messaging service "WHATSAPP." Zuckerberg said, "Hey, if you know another way for people to communicate without talking, I'm all ears."

Seth Meyers: New research finds sex greatly increases the long-term memory. So if you can't remember the last time you had sex, that's why.

Conan: New research suggests people are attracted to voices similar to their own. Which is why I've always had a thing for dolphins.

Fallon: Obama tells supporters they're doing God's work promoting ObamaCare. God said, "Whoa! Look, I'm flattered. But ObamaCare? That's all you, man!"

SethMeyers: A South Carolina man tried paying for lunch with a counterfeit \$1 trillion bill. Unfortunately, he came up short because he was having lunch at Whole Foods.

SethMeyers: Chipotle began selling tofu burritos in the New York area today. So if you love burritos and you love tofu, you probably don't exist.

SethMeyers: Russia gave its Olympic gold medalists \$120,000 plus a Mercedes SUV. While the silver and bronze medalists all received life in prison.

Fallon: Russia gave its 44 Olympic medalists a Mercedes. Asked what happened to athletes who DIDN'T medal, Putin said, "Do not open trunk."

SethMeyers: The captain of the sunken Italian cruise ship Costa Concordia returned to the wreck for the first time since the accident. He said, "It looks so different sober."

Fallon: A Mississippi man came back to life in the funeral home. Guests knew something was up. After a friend's moving eulogy, the dead man said, "Thanks, Dave."

Fallon: Boeing, the airplane manufacturer, is working on a new smartphone that will self-destruct if it's tampered with. While Apple has a smartphone that will self-destruct if you spill water on it, drop it, tap it too hard, forget to update it, or just kinda look at it the wrong way.

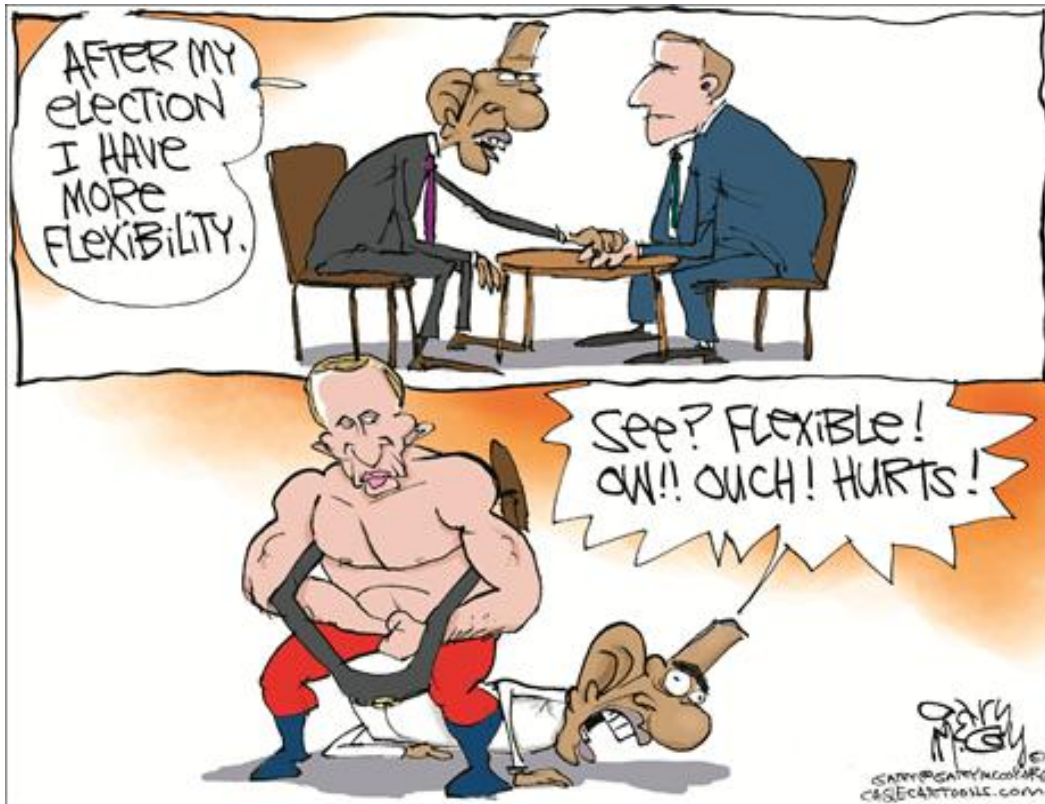
SethMeyers: Although Ukraine has been all over the news for weeks, a survey finds 64% of U.S. students still can't find Ukraine on a map. Said Vladimir Putin, "Soon, nobody will."

Fallon: A new survey has found that almost half of dog owners admit to spending more money on their dogs than on their significant others. I tried to ask my wife if that's true, but she and our dog were out to dinner.

Conan: Newsweek magazine is returning, and this time it will be more expensive. This should work, since everyone's main complaint with Newsweek magazine before was, "Too affordable."

Conan: In France, a woman won the right to marry her dead fiancé. Just when he thought he'd gotten out of it.

Conan: Russia suspended coverage of the Oscars last night. And I'm going to guess they're also not going to show the Tony's.



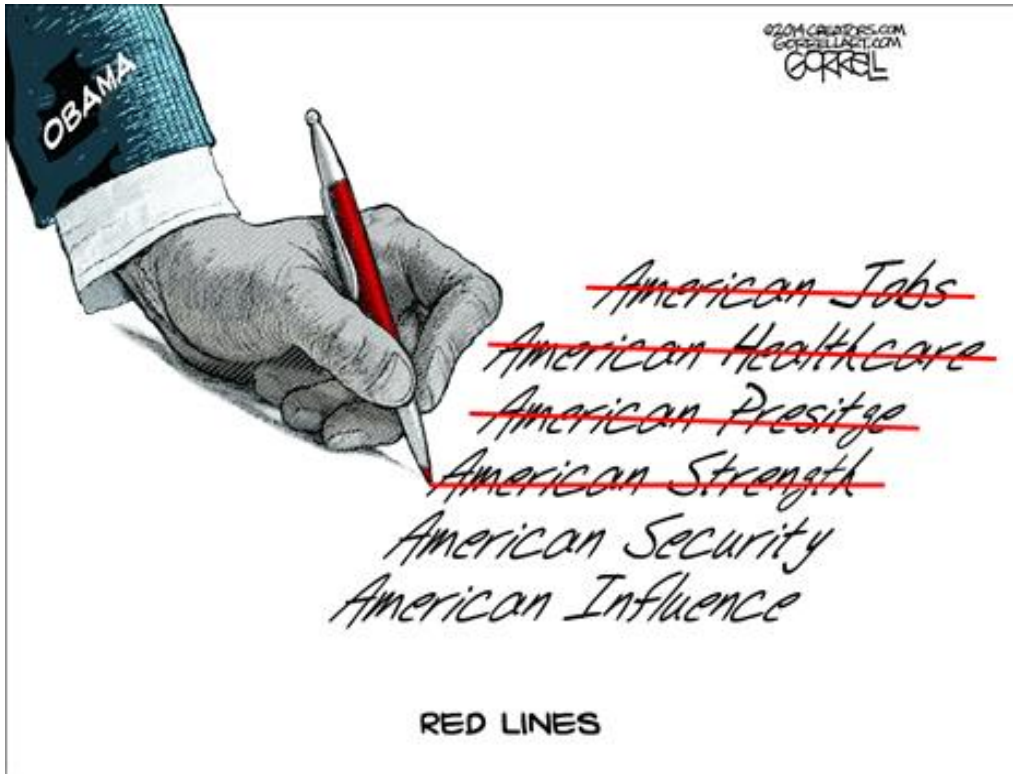
INVESTORS BUSINESS DAILY  
2014 © CREATORS.COM

# AMERICAN ~~Exceptionalism~~



THE REDLINE part II

[www.investors.com/cartoons](http://www.investors.com/cartoons)





YOUR FATHER IS PRACTICING TO LOOK TOUGH  
WHEN HE TELECONFERENCEs WITH PUTIN TODAY...

