

June 4, 2014

### Craig Pirrong gets first dibs on the Bergdahl flap.

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*There are many, many things wrong with this. In fact, pretty much everything is wrong with this.*

- Negotiating exchanges with terrorists, especially at such an exchange rate, is a bad idea. It just incentivizes the capture and ransoming of US military personnel, and US citizens. I understand that presidents are under a lot of pressure to renege on pledges not to negotiate with hostage takers, but the frequent renegeing perpetuates the bad equilibrium. Many have pointed out that previous administrations, including for instance Reagan's, have engaged in such exchanges or negotiations for such exchanges. The simple fact is that because it has been done before doesn't mean we should be doing it now: N wrongs don't make a right. The appalling outcomes of the previous negotiations (and not just in the US-Israel too) should be proof of the futility and indeed perversity of such a course.*
- The fact that the five people exchanged are truly very, very bad guys only puts an exclamation point to the previous conclusion. The fact that the Qataris will allegedly hold these people so they cannot fight against the US means nothing: they will be living large, with their families, a long way from Gitmo. It is the precedent and the incentive for future hostage taking that is the problem.*
- This is apparently part of some grand Obama scheme to negotiate a settlement in Afghanistan with the Taliban. I cannot think of anything more delusional. ...*

An officer in Bergdahl's battalion tells the story of how he came to be missing. This is from the Daily Beast.

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*The Daily Beast's Christopher Dickey later wrote that "[w]hether Bergdahl...just walked away from his base or was lagging behind on a patrol at the time of his capture remains an open and fiercely debated question." Not to me and the members of my unit. Make no mistake: Bergdahl did not "lag behind on a patrol," as was cited in news reports at the time. There was no patrol that night. Bergdahl was relieved from guard duty, and instead of going to sleep, he fled the outpost on foot.*

*He deserted. I've talked to members of Bergdahl's platoon—including the last Americans to see him before his capture. I've reviewed the relevant documents. That's what happened. ...*

How does the president ends up in the Rose Garden with a Taliban wannabee? Or is Bergdahl's father trying out for Duck Dynasty? [Victor Davis Hanson](#) has more substantive questions.

*There has been a lot to think about during these years of Obama's foreign policy. But the problem is not just the existential issues, from reset to Benghazi, but also the less heralded developments, such as young non-high-school graduate Edward Snowden's trotting off with the most sensitive secrets of the NSA, the "stuff happens" outing of a CIA station chief in Afghanistan, and the failure to destroy the downed drone that ended up in Iran.*

*In the latter category falls the mysterious prisoner swap of Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl for five top Taliban inmates, given that even at this early juncture there are lots of disturbing questions: Why not as the law demanded consult Congress on the releases from Guantanamo, or at least the congressional leadership? Why swap some of the most dangerous and important members of the Taliban hierarchy? What exactly were the circumstances of the original departure of Bergdahl (in 2009 two military officials told the AP that Bergdahl "had just walked off" with three other Afghans), and why were other soldiers requested not to disclose what they knew about the nature of his departure or the costly efforts to find Bergdahl? What exactly is the present U.S. position on trading captives for prisoners/hostages? Do we really believe that the released terrorists will be kept another year in the Middle East? ...*

[Max Boot](#) posts on how not to handle a prisoner swap.

*Ronald Reagan traded arms for hostages. Benjamin Netanyahu traded more than 1,000 Palestinian prisoners for Corporal Gilad Shalit. Ehud Olmert traded five living terrorists—one of them responsible for killing a four-year-old girl by crushing her skull with the butt of his rifle—for two dead Israeli soldiers. So there is nothing new about making deals with terrorists or exchanging captives with them. It's even possible that President Obama did the right thing by freeing five senior Taliban leaders in exchange for Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl, who has been held by the Taliban since 2009. Certainly Obama as commander in chief had the power to do so even if some members of Congress are miffed at not being consulted.*

*What I find offensive is that the president and his team are not treating this as a grubby and inglorious compromise—an attempt to reconcile our competing ideals of "don't deal with terrorists" and "leave no man behind." Instead the administration seems to be taking a victory lap. The president held a White House event with Bergdahl's parents. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel flew to Afghanistan to commemorate the occasion. National Security Adviser Susan Rice [called it](#) "a great day for America." ...*

Time for a welcome change of subject. [John Fund](#) writes on the new war between the states.

*Wealth and people are moving in America, from places where local policies inhibit economic growth to places where the tax and regulatory climate is sunnier.*

*The numbers are clear. Between 1995 and 2010 over \$2 trillion in adjusted gross income moved between the states. That's the equivalent of the GDP of California, the ninth largest GDP in the world. Some of the movement might be due to weather — that helps to explain some of Florida's \$86.4 billion gain and New York's \$58.6 billion loss. But we can attribute a great deal to the fact that capital flows to where it is best treated. Travis Brown, author of the new book How Money Walks, reports that the nine states without a personal income tax gained \$146 billion in new wealth while the nine states with the highest income tax rates lost \$107 billion. ...*

More on this with a focus on three states from Sam Brownback, Governor of Kansas. Interesting here is cooperation rather than competition.

*Fifty years ago, in 1964, Ronald Reagan gave a famous speech widely broadcast on radio and television called "A Time for Choosing," in which he described the contrast between two potential paths forward for our nation. One path was the continuation of the big-government policies of higher taxes, higher spending, soaring debt, more centralization of power in Washington, more regulation of the economy, more dependence on government programs . . . and less freedom.*

*The other path, the new path, he described would bring to our nation lower taxes, less spending, reduced deficits, less government dependence, less centralization of power . . . and more freedom. He described a path in which "the free men and women of this country" were not "the masses," a "term we haven't applied to ourselves in America." He reminded us that "the full power of centralized government . . . was the very thing the Founding Fathers sought to minimize." And that the Founding Fathers further understood that "outside of its legitimate functions, government does nothing as well or as economically as the private sector of the economy."*

*Today some call that a choice between a "red state" or "blue state" model. I say it is a choice between dependence and self-reliance, between intrusion and freedom.*

*While President Obama continues to implement his big-government vision for the nation, Kansas and its neighbors in Missouri and Oklahoma are charting a course based on a vision of lower taxes and leaner governments leading to a more prosperous citizenry. Together our states are implementing taxes and regulatory policies that are building a Midwest renaissance. ...*

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## **Streetwise Professor**

### **[How Bad is the Bergdahl Deal? Let Me Count the Ways](#)**

by Craig Pirrong

Obama has exchanged five hard-core Taliban held in Gitmo for Bowe Bergdahl, a US soldier who went missing in 2009, and who was captured by the Taliban and subsequently held by the Haqqani Network. (The circumstances of his going walkabout are important, as I discuss in more detail below.)

There are many, many things wrong with this. In fact, pretty much everything is wrong with this.

- Negotiating exchanges with terrorists, especially at such an exchange rate, is a bad idea. It just incentivizes the capture and ransoming of US military personnel, and US citizens. I understand that presidents are under a lot of pressure to renege on pledges not to negotiate with hostage takers, but the frequent renegeing perpetuates the bad equilibrium. Many have pointed out that previous administrations, including for instance Reagan's, have engaged in such exchanges or negotiations for such exchanges. The simple fact is that because it has been done before doesn't mean we should be doing it now: N wrongs don't make a right. The appalling outcomes of the previous negotiations (and not just in the US-Israel too) should be proof of the futility and indeed perversity of such a course.
- The fact that the five people exchanged are truly very, very bad guys only puts an exclamation point to the previous conclusion. The fact that the Qataris will allegedly hold these people so they cannot fight against the US means nothing: they will be living large, with their families, a long way from Gitmo. It is the precedent and the incentive for future hostage taking that is the problem.
- This is apparently part of some grand Obama scheme to negotiate a settlement in Afghanistan with the Taliban. I cannot think of anything more delusional. Even negotiating with Iran looks sane by comparison. Ever heard of Taqiya, Obama? And pray tell how would any deal with the Taliban be enforced? Or is this just another grab for a fig leaf, *a la* the farcical deal to eliminate Assad's chemical weapons?
- Obama also broke the law which requires informing Congress 30 days prior to releasing Gitmo detainees. This is part of a pattern with him, and not a good pattern: the law should not be optional, to be followed or not at the president's discretion, unless the law grants that discretion. Ironically, Obama's signing statement attached to the bill said that he would not be constrained by the law if it undermined his authority as commander and chief. I say ironically, because Obama blasted Bush for making similar assertions in signing statements. Obama haughtily referred to his experience as a teacher of Constitutional law to support his claim that such statements are extra-Constitutional. That was then, this is now. What's sauce for the Bush isn't sauce for the Bamster, apparently.
- The involvement of the Qataris is also disturbing. They are malign and completely untrustworthy. They are the main supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood and have been the source of much mischief.
- Obama appeared in the Rose Garden with Bergdahl's parents. This is incredibly disturbing because Bowe's father Bob Bergdahl is a Taliban fellow traveler who routinely criticizes the United States and embraces the Taliban cause. Check out his Twitter timeline, [of which this \(deleted\) tweet is representative](#). Bergdahl also grew a Talibanesque beard and learned Pashto. The most charitable interpretation to put on his actions is that he suffers from Stockholm Syndrome by Proxy. Regardless of the genesis of Bergdahl's allegiances, those allegiances are there for all to see: it is extraordinarily troubling for a US president to appear publicly with a man who supports quite publicly the cause of those killing US military personnel and who wish to make Afghanistan safe for Al Qaeda again.
- Bowe Bergdahl himself is a troubling figure. [This 2012 Rolling Stone profile](#) based on extensive interviews with those who knew him, and on emails he sent to his parents, makes him out to be a combination of Holden Caulfield and Walter Mitty. He joined the Army only after being turned down by the French Foreign Legion (!). He was a wannabe mercenary and survivalist. This Caulfield-esque rant suggests that he was a self-absorbed Jonah: "The US army is the biggest joke the world has to laugh at. It is the army of liars, backstabbers, fools, and bullies. The few good SGTs are getting out as soon as they can, and they are telling us privates to do the same."
- The most plausible explanation for Bergdahl's capture is that he deserted because of his hatred of the Army and his sympathy for the Taliban: the Rolling Stone article strongly supports that conclusion, and provides zero support for any benign alternative. This raises an important question: will the US Army investigate his conduct? Will it inquire whether he

provided aid and comfort to an enemy killing US troops? For instance, did Bergdahl provide information about US security procedures? Did he help translate US communications for Afghans fighting the US?

- It is imperative for the good order and discipline of the service that Bowe be investigated thoroughly, and if he is found to have deserted, and/or provided aid-and-comfort, that he be disciplined accordingly. But is it really likely that the Army will proceed with a thorough investigation, and bring charges against Bergdahl, after Obama personally negotiated his release? I would be shocked if the Army does in fact undertake an investigation that would call into question Obama's actions. If the Army does not, this will be yet another example of Obama's corrosive effect on US institutions.
- Speaking of translation, and investigations, Bowe Bergdahl's father claims that Bowe has difficulty understanding English after his captivity. I am deeply dubious. This sounds for all the world like a ploy to impede interrogation.

I don't like to see US service personnel in the hands of the likes of the Taliban or the Haqqani Network. But I also don't like to see the president of the US making deals with terrorists (precisely because that increases the odds of US troops being held hostage), especially to free soldiers who most likely willingly defected to the enemy, and especially as part of a delusional scheme to negotiate with sworn enemies who will under no circumstances live up to any agreement we reach with them. I do not see the upside for the US here, but do see numerous downsides.

Obama is a national security and diplomatic disaster. What a mess he will be leaving for his successors to clean up.

## Daily Beast

### [We Lost Soldiers in the Hunt for Bergdahl, a Guy Who Walked Off in the Dead of Night](#)

***For five years, soldiers have been forced to stay silent about the disappearance and search for Bergdahl. Now we can talk about what really happened.***

by Nathan Bradley Bethea

It was June 30, 2009, and I was in the city of Sharana, the capitol of Paktika province in Afghanistan. As I stepped out of a decrepit office building into a perfect sunny day, a member of my team started talking into his radio. "Say that again," he said. "There's an American soldier missing?"

There was. His name was Private First Class Bowe Bergdahl, the only prisoner of war in the Afghan theater of operations. [His release from Taliban custody on May 31](#) marks the end of a nearly five-year-old story for the soldiers of his unit, the 1st Battalion, 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment. I served in the same battalion in Afghanistan and participated in the attempts to retrieve him throughout the summer of 2009. After we redeployed, every member of my brigade combat team received an order that we were not allowed to discuss what happened to Bergdahl for fear of endangering him. He is safe, and now it is time to speak the truth.

And that the truth is: Bergdahl was a deserter, and soldiers from his own unit died trying to track him down.

On the night prior to his capture, Bergdahl pulled guard duty at OP Mest, a small outpost about two hours south of the provincial capitol. The base resembled a wagon circle of armored vehicles with some razor wire strung around them. A guard tower sat high up on a nearby hill, but the outpost itself was no fortress. Besides the tower, the only hard structure that I saw in July 2009 was a plywood shed filled with bottled water. Soldiers either slept in poncho tents or inside their vehicles.

The next morning, Bergdahl failed to show for the morning roll call. The soldiers in 2nd Platoon, Blackfoot Company discovered his rifle, helmet, body armor and web gear in a neat stack. He had, however, taken his compass. His fellow soldiers later mentioned his stated desire to walk from Afghanistan to India.

The Daily Beast's Christopher Dickey later [wrote](#) that "[w]hether Bergdahl...just walked away from his base or was lagging behind on a patrol at the time of his capture remains an open and fiercely debated question." Not to me and the members of my unit. Make no mistake: Bergdahl did not "lag behind on a patrol," as was cited in news reports at the time. There was no patrol that night. Bergdahl was relieved from guard duty, and instead of going to sleep, he fled the outpost on foot. He deserted. I've talked to members of Bergdahl's platoon—including the last Americans to see him before his capture. I've reviewed the relevant documents. That's what happened.

Our deployment was hectic and intense in the initial months, but no one could have predicted that a soldier would simply wander off. Looking back on those first 12 weeks, our slice of the war in the vicinity of Sharana resembles a perfectly still snow-globe—a diorama in miniature of all the dust-coated outposts, treeless brown mountains and adobe castles in Paktika province—and between June 25 and June 30, all the forces of nature conspired to turn it over and shake it. On June 25, [we suffered our battalion's first fatality](#), a platoon leader named [First Lieutenant Brian Bradshaw](#). Five days later, Bergdahl walked away.

His disappearance translated into daily search missions across the entire Afghanistan theater of operations, particularly ours. The combat platoons in our battalion spent the next month on daily helicopter-insertion search missions (called "air assaults") trying to scour villages for signs of him. Each operations would send multiple platoons and every enabler available in pursuit: radio intercept teams, military working dogs, professional anthropologists used as intelligence gathering teams, Afghan sources in disguise. They would be out for at least 24 hours. I know of some who were on mission for 10 days at a stretch. In July, the temperature was well above 100 degrees Fahrenheit each day.

These cobbled-together units' task was to search villages one after another. They often took rifle and mortar fire from insurgents, or perhaps just angry locals. They intermittently received resupply from soot-coated Mi-17s piloted by Russian contractors, many of whom were Soviet veterans of Afghanistan. It was hard, dirty and dangerous work. The searches enraged the local civilian population and derailed the counterinsurgency operations taking place at the time. At every juncture I remember the soldiers involved asking why we were burning so much gasoline trying to find a guy who had abandoned his unit in the first place. The war was already absurd and quixotic, but the hunt for Bergdahl was even more infuriating because it was all the result of some kid doing something unnecessary by his own volition.

On July 4, 2009, a human wave of insurgents [attacked the joint U.S./Afghan outpost at Zerok](#). It was in east Paktika province, the domain of our sister infantry battalion (3rd Battalion, 509th Infantry). Two Americans died and many more received wounds. Hundreds of insurgents attacked and were only repelled by teams of Apache helicopters. Zerok was very close to the Pakistan border, which put it into the same category as outposts now infamous—places like COP Keating or

Wanat, places where insurgents could mass on the Pakistani side and then try to overwhelm the outnumbered defenders.

One of my close friends was the company executive officer for the unit at Zerok. He is a mild-mannered and generous guy, not the kind of person prone to fits of pique or rage. But, in his opinion, the attack would not have happened had his company received its normal complement of intelligence aircraft: drones, planes, and the like. Instead, every intelligence aircraft available in theater had received new instructions: find Bergdahl. My friend blames Bergdahl for his soldiers' deaths. I know that he is not alone, and that this was not the only instance of it. His soldiers' names were [Private First Class Aaron Fairbairn](#) and [Private First Class Justin Casillas](#).

Though the 2009 Afghan presidential election slowed the search for Bergdahl, it did not stop it. Our battalion suffered six fatalities in a three-week period. On August 18, an IED killed [Private First Class Morris Walker](#) and [Staff Sergeant Clayton Bowen](#) during a reconnaissance mission. On August 26, while conducting a search for a Taliban shadow sub-governor supposedly affiliated with Bergdahl's captors, [Staff Sergeant Kurt Curtiss](#) was shot in the face and killed. On September 4, during a patrol to a village near the area in which Bergdahl vanished, an insurgent ambush killed [Second Lieutenant Darryn Andrews](#) and gravely wounded [Private First Class Matthew Martinek](#), who died of his wounds a week later. On September 5, while conducting a foot movement toward a village also thought affiliated with Bergdahl's captors, [Staff Sergeant Michael Murphrey](#) stepped on an improvised land mine. He died the next day.

It is important to name all these names. For the veterans of the units that lost these men, Bergdahl's capture and the subsequent hunt for him will forever tie to their memories, and to a time in their lives that will define them as people. He has finally returned. Those men will never have the opportunity.

Bergdahl was not the first American soldier in modern history to walk away blindly. As I write this in Seoul, I'm about 40 miles from where [an American sergeant defected to North Korea in 1965](#). Charles Robert Jenkins later admitted that he was terrified of being sent to Vietnam, so he got drunk and wandered off on a patrol. He was finally released in 2004, after almost 40 hellish years of brutal internment. The Army court-martialed him, sentencing him to 30 days' confinement and a dishonorable discharge. He now lives peacefully with his wife in Japan—they met in captivity in North Korea, where they were both forced to teach foreign languages to DPRK agents. His desertion barely warranted a comment, but he was not hailed as a hero. He was met with sympathy and humanity, and he was allowed to live his life, but he had to answer for what he did.

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I believe that Bergdahl also deserves sympathy, but he has much to answer for, some of which is far more damning than simply having walked off. Many have suffered because of his actions: his fellow soldiers, their families, his family, the Afghan military, the unaffiliated Afghan civilians in Paktika, and none of this suffering was inevitable. None of it had to happen. Therefore, while I'm pleased that he's safe, I believe there is an explanation due. Reprimanding him might yield horrible press for the Army, making our longest war even less popular than it is today. Retrieving him at least reminds soldiers that we will never abandon them to their fates, right or wrong. In light of the propaganda value, I do not expect the Department of Defense to punish Bergdahl.

He's lucky to have survived. I once saw an insurgent cellphone video of an Afghan National Police enlistee. They had young boys hold him down, boys between the ages of 10 and 15, all of whom giggled like they were jumping on a trampoline. The prisoner screamed and pleaded for his life.

The captors cut this poor man's head off. That's what the Taliban and their allies do to their captives who don't have the bargaining value of an American soldier. That's what they do to their fellow Afghans on a regular basis. No human being deserves that treatment, or to face the threat of that treatment every day for nearly five years.

But that certainly doesn't make Bergdahl a hero, and that doesn't mean that the soldiers he left behind have an obligation to forgive him. I just hope that, with this news, it marks a turning point for the veterans of that mad rescue attempt. It's done. Many of the soldiers from our unit have left the Army, as I have. Many have struggled greatly with life on the outside, and the implicit threat of prosecution if they spoke about Bergdahl made it much harder to explain the absurdity of it all. Our families and friends wanted to understand what we had experienced, but the Army denied us that.

I forgave Bergdahl because it was the only way to move on. I wouldn't wish his fate on anyone. I hope that, in time, my comrades can make peace with him, too. That peace will look different for every person. We may have all come home, but learning to leave the war behind is not a quick or easy thing. Some will struggle with it for the rest of their lives. Some will never have the opportunity.

And Bergdahl, all I can say is this: Welcome back. I'm glad it's over. There was a spot reserved for you on the return flight, but we had to leave without you, man. You're probably going to have to find your own way home.

*Nathan Bradley Bethea served as an infantry officer in the U.S. Army from 2007 to 2014 and is now a creative writing MFA student at Brooklyn College.*

## The Corner

### [The Bergdahl Release Is Just the Beginning](#)

by Victor Davis Hanson

There has been a lot to think about during these years of Obama's foreign policy. But the problem is not just the existential issues, from reset to Benghazi, but also the less heralded developments, such as young non-high-school graduate Edward Snowden's trotting off with the most sensitive secrets of the NSA, the "stuff happens" outing of a CIA station chief in Afghanistan, and the failure to destroy the downed drone that ended up in Iran.

In the latter category falls the mysterious prisoner swap of Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl for five top Taliban inmates, given that even at this early juncture there are lots of disturbing questions: Why not as the law demanded consult Congress on the releases from Guantanamo, or at least the congressional leadership? Why swap some of the most dangerous and important members of the Taliban hierarchy? What exactly were the circumstances of the original departure of Bergdahl (in 2009 two military officials told the AP that Bergdahl "had just walked off" with three other Afghans), and why were other soldiers requested not to disclose what they knew about the nature of his departure or the costly efforts to find Bergdahl? What exactly is the present U.S. position on trading captives for prisoners/hostages? Do we really believe that the released terrorists will be kept another year in the Middle East?

All of the above may prove to be irrelevant concerns, and it is certainly good to have a U.S. soldier out of the hands of the Taliban or its allies. But right now the problem is that Susan Rice, given her past proclamations about Benghazi, is not a credible official to assure the public about the past



and present status of Bergdahl or the nature of the swap. And given the president's past neglect of enforcing settled laws and his most recent efforts to circumvent the Congress on energy matters, the present end around on Guantanamo likewise stains the entire episode.

The picture may change as more information is collated, but the Bergdahl incident seems to fit the iconoclastic pattern of a Bradley Manning or Edward Snowden, unlikely loners who voiced anger at the U.S., and likewise whose actions ended up changing the most sensitive areas of American security. Otherwise it is the same old, same old: Susan Rice goes on TV to assert the "truth," Barack Obama circumvents the law and ignores the Congress, and, as in the Pat Tillman case, the military initially does not wish to disclose the full details surrounding a disturbing episode. Meanwhile, we are back to the VA . . .

## Contentions

### How Not to Handle a Prisoner Swap

by Max Boot

Ronald Reagan traded arms for hostages. Benjamin Netanyahu traded more than 1,000 Palestinian prisoners for Corporal Gilad Shalit. Ehud Olmert traded five living terrorists—one of them responsible for killing a four-year-old girl by crushing her skull with the butt of his rifle—for two dead Israeli soldiers. So there is nothing new about making deals with terrorists or exchanging captives with them. It's even possible that President Obama did the right thing by freeing five senior Taliban leaders in exchange for Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl, who has been held by the Taliban since 2009. Certainly Obama as commander in chief had the power to do so even if some members of Congress are miffed at not being consulted.

What I find offensive is that the president and his team are not treating this as a grubby and inglorious compromise—an attempt to reconcile our competing ideals of "don't deal with terrorists" and "leave no man behind." Instead the administration seems to be taking a victory lap. The president held a White House event with Bergdahl's parents. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel flew to Afghanistan to commemorate the occasion. National Security Adviser Susan Rice [called it](#) "a great day for America."

If only the president and his team showed as much passion about actually winning the war in Afghanistan. Sadly, it appears that the handling of this whole issue is symptomatic of the administration's approach to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan: Their emphasis has always been on bringing the troops home, no matter the price, not on making sure that the troops accomplish their objectives.

In the case of Bergdahl the price includes encouraging the Taliban (and other Islamist terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda) to think that we are weak and can be rolled—to think that they can win American concessions if they take Americans hostage. This makes a mockery of our criticism of allies such as France, Italy, and South Korea, which have provided payoffs to get their hostages released. And it exposes our troops to greater danger down the line, once the Guantanamo releasees return to the fight—as they surely will, even if Qatar sticks by its pledge to keep them out of trouble for a year.

And what makes it all the more annoying is that Bergdahl is hardly a hero as he is now being portrayed. We still don't have a definitive accounting of how he was captured, but members of his unit believe he was a deserter who walked off his guard post. And they're angry about the whole situation—as former army officer Nathan Bradley Bethea [writes in the Daily Beast](#).

Bethea served in the same battalion as Bergdahl and participated in attempts to free him in the summer of 2009. Bethea is upset, and understandably so, because good men died trying to free Bergdahl—not only in the search itself but, he argues, indirectly, because the search pulled in so many intelligence and surveillance assets that other units were left exposed to Taliban attack. Bethea writes: “The truth is: Bergdahl was a deserter, and soldiers from his own unit died trying to track him down.”

If those assertions are true, then Bergdahl, now that he's freed, should be court-martialed, because desertion in the face of the enemy is a serious offense. Whatever his ultimate fate, Bergdahl deserves our sympathy for his ordeal. His parents deserve sympathy for what they have had to endure too. But he should not be canonized and the administration should not treat his release as a high point of its foreign policy. Because surely they must have some more worthy achievements to boast of. Right?

## National Review

### [The New War Between the States](#)

***As businesses and residents vote with their feet, low-tax states like Texas are winning.***

by John Fund

Wealth and people are moving in America, from places where local policies inhibit economic growth to places where the tax and regulatory climate is sunnier.

The numbers are clear. Between 1995 and 2010 over \$2 trillion in adjusted gross income moved between the states. That's the equivalent of the GDP of California, the ninth largest GDP in the world. Some of the movement might be due to weather — that helps to explain some of Florida's \$86.4 billion gain and New York's \$58.6 billion loss. But we can attribute a great deal to the fact that capital flows to where it is best treated. Travis Brown, author of the new book [How Money Walks](#), reports that the nine states without a personal income tax gained \$146 billion in new wealth while the nine states with the highest income tax rates lost \$107 billion.

States are now competing for wealth transfers like never before. In New Jersey, Governor Chris Christie used a recent *Wall Street Journal* forum to slam neighboring New York as going in the “wrong direction” and to urge residents of the Empire State to move to his home turf. “You see taxes being increased there,” Christie told the audience of CEOs. “You have a new mayor in New York who is aggressively talking about increasing taxes in New York City. While I feel badly for New Yorkers, come to New Jersey.”

Nor is Christie alone. Tom Foley, a GOP candidate for governor in Connecticut, used the November 2013 election of the ardent “progressive” Bill de Blasio as New York mayor to run TV ads urging people to relocate. “Hey, New York City, with your new mayor, I know many of you are thinking about leaving,” Foley says in one commercial. “Connecticut next year will probably elect a new governor. When it does, Connecticut once again will be the place people want to be in the Northeast.”

Of course, most New Yorkers who will move homes or businesses will leapfrog their neighboring states, which are still much more highly taxed and anti-business than those in the South and West. The Census Bureau reports that Raleigh, Austin, Las Vegas, Orlando, Charlotte, Phoenix, Houston, San Antonio, and Dallas were among the ten fastest-growing metro areas last year.

Metro areas that lost the most population included Cleveland, Detroit, Buffalo, Providence, and Rochester, all firmly under the control of liberal politicians. Indeed, America's major cities are turning more Democratic than ever. Take Texas, where every statewide officeholder is Republican but all the major cities from Dallas to Houston to San Antonio have Democratic mayors.

But even cities with liberal leadership benefit from statewide policies that increase incentives for job creation. Many states have right-to-work laws that make it illegal to require workers to join a union and pay dues — dues that overwhelmingly fuel the election of liberal politicians. Right-to-work laws are a powerful business-recruiting tool — so much so that even traditionally pro-union Midwestern states such as Michigan and Indiana have recently adopted them. By contrast, many states where unions hold sway are passing super-minimum-wage laws that price low-income workers out of the job market.

Union-dominated states are sinking further into economic stagnation as Democratic politicians increasingly dominate the local political climate. In 2012, California Democrats won a supermajority in both houses of the legislature and proceeded to accelerate a tax and spending spree that has been ongoing for two decades. For example, California now has the nation's top state income-tax rate, at 13.3 percent.

Those kind of policies have consequences. The Manhattan Institute released a report in 2012 that found that since 1990, California had lost nearly 3.4 million residents to other states with lower tax rates. Over the last decade, an average of 225,000 residents left the state each year. The Manhattan Institute concluded:

States that have gained the most at California's expense are rated as having better business climates. The data suggest that many cost drivers — taxes, regulations, the high price of housing and commercial real estate, costly electricity, union power and high labor costs — are prompting businesses to locate outside California, thus helping to drive the exodus.

The gulf separating growth-friendly states and "progressive" states is likely only to widen in the future. In a new report, the American Legislative Exchange Council notes that 18 states cut taxes within the last year and a half, but at the same time, slow-growth Illinois, Maryland, Connecticut, and Minnesota all raised their income taxes.

Economists Steve Moore and Art Laffer predict that within the next ten years, a half dozen Southern states will completely eliminate their income taxes. "This would mean that the region stretching from Florida through Texas and Louisiana could become a vast state income-tax-free zone," they write. Florida, Texas, and Tennessee already have no income tax; and, spurred by their example, Republican governors in North Carolina and Louisiana are publicly proclaiming their goal is to join them. Other states are catching the fever. Kansas governor Sam Brownback vows to end his state's income tax, and neighboring GOP governor Mary Fallin of Oklahoma says she wants to do the same.

The U.S. is swiftly becoming a tale of two nations. States that are following the Reagan model of low taxes and incentives are booming while states that are opting for the Obama model of wealth redistribution and European welfare-state economics are stagnating.

Some say the competition between them is unfair. “The blue states now have aging infrastructures, large pensions to pay, and entrenched trade unions,” Chicago businessman Kevin Gallagher told me. “The competitive advantage that most of the red states have is that they are a blank page *and* they don’t have the obligations the blue states have.”

True enough. But even states in a collectivist ditch have shown the ability to dig out of it. “They said we couldn’t reform a state that pioneered the Progressive Era’s policies and saw the nation’s largest public-employee union founded in Madison,” Wisconsin governor Scott Walker told me last month. “But we dared to try, and we succeeded. Now you can tell our reforms are working because our opponents refuse to pledge to roll them back. Any state can reform itself if the people decide they’ve had enough.”

**WSJ**

### **A Midwest Renaissance Rooted in the Reagan Formula**

***An emphasis on lower taxes and leaner government has taken hold in Kansas, Missouri and Oklahoma.***

by Sam Brownback

Fifty years ago, in 1964, Ronald Reagan gave a famous speech widely broadcast on radio and television called "A Time for Choosing," in which he described the contrast between two potential paths forward for our nation. One path was the continuation of the big-government policies of higher taxes, higher spending, soaring debt, more centralization of power in Washington, more regulation of the economy, more dependence on government programs . . . and less freedom.

The other path, the new path, he described would bring to our nation lower taxes, less spending, reduced deficits, less government dependence, less centralization of power . . . and more freedom. He described a path in which "the free men and women of this country" were not "the masses," a "term we haven't applied to ourselves in America." He reminded us that "the full power of centralized government . . . was the very thing the Founding Fathers sought to minimize." And that the Founding Fathers further understood that "outside of its legitimate functions, government does nothing as well or as economically as the private sector of the economy."

Today some call that a choice between a "red state" or "blue state" model. I say it is a choice between dependence and self-reliance, between intrusion and freedom.

While President Obama continues to implement his big-government vision for the nation, Kansas and its neighbors in Missouri and Oklahoma are charting a course based on a vision of lower taxes and leaner governments leading to a more prosperous citizenry. Together our states are implementing taxes and regulatory policies that are building a Midwest renaissance.

Last year, my administration implemented income-tax cuts that made Kansas highly attractive to working families and small businesses. The Kansas tax cuts collapsed three brackets into two and reduced the top income-tax rate to 4.8% from 6.45%, a roughly 25% tax break.

Additionally, Kansas did something truly unique: We supported small business by taking away all income taxes on small businesses—allowing them to reinvest in their businesses, creating jobs and growth for specific businesses including Sub S chapters (small domestic corporations with limited shareholders and only one class of stock), LLCs (limited liability corporations in which members are not held personally liable for debt or liabilities) and sole proprietorships. Those

businesses went from a tax rate of 6.45% to zero. And in 2013 we saw a record year for new-business formation in Kansas, creating opportunities across the state; 77% of Kansans work for a small business with fewer than 10 employees. By giving these companies more money to reinvest in their businesses, we are enabling them to hire more people and invest in needed equipment.

In our region, we hear much about the "border war," a competition for business growth and location between Missouri and Kansas. In truth we are at our strongest when we offer economic opportunity to residents on both sides of State Line Road. Our ultimate goal is the success of our region, bringing businesses from across the nation to the Midwest. When we thrive as a region, we retain and attract the best and brightest.

Economic policy in Kansas, together with tax cuts for working families in Oklahoma and recent legislation in Missouri, means the American Midwest is fulfilling the dream of a Midwest renaissance in America.

On May 6, 2014, the Missouri legislature enacted SB 509, which will make our region more competitive. The bill reduces the state income-tax rate by 10% for all Missourians making \$9,000 or more. The legislation also starts indexing the current tax brackets, which will lead to further tax reductions while implementing a progressive tax structure. Small businesses will see their state income-tax burden reduced by 25%, enabling them to reinvest in their businesses and hire new employees. This is a key component, given that small businesses create nearly two-thirds of new private-sector jobs nationally each year.

In Oklahoma, Senate Bill 1246 will gradually lower Oklahoma's top income-tax rate to 4.85% from 5.25% over several years. Oklahoma Gov. Mary Fallin stated it best when she said, "Most Oklahomans will receive a tax cut from this legislation. . . . But every Oklahoman will benefit from a stronger economy and a state that is more attractive to work, live and invest in."

In Kansas the early results are impressive. In the past year, a record number of small businesses—more than 15,000—were formed, and we boast one of the lowest unemployment rates in the nation at 4.8%. Since January 2011 Kansas has created more than 50,000 new private-sector jobs, according to the Kansas Department of Labor. And Kansas has the fourth-highest rate of growth in the construction industry in the nation, according to the Associated General Contractors of America.

While most of the country struggles to recover from a recession that ended five years ago, Kansas, Oklahoma and Missouri are charting a course for a prosperous future—a Midwest renaissance based on bedrock American principles that Ronald Reagan laid out back in 1964.

*Mr. Brownback, a Republican, is the governor of Kansas.*





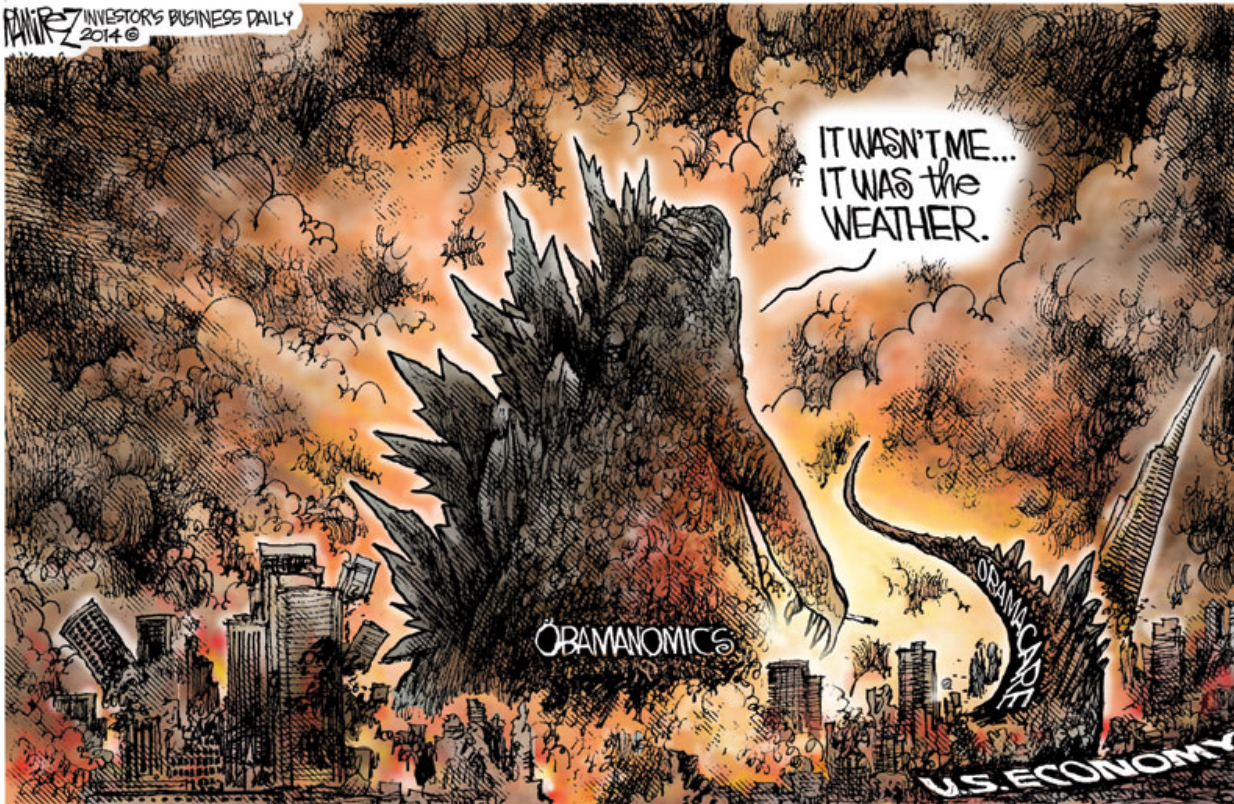
"OBAMA IS RIGHT WHEN HE SAYS HE DOESN'T NEGOTIATE WITH TERRORISTS!  
...I ALSO GOT HIM TO FALL FOR THE OL' 12-ALBUMS-FOR-A-PENNY DEAL!"

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