

June 18, 2014

**Craig Pirrong** has a look at Iraq.

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*And this isn't the sole disaster in the making. There's Ukraine, too, where American and European pusillanimity are encouraging Putin to pursue his asymmetric warfare strategy.*

*When I contemplate the further damage that Obama can do in the next two-and-a-half years, I am tempted to go on a permanent hiatus. It is just so discouraging to watch a great nation stumble so badly, all due to the extreme misjudgments of its chief executive. It is perhaps even more discouraging to recognize that despite the evidence of failure that lies wherever one looks, the author of this disaster is utterly convinced that his judgment has been unerring. There are few combinations more dangerous than extreme incompetence, insufferable arrogance, and an unwillingness to acknowledge empirical reality. But Barrack Obama combines those things, by the gross.*

**Allysia Finley** posts on presidential priorities.

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*Where was President Obama while the world was set aflame? He was in sunny California, campaigning and working on his golf handicap. On Saturday morning, he attended a private fundraiser in tony Laguna Beach for the Democratic National Committee, after which he gave a campaign speech which doubled as a commencement address at the University of California, Irvine. ...*

**Paul Mirengoff** uses a New Yorker article written by a NY Times reporter to show how the president owns Iraq.

*The Islamist blitzkrieg in Iraq is the direct result of President Obama's failure to maintain an American military presence there. As David French has shown, when Obama took office the Islamist extremists were a subdued and nearly defeated force. With a continued American presence, they would have remained subdued.*

*Some Obama apologists argue that we could not maintain our military presence because the Iraqi government wanted us out, and thus would not negotiate a status of forces agreement with us. In reality, though, Iraqi prime minister Maliki and his government wanted a continued U.S. military presence, and it was Obama who never seriously negotiated for this to happen. His goal was a complete military withdrawal so he could boast that he ended the war in Iraq.*

*You don't have to my word for this. Dexter Filkins, who covered the Iraq war for the New York Times, has written an article in the New Yorker that lays out the sorry history.*

*I urge you to read the whole thing, but here are relevant highlights: ...*

**Bret Stephens** on the pace of the disasters.

*Was it only 10 months ago that President Obama capitulated on Syria? And eight months ago that we learned he had no idea the U.S. eavesdropped on Angela Merkel ? And seven months ago that his administration struck its disastrous interim nuclear deal with Tehran? And four months ago that Chuck Hagel announced that the United States Army would be cut to numbers not seen since the 1930s? And three months ago that Russia seized Crimea? And two months ago that John Kerry's Israeli-Palestinian peace effort sputtered into the void? And last month that Mr. Obama announced a timetable for total withdrawal from Afghanistan—a strategy whose predictable effects can now be seen in Iraq?*

*Even the Bergdahl deal of yesterweek is starting to feel like ancient history. Like geese, Americans are being forced to swallow foreign-policy fiascoes at a rate faster than we can possibly chew, much less digest.*

**Roger Simon** weighs in.

*... This is a moment when we need a Churchill and what we have is the man who sent Churchill's bust home — a nowhere man whose only demonstrable skill is fund-raising. (In that way, however, he was even outdone by Abu Bakr himself who evidently snatched several hundred million for his cause from Mosul banks in one day.)*

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**Matthew Continetti** says we're seeing the start of the post-presidency.

*One evening in March, during a visit to Italy, President Obama asked the U.S. ambassador to round up a bunch of—and I quote—"interesting Italians" for a dinner at the ambassadorial residence. The history of the property, the Villa Taverna, goes as far back as the tenth century. Its art collection includes Roman sarcophagi and centuries-old imperial busts. The menu that evening included a variety of pastas, and wines from Tuscany and the regions around Venice. Dinner lasted four hours.*

*In this sumptuous and Baroque setting, amid these beautiful artifacts of long-gone civilizations, enjoying the finest foods and most delicate wines, President Obama was at home. The interesting Italians surrounding him included a particle physicist, two heirs to the Fiat auto fortune, and the postmodern architect Renzo Piano. The dinner conversation, according to Politico's Carrie Budoff Brown and Jennifer Epstein, touched on architecture, on art, on science, and on urban planning. Protocol demands that the president be the first guest to leave such an event. But Obama would not shut up. It was "a quite long dinner," Piano told Politico.*

*Piano said that he and Obama compared and contrasted the work of architectural design with the work of drafting a political speech—and in these particular cases, it should be noted, the quality of the results is the same. This was but one digression in a long and meandering colloquy, however. "It took a certain time to end," Piano said. "It wasn't like, 'I have to go.' We kept going, talking, talking, talking. ... You don't stand up. You stay at the table."*

*The next morning, during a briefing, the president—whose office holds a burden of responsibility matched only by its power—regretted that his job involved duties other than pretentious conversation with extremely wealthy famous people. "One aide paraphrased Obama's response: 'Just last night I was talking about life and art, big interesting things, and now we're back to the minuscule things of politics.'" ...*

*... "The bull sessions satisfy the president's intellectual curiosity as he indulges in nuanced conversations about life, ideas, and art," Politico reports. But how nuanced, really, can these conversations be? Has anyone at these parties ever suggested to Barack Obama that his take on life and ideas and art is incomplete, biased, shallow, or—gulp—wrong? Or that, you know, maybe he should devote some attention to his actual job?*

*Referring to the administration, one Democrat said to Politico: "I wouldn't be surprised if they looked at the next three years and think, 'Oh my God, how are we going to survive the next 36 months of this bullshit?'" Good question—one the president seems intent on answering by not caring, by retreating into his comfy and unthreatening cocoon of affluent bourgeois liberals from around the world. The rest of us have to live with the consequences. ...*

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## **Streetwise Professor**

### **Obama Wants to Reverse Bush's Iraq Mistake In the Worst Way, and Has Succeeded**

by Craig Pirrong

Jeez, I take off a few days for a conference in Amsterdam, a quick trip to Bern to discuss commodity trading firms with the Swiss government, and some R&R, and the world careens to hell in a rocket propelled hand basket.

During this brief hiatus, Russian tanks and Grad rocket launchers conducted a probe into Ukraine, and a transport plane carrying Ukrainian paratroopers was shot down, killing all aboard. What's more, the world's most vicious, brutal, and crazed jihadist group, ISIL (aka ISIS) captured Iraq's second largest city (Mosul), where it immediately instituted a reign of terror. Not content with this, ISIL surged south, capturing Tikrit, reached the outskirts of Samara, and threatened to assault

Baghdad. ISIL captured large quantities of US-supplied weapons and equipment, and bolstered its finances by looting hundreds of millions of dollars from the Mosul branch of the Iraqi central bank.

In response, the Kurdish Peshmerga seized Kirkuk, and the Iranians dispatched three battalions of its Qods force to prop up the Shia-dominated Iraqi government.

ISIL's advance was made possible by the utter collapse of at least two Iraqi army divisions.

Obama's response? A peevish statement that basically told the Iraqis they are on their own, delivered in front of Marine One before embarking on a-what else?-golfing and fund-raising weekend. Obama blamed (with some justice) Iraq's government for these developments, and said more about what the US wouldn't do than what it would. Later it was announced that he would take a few days to figure out what to do, even though during his original statement he said that the developments were not a surprise: if not a surprise, why weren't contingency plans in place? Why the need to mull over responses to anticipated developments?

Today the US announced that a carrier (the George H. W. Bush) would be dispatched to the Gulf. Perhaps the time to think about what to do was nothing the sort. Perhaps we just didn't have the resources in place to respond rapidly: that would be a repeat of previous problems, notably Benghazi. (This also illustrates the potential dangers of reducing the US carrier fleet below 11 decks, as some are proposing.)

US airpower could do a great deal to stop ISIL's advance. The further it drives into the heart of Iraq, the longer its communications and supply lines become. These are vulnerable to air power. Similarly, any ISIL assault on Baghdad or Samara would be at the mercy of precision air ordnance.

Although I doubt that ISIL has the capability to attack Baghdad successfully, especially the face of US airpower, reversing its gains will take brutal, close-in fighting in urban terrain. The best military in the world was able to achieve this at considerable cost in places like Fallujah and Ramadi. I doubt the Iraqi military has either the capability or the will to achieve it. Thus, get ready for ISIL to control an extensive territory in the heart of the Middle East.

The Maliki government supposedly asked for US air support in Mosul, but we declined. Presumably, the experience of the last week will lead to a reversal of such decisions.

But one cannot be sure with Obama, especially where Iraq is concerned. He believes fervently that American involvement there in 2003 was a colossal error, and has wanted in the worst way to reverse Bush's mistake, and has succeeded.

Whatever you think about the decision to invade in 2003, it happened. It is a historical fact.

Sunk costs are sunk. You can't undo what has already been done. You can just deal with the consequences of past decisions-including past mistakes-the best you can.

The US did this in a fashion that brings to mind Churchill's aphorism that the US always does the right thing, after trying everything else first. After years of missteps, the Surge and the associated Anbar Awakening produced a stable (by Iraqi) standards situation that held out hope for progress in that cursed country. As a result, Obama inherited a manageable situation, which he then proceeded to mismanage in every way possible. He snatched defeat from the jaws of a hard-fought victory, paid for in the blood, sweat, and tears of American soldiers and Marines.

This mismanagement was rooted in Obama's fixed belief that American involvement in Iraq was a blunder and a sin. Based on this belief, Obama was willing to exit Iraq under almost any terms. Even though it was widely predicted at the time that a complete American withdrawal would create a serious risk of a resurgence of the Sunni terrorists (like ISIL), in part due to the fact that our absence would permit the Shia Maliki to engage in a sectarian purge that would undo everything accomplished in Anbar and elsewhere, Obama single-mindedly pursued a course that ended with the departure of all American troops. He made only a token effort-at best-to negotiate a status of forces agreement that could have allowed Americans to remain in the country. It is arguable that he actually deliberately undermined the achievement of such an agreement.

With the Americans gone, training of Iraq's army effectively stopped, Iraq's intelligence capability plummeted, and Maliki pursued his sectarian agenda. All of these factors contributed significantly to the current disaster.

[Now Obama is allegedly conditioning the commitment of American air power on the negotiation of more inclusive political arrangements in Baghdad.](#) Yes, such arrangements are necessary to create an Iraq that is not a cockpit for Sunni-Shiite-Kurdish war of all against all. But they will take a long time to negotiate, and the immediate military problem is too pressing to await the completion of such a process. What's more, political negotiations are unlikely to succeed while the country is under existential threat. This is especially true given that no sane Sunni leader will negotiate while the head choppers of ISIL are in ascendance. ISIL must be cut down substantially before new political arrangements can be crafted. This all means that Obama's gambit is doomed to failure.

Which may be his intention. He is so inveterately opposed to American involvement in Iraq that I can easily see him imposing impossible to meet conditions in order to preclude US re-engagement.

Obama campaigned in 2012 on the theme that he had ended the war in Iraq. War can never be ended unilaterally, except by surrender. The enemy has a say. And that enemy-ISIL-is now having that say in a very convincing way.

Whatever you think of the situation Obama inherited in 2009, you cannot dispute that he has made it immeasurably worse. America's two most dangerous enemies in the Middle East-radical Sunni jihadists and the radical Shia Iranian government-have been empowered. Indeed, in his desperation Obama is pursuing direct talks with Iran to coordinate a response to the ISIL threat.

Right now the best we can reasonably hope for is a stalemate, with a de facto division of Iraq, with two segments under control of American enemies.

And this isn't the sole disaster in the making. There's Ukraine, too, where American and European pusillanimity are encouraging Putin to pursue his asymmetric warfare strategy.

When I contemplate the further damage that Obama can do in the next two-and-a-half years, I am tempted to go on a permanent hiatus. It is just so discouraging to watch a great nation stumble so badly, all due to the extreme misjudgments of its chief executive. It is perhaps even more discouraging to recognize that despite the evidence of failure that lies wherever one looks, the author of this disaster is utterly convinced that his judgment has been unerring. There are few combinations more dangerous than extreme incompetence, insufferable arrogance, and an unwillingness to acknowledge empirical reality. But Barack Obama combines those things, by the gross.

## WSJ - Political Diary

### Obama's Priorities

by Allysia Finley

Over the weekend, Sunni insurgents reportedly mass murdered Iraqi Shiite soldiers and captured another key outpost in the country's North. Kremlin-abetted fighters shot down a Ukrainian military plane as Russian tanks entered Eastern Ukraine. The Taliban killed 68 Afghans in an unsuccessful effort to obstruct the fledgling democracy's presidential election. And Somalia Islamists gunned down 50 soccer fans at a Kenyan hotel.

Where was President Obama while the world was set aflame? He was in sunny California, campaigning and working on his golf handicap. On Saturday morning, he attended a private fundraiser in tony Laguna Beach for the Democratic National Committee, after which he gave a campaign speech which doubled as a commencement address at the University of California, Irvine.

The president began by hailing his administration's accomplishments: "Fewer Americans are at war. More have health insurance. More are graduating from college. Our businesses have added more than 9 million new jobs. The number of states where you're free to marry who you love has more than doubled."

But, he added, "We do face real challenges: Rebuilding the middle class and reversing inequality's rise. Reining in college costs. Protecting voting rights. Welcoming the immigrants and young dreamers who keep this country vibrant. Stemming the tide of violence that guns inflict on our schools." Geopolitical turmoil and Islamic insurgencies didn't make the president's list of "real challenges."

Then he turned to climate change, which he called "one of the most significant long-term challenges that our country and our planet faces." While flogging the growth in renewable energy, he insisted that "we've got to do more" since "weather-related disasters like droughts, and fires, and storms, and floods are going to get harsher and they're going to get costlier."

"Part of what's unique about climate change, though," he explained, "is the nature of some of the opposition to action" from Congress, which "is full of folks who stubbornly and automatically reject the scientific evidence about climate change" or "duck the question." Disputing the climate-change orthodoxy, he snickered, was like "saying that the moon wasn't there or that it was made of cheese" in JFK's day.

The best way to fight climate change, he impelled students, is "to invest in what helps, and divest from what harms" and "to remind everyone who represents you, at every level of government, that doing something about climate change is a prerequisite for your vote." Why didn't the White House ask San Francisco hedge-fund billionaire Tom Steyer to give the speech in the president's place?

After completing his political duties, Mr. Obama jetted off to the Rancho Mirage, where the Desert Sun reported he played nearly nine hours of golf on Saturday and Sunday. The White House, however, assured the press that the President was being briefed on the fast-moving crisis in Iraq by National Security Adviser Susan Rice, who notoriously flubbed key points about the Benghazi attack and Bergdahl swap on Sunday news talk shows.

To sum up: As the Arab world blows up, President Obama plays golf and complains about the weather.

## Power Line

### Why Obama “owns” Iraq

by Paul Mirengoff

The [Islamist blitzkrieg](#) in Iraq is the direct result of President Obama’s failure to maintain an American military presence there. As [David French has shown](#), when Obama took office the Islamist extremists were a subdued and nearly defeated force. With a continued American presence, they would have remained subdued.

Some Obama apologists argue that we could not maintain our military presence because the Iraqi government wanted us out, and thus would not negotiate a status of forces agreement with us. In reality, though, Iraqi prime minister Maliki and his government wanted a continued U.S. military presence, and it was Obama who never seriously negotiated for this to happen. His goal was a complete military withdrawal so he could boast that he ended the war in Iraq.

You don’t have to my word for this. [Dexter Filkins](#), who covered the Iraq war for the New York Times, has written an article in the New Yorker that lays out the sorry history.

I urge you to read the whole thing, but here are relevant highlights:

Filkins confirms that the Iraqi government wanted a continued U.S. military presence. He writes:

The leaders of all the major Iraqi parties had privately told American commanders that they wanted several thousand military personnel to remain, to train Iraqi forces and to help track down insurgents. The commanders told me that Maliki, too, said that he wanted to keep troops in Iraq. But he argued that the long-standing agreement that gave American soldiers immunity from Iraqi courts was increasingly unpopular; parliament would forbid the troops to stay unless they were subject to local law.

So there was a sticking point that required negotiations. Unfortunately, the Obama administration did not seriously negotiate:

For several months, American officials told me, they were unable to answer basic questions in meetings with Iraqis — like how many troops they wanted to leave behind — because the Administration had not decided. “We got no guidance from the White House,” [one official] told me. “We didn’t know where the President was. Maliki kept saying, ‘I don’t know what I have to sell.’”

“The American attitude was: Let’s get out of here as quickly as possible,” Sami al-Askari, the Iraqi member of parliament, said.

That, of course, is what happened.

Would a continued American military presence have made a major difference?

Many Iraqi and American officials are convinced that even a modest force would have been able to prevent chaos — not by fighting but by providing training, signals intelligence, and a symbolic



presence. “If you had a few hundred here, not even a few thousand, they would be cooperating with you, and they would become your partners,” Askari told me. “But, when they left, all of them left. There’s no one to talk to about anything.”

Ben Rhodes, the U.S. deputy national-security adviser, told Filkins that Obama believes a full withdrawal was the right decision. This confirms that the full withdrawal was, indeed, an Obama decision, not something forced on the president by Iraqi unwillingness to negotiate a deal under which our troops could have stayed.

Rhodes tried to justify Obama’s decision by minimizing the impact we could have had if we had remained:

“There is a risk of overstating the difference that American troops could make in the internal politics of Iraq,” [Rhodes] said. “Having troops there did not allow us to dictate sectarian alliances. Iraqis are going to respond to their own political imperatives.”

But this claim is unpersuasive. Filkins reports:

U.S. diplomats and commanders argue that they played a crucial role, acting as interlocutors among the factions—and curtailing Maliki’s sectarian tendencies.

“We used to restrain Maliki all the time,” Lieutenant General Michael Barbero, the deputy commander in Iraq until January, 2011, told me. “If Maliki was getting ready to send tanks to confront the Kurds, we would tell him and his officials, ‘We will physically block you from moving if you try to do that.’”

Barbero was angry at the White House for not pushing harder for an agreement. “You just had this policy vacuum and this apathy,” he said. “Now we have no leverage in Iraq. Without any troops there, we’re just another group of guys.” There is no longer anyone who can serve as a referee, he said, adding, “Everything that has happened there was not just predictable—we predicted it.”

“Everything” includes Maliki’s authoritarianism, which Obama’s apologists blame, with some justification, for the present difficulties. Filkins’ reporting shows not only that the Obama administration helped create this monster, but was actually warned by our diplomats that it was doing so:

[M]onths before the election, American diplomats in Iraq sent a rare dissenting cable to Washington, complaining that the U.S., with its combination of support and indifference, was encouraging Maliki’s authoritarian tendencies. “We thought we were creating a dictator,” one person who signed the memo told me.

By pulling our military out, we effectively did. As Filkins points out, less than twenty-four hours after the last convoy of American fighters left, Maliki’s government ordered the arrest of Vice-President Tariq al-Hashemi, the highest-ranking Sunni Arab. An aggressive campaign to crack down on dissent quickly followed.

After the U.S. invasion, it was said that, having “broken” Iraq we “owned” it. President Bush accepted that responsibility and American, at a great cost in lives and treasure, put the broken country more or less back together.

By pulling all of our military forces out of Iraq, President Obama has broken that country again. Whether he admits it or not (and he never will), Obama owns Iraq now.



WSJ

## The Pace of Obama's Disasters

*Bergdahl one week. Then Ukraine. Now Iraq. What could be next?*

by Bret Stephens

Was it only 10 months ago that President Obama capitulated on Syria? And eight months ago that we learned he had no idea the U.S. eavesdropped on [Angela Merkel](#)? And seven months ago that his administration struck its disastrous interim nuclear deal with Tehran? And four months ago that Chuck Hagel announced that the United States Army would be cut to numbers not seen since the 1930s? And three months ago that Russia seized Crimea? And two months ago that [John Kerry's](#) Israeli-Palestinian peace effort sputtered into the void? And last month that Mr. Obama announced a timetable for total withdrawal from Afghanistan—a strategy whose predictable effects can now be seen in Iraq?

Even the Bergdahl deal of yesterweek is starting to feel like ancient history. Like geese, Americans are being forced to swallow foreign-policy fiascoes at a rate faster than we can possibly chew, much less digest.

Consider the liver.

On Thursday, Russian tanks rolled across the border into eastern Ukraine. On Saturday, Russian separatists downed a Ukrainian transport jet, murdering 49 people. On Monday, Moscow stopped delivering gas to Kiev. All this is part of the Kremlin's ongoing stealth invasion and subjugation of its neighbor. And all of this barely made the news. [John Kerry](#) phoned Moscow to express his "strong concern." *Concern*, mind you, not condemnation.

If the president of the United States had any thoughts on the subject, he kept them to himself. His weekly radio address was devoted to wishing America's dads a happy Father's Day.

Also last week, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria seized Mosul. Then ISIS took Tikrit. Then it was Tal Afar. Mass executions of Shiites in each place. The administration is taking its time deciding what, if any, aid it will provide the government in Baghdad. But it is exploring the possibility of using Iraq's distress as an opportunity to open avenues of cooperation with Tehran.

So because the administration has a theological objection to using military force in Iraq to prevent it from being overrun by al Qaeda or dissolving into potentially genocidal civil war, it will now work with Tehran, a designated state sponsor of terrorism for 30 years and a regime that continues to arm Hezbollah in Lebanon, Islamic Jihad in Gaza and Bashar Assad in Syria, to help "stabilize" Iraq. At least the White House has ruled out military cooperation with Iran. But give it time.

Here, then, is the cravenness that now passes for cleverness in this administration: Make friends with a terrorist regime to deal with a terrorist organization. Deliver Iraq's Arab Shiites into the hands of their Persian coreligionists, who will waste no time turning southern Iraq into a satrapy modeled on present-day Lebanon.

Deal brusquely with Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki—who, for all his manifest shortcomings as a leader nonetheless wishes to be our ally—and obsequiously with an Iranian regime that spent

the better part of the last decade killing American soldiers. Further alienate panicky allies in Riyadh and Jerusalem for the sake of ingratiating ourselves with the mullahs.

Hand those mullahs some additional strategic leverage as they head into the next (supposedly final) round of nuclear negotiations.

"We are, I am afraid, drifting in a state of semi-animation, towards the rapids." Those were the words of Hugh Dalton, Clement Attlee's chancellor of the exchequer, describing the state of Britain in the winter of 1947, on the eve of the end of Empire.

Back then, the U.K. had spent a quarter of its national treasure fighting World War II. It was still spending 19% of its GDP on its military budget. The coldest winter in its history had frozen the country's stocks of coal, causing electricity blackouts and putting two million people out of work.

The U.S. faces no such crises today. Mr. Obama blew more money on his stimulus plan in 2009 than we had spent up until then on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan combined. Defense spending in the U.S. amounts to 4% of GDP. Our economy is sluggish, but it isn't crumbling.

Yet when it comes to leadership, we have our very own Clement Attlee at the top, eager to subtract the burdens of international responsibility so he can get on with the only thing that really animates him, which is building social democracy at home. Actually, that's unfair to Attlee, who could count on a powerful ally to pick up England's dropped reins, rescue Europe, stop the Soviets. Mr. Obama's method is to ignore a crisis for as long as possible, give a speech, impose a sanction, and switch the subject to climate change or income inequality.

America's retreat needn't end in tragedy, and even the Obama presidency is a survivable event. But the strategic blunders and international disasters are accumulating at an unsustainable pace. This is what the real post-American world looks like.

## **Roger L. Simon** **[America, the Headless Horseman](#)**

Forget the endless scandals that seem to come at us every other day — the latest being the Benghazi terrorists using State Department cell phones (!), a crusade of Hispanic children pouring over our Southern border in the company of cartel drug lords and, of course, the suddenly "missing" IRS emails of Lois Lerner — the Obama administration has reached levels of hitherto unknown incompetence.

It is a complete and utter debacle.

Hardly anyone believes in the president anymore. Last night, on the *O'Reilly Factor*, even Geraldo deserted him. What next? James Carville? (Well, probably, to aid in Hillary's coming separation from Obama.)

No wonder the talking heads can't figure out how to respond to new bogeyman no. 1 Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and his ISIS on their way to creating a caliphate across Syria and Iraq that would be a mammoth staging ground for global terrorism the likes of which we have never seen. We don't have a leader to stop him that anyone would conceivably want to follow. What we have is a serial

liar who can't even tell the truth about healthcare — or in his own memoir for that matter (assuming he wrote it). How do you trust him in war?

This is a moment when we need a Churchill and what we have is the man who sent Churchill's bust home — a nowhere man whose only demonstrable skill is fund-raising. (In that way, however, he was even outdone by Abu Bakr himself who evidently snatched several hundred million for his cause from Mosul banks in one day.)

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Imagine, if you will, what it would have been like if Barack Obama had been president during 9/11, not George W. Bush. We might be under Sharia law by now. What a joke that would be on all the paleo-feminists on college campuses complaining about micro-agressions and other PC illusions. They'd be walking around in head coverings, if they still had heads.

But kidding aside, we're in a dreadful situation that is not going to go away anytime soon. Bill Roggio was absolutely right when he named his excellent site [The Long War Journal](#). Only a complete moral narcissist naif like Obama could have thought otherwise. When Abu Bakr said "See you in New York" to our soldiers on his release from jail several years ago, he was serious, far more serious than Joe Biden when he said Iraq would be one of the signature achievements of the Obama administration. But in a way, I suppose it is.

## Free Beacon

### [Dialing It In](#)

#### ***The Obama post-presidency has already begun***

by Matthew Continetti.

One evening in March, during a visit to Italy, President Obama asked the U.S. ambassador to round up a bunch of—and I quote—"interesting Italians" for a dinner at the ambassadorial residence. The history of the property, the [Villa Taverna](#), goes as far back as the tenth century. Its art collection includes Roman sarcophagi and centuries-old imperial busts. The menu that evening included a variety of pastas, and wines from Tuscany and the regions around Venice. Dinner lasted four hours.

In this sumptuous and Baroque setting, amid these beautiful artifacts of long-gone civilizations, enjoying the finest foods and most delicate wines, President Obama was at home. The interesting Italians surrounding him included a particle physicist, two heirs to the Fiat auto fortune, and the postmodern architect Renzo Piano. The dinner conversation, [according to Politico's Carrie Budoff Brown and Jennifer Epstein](#), touched on architecture, on art, on science, and on urban planning. Protocol demands that the president be the first guest to leave such an event. But Obama would not shut up. It was "a quite long dinner," Piano told *Politico*.

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“It took a certain time to end,” Piano said. “It wasn’t like, ‘I have to go.’ We kept going, talking, talking, talking. ... You don’t stand up. You stay at the table.”

The next morning, during a briefing, the president—whose office holds a burden of responsibility matched only by its power—regretted that his job involved duties other than pretentious conversation with extremely wealthy famous people. “One aide paraphrased Obama’s response: ‘Just last night I was talking about life and art, big interesting things, and now we’re back to the minuscule things of politics.’ You know, minuscule things like the [maskirovka](#) invasion of Ukraine, the implementation of Obamacare, scandals at the IRS and Department of Veterans Affairs, negotiations with Syria and Iran, withdrawal from Afghanistan. These subjects are far too small and mundane for our president. He prefers contemplative and thoughtful and nuanced symposia on philosophy, quantum mechanics, and how best to spend inheritances—all accompanied by Tuscan wine.

According to *Politico*, Obama’s Italian dinner party illustrates the paradox of his second term. “Stymied at home and abroad, Obama recognizes that he is less in control of the Washington agenda than ever in his presidency,” write Budoff Brown and Epstein. “Yet his newfound realism has also given him a palpable sense of liberation.” I find nothing paradoxical about Obama’s recent pattern of behavior, nothing mysterious about the golfing, partying, traveling. It is quite obvious: Obama has given up.

He knows that his agenda is now limited to executive orders and bureaucratic regulation, and that even these measures are likely to be in the courts for years. He knows that his foreign policy agenda of engagement with the enemies of America will prove controversial and unpopular. He knows his staff has been ducking-and-covering ever since Lois Lerner announced the IRS had targeted Tea Party groups, and that they have been playing defense through Edward Snowden and Syria and Healthcare.gov and Crimea and the VA and now Bowe Bergdahl. He knows there is a chance that the Republicans will control Congress next January, and he has said, according to *Politico*, that this “would make his last two years in office unbearable.”

Obama, *Politico* says, is “giving more thought to his post-presidency than his aides like to suggest.” But there is nothing really for Obama to think about. His ambitions in this office, just like his ambitions at Harvard, in New York, in Chicago, and in the Senate, are now exhausted. America has disappointed him, and it is time to look to the next challenge worthy of Barack Obama. His post-presidency has already begun.

He has decided to relax. He has decided to fill his remaining days getting the most out of his presidential experience. The free travel and lodgings and security escort, the access to good tee times, the ability to get a reservation wherever and whenever he wants, the chance to meet VIPs who will flatter and ingratiate themselves to him—he is enjoying these perks and privileges to the utmost. His motto is not YOLO. It is YOPO: You’re only president once. Why not savor it?

Obama is golfing more than at any point in his term. In March, as Vladimir Putin launched the newest phase of his quest to recreate the Russian Empire, some in the White House had the temerity to suggest that it might not be a good idea to fly to Key Largo for a long weekend of golf and relaxation. Obama disagreed. “[Obama sticks to Florida vacation schedule](#),” read one headline. This was one commitment on which the president would not renege. “I needed this,” he told guests, including his new friend Alonzo Mourning, over dinner at the Ocean Reef Club. “I needed the golf. I needed to laugh. I need to spend time with friends.” I am sure the Ukrainians understand.

“With his daughters around less,” *Politico* reports—without saying exactly where Sasha and Malia, neither of whom is in college, have gone—Barack and Michelle are having more date nights. In April, in New York City to deliver a speech to Al Sharpton’s nonprofit, the Obamas, sidekick Valerie Jarrett, her boyfriend Ahmad Rashad, poet Elizabeth Alexander, and the Dibles of Chicago had dinner at the Gramercy hotel’s [Maialino](#). Then the Obamas and Jarrett and friend took in Denzel Washington in the revival of Lorraine Hansberry’s *Raisin in the Sun*. “The presidential motorcade froze traffic out of Times Square and drew crowds of onlookers who stood up to 30 people deep along Obama’s route to catch a glimpse of his limousine and entourage,” [said the \*Grio\*](#). I can only imagine what rush hour was like in Manhattan that evening. But hey: Obama needed this.

Jarrett, who serves the same role in this White House that Colonel House served in Woodrow Wilson’s, is the key figure in Obama’s premature post-presidency. She organizes the dinner parties in Washington and abroad, none of which appear on the president’s official schedule. For all the secrecy, the guest lists are entirely predictable. They include the sort of celebrities one sees on the red carpet at Cannes or on panels at Davos: Will Smith and Samuel L. Jackson, Colin Powell and Warren Buffett, Gayle King and Anna Wintour, the CEO of Apple and the head of the World Bank. Like the liberals who attend them, the parties are demographically diverse but intellectually uniform. Of all the boldfaced names mentioned in Budoff Brown and Epstein’s story, the only one that seems remotely capable of independent thought is, of all people, Bono, who is friendly with George W. Bush and got along with the late Jesse Helms.

I like to imagine the conversations at these parties. How are they structured? Is there any awkwardness at the beginning? Does it take a few drinks to get things going? I imagine that there is plenty of hesitant and anodyne talk about children, about movies, about basketball, about the weather. When the discussion turns to domestic or foreign affairs, though, the clichés must be stifling: How can the Republicans be so obstructionist and rude and luddite, what happened to the nice moderate conservatives they used to have in the Eisenhower and George H.W. Bush administrations, have you seen the latest essays by Ezra Klein and Michael Tomasky and Ta-Nehisi Coates, who cares what the media says, E.J. Dionne says you are doing A-OK, what’s it like to hold the nuclear football, have you been to Eric Ripert’s newest restaurant, weren’t the Afghan and Iraq wars terrible mistakes, people have got to recognize America can’t go its own way in today’s integrated, global, flat world, the *Wire* is Shakespearean, what are you going to do about the polar bears, we need to appreciate the value of other cultures, America doesn’t have such a clean record itself you know, my son just took a job in Dubai, wasn’t Sheryl Sandberg brilliant in her City Colleges of Chicago commencement speech, let’s touch base on the new youth outreach project Mark Zuckerberg is standing up, do you watch *Mad Men*, politics is a relay race and we just have to keep going until we hand the baton to the next person, where do you come up with all of those beautiful words, we leave for Beijing next week, Putin doesn’t understand how we do things in the twenty-first century, God that Bibi is so unreasonable, who are your favorite authors, it’s time for a real conversation about race, is *Homeland* like real life, this is the sushi place to go to in Los Angeles, you are a real role model for young men not only in this country but all around the world, I watch *House of Cards* but my wife prefers *Orange is the New Black*. ... The earnestness, the posing, the sentimentality, the affected and knowing tones, the blather, the sanctimony, the insinuation, the phoniness, the small talk, above all the endless putting on airs before the most gigantic ego known to mankind—that wine had better be good.

“The bull sessions satisfy the president’s intellectual curiosity as he indulges in nuanced conversations about life, ideas, and art,” *Politico* reports. But how nuanced, really, can these conversations be? Has anyone at these parties ever suggested to Barack Obama that his take on life and ideas and art is incomplete, biased, shallow, or—gulp—wrong? Or that, you know, maybe he should devote some attention to his *actual job*?



Referring to the administration, one Democrat said to *Politico*: “I wouldn’t be surprised if they looked at the next three years and think, ‘Oh my God, how are we going to survive the next 36 months of this bullshit?’” Good question—one the president seems intent on answering by not caring, by retreating into his comfy and unthreatening cocoon of affluent bourgeois liberals from around the world. The rest of us have to live with the consequences.

The next time the president indulges in his intellectual curiosity, perhaps someone will bring up the subject of political philosophy. I for one can not help thinking of Nietzsche when I consider the drift and lassitude and emptiness of Obama’s post-presidential presidency. The sort of exhaustion we see every day was predicted long ago. “Who still wants to rule? Who obey? Both require too much exertion,” wrote the German philosopher of the Last Men whom he predicted would appear at the end of History, would emerge when democracy was triumphant. These hollow-chested men, Nietzsche said, would blanch at the first site of difficulty. They would surrender and look inward, content to spend their days in the pursuit of pleasure. In Obama we have more than a Last Man. We have a Last President.







