

June 26, 2014

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Welcome to President Obama's brave new world. After six years in office pursuing strategies he believed would tame the terror threat and doing his best to reassure the American people that the terror situation was under control, with the "remnants" of al-Qaeda skittering into the shadows like roaches when the exterminator arrives, Obama now confronts the most powerful and hostile jihadi movement of modern times, a movement that dances on the graveyard of his hopes. ...

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Fouad Ajami, often in these pages, gets a send off from **Bret Stephens**.

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"Throughout [Mubarak's] reign, a toxic brew poisoned the life of Egypt—a mix of anti-modernism, anti-Americanism and anti-Zionism. That trinity ran rampant in the universities and the professional syndicates and the official media. As pillage had become the obsession of the ruling family and its retainers, the underclass was left to the rule of darkness and to a culture of conspiracy."

Or here he is on Barack Obama's fading political appeal, from a piece from last November:

"The current troubles of the Obama presidency can be read back into its beginnings. Rule by personal charisma has met its proper fate. The spell has been broken, and the magician stands exposed. We need no pollsters to tell us of the loss of faith in Mr. Obama's policies—and, more significantly, in the man himself. Charisma is like that. Crowds come together and they project their needs onto an imagined redeemer. The redeemer leaves the crowd to its imagination: For as long as the charismatic moment lasts—a year, an era—the redeemer is above and beyond judgment."

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Claire Groden posts on separatist voting in Scotland.

Scots are expected to turn out en masse for a September referendum that could cleave the British Isle into two countries. If a majority of Scots vote "yes," then the state would splinter from the United Kingdom, limiting the latter's access to Scotland's fossil fuel reserves, Navy bases and kilts.

Chief Secretary to the Treasury in the U.K., Danny Alexander, frames the referendum in the economic effects for both sides. In an interview with Wall Street Journal editors this week, he said that 15 percent to 20 percent of Scots are still undecided and that those votes will depend on their pocketbooks rather than nationalistic sentiments. ...

Turns out now the lowly crock-pot has gone high tech. Now it can take orders from your smart phone. **WSJ has the story.**

A Crock-Pot is one of the simplest and most trustworthy pieces of home-ec tech there is. Its hallowed history dates back nearly half a century. That ultra-basic interface—High, Low and Warm temperatures, plus a timer—is so foolproof there seems no reason to make it "smarter."

So, when news came in January of a Smart Crock-Pot with Wi-Fi and the ability to be controlled by smartphone, I was thrown for a loop. As an enthusiastic home cook and professional gadget nerd, I welcome new kitchen technologies. But the very idea of a networked slow-cooker stokes a debate that won't soon end: Just because you can connect anything to the Internet, should you?

Still, the slow-cooker is the one high-temperature kitchen appliance that we gladly leave on when we're out of the house. That's basically its point: If I want to make pulled pork but am nervous about leaving my oven unattended, out comes the Crock-Pot. ...

Ann Coulter says the favorite American pastime is; Hating Soccer.

I've held off on writing about soccer for a decade — or about the length of the average soccer game — so as not to offend anyone. But enough is enough. Any growing interest in soccer can only be a sign of the nation's moral decay.

(1) Individual achievement is not a big factor in soccer. In a real sport, players fumble passes, throw bricks, and drop fly balls — all in front of a crowd. When baseball players strike out, they're standing alone at the plate. But there's also individual glory in home runs, touchdowns, and slam-dunks

In soccer, the blame is dispersed and almost no one scores anyway. There are no heroes, no losers, no accountability, and no child's fragile self-esteem is bruised. There's a reason perpetually alarmed women are called "soccer moms," not "football moms."

Do they even have MVPs in soccer? Everyone just runs up and down the field and, every once in a while, a ball accidentally goes in. That's when we're supposed to go wild. I'm already asleep. ...

American Interest

Welcome To Obama's Brave New World

The Jihadi Menace Gets Real

by Walter Russell Mead

ISIS is bigger, badder, richer, and better organized than any jihadi threat the United States has faced thus far. Its rise represents a foreign policy disaster of the first order.

A group more radical than al-Qaeda, better organized, better financed, commanding the loyalty of thousands of dedicated fanatics including many with Western and even U.S. passports? And this group now controls some of the most strategic territory at the heart of the Middle East?

Welcome to President Obama's brave new world. After six years in office pursuing strategies he believed would tame the terror threat and doing his best to reassure the American people that the terror situation was under control, with the "remnants" of al-Qaeda skittering into the shadows like roaches when the exterminator arrives, Obama now confronts the most powerful and hostile jihadi movement of modern times, a movement that dances on the graveyard of his hopes.

The *FT* has [rounded up](#) some expert commentary that tries to describe exactly what kind of organization we're up against here:

"They're probably the richest jihadi organisation ever seen," says Aaron Zelin, a fellow at the Washington Institute, and an expert on extremism. "They get their money from trafficking weapons, kidnappings for ransom, counterfeit currencies, oil refining, smuggling artefacts that are thousands of years old and from taxes that they have for areas they are in – either on businesses, or at checkpoints or on ordinary people," he adds. [...]

“Most jihadist groups are tightly controlled, secretive and well co-ordinated, but Isis has essentially taken that to another level, with a quite impressive level of bureaucracy, extensive account keeping, and multiple channels of accountability,” says Charles Lister, an analyst at the Brookings Doha Centre.

The state ISIS hopes to construct may not endure; in periods of radical instability like this one in the Middle East, the fortunes of war can change with breathtaking speed. But the capacities it is building, the supplies it is gathering, the networks forming around it, the training it imparts, and the enormous psychological boost its current success, however fleeting, gives to the jihadi cause will remain.

One wishes we had a Republican President right now if only because when a Republican is in the White House, the media and the chattering classes believe they have a solemn moral duty to categorize and analyze the failures of American strategy and policy. Today that is far from the case; few in the mainstream press seem interested in tracing the full and ugly course of the six years of continual failure that dog the footsteps of the hapless Obama team in a region the White House claimed to understand. Nothing important has gone right for the small and tightly knit team that runs American Middle East policy. Most administrations have one failure in Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking; this administration has two, both distinctly more ignominious and damaging than average. The opening to the Middle East, once heralded by this administration as transformative, has long vanished; no one even talks about the President’s speeches in Cairo and Istanbul anymore, unless regional cynics are looking for punch lines for bitter jokes. The support for the “transition to democracy” in Egypt ended on as humiliating a note as the “red line” kerfuffle in Syria. The spectacular example of advancing human rights by leading from behind in Libya led to an unmitigated disaster from which not only Libya but much of north and west Africa still suffers today.

Rarely has an administration so trumpeted its superior wisdom and strategic smarts; rarely has any American administration experienced so much ignominious failure, or had its ignorance and miscalculation so brutally exposed. No one, ever, will call this administration’s Middle East policies to date either competent or wise—though the usual press acolytes will continue to do what they can to spread a forgiving haze over the strategic collapse of everything this White House has attempted, as they talk about George W. Bush at every chance they get. (An honorable exception in the *NYT* today: Peter Baker [has a piece](#) examining the Administration’s failure to end American involvement in Iraq, and making the obvious but important point that the Iraq fiasco is a consequence of Administration failures in Syria. There are more dots still to connect.)

Now, from the ruins of the Obama Administration’s Middle East strategy, the most powerful and dangerous group of religious fanatics in modern history has emerged in the heart of the Middle East. The rise of ISIS is a strategic defeat of the first magnitude for the United States and its allies (as well as countries like Russia and even China). It is a perfect storm of bad policy intersecting with troubled times to create the gravest threat to U.S. and world stability since the end of the Cold War.

The mainstream press and the professional chatterboxes of the news shows need to set aside their squeamishness at poring over the details of a major strategic failure by a liberal Democrat. The rise of ISIS/ISIL is a disaster that must be examined and understood. How could the U.S. government have been caught napping by the rise of a new and hostile power in a region of vital concern? What warning signs were missed, what opportunities were lost—and why? What role did the administration’s trademark dithering and hairsplitting over aid to ISIS’s rivals in the Syrian opposition play in the rise of the radicals?

Meanwhile, as the liberal press does its earnest best to ignore the real-time collapse of a foreign policy it once cheered to the rafters, some GOP voices are doing their best to add to the confusion and further muddy the debate. The architects of the war in Iraq are claiming that this disaster somehow vindicates them, and some hope that, as the nature of the danger and the magnitude of the disaster sink in, the nation will call them back to power.

In fact, the architects of the surge and the policies that stabilized Iraq following the nadir of the war do deserve credit; Generals Petraeus and McCrystal, both driven from public service as a consequence of minor indiscretions, tower like giants over the moralistic timeservers who arrogantly and foolishly cast them aside. But if those who led the nation into Iraq want to play a positive role now, they need to embrace some humility and talk about “lessons learned.” If they want to help the United States of America in an hour of real need, they must not try to use the current situation to win personal vindication—and the more stridently they demand it the more they will place obstacles in the path of the debate that we need, marginalize their own voices and divide a people who need to unite as the dangers grow.

Some members of the Democratic foreign policy establishment are looking for ways to rescue their nation and party from the current mess. Les Gelb at the *Daily Beast* [understands](#) the revolutionary nature of the jihadi blitzkrieg, and argues for a new Grand Alliance of the U.S., Russia, Iran and even Assad against the new power in the Middle East. He tries to head off criticisms:

I’m certainly not saying that Assad is a good guy and that we should abandon pursuing his eventual departure, or that we can now trust Russia and Iran. Washington has and will have serious problems with all these countries. And most certainly, the U.S. will have to stay on its guard. But the fact is that there is common ground with Moscow and Tehran to combat the biggest threat to all of us at this moment. Russia frets all the time about the jihadis in the Mideast making joint cause with Muslim extremists in Russia; it’s Moscow’s number one security issue. Iran worries greatly about the Sunni jihadis torturing and killing Shiites in Syria and Iraq. There’s nothing more frightening in the world today than these religious fanatics.

But ultimately, even with Gelb’s many caveats, his proposal may not be practical; a number of these “allies” would be at least as interested in weakening the U.S. as in striking at ISIS—and placing the U.S. on one side of a sectarian war has big drawbacks. There is also the question of whether the earnest White House types who have piled up such a disastrous record in the Middle East could negotiate their way into a used car lot, much less handle a complex negotiation involving Russia, Iran, Assad, and a bunch of other canny operators. Even so, Gelb is right about this: The rise of ISIS, unless checked, presents a challenge big enough to change the international alignment of more than one state. We could be looking at a major geopolitical upheaval here, an earthquake whose aftershocks will be felt across the world.

From current press reports, it appears that Secretary Kerry is off to the Middle East on a mission of splitting the difference. On the one hand, he is kissing up to the Saudis: telling the Saudi backed Egyptian leader Sisi not to worry, that the aid check is in the mail, and insisting that any solution in Iraq must involve a better deal for the Sunnis. On the other hand, he is urging the Shia to make nice—to throw Maliki out and “be more inclusive” with the Sunnis in Iraq. This is the sort of counsel the U.S. always hands out in these situations; we want both sides to “rise above” their “narrow interests” and accept a compromise solution that, coincidentally, gives us what we want.

The Middle East’s leaders have heard exactly this kind of message from many Presidents and Secretaries of State in the past. They are less inspired by our logic than American policymakers think. As the region’s leaders listen to Kerry, they will be asking whether he brought anything but the usual stale platitudes in his baggage. What, specifically, does the U.S. want people to do? And

what good things will happen to those who agree to support the U.S. line in this crisis, and what bad things will happen to those who don't? One hopes the White House has given Kerry big bags full of extra-tasty carrots and intimidating sticks; otherwise, his mission this week will be no more successful than his most recent bout of Middle East peacemaking with the Israelis and Palestinians. The problem is that what Middle Eastern leaders want most from the United States is exactly what President Obama doesn't want to give them: firm promises of significant and effective military support. The Iraqis want more than a few drone strikes, the Saudis want Iran's ambitions blocked and the "moderate" Syrian rebels effectively helped; the Iranians want the U.S. to crush ISIS for them.

Secretary Kerry faces a tough week, especially after the Egyptians celebrated his visit by [convicting three Al-Jazeera journalists](#) on terrorism charges and giving them long prison terms. For our part, we wish him all the success in the world, and observe that any tangible successes — like the ouster of Maliki — would help to restore the credibility of an administration that desperately needs a win.

For the immediate future, there are two things to watch. First, does ISIS's momentum carry it forward when it reaches the Shia districts of Iraq? The militias and parade groups currently marching around Baghdad and thumping their chests may not be very effective in the field, and it is not yet clear whether the Iraqi Army will fight any better on Shia home turf than it did in the north and the west. The Sunni crushed the Shia in Iraq for decades and there is no law of nature that says they can't do it again—if they are willing to be brutal enough.

They probably are.

In any case, the fall of Baghdad and further disintegration of the fragile Shia Army would create one kind of situation; the stabilization of a military front north and west of the city or even inside it would be something quite different. Until we know how that develops on the ground, it will be difficult to think much about the future.

Second, there's the [question](#) of the political balance within the ISIS-held territories. Tribal leaders, Baathist activists, other religious groups and their allies outnumber the true ISIS cadres by an immense factor. It is far from clear whether the rebel region in Syria and Iraq will be under one increasingly powerful and effective government or whether it falls apart into factionalism and internal power struggles. For ISIS to impose real order and authority on the population under its military control, and to build up its forces from a guerrilla army to a force capable of imposing dictatorial religious rule on a large civilian population, would be a victory as difficult and in some ways more astonishing than the triumph of its forces on the ground. The U.S. might do better to try to strengthen the non-ISIS components of the Sunni movements in Syria and Iraq than to look to Tehran and the Kremlin for help.

So the dust will have to settle before we can tell what exactly we are dealing with. But even as we wait for the new picture to emerge internationally, the American people need to come to grips with a strategic escalation of the terror threat at home. ISIS is much richer, much bigger, much better organized and much better positioned to launch attacks in the U.S. and Europe than any of its predecessors. For now, the organization appears to be focused on its local wars, where it certainly has plenty to do. But we've consistently underestimated the group's capabilities, strategic intelligence, innovative planning methods, and drive to prevail. It would be most unwise to assume that a jihadi terror organization 2.0 like ISIS, richer than Osama bin Laden and better supplied with arms and supporters, is incapable of thinking one or two steps ahead. And there's the reality that hotheads all over the world will be inspired by its success to try a little murder and mayhem on their own.

So here, alas, is where we now stand six years into the Age of Obama: The President isn't making America safer at home, he doesn't have the jihadis on the run, he has no idea how to bring prosperity, democracy, or religious moderation to the Middle East, he can't pivot away from the region, and he doesn't know what to do next. He's the only President this country has got, and one can't help but wish him well, but if things are going to get any better, he needs to stop digging. He probably needs to bring in some new blood, and he must certainly ask himself some tough questions about why so many of his most cherished ideas keep leading him and his country into such ugly places.

Six years into what the President and his supporters thought would be an era of liberal Democrats seizing the national security high ground from enfeebled, discredited Republicans, the outlook is much grimmer than the President's team could have dreamed. Perhaps they should take comfort from the example of George W. Bush; at this point in his presidency things looked pretty bleak, too. Between the surge in Iraq and hard work building bridges with allies, Bush had some positive foreign policy momentum going by the time he left office. It's not a place on Mount Rushmore, but it's better than the alternative. Mr. Obama must now hope he can accomplish as much.

WSJ

Fouad Ajami, Great American

His genius lay in the breadth of his scholarship and the quality of his human understanding.

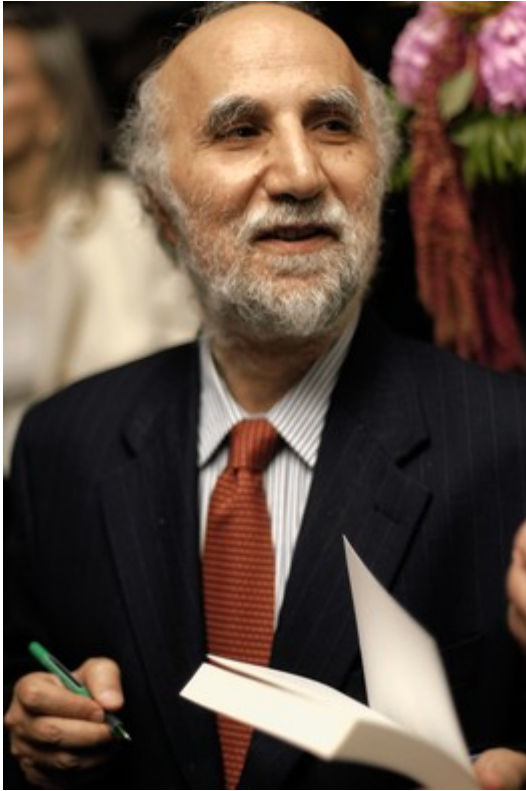
by Bret Stephens

Fouad Ajami would have been amused, but not surprised, to read his own obituary in the [New York Times](#). "Edward Said, the Palestinian cultural critic who died in 2003, accused [Ajami] of having 'unmistakably racist prescriptions,'" quoted obituarist Douglas Martin.

Thus was Said, the most mendacious, self-infatuated and profitably self-pitying of Arab-American intellectuals—[a man whose account of his own childhood cannot be trusted](#)—raised from the grave to defame, for one last time, the most honest and honorable and generous of American intellectuals, no hyphenation necessary.

Ajami, who died of prostate cancer Sunday in his summer home in Maine, was often described as among the foremost scholars of the modern Arab and Islamic worlds, and so he was. He was born in 1945 to a family of farmers in a Shiite village in southern Lebanon and was raised in Beirut in the politics of the age.

"I was formed by an amorphous Arab nationalist sensibility," he wrote in his 1998 masterpiece, "The Dream Palace of the Arabs." He came to the U.S. for college and graduate school, became a U.S. citizen, and first made his political mark as an advocate for Palestinian nationalism. For those who knew Ajami mainly as a consistent advocate of Saddam Hussein's ouster, it's worth watching a [YouTube snippet](#) of his 1978 debate with Benjamin Netanyahu, in which Ajami makes the now-standard case against Israeli iniquity.



Fouad Ajami

Today Mr. Netanyahu sounds very much like his 28-year-old self. But Ajami changed. He was, to borrow a phrase, mugged by reality. By the 1980s, he wrote, "Arab society had run through most of its myths, and what remained in the wake of the word, of the many proud statements people had made about themselves and their history, was a new world of cruelty, waste, and confusion."

What Ajami did was to see that world plain, without the usual evasions and obfuscations and shifting of blame to Israel and the U.S. Like Sidney Hook, a great ex-communist of a previous generation, his honesty, courage and intelligence got the better of his ideology; he understood his former beliefs with the hard-won wisdom of the disillusioned.

He also understood with empathy and without rancor. Converts tend to be fanatics. But Ajami was too interested in people—in their motives and aspirations, their deceits and self-deceits, their pride, shame and unexpected nobility—to hate anyone except the truly despicable, namely tyrants and their apologists. To read Ajami is to see that his genius lay not only in the breadth of the scholarship or the sharpness of political insight but also in the quality of human understanding. If Joseph Conrad had been reborn as a modern-day academic, he would have been Fouad Ajami.

Consider a typical example, from an op-ed he wrote for these pages in [February 2013](#) on the second anniversary of the fall of [Hosni Mubarak](#)'s regime:

"Throughout [Mubarak's] reign, a toxic brew poisoned the life of Egypt—a mix of anti-modernism, anti-Americanism and anti-Zionism. That trinity ran rampant in the universities and the professional syndicates and the official media. As pillage had become the obsession of the ruling family and its retainers, the underclass was left to the rule of darkness and to a culture of conspiracy."

Or here he is on [Barack Obama](#)'s fading political appeal, from a piece from [last November](#):

"The current troubles of the Obama presidency can be read back into its beginnings. Rule by personal charisma has met its proper fate. The spell has been broken, and the magician stands exposed. We need no pollsters to tell us of the loss of faith in Mr. Obama's policies—and, more significantly, in the man himself. Charisma is like that. Crowds come together and they project their needs onto an imagined redeemer. The redeemer leaves the crowd to its imagination: For as long as the charismatic moment lasts—a year, an era—the redeemer is above and beyond judgment."

A publisher ought to collect these pieces. Who else could write so profoundly and so well? Ajami understood the Arab world as only an insider could—intimately, sympathetically, without self-pity. And he loved America as only an immigrant could—with a depth of appreciation and absence of cynicism rarely given to the native-born. If there was ever an error in his judgment, it's that he believed in people—Arabs and Americans alike—perhaps more than they believed in themselves. It was the kind of mistake only a generous spirit could make.

Over the years Ajami mentored many people—the mentorship often turning to friendship—who went on to great things. One of them, Samuel Tadros, a native of Egypt and now a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute, wrote me Monday with an apt valediction:

"Fouad is remarkable because he became a full American, loved this country as anyone could love it, but that did not lessen his passion for what he left behind. He cared deeply about the region, he was always an optimist. He knew well the region's ills, the pains it gave those who cherished it. God knows it gave him nothing but pain, but he always believed that the peoples of the region deserved better."

WSJ - Political Diary

[Will the Scots Go It Alone?](#)

by Claire Groden

Scots are expected to turn out en masse for a September referendum that could cleave the British Isle into two countries. If a majority of Scots vote "yes," then the state would splinter from the United Kingdom, limiting the latter's access to Scotland's fossil fuel reserves, Navy bases and kilts.

Chief Secretary to the Treasury in the U.K., Danny Alexander, frames the referendum in the economic effects for both sides. In an interview with Wall Street Journal editors this week, he said that 15 percent to 20 percent of Scots are still undecided and that those votes will depend on their pocketbooks rather than nationalistic sentiments.

First Minister of Scotland Alex Salmond has insisted that the new country would continue to enjoy economic perks associated with the U.K., but British officials are skeptical. There is little incentive for the U.K. to continue to share the pound or the Bank of England with the Scots, which would leave the fledgling country in economic tumult. Scotland's economy would lean on oil exports, leaving it vulnerable to a volatile market. Barring political acrobats, Scotland would at least temporarily lose its place in the European Union, endangering international investment.

There are also demographic trends that argue against a split. Compared to the rest of the U.K., Scotland is going gray. Between 2010 and 2035, pensioners will grow by 26 percent, compared to the 7 percent growth expected for the working age population. With all of these economic hurdles, an independent Scotland would be unlikely to see any of the financial benefits that Mr. Salmond

claims. "The austerity measures that I've been doing would look like a tea party," Mr. Alexander said.

There is also uncertainty over whether Scotland will continue to share the BBC, Britain's public service broadcasting giant, or even the U.K. lottery. Mr. Alexander said that, in the event of a break-up, extensive negotiations would determine all of these terms. Since the lottery and BBC are national services, the British government would have to transform them into international entities to accommodate an independent Scotland's love of "Doctor Who."

The referendum is the brainchild of the Scottish Nationalist Party, which gained a majority in Scottish Parliament in 2011. Mr. Salmond has trumpeted the economic benefits that he claims Scotland would enjoy with independence, fluffing the numbers by assuming only an 8 percent slice of Britain's debt—which ignores the debt incurred from the Royal Bank of Scotland's failure—and almost all of its oil revenue. Mr. Salmond can dream. But if he convinces Scots to vote yes in September, he may be in for a rude awakening when he gets his wish.

WSJ

How Smart Is Your Crock-Pot?

A Test of Whether a Smartphone-Controlled Cooker Is Worth It; Adjust the Heat and Finish Time From Work

by Wilson Rothman

A Crock-Pot is one of the simplest and most trustworthy pieces of home-ec tech there is. Its hallowed history dates back nearly half a century. That ultra-basic interface—High, Low and Warm temperatures, plus a timer—is so foolproof there seems no reason to make it "smarter."

So, when news came in January of a Smart Crock-Pot with Wi-Fi and the ability to be controlled by smartphone, I was thrown for a loop. As an enthusiastic home cook and professional gadget nerd, I welcome new kitchen technologies. But the very idea of a networked slow-cooker stokes a debate that won't soon end: Just because you can connect anything to the Internet, should you?

Still, the slow-cooker is the one high-temperature kitchen appliance that we gladly leave on when we're out of the house. That's basically its point: If I want to make pulled pork but am nervous about leaving my oven unattended, out comes the Crock-Pot.

For my first test, [I made chili](#). You still have to go through the prep work the old-fashioned way, with knife and cutting board and can opener. I browned my beef ahead of time (optional, but preferred), then dumped all of my ingredients into the familiar stoneware vat. But instead of reaching for any knobs or buttons on the front of the device, I launched an app on my phone to set temperature and time.

The machine fired up, eventually reaching a simmer. The app kept track of time and alerted me with a pop-up message when my three-hour stew was ready for mass consumption. If I had wanted to bump the temperature from High to Low or adjust the cook time, I could easily do that whether I was down the street or half a world away.

I am happy to report that the \$130 Smart Crock-Pot works as billed. While it's part of [Belkin's WeMo connected-home system](#), there's no sense tying it into other automated services that WeMo supports—mainly lighting and cameras for now. Still, the app did the job. Even when I ran up against a remote access issue, a tech-support rep easily explained and resolved the problem. (It's one unlikely to occur with most people, as it resulted from an environment with multiple wireless networks—and was exacerbated by my own impatience.)

Most important, the chili came out great. ([Here's the recipe if you want to try it at home.](#))

It was at that point that the greater existential questions surrounding a Smart Crock-Pot began surfacing: When would I really need this? Is it worth the extra \$50? And is it smart enough?



The Crock-Pot® Smart Slow Cooker is controlled using an app called WeMo, allowing you to check in on what you're cooking when you're out of the house.

There are a few obvious uses for remotely controlling a slow-cooker. Many recipes instruct you to raise the cooking temperature at the end, or lower it from the High setting halfway through. More often, there are occasions when I am ahead of schedule and wish my food were cooking faster, or am late and want to put the brakes on my meal. In rare circumstances, I may want to toss ingredients into the cooker, but not fire it up until later (while obeying all rules of food safety, of course).

My wife, herself a fan of one-pot cooking, agreed that the Internet connectivity helped, simply because she would like to be able to check the timer while sitting at her desk.

But were we kidding ourselves? Given my occupation, I feared I was perhaps too eager to give this technology a pass. So I called the most no-nonsense home cook I know, someone who still uses the same electric knife she got for a wedding present 44 years ago: my mother-in-law Lynda.

When I said I was testing a smartphone-controlled Crock-Pot, she burst out laughing. Something about the juxtaposition of timeless kitchen classic and the latest electronic trend cracks people up.

So I was surprised that, after the laughter subsided, she proceeded to rattle off many of the same scenarios I had thought up for this device.

She really likes the idea of a delayed cooking start. As she points out, even on the Warm setting, which maintains food just above 140 degrees Fahrenheit once the timer runs out, meat continues to cook.

"I'm not going to add it to my Amazon wish list," she said of the Smart Crock-Pot, "but I would use it."

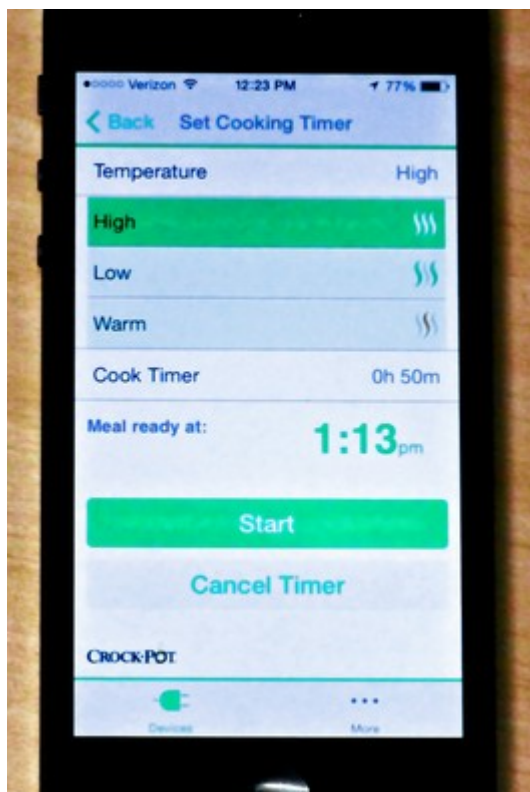
Then she surprised me further by saying she would actually like a networked oven, too.

Her mother used to put a roast in the oven before church on Sundays, then pull it out when the family got home. Lynda would like an updated version of this: If she has a roast in the oven but gets sidetracked, she'd like to pull out her phone and cut the heat so her meat doesn't overcook.

That suggestion reminded me of what's missing from the Smart Crock-Pot I tested: a temperature probe.

The deliberately simple slow-cooker method has helped skilled crockers whip up beautiful meals for decades. But knowing one simple number, the internal temperature of your hunk of meat, tells you a lot about what's going on with your food. Competing slow-cookers have probes, so why didn't Jarden, the keeper of the hallowed Crock-Pot brand, include one in its smartest model?

There's also a \$100 Crock-Pot that lets you tell it what you're cooking and when you want it ready. "It does all the thinking for you," according to its Web promo. Why would I not want that as part of the Smart Crock-Pot package?



The Smart Crock-Pot's app allows cooks far from the kitchen to adjust the heat and the time at which they wish their meal to be ready.

"We wanted the first version to be very simple and approachable," said Lori Gonzalez, vice president and general manager of Jarden Consumer Solutions. "We're focusing on a very basic benefit to consumers: Control your meal from anywhere. We kept functionality very basic so people wouldn't be intimidated by it." She did say that future versions of the WeMo app would let the Smart Crock-Pot perform functions like its sibling and that the company could "absolutely see the benefit" of features like a probe.

Whether you're tickled or terrified by the notion of an Internet-connected piece of crockery, please realize: This is happening. This fall, Jarden itself will also sell a networked Mr. Coffee machine and a line of Holmes-branded smart air products—some which may eventually interact with the Crock-Pot via the WeMo system. (Cooking smells getting too heady? On goes the air purifier.)

Five years from now, it's likely that most slow cookers will be smartphone-controlled. For now, if you need a new one, the feature is simply one of many to consider.

Write to Wilson Rothman at Wilson.Rothman@wsj.com or on Twitter [@wjrothman](https://twitter.com/wjrothman). Geoffrey A. Fowler will return next week.

Human Events

America's favorite national pastime: Hating soccer

by Ann Coulter

I've held off on writing about soccer for a decade — or about the length of the average soccer game — so as not to offend anyone. But enough is enough. Any growing interest in soccer can only be a sign of the nation's moral decay.

(1) Individual achievement is not a big factor in soccer. In a real sport, players fumble passes, throw bricks, and drop fly balls — all in front of a crowd. When baseball players strike out, they're standing alone at the plate. But there's also individual glory in home runs, touchdowns, and slam-dunks

In soccer, the blame is dispersed and almost no one scores anyway. There are no heroes, no losers, no accountability, and no child's fragile self-esteem is bruised. There's a reason perpetually alarmed women are called "soccer moms," not "football moms."

Do they even have MVPs in soccer? Everyone just runs up and down the field and, every once in a while, a ball accidentally goes in. That's when we're supposed to go wild. I'm already asleep.

(2) Liberal moms like soccer because it's a sport in which athletic talent finds so little expression that girls can play with boys. No serious sport is co-ed, even at the kindergarten level.

(3) No other "sport" ends in as many scoreless ties as soccer. This was an actual marquee sign by the freeway in Long Beach, California, about a World Cup game last week: "2nd period, 11 minutes left, score: 0:0." Two hours later, another World Cup game was on the same screen: "1st period, 8 minutes left, score: 0:0." If Michael Jackson had treated his chronic insomnia with a tape of Argentina vs. Brazil instead of Propofol, he'd still be alive, although bored.

Even in football, by which I mean football, there are very few scoreless ties — and it's a lot harder to score when a half-dozen 300-pound bruisers are trying to crush you.

(4) The prospect of either personal humiliation or major injury is required to count as a sport. Most sports are sublimated warfare. As Lady Thatcher reportedly said after Germany had beaten England in some major soccer game: *Don't worry. After all, twice in this century we beat them at their national game.*

Baseball and basketball present a constant threat of personal disgrace. In hockey, there are three or four fights a game — and it's not a stroll on beach to be on ice with a puck flying around at 100 miles per hour. After a football game, ambulances carry off the wounded. After a soccer game, every player gets a ribbon and a juice box.

(5) You can't use your hands in soccer. (Thus eliminating the danger of having to catch a fly ball.) What sets man apart from the lesser beasts, besides a soul, is that we have opposable thumbs. Our hands can hold things. Here's a great idea: Let's create a game where you're not allowed to use them!

(6) I resent the force-fed aspect of soccer. The same people trying to push soccer on Americans are the ones demanding that we love HBO's "Girls," light-rail, Beyonce, and Hillary Clinton. The number of *New York Times* articles claiming soccer is "catching on" is exceeded only by the ones pretending women's basketball is fascinating.

I note that we don't have to be endlessly told how exciting football is.

(7) It's foreign. In fact, that's the precise reason the *Times* is constantly hectoring Americans to love soccer. One group of sports fans with whom soccer is not "catching on" at all is African-Americans. They remain distinctly unimpressed by the fact that the French like it.

(8) Soccer is like the metric system, which liberals also adore because it's European. Naturally, the metric system emerged from the French Revolution, during the brief intervals when they weren't committing mass murder by guillotine.

Despite being subjected to Chinese-style brainwashing in the public schools to use centimeters and Celsius, ask any American for the temperature, and he'll say something like "70 degrees." Ask how far Boston is from New York City, he'll say it's about 200 miles.

Liberals get angry and tell us that the metric system is more "rational" than the measurements everyone understands. This is ridiculous. An inch is the width of a man's thumb, a foot the length of his foot, a yard the length of his belt. That's easy to visualize. How do you visualize 147.2 centimeters?

(9) Soccer is not "catching on." Headlines this week proclaimed "Record U.S. ratings for World Cup," and we had to hear — again — about the "growing popularity of soccer in the United States."

The USA-Portugal game was the blockbuster match, garnering 18.2 million viewers on ESPN. This beat the second-most watched soccer game ever: The 1999 Women's World Cup final (USA vs. China) on ABC. (In soccer, the women's games are as thrilling as the men's.)

Run-of-the-mill, regular-season Sunday Night Football games average more than 20 million viewers; NFL playoff games get 30 to 40 million viewers; and this year's Super Bowl had 111.5 million viewers.

Remember when the media tried to foist British soccer star David Beckham and his permanently camera-ready wife on us a few years ago? Their arrival in America was heralded with 24-7 news coverage. That lasted about two days. Ratings tanked. No one cared.

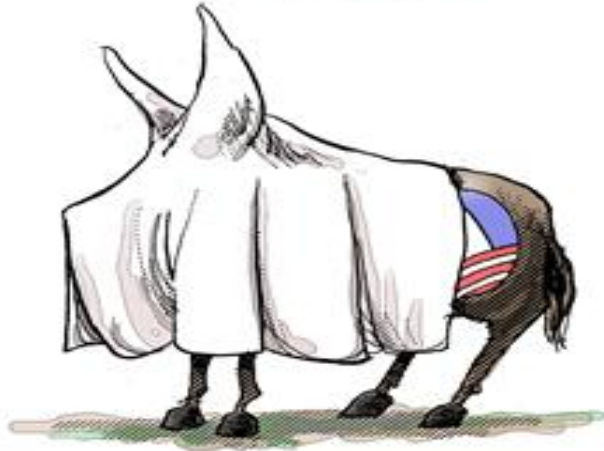
If more "Americans" are watching soccer today, it's only because of the demographic switch effected by Teddy Kennedy's 1965 immigration law. I promise you: No American whose great-grandfather was born here is watching soccer. One can only hope that, in addition to learning English, these new Americans will drop their soccer fetish with time.



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HOW TO BECOME A WHITE HOUSE CORRESPONDENT

20TH-CENTURY SAM



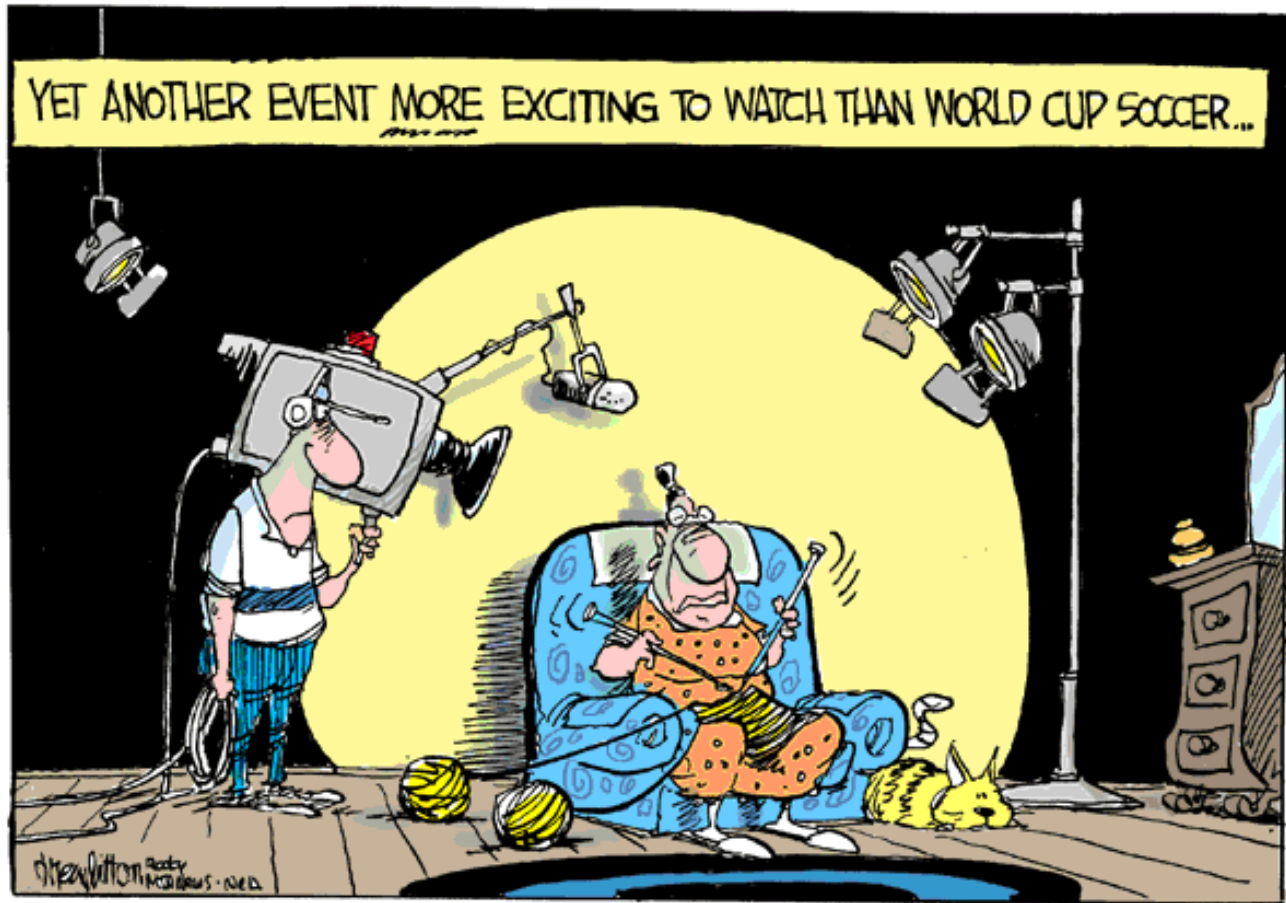
I WANT YOU

21ST-CENTURY SAM



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THE WORLD
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