

July 21, 2014

Charles Krauthammer writes on the moral clarity in the Middle East.

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“Here’s the difference between us,” explains the Israeli prime minister. “We’re using missile defense to protect our civilians, and they’re using their civilians to protect their missiles.”

Rarely does international politics present a moment of such moral clarity. Yet we routinely hear this Israel-Gaza fighting described as a morally equivalent “cycle of violence.” This is absurd. What possible interest can Israel have in cross-border fighting? Everyone knows Hamas set off this mini-war. And everyone knows the proudly self-declared raison d’etre of Hamas: the eradication of Israel and its Jews.

Apologists for Hamas attribute the blood lust to the Israeli occupation and blockade. Occupation? Does no one remember anything? It was less than 10 years ago that worldwide television showed the Israeli army pulling die-hard settlers off synagogue roofs in Gaza as Israel uprooted its settlements, expelled its citizens, withdrew its military and turned every inch of Gaza over to the Palestinians. There was not a soldier, not a settler, not a single Israeli left in Gaza. ...

We turn attention back to the sad sack in the white house. **Power Line** has some thoughts.

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But Obama is not giving us a thoughtful reconsideration of American grand strategy. He’s just bugging out.

The Manchester Union Leader's editors say the president's priority is raising money. *The Middle East is imploding, our southern border is effectively erased, the economy continues to sputter, Social Security is inching closer to insolvency, and our national debt is on track to exceed the entire U.S. economy in 25 years. What has President Obama been doing? Holding fundraisers.*

The Washington Post reported on Wednesday that President Obama has held 393 fundraisers, including 34 so far this year. President George W. Bush held 318 fundraisers in his entire two terms.

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Ron Fournier says the president needs to get over himself, but he staffed the administration with sycophants.

"Every political cause has a narrative. And every narrative has a plot." Over lunch in Georgetown last month, a top Democratic spokesman, somebody who works intimately with both the White House and Hillary Rodham Clinton's team, wanted me to understand his frustration with President Obama. He said every plot has a hero. And every hero leaps over overwhelming obstacles to accomplish a goal.

"Who's the hero in the White House narrative?" the Democrat asked.

I shrugged; "Barack Obama." Aren't all elections about the candidate, and all White Houses about the president?

The Democrat shook his head. "That's the problem with this White House. Barack Obama is the hero of their narrative, but he's not supposed to be," he said. "The hero of every political narrative should be the voters."

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OpEd from The Daily Mail,UK on the big talking small action president.

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It was a far cry from President Reagan's 1983 fierce denunciation of the Soviet shooting down of a Korean airliner as a 'crime against humanity'.

But it only confirmed the chaos into which US foreign policy has descended since the summer of 2012 when reporters at a White House briefing asked Mr Obama about the security of chemical weapons in the Syrian stockpile.

The commander in chief went beyond safety and said: ‘We have been very clear to the Assad regime ... that a red line for us is [when] we start seeing a whole bunch of chemical weapons moving around or being utilised.’

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Before the President spoke, no one vetted the term and its consequences in the White House policy process and, once the words came out, no one undertook preparations in case Syrian president Bashar al-Assad called Mr Obama’s bluff.

According to reports, no one made the diplomatic rounds to line up the support of allies just in case, or the congressional rounds to line up the support of Congress. No one developed military plans or sent quiet signals to Assad that the US was not to be trifled with on this matter.

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Washington Post

Moral clarity in Gaza

by Charles Krauthammer

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And there was no blockade. On the contrary. Israel wanted this new Palestinian state to succeed. To help the Gaza economy, Israel gave the Palestinians its 3,000 greenhouses that had produced fruit and flowers for export. It opened border crossings and encouraged commerce.

The whole idea was to establish the model for two states living peacefully and productively side by side. No one seems to remember that, simultaneous with the Gaza withdrawal, Israel dismantled four smaller settlements in the northern West Bank as a clear signal of Israel's desire to leave the West Bank as well and thus achieve an amicable two-state solution.

This is not ancient history. This was nine years ago.

And how did the Gaza Palestinians react to being granted by the Israelis what no previous ruler, neither Egyptian, nor British, nor Turkish, had ever given them — an independent territory? First, they demolished the greenhouses. Then they elected Hamas. Then, instead of building a state with its attendant political and economic institutions, they spent the better part of a decade turning Gaza into a massive military base, brimming with terror weapons, to make ceaseless war on Israel.

Where are the roads and rail, the industry and infrastructure of the new Palestinian state? Nowhere. Instead, they built mile upon mile of underground tunnels to hide their weapons and, when the going gets tough, their military commanders. They spent millions importing and producing rockets, launchers, mortars, small arms, even drones. They deliberately placed them in schools, hospitals, mosques and private homes to better expose their own civilians. (Just Thursday, the U.N. announced that it found 20 rockets in a Gaza school.) And from which they fire rockets at Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.

Why? The rockets can't even inflict serious damage, being almost uniformly intercepted by Israel's Iron Dome anti-missile system. Even West Bank leader Mahmoud Abbas has asked: "What are you trying to achieve by sending rockets?"

It makes no sense. Unless you understand, as Tuesday's Post editorial explained, that the whole point is to draw Israeli counterfire.

This produces dead Palestinians for international television. Which is why Hamas perversely urges its own people not to seek safety when Israel drops leaflets warning of an imminent attack.

To deliberately wage war so that your own people can be telegenically killed is indeed moral and tactical insanity. But it rests on a very rational premise: Given the Orwellian state of the world's treatment of Israel (see: the U.N.'s grotesque Human Rights Council), fueled by a mix of classic anti-Semitism, near-total historical ignorance and reflexive sympathy for the ostensible Third World underdog, these eruptions featuring Palestinian casualties ultimately undermine support for Israel's legitimacy and right to self-defense.

In a world of such Kafkaesque ethical inversions, the depravity of Hamas begins to make sense. This is a world in which the Munich massacre is a movie and the murder of Klinghoffer is an opera — both deeply sympathetic to the killers. This is a world in which the U.N. ignores humanity's worst war criminals while incessantly condemning Israel, a state warred upon for 66 years that nonetheless goes to extraordinary lengths to avoid harming the very innocents its enemies use as shields.

It's to the Israelis' credit that amid all this madness they haven't lost their moral scruples. Or their nerve. Those outside the region have the minimum obligation, therefore, to expose the madness and speak the truth. Rarely has it been so blindingly clear.

Power Line

Headline of the Day

by Steve Hayward

Can the [killer rabbit](#) be very long in coming? Because this is the headline of the day, if not the year, from the *Wall Street Journal*:

Obama Contends With Arc of Instability Not Seen Since '70s

And we all remember who was president when the 1970s spun fully out of control? Anyway, in case you don't have a WSJ subscription, here's the lede:

WASHINGTON—A convergence of security crises is playing out around the globe, from the Palestinian territories and Iraq to Ukraine and the South China Sea, posing a serious challenge to President [Barack Obama](#)'s foreign policy and reflecting a world in which U.S. global power seems increasingly tenuous.

The breadth of global instability now unfolding hasn't been seen since the late 1970s, U.S. security strategists say, when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, revolutionary Islamists took power in Iran, and Southeast Asia was reeling in the wake of the U.S. exit from Vietnam. . .

The chaos has meant that the Obama administration finds itself in the middle of a second term reacting to rather than directing world events. Dangers for the president and for the U.S. are growing as militant groups gain greater control.

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Manchester Union Leader - Editorial

Obama's priority: Raising money

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National Journal

Mr. 'I, Me, My': Obama Oughta Know He's Not the Hero

A successful White House crafts its narrative around the struggles of Americans, not the president.

by Ron Fournier

"Every political cause has a narrative. And every narrative has a plot." Over lunch in Georgetown last month, a top Democratic spokesman, somebody who works intimately with both the White House and Hillary Rodham Clinton's team, wanted me to understand his frustration with President Obama. He said every plot has a hero. And every hero leaps overwhelming obstacles to accomplish a goal.

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The Democrat shook his head. "That's the problem with this White House. Barack Obama is the hero of their narrative, but he's not supposed to be," he said. "The hero of every political narrative should be the voters."

I thought of this exchange while vacationing the last two weeks in Michigan, a state still recovering from the 2008 recession, still limping out of the industrial era, and just now dealing with the decades-long decline of its largest city, Detroit.

Three topics dominate conversations in Michigan: jobs, the weather, and the Detroit Tigers. The dearth of quality jobs gnaws at everybody, especially in northern Michigan, where financially desperate families are selling second- and third-generation cottages—a tangible loss of 20th-century middle-class vibrancy. The weather matters because of its effect on farmers, construction workers, and the tourism industry. The Tigers are a pleasant distraction.

What do these folks hear from the White House and the rest of Washington? Whining, mostly. Obama and his GOP rivals can't seem to tell the story of America without casting themselves as the protagonists.

"They don't do anything except block me and call me names," Obama [said](#) in Minneapolis after House Speaker John Boehner threatened a lawsuit over the president's use of executive authority.

"They've decided to sue me for doing my job," Obama groused. The president also has [said](#), "Middle-class families can't wait for Republicans in Congress to do stuff. So sue me. As long as they're doing nothing, I'm not going to apologize for trying to do something."

Obama would argue that he's fighting for Americans and is blocked by a stubbornly conservative House. It's a point worthy of debate, but it's argued poorly, because Obama leans on three words that should be virtually banned from the vocabulary of any leader: I, me, and my.

The day after that speech, a Tawas City, Mich., plumber told me he was a lifelong Democrat who had voted twice for Obama but had grown disenchanted. He pointed to a local newspaper headline about the Minnesota address and said, "It's not about you, Mr. President."

Obama's message also dismisses the enormous number of voters—on some issues, a majority—who don't habitually agree with him, and who will never be won over by condescension.

Boehner has been more careful with his rhetoric, casting his pending lawsuit as a writ for America. "The president has circumvented the American people and their elected representatives through executive action," he [said](#) in a July 7 op-ed.

But the suit is clearly personal. Boehner and the Republicans he nominally leads have no interest in cooperating with Obama. The House speaker essentially [announced](#) last week that he was finished dealing with the president. "This is a problem of the president's own making," a visibly angry Boehner said of the border crisis. "He's been president for five and a half years! When is he going to take responsibility for something?"

Obama responded with finger-pointing and a blast of first-person pronouns. "So when folks say they're frustrated with Congress, let's be clear about what the problem is. *I'm* just telling the truth now. *I* don't have to run for office again." He added, "The best thing you can say about this Congress—the Republicans in Congress, and particularly the House of Representatives—the best you can say for them this year is that so far they have not shut down the government."

Even Democrats are starting to tire of their president sounding less like a leader than a kindergartener—whiny ("*They don't do anything except block me and call me names*"); petulant ("*So sue me*"); and self-absorbed ("*I ... me ... my*").

"The bear is on the loose!" Obama says whenever he shows up at a coffee shop, diner, or bar to mingle with voters. These events are carefully managed so as to not look carefully managed—a gimmick in any president's bag of tricks. But with Obama, the photo opportunities ring false.

First, he piously claims to be above such pettiness. "I am not interested in photo ops," he said amid calls to personally attend to the immigration crisis on the Texas border.

Second, the White House has a habit of making the mingling about Obama. "I think, frankly, we've all been through a cold and bitter winter and the bear has cabin fever," explained Obama friend and senior adviser Valerie Jarrett. "His cabin is a little bit bigger and harder to escape than most."

Pity the president? No. In fact, White House officials, stop talking about him. And, Mr. President, put a muzzle on "I," "me," and "my."

Obama's slide in popularity will be permanent unless he realizes that the story of his presidency is not about him. It's certainly not about the GOP. It's about the people in Michigan and throughout the rest of the country who face enormous obstacles—and struggle heroically to overcome them.

Daily Mail, UK

This weak and timid President talks big... and does nothing:

A devastating attack on Obama by a top Washington insider

by Clark S. Judge

At a political event in Wilmington, Delaware, on Thursday, President Obama devoted only 40 seconds to the shooting down of the Malaysian airline, his first statement to the world following the news.

His emotionless reference to the attack as 'a terrible tragedy' seemed disconnected from the horrific moment, particularly as he immediately reverted to script to praise his administration and criticise Republicans.

It was a far cry from President Reagan's 1983 fierce denunciation of the Soviet shooting down of a Korean airliner as a 'crime against humanity'.

But it only confirmed the chaos into which US foreign policy has descended since the summer of 2012 when reporters at a White House briefing asked Mr Obama about the security of chemical weapons in the Syrian stockpile.

The commander in chief went beyond safety and said: 'We have been very clear to the Assad regime ... that a red line for us is [when] we start seeing a whole bunch of chemical weapons moving around or being utilised.'

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Even bigger blunders came after the Syrian chemical attack. Mr Obama began signalling that, despite his remark, he did not want a response, any response. First there was the verification charade. Multiple eyewitness accounts of rockets rising out of Syrian army installations and falling into the stricken zones at the time of the chemical attacks were not enough to warrant quick action.

Then there was his call for a congressional vote, delivered just when the need to respond was most urgent if air strikes were to deliver an effective message.

Finally, there was the utter failure to attract congressional support, assuming Mr Obama really wanted Congress to endorse the proposed attacks.

That the Parliament of our closest ally, Great Britain, rejected an air campaign first gave Mr Obama an additional reason for inactivity. The flailing seemed to end when Russian President Vladimir Putin opened the door to a negotiated deal with Syria. But it was not the end; it was the beginning.

For as the administration rushed to that door, all over the world those who depended on America when in harrowing circumstances were asking themselves: How reliable is America now? How strong now?

Also asking was Mr Putin. He noted the contrast between Mr Obama's bold talk and timid response. As the former head of a friendly government said in a small meeting I attended not long ago: 'Putin is cautious. He will probe. If he encounters resistance, he will pull back.'

The US failure to follow through in Syria gave the Russian president confidence that he could move with impunity.

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SOON he was picking a fight with Ukraine. Like the scene in *The Godfather* – when, at his child's baptism, Michael Corleone renounces the devil as the camera cuts back and forth to his men eliminating rival gangsters – Putin, before global television cameras, watched the opening ceremonies of the Sochi Olympics as Russian troops began movements preparatory to seizing Crimea.

This week, in the skies over Ukraine, we saw the consequences of the recklessness that the Russian godfather's probing has unleashed.

Putin was not the only one to detect opportunity in American indecision. China stepped up its probes in the East and South China Seas. In the Middle East, with the US military presence drawn

down nearly to zero in Iraq and soon Afghanistan, an army of ruthless fanatics gestating unnoticed in Syria's east saw the chance to break out of national boundaries and within a few weeks occupied much of western and central Iraq.

Why has so much of the global order come apart so fast?

For the same reason that, as a friend reports, on the streets of San Salvador those who will smuggle your child to the Rio Grande have been securing an unprecedented volume of sign-ups. When asked about the chances of the child staying in America once the border is crossed, they tell parents: 'It has never been easier.'

Now the word on weakness is everywhere, even the poorest barrios of Central America.

'The fact that you have a crisis in Ukraine has nothing to do with Gaza,' a deputy national security adviser to the President told an interviewer recently.

The current White House doesn't understand how US fecklessness in Syria can reverberate to Ukraine, and from there to the South China Sea, and the Americas, and Gaza and elsewhere in the Middle East.

In all this I have referred to the United States as the primary shaper of world events, which is, in fact, a misleading shorthand. The US is not a superpower so much as the biggest player in a set of super-alliances, the most critical of which is with the UK.

Since the Second World War, when the US and Britain have been of one mind, liberal values have been secure and even advanced. When either has lost its sense of direction, neither has been nearly so effective.

The great danger in being the anchor to the global order is that when we lose our way the general peace itself is threatened.

This is just what we are seeing in theatre after theatre around the world. Perhaps it is time for a key ally like Prime Minister David Cameron to have a friendly talk with the President.

It is not just American interests that a flailing White House threatens. It is that of peoples everywhere.

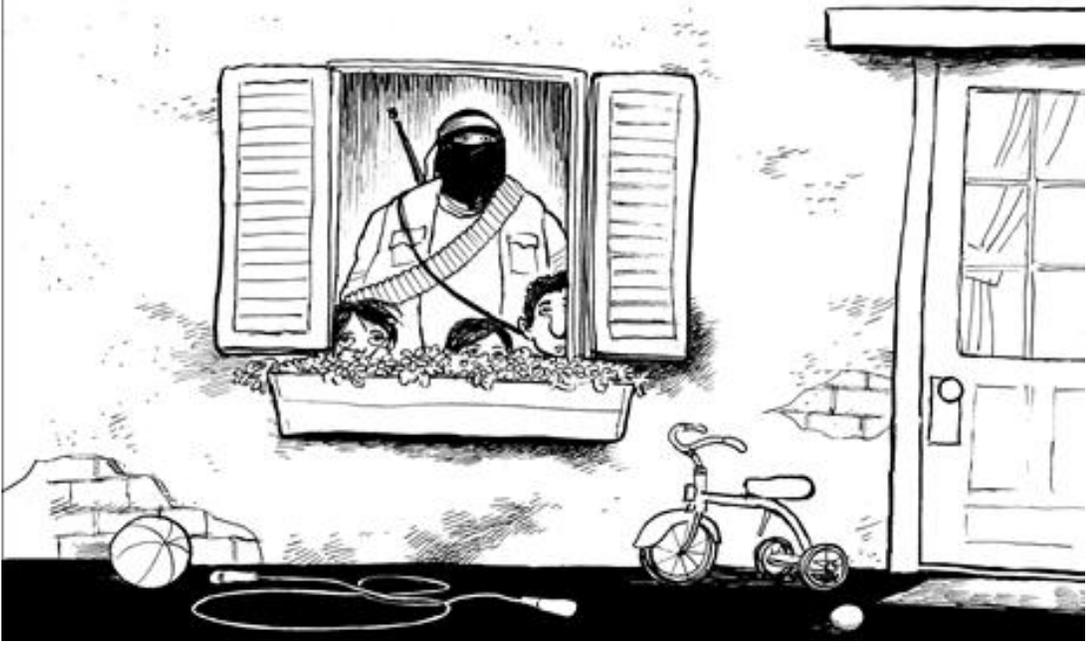
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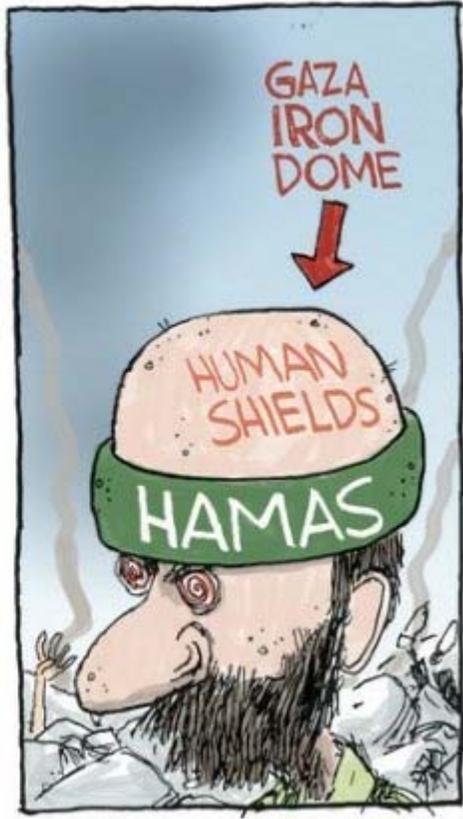
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