

August 17, 2014

John Podhoretz posts on a WSJ article about the administration's interference in weapons purchases by Israel. Now the Pentagon can no longer proceed with transfers without white house and state department approval thus allowing more passive/aggressive behavior towards Netanyahu.

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They decided to require White House and State Department approval for even routine munitions requests by Israel, officials say.

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These transfers were taking place through entirely traditional, legal, and uncontroversial means. Israel is an ally. It's at war. War depletes stocks. So why is this happening?

Simply put: It's a gigantic hissy fit, an expression of rage against Bibi Netanyahu, by whom the administration feels dissed. The quotes in this article are almost beyond belief. In the annals of American foreign policy, no ally has ever been talked about in this way. ...

Here is the Wall Street Journal article mentioned above by Podhoretz.

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Since then the Obama administration has tightened its control on arms transfers to Israel. But Israeli and U.S. officials say that the adroit bureaucratic maneuvering made it plain how little influence the White House and State Department have with the government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu —and that both sides know it.

The munitions surprise and previously unreported U.S. response added to a string of slights and arguments that have bubbled behind the scenes during the Gaza conflict, according to events related by senior American, Palestinian and Israeli officials involved. (See photos and maps surveying the destruction in Gaza.)

In addition, current and former American officials say, U.S.-Israel ties have been hurt by leaks that they believe were meant to undercut the administration's standing by mischaracterizing its position and delay a cease-fire. The battles have driven U.S.-Israeli relations to the lowest point since President Barack Obama took office.

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Israeli officials, in turn, describe the Obama administration as weak and naive, and are doing as much as they can to bypass the White House in favor of allies in Congress and elsewhere in the administration. ...

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A senior Republican congressional aide said Israeli officials told senators they wanted the money sooner rather than later. He said Israel's main purpose in accelerating the vote in Congress to before legislators' August recess was to provide an overwhelming "show of support" for the military operation. ...

Jonathan Tobin says Israel should ignore the tantrum from the petulant president. *Last month as the fighting raged in Gaza, news about the United States resupplying the ammunition stocks of the Israel Defense Forces balanced other, more troubling stories about arguments between the two countries over diplomacy. But it turns out the arguments between the Obama administration and the Israelis were even angrier than we thought. As the Wall Street Journal reports today, the White House has been having a full-fledged temper tantrum over Israel's unwillingness to take orders from Washington and doesn't care who knows it. But the best advice friends of Israel can give Prime Minister Netanyahu is to stick to his positions despite the insults being flung in his direction.*

The article, which appears to be based on leaks from high-ranking U.S. officials, revolves around the notion that the administration is furious with Israel. The anger emanating from the White House is, at its core, the function of policy differences about the peace process. It also revolves around Israel's decision to attempt to reduce Hamas's arsenal rather than merely shoot down the rockets aimed at its cities. But what really seems to have gotten the president's goat is the ease with which Jerusalem has been able to circumvent his desire to pressure it to make concessions via the strong support of Congress and the close ties that have been established between Israel's defense establishment and the Pentagon. ...

Pickerhead has been on the case of the public safety goobbers running wild with military gear. Here's [Kevin Williamson](#) with comments on the equipment used by police in Ferguson, MO.

... The old-style police uniform, whether that of the English bobby or his American counterpart, communicated a specific civic ethic. Both “bobby” and “peeler” are slang based on the name of Sir Robert Peel, who in 1829 organized the first modern police force, in London. (As prime minister, Peel would make history, and end his career, by repealing the Corn Laws, a red-letter event in the history of free trade.) Peel spelled out his famous Nine Principles of Policing, which are still in effect and still very wise.

The first order of police work is, according to Peel, “to prevent crime and disorder, as an alternative to their repression by military force and severity of legal punishment.” The second principle is “to recognize always that the power of the police to fulfill their functions and duties is dependent on public approval of their existence, actions, and behavior, and on their ability to secure and maintain public respect.” He called this “policing by consent.” The policeman, in Peel’s view, was a citizen: “The police are the public and that the public are the police, the police being only members of the public who are paid to give full-time attention to duties which are incumbent on every citizen in the interests of community welfare and existence.”

In that context, the function of the police uniform is simply that of an imprimatur — of the municipal government of London or of New York or Mayberry. It tells little Peter Pat whom he can trust.

Our contemporary and increasingly militarized police uniforms are designed for a different purpose: the projection of force. Peel organized the Metropolitan Police as an alternative to “military repression,” but we, in turn, have turned our police into quasi-military organizations: Armored vehicles roam the mean streets of Pulaski County, Ind. Why? “It’s more intimidating,” the sheriff says. In New York City on Monday, I noted four police officers in battle helmets, carrying carbines, standing in front of Le Pain Quotidien on Park Avenue, perhaps expecting some particularly nasty muffin burglar. My subway stop, which is between City Hall and 1 Police Plaza, often resembles a military parade ground. (Not that they do anything about the vagrants camped out there.) Police in my hometown of Lubbock, Texas, occasionally go about their business in army-green armored vehicles and uniforms with woodland camouflage patterns, in spite of the fact that God never saw fit to put a tree within a hundred miles of there.

The different uniforms are meant for different kinds of policing: The traditional blue coat is for the policeman who walks a beat, and the ridiculous stormtrooper suits are for those who roll through in an MRAP.

Which sort of policing would you prefer? ...

Popular Science posts on spotting military gear used by police. The formatting of this article so hard to manage so follow the link if you want the complete story. You'll like the picture of VA Beach storm troopers riding into battle.

Following the fatal police shooting of teenager Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri last Saturday, a protest movement broke out in the small town. Police from St. Louis County responded, showing up with body armor, gas masks, rifles, camouflage uniforms, armored cars, and tear gas. This excessive show of force, combined with gear that looks very military, has

lead to widespread outcry against police militarization, including some objections from **veterans themselves**. Here's a look at some of the gear on the ground in Ferguson and how it made its way from military service to police armories. ...

John Steele Gordon writes on 100 years of the Panama Canal.

On August 15, 1914, the world was fixated on the dramatic first month of World War I, as the German army raced towards Paris and the fate of Europe hung in the balance. But on that day, half a world away, a ship named the SS Ancon became the first vessel to officially transit the Panama Canal — and the canal was opened for business.

It had been 401 years since Balboa had first crossed the Isthmus in 1513 and “stared at the Pacific ... Silent, upon a peak in Darien.” For most of that time, a water route across Panama had been a dream. Thanks to one of the supreme engineering feats of the early 20th century, that dream had now been realized.

Until the advent of the railroad in the 1830s, bulk cargo moved by water or it did not move. To shorten these water routes, canals had been constructed since ancient times. In the 17th century, France built the Canal du Midi, fully 150 miles long. It connected the Garonne River, which flowed into the Atlantic, with the Mediterranean Sea, eliminating the need for cargo to sail around the Iberian Peninsula.

The Erie Canal, which connected the Great Lakes with the Hudson River, opened in 1825, greatly shortening the distance between the burgeoning Middle West and the east coast. It quickly made New York City, “that tongue that is licking up the cream of commerce of a continent,” and the greatest boom town in world history.

In the mid-19th century, the Suez Canal, originally 102 miles long, shortened the sea route between Europe and India by thousands of miles.

The Panama Canal route was much shorter than these three great canals, a mere 48 miles. But Suez was built in a level, low-lying desert. Building Suez was, therefore, essentially a matter of shoveling sand, although, to be sure, there was a lot of sand to be shoveled.

Panama, in contrast, was another matter altogether. ...

Contentions

Obama Administration Makes War on Israel

by John Podhoretz

What on earth? In the middle of a war this country's president (**That would be barry obama**) publicly says is justified owing to the relentlessness of the rocket fire against civilian populations, U.S. officials proudly [tell the Wall Street Journal](#), they are holding up weapons transfers to Israel:

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EXAMPLE: "We have many, many friends around the world. The United States is their strongest friend," the official said. "The notion that they are playing the United States, or that they're manipulating us publicly, completely miscalculates their place in the world."

Even in the article's own terms, the official's accusation Israel is "playing the United States" is entirely false. The true claim here is that Israel is "playing" the Obama administration because it has support from Congress that limits the administration's ability to bash it.

EXAMPLE: A senior U.S. official said the U.S. and Israel clashed mainly because the U.S. wanted a cease-fire before Mr. Netanyahu was ready to accept one. "Now we both want one," one of the officials said.

This is also transparently absurd. Netanyahu didn't want this war, and is transparently eager for any way to extricate Israel from a long struggle. What he can't accept is a cease-fire that leaves Hamas with sufficient firepower and with intact tunnels—which is something you'd think the United States would similarly support.

EXAMPLE: "It's become very personal," an official tells the Wall Street Journal. Yeah, no kidding. That's a great way to make policy.

For five and a half years now, some Israel advocates have been attempting to make the case to others that there is something new and dark in the Obama administration's perspective on Israel—that there is an animus as pronounced as the one during the administration of the Elder George Bush, which was so self-evident the Jewish vote for Bush in the 1992 reelection was a staggeringly low 11 percent.

This Wall Street Journal article should now leave no illusions. In its transparent hostility—not to mention the cowardice of hiding behind anonymity to issue its repugnant bitch-slaps—the Obama administration is worse than the Bush 41 administration. It's the worst since Eisenhower. Were it not for Iron Dome, it would be the worst ever. And given the decision to hold up weaponry during wartime, it may yet surpass Eisenhower.

WSJ

Gaza Crisis: Israel Outflanks the White House on Strategy
White House Now Scrutinizing Israeli Requests for Ammunition

by Adam Entous



Benjamin Netanyahu, left, looks on as President Barack Obama speaks at the White House in March.

JERUSALEM—White House and State Department officials who were leading U.S. efforts to rein in Israel's military campaign in the Gaza Strip were caught off guard last month when they learned that the Israeli military had been quietly securing supplies of ammunition from the Pentagon without their approval.

Since then the Obama administration has tightened its control on arms transfers to Israel. But Israeli and U.S. officials say that the adroit bureaucratic maneuvering made it plain how little influence the White House and State Department have with the government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu —and that both sides know it.

The munitions surprise and previously unreported U.S. response added to a string of slights and arguments that have bubbled behind the scenes during the Gaza conflict, according to events related by senior American, Palestinian and Israeli officials involved. ([See photos and maps surveying the destruction in Gaza.](#))

In addition, current and former American officials say, U.S.-Israel ties have been hurt by leaks that they believe were meant to undercut the administration's standing by mischaracterizing its position and delay a cease-fire. The battles have driven U.S.-Israeli relations to the lowest point since President [Barack Obama](#) took office.

Now, as Egyptian officials shuttle between representatives of Israel and Hamas seeking a long-term deal to end the fighting, U.S. officials are bystanders instead of in their historic role as mediators. The White House finds itself largely on the outside looking in.

U.S. officials said Mr. Obama had a particularly combative phone call on Wednesday with Mr. Netanyahu, who they say has pushed the administration aside but wants it to provide Israel with security assurances in exchange for signing onto a long-term deal.

As a 72-hour pause in the fighting expired at midnight Wednesday, a senior Hamas official said negotiators [agreed to another cease-fire](#), this one of five days. The cease-fire was holding on Thursday.

The frayed relations raise questions about whether Mr. Obama and Mr. Netanyahu can effectively work together. Relations between them have long been strained over other issues, including Mr. Obama's outreach to Iran and U.S.-backed peace talks with the Palestinians.

Today, many administration officials say the Gaza conflict—the third between Israel and Hamas in under six years—has persuaded them that Mr. Netanyahu and his national security team are both reckless and untrustworthy.

Israeli officials, in turn, describe the Obama administration as weak and naive, and are doing as much as they can to bypass the White House in favor of allies in Congress and elsewhere in the administration.

While Israeli officials have privately told their U.S. counterparts the poor state of relations isn't in Israel's interest long term, they also said they believed Mr. Netanyahu wasn't too worried about the tensions. The reason is that he can rely on the firmness of Israeli support in Congress, even if he doesn't have the White House's full approval for his policies. The prime minister thinks he can simply wait out the current administration, they say.

"The allegations are unfounded," said Israel's ambassador to the U.S., Ron Dermer. "Israel deeply appreciates the support we have received during the recent conflict in Gaza from both the Obama administration and the Congress for Israel's right to defend itself and for increased funding of Iron Dome."

A senior Obama administration official said the White House didn't intend to get into a "tit for tat" with the Israelis when the war broke out in Gaza. "We have many, many friends around the world. The United States is their strongest friend," the official said. "The notion that they are playing the United States, or that they're manipulating us publicly, completely miscalculates their place in the world."

American officials say they believe they have been able to exert at least some influence over Mr. Netanyahu during the Gaza conflict. But they admit their influence has been weakened as he has used his sway in Washington, from the Pentagon and Congress to lobby groups, to defuse U.S. diplomatic pressure on his government over the past month.



Israeli soldiers fire a mortar toward the Gaza Strip

Tensions really started to flare after Israel launched Gaza ground operations July 17 and the civilian death toll started to rise sharply, prompting U.S. officials to complain that Israel wasn't showing enough restraint. Israeli officials rejected that notion, saying Hamas was using civilians as human shields.

U.S. officials say Mr. Netanyahu told them he was interested in a cease-fire from the start, but the two sides clashed over the process of achieving one and the players who would take part.

Bracing for a longer military campaign than expected, Israel approached the Defense Department within days of the start of the ground fighting to request money for more interceptors for the Iron Dome, which shoots down rockets aimed at population centers.

After consulting with the White House, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel told aides to submit a proposal to Congress for \$225 million.

Within the administration, the request was deemed noncontroversial because the Iron Dome was defensive and couldn't be used in Gaza ground fighting, U.S. officials said.

In meetings at the Pentagon, the State Department and the White House, Israeli officials told the Americans Israel had enough Iron Dome interceptors for the current Gaza operation, but wanted to replenish its stocks, according to U.S. officials who attended. So with Israel's consent, the administration didn't seek immediate emergency funding, Pentagon officials said, adding that they expected Congress to approve the request sometime in the fall.

Unknown to many policy makers, Israel was moving on separate tracks to replenish supplies of lethal munitions being used in Gaza and to expedite approval of the Iron Dome funds on Capitol Hill.

On July 20, Israel's defense ministry asked the U.S. military for a range of munitions, including 120-mm mortar shells and 40-mm illuminating rounds, which were already kept stored at a pre-positioned weapons stockpile in Israel.

The request was approved through military channels three days later but not made public. Under the terms of the deal, the Israelis used U.S. financing to pay for \$3 million in tank rounds. No presidential approval or signoff by the secretary of state was required or sought, according to officials.

A U.S. defense official said the standard review process was properly followed.

While the military-to-military relationship between Israel and the U.S. was operating normally, ties on the diplomatic front were imploding. For the Americans, they worsened dramatically on July 25, when aides to Secretary of State [John Kerry](#) sent a draft of a confidential cease-fire paper to Mr. Netanyahu's advisers for feedback.

The Americans wanted the Israelis to propose changes. The U.S. didn't intend or expect the draft paper to be presented to the Israeli cabinet, but that was what Mr. Netanyahu did. U.S. officials say Mr. Netanyahu's office breached protocol by sending back no comments and presenting the paper to the cabinet for a vote.

The paper was also leaked to the Israeli media. U.S. officials say they believe the Israeli government publicly mischaracterized Mr. Kerry's ideas with the intent of buying more time to prosecute the fight against Hamas because Israeli officials were angry over outreach by Mr. Kerry to Qatar and Turkey.

Israel and Egypt had sought to sideline Qatar and Turkey—two countries that backed Hamas—rather than increase their influence. U.S. officials say Mr. Kerry reached out to the two because they had leverage with Hamas that would be critical to getting the group to agree to another cease-fire.

From Israel's perspective, Mr. Kerry's cease-fire draft reflected an approach "completely out of sync with Israel, not just on a governmental level but on a societal level," said Michael Oren, a former Israeli ambassador to the U.S. under Mr. Netanyahu.

"The best thing that Kerry can do is stay out... We need time to do the job, we need to inflict a painful and unequivocal blow on Hamas. Anything less would be a Hamas victory," Mr. Oren said.

The watershed moment came in the early morning in Gaza July 30. An Israeli shell struck a United Nations school in Jabaliya that sheltered about 3,000 people. Later that day, it was reported in the U.S. that the 120-mm and 40-mm rounds had been released to the Israeli military.

"We were blindsided," one U.S. diplomat said.

White House and State Department officials had already become increasingly disturbed by what they saw as heavy-handed battlefield tactics that they believed risked a humanitarian catastrophe capable of harming regional stability and Israel's interests.

They were especially concerned that Israel was using artillery, instead of more precision-guided munitions, in densely populated areas. The realization that munitions transfers had been made without their knowledge came as a shock.

"There was no intent to blindsides anyone. The process for this transfer was followed precisely along the lines that it should have," another U.S. defense official said.

Then the officials learned that, in addition to asking for tank shells and other munitions, Israel had submitted a request through military-to-military channels for a large number of Hellfire missiles, according to Israeli and American officials.

The Pentagon's Defense Security Cooperation Agency, or DSCA, was about to release an initial batch of the Hellfires, according to Israeli and congressional officials. It was immediately put on hold by the Pentagon, and top officials at the White House instructed the DSCA, the U.S. military's European Command and other agencies to consult with policy makers at the White House and the State Department before approving any additional requests.

A senior Obama administration official said the weapons transfers shouldn't have been a routine "check-the-box approval" process, given the context. The official said the decision to scrutinize future transfers at the highest levels amounted to "the United States saying 'The buck stops here. Wait a second...It's not OK anymore.' "

White House and State Department officials were worried about public reaction.

The Palestinians, in particular, were angry, according to U.S. diplomats.

"The U.S. is a partner in this crime," Jibril Rajoub, a leader in Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas's Western-backed Fatah party, said of the decision to provide arms to Israel during the conflict.

Even as tensions with the White House and the State Department were spilling over, Israeli officials worked to expedite the Iron Dome money on Capitol Hill.

Republican Sen. [John McCain](#) of Arizona said Israeli officials told lawmakers the money was urgently needed because they were running out of interceptors and couldn't hold out for a month or more.

Sen. Lindsey Graham, a South Carolina Republican, said Congress's goal in approving the money quickly on Aug. 1 was to send a message to the administration to stop calling Israel out about civilian casualties.

A senior Republican congressional aide said Israeli officials told senators they wanted the money sooner rather than later. He said Israel's main purpose in accelerating the vote in Congress to before legislators' August recess was to provide an overwhelming "show of support" for the military operation.

The last straw for many U.S. diplomats came on Aug. 2 when they say Israeli officials leaked to the media that Mr. Netanyahu had told the U.S. ambassador to Israel, Dan Shapiro, that the Obama administration was "not to ever second-guess me again" about how to deal with Hamas.

The White House and State Department have sought to regain greater control over U.S.-Israeli policy. They decided to require White House and State Department approval for even routine munitions requests by Israel, officials say.

Instead of being handled as a military-to-military matter, each case is now subject to review—slowing the approval process and signaling to Israel that military assistance once taken for granted is now under closer scrutiny.

A senior U.S. official said the U.S. and Israel clashed mainly because the U.S. wanted a cease-fire before Mr. Netanyahu was ready to accept one. "Now we both want one," one of the officials said.

A top Israeli official said the rift runs deeper than that. "We've been there before with a lot of tension with us and Washington. What we have now, on top of that, is mistrust and a collision of different perspectives on the Middle East," the official said. "It's become very personal."

Contentions

[Israel Should Ignore Obama's Tantrum](#)

by Jonathan S. Tobin

Last month as the fighting raged in Gaza, news about the United States resupplying the ammunition stocks of the Israel Defense Forces balanced other, more troubling stories about arguments between the two countries over diplomacy. But it turns out the arguments between the Obama administration and the Israelis were even angrier than we thought. [As the Wall Street Journal reports today](#), the White House has been having a full-fledged temper tantrum over Israel's unwillingness to take orders from Washington and doesn't care who knows it. But the best advice friends of Israel can give Prime Minister Netanyahu is to stick to his positions despite the insults being flung in his direction.

The article, which appears to be based on leaks from high-ranking U.S. officials, revolves around the notion that the administration is furious with Israel. The anger emanating from the White House is, at its core, the function of policy differences about the peace process. It also revolves around Israel's decision to attempt to reduce Hamas's arsenal rather than merely shoot down the rockets aimed at its cities. But what really seems to have gotten the president's goat is the ease with which Jerusalem has been able to circumvent his desire to pressure it to make concessions via the strong support of Congress and the close ties that have been established between Israel's defense establishment and the Pentagon.

[As Seth noted earlier](#), rather than speeding the necessary ammunition supplies to the IDF, the administration was doing the opposite. But the ammunition transfers were just the last straw for a White House that regards Israel's government and the wall-to-wall bipartisan pro-Israel consensus that backs it up as a source of unending frustration.

It bears remembering that this administration came into office in January 2009 determined to create more daylight between the positions of the two countries, and that's exactly what it did. Obama picked pointless fights with Netanyahu over settlements and Jerusalem throughout his first term, culminating in a calculated ambush of the prime minister on a trip to Washington in

May 2011 when the president sought to impose the 1967 lines as the starting point for future peace talks. But Netanyahu, who had sought to downplay differences until that point, was having none of it and made clear his resistance. Instead of humiliating the Israeli, Obama was forced to watch as Netanyahu was endlessly cheered before a joint meeting of Congress as if he was Winston Churchill visiting the U.S. during World War Two.

That might have led to a further escalation of the fight between the two governments, but the president's looming reelection campaign intervened. What followed instead was an administration charm offensive aimed at pro-Israel voters in which all was seemingly forgotten and forgiven even if anger still lingered beneath the surface.

Those tensions have now resurfaced in Obama's second term. The trigger for much of it was Secretary of State John Kerry's decision to waste much of the last year on an effort to revive peace talks with the Palestinians that no one with any sense thought had a chance of success. Predictably, his failure (which was unfairly blamed by both the secretary and the president on Israel rather than on a Palestinian Authority that remains unable and/or unwilling to make peace) exacerbated the situation and led, albeit indirectly, to this summer's fighting. Yet rather than learn from this mistake, the administration's reaction to Gaza has been mostly motivated by pique against the Israelis and an incoherent impulse to frustrate Netanyahu.

But now that the dust appears to have settled in Gaza at least for the moment, where does that leave U.S.-Israel relations? It is true, [as John noted earlier](#), that the alliance seems to have sunk to a point that is roughly comparable to that experienced during the administration of the elder George Bush. Administration officials are openly saying that Netanyahu doesn't know his place and making implicit threats of retaliation.

But, as was the case in 2011, it's not clear that Obama and his minions in the West Wing can do anything but complain about Netanyahu to their friends in the press. But the *Journal* story highlights an important fact. No matter how angry Obama may be about Netanyahu's refusal to do his bidding and make concessions that make even less sense today than they did a few years ago, there are limits as to how far he can go and what he may do to take revenge for this.

The thing that is driving Obama crazy is not so much Netanyahu's willingness to say no to him but the fact that Congress and most Americans seem to think there is nothing wrong with it. The president may be, as Aaron David Miller famously said, someone who is "not in love with the idea of Israel" as his recent predecessors have been. But the alliance he inherited from George W. Bush and Bill Clinton is one that is so strong and so deeply entrenched within the U.S. political and defense establishments that there isn't all that much he can't do about it.

Try as he might, Obama can't persuade any Israeli government to endanger its people by repeating the Gaza experiment in the West Bank. Nor will he persuade them to refrain from hitting Hamas hard and opposing negotiations that further empower it. Netanyahu has a relatively united Israeli nation behind him that rightly distrusts Obama. He also can count on the support of a bipartisan consensus in Congress that sees no reason to back an increasingly unpopular and ineffective lame duck president against the country's only democratic ally in the Middle East.

This administration can still undermine the alliance and America's own interests by perpetuating this personal feud with the prime minister and exacerbating it by further appeasement of Iran in the nuclear talks. But if Obama couldn't break Netanyahu in his first term, he won't do so now. As difficult as it may be to ignore the brickbats flying from Washington, the Israelis can stand

their ground against this president sure in the knowledge that most Americans back them and that the next occupant of the Oval Office, whether a Democrat or a Republican, is likely to be far more supportive of this special alliance that Obama disdains.

National Review

Looks That Kill

Ditch the stormtroopers, bring back the peelers.

by Kevin D. Williamson

When I imagine a policeman, I see in my mind something that probably has not existed during my lifetime, at least in any place I've lived: a man in a blue coat with brass buttons, shiny black shoes, and a peaked cap with a patent-leather bill. If he is armed, it is with a truncheon and, possibly, a sidearm. Specifically, what I see is an illustration from *Peter Pat and the Policeman*, a book I possessed as a small child about a boy who gets lost and, recognizing the iconic blue police uniform as an emblem of trust, is taken home by the local policeman. In reality, our police look much more like fictional characters who would command my attention a few years later: stormtroopers — not the kind who answer to Adolf Hitler, but the kind who answer to Darth Vader. The main difference is that the minions of the Galactic Empire subverted cinematic convention: They were bad guys who wore white.

Aesthetics matters.

After making a ceremonial bow in the general direction of Mike Godwin, consider the case of the aforementioned Adolf Hitler, whose aesthetic sensibility not only preceded his political ideology but provided the foundation upon which it was built. “The beautiful,” he wrote, “should reign over humans; the beautiful itself wants to retain its power.” He told his advisers that it would be a “crime” if the British were to damage anything in Florence or Rome during the course of the war. “It would not be a shame in the case of Berlin,” he added. Hitler’s political ambitions were in many ways subordinate to his artistic ambitions, and that was true to some degree of many of the men with whom he surrounded himself: the formerly apolitical architect Albert Speer, the failed novelist-dramatic Joseph Goebbels, man of letters and son of a theater family Baldur von Schirach, the artist Karl Diebitsch, who was the main stylistic force behind the infamous all-black SS uniform. (It is an enduring myth that the SS uniform was designed by Hugo Boss.) For Hitler, the drama was in no small part an excuse to exercise his set-design and costuming skills. As Frederic Spotts puts it in *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics*, part of the point of the Nuremberg rallies was the “architecturalizing” of Hitler’s followers: “His deployment of them in geometrical patterns reduced to them noctambulant creatures.”

The monumentalism of Nazi architecture and its mythical invocation of grand periods of time — from the mists of Teutonic legend to a Thousand-Year Reich — functioned in no small part to subsume the individual. “A fly lays a million eggs; they all die,” Spotts wrote. “But flies survive.” The black SS uniforms were at the same time modern and based on traditional Prussian models — not unlike National Socialism itself. The black uniforms, partly military and partly clerical, set SS officers apart from military tradition and invested them with a sense of mystery — and purpose. They remain objects of fascination (and fetish — as P. J. O’Rourke observed, “No one has ever had a fantasy about being tied to a bed and sexually ravished by someone dressed as a liberal”).

The old-style police uniform, whether that of the English bobby or his American counterpart, communicated a specific civic ethic. Both “bobby” and “peeler” are slang based on the name of Sir Robert Peel, who in 1829 organized the first modern police force, in London. (As prime minister, Peel would make history, and end his career, by repealing the Corn Laws, a red-letter event in the history of free trade.) Peel spelled out his famous Nine Principles of Policing, which are still in effect and still very wise.

The first order of police work is, according to Peel, “to prevent crime and disorder, as an alternative to their repression by military force and severity of legal punishment.” The second principle is “to recognize always that the power of the police to fulfill their functions and duties is dependent on public approval of their existence, actions, and behavior, and on their ability to secure and maintain public respect.” He called this “policing by consent.” The policeman, in Peel’s view, was a citizen: “The police are the public and that the public are the police, the police being only members of the public who are paid to give full-time attention to duties which are incumbent on every citizen in the interests of community welfare and existence.”

In that context, the function of the police uniform is simply that of an imprimatur — of the municipal government of London or of New York or Mayberry. It tells little Peter Pat whom he can trust.

Our contemporary and increasingly militarized police uniforms are designed for a different purpose: the projection of force. Peel organized the Metropolitan Police as an alternative to “military repression,” but we, in turn, have turned our police into quasi-military organizations: Armored vehicles roam the mean streets of Pulaski County, Ind. Why? “It’s more intimidating,” the sheriff says. In New York City on Monday, I noted four police officers in battle helmets, carrying carbines, standing in front of Le Pain Quotidien on Park Avenue, perhaps expecting some particularly nasty muffin burglar. My subway stop, which is between City Hall and 1 Police Plaza, often resembles a military parade ground. (Not that they do anything about the vagrants camped out there.) Police in my hometown of Lubbock, Texas, occasionally go about their business in army-green armored vehicles and uniforms with woodland camouflage patterns, in spite of the fact that God never saw fit to put a tree within a hundred miles of there.

The different uniforms are meant for different kinds of policing: The traditional blue coat is for the policeman who walks a beat, and the ridiculous stormtrooper suits are for those who roll through in an MRAP.

Which sort of policing would you prefer?

People in places such as Ferguson, Mo., often talk about the police as though they were an occupying force, and there is, in Ferguson and in many other places, a strong racial component. During my time in Philadelphia, the city had a black mayor, a black police commissioner, and a heavily black police force, and the city’s worst crime was concentrated in two black neighborhoods. Police innovations such as sending extra patrols to schools at dismissal time were criticized by community leaders who complained that the police were “targeting” black neighborhoods. Which, of course, they were: That’s where the crime was. The police were of course in an impossible position: On the one hand, they were regarded as unwelcome intruders; on the other, they could not simply abandon those neighborhoods.

But they might seem a little bit less like an occupying force if they didn’t dress like one. If they weren’t armed like one. If they didn’t roll through like one. If they weren’t being told, and telling themselves, that they are “at war.”

And though I recognize that the police have a difficult task, they might also get a little more support from communities such as Ferguson if they were doing their job. Peel again: “Recognize always that the test of police efficiency is the absence of crime and disorder, and not the visible evidence of police action in dealing with them.”

That sound like Ferguson, Mo., to you? Or Chicago? Or Detroit? Or Los Angeles?

Bring back the peelers. And bring back Peel, while you're at it.

Popular Science

[A Spotter's Guide To Military-Grade Gear Now Being Used By Police](#)

Tactical equipment without a strategic goal.

by Kelsey D. Atherton



Virginia Beach SWAT team members ride the running boards of an armored van.

Following the fatal police shooting of teenager Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri last Saturday, a protest movement broke out in the small town. Police from St. Louis County responded, showing up with body armor, gas masks, rifles, camouflage uniforms, armored cars, and tear gas. This excessive show of force, combined with gear that looks very military, has led to widespread outcry against police militarization, including some objections from [veterans themselves](#). Here's a look at some of the gear on the ground in Ferguson and how it made its way from military service to police armories.

American.com

100 Years of the Panama Canal

One of the supreme engineering feats of the early 20th century, the canal has been an immense boon to shipping and of major geopolitical benefit to the United States.

by John Steele Gordon



On August 15, 1914, the world was fixated on the dramatic first month of World War I, as the German army raced towards Paris and the fate of Europe hung in the balance. But on that day, half a world away, a ship named the *SS Ancon* became the first vessel to officially transit the Panama Canal — and the canal was opened for business.

It had been 401 years since Balboa had first crossed the Isthmus in 1513 and “stared at the Pacific ... Silent, upon a peak in Darien.” For most of that time, a water route across Panama had been a dream. Thanks to one of the supreme engineering feats of the early 20th century, that dream had now been realized.

Until the advent of the railroad in the 1830s, bulk cargo moved by water or it did not move. To shorten these water routes, canals had been constructed since ancient times. In the 17th century, France built the Canal du Midi, fully 150 miles long. It connected the Garonne River, which flowed into the Atlantic, with the Mediterranean Sea, eliminating the need for cargo to sail around the Iberian Peninsula.

The Erie Canal, which connected the Great Lakes with the Hudson River, opened in 1825, greatly shortening the distance between the burgeoning Middle West and the east coast. It quickly made New York City, “that tongue that is licking up the cream of commerce of a continent,” and the greatest boom town in world history.

In the mid-19th century, the Suez Canal, originally 102 miles long, shortened the sea route between Europe and India by thousands of miles.

The Panama Canal route was much shorter than these three great canals, a mere 48 miles. But Suez was built in a level, low-lying desert. Building Suez was, therefore, essentially a matter of shoveling sand, although, to be sure, there was a lot of sand to be shoveled.

Panama, in contrast, was another matter altogether. Rather than desert, Panama has one of the densest rain forests on earth. The rainfall for much of the year is torrential, with Colón, at the Atlantic end of the canal, receiving as much as 138 inches a year, mostly between May and December. Even Panama City, on the drier Pacific side, gets nearly 80 inches. In this climate, tropical diseases such as yellow fever and malaria were rampant.

And Panama has a range of low mountains running along its length. These would have to be breached before there could be a water route across the isthmus.

Still, Ferdinand de Lesseps, the hero of the Suez Canal, was sure he could duplicate his feat in Suez despite the very different conditions. He was wrong. After eight years of work, the project collapsed in bankruptcy and scandal in 1889. A second French attempt began in the mid-1890s, but it was a minimal effort.

Enter the United States. The country had been expanding economically at a furious pace since the end of the Civil War. By 1900 it was the world's largest economy and was beginning to play a larger role on the world stage. And while a Panama Canal would have great commercial benefits, it would have a major geopolitical benefit for the United States as well. The country had fleets in both the Atlantic and the Pacific. But they could not be mutually supporting, as the trip around Cape Horn at the southern tip of South America was just too long.

The country negotiated with Colombia, which then owned Panama, to take over the project, but the Colombian Senate refused to ratify the treaty. So President Theodore Roosevelt encouraged a revolt in Panama and used war ships to make sure Colombia was unable to put it down. Roosevelt then signed a treaty with the newly independent Panama.

The first task was to improve the conditions at the building site. The railroads were rebuilt, as was the housing. Facilities for entertainment were created, run by the YMCA, to cut down on drunkenness. But the most important task was improving the sanitary conditions to reduce the appalling disease rate.

Dr. William Gorgas was appointed chief sanitary officer for the Canal Zone. Relying on the latest research that had identified mosquitoes as the vector of both malaria and yellow fever, he drained ponds and swamps, installed modern water and sanitary systems, and provided mosquito netting for beds. This resulted in a drastic reduction in the infection rate among the thousands of workers brought in to build the canal. It is not an exaggeration to say that Dr. Gorgas's actions made the Panama Canal possible.

Unlike the original French plan, the American canal called for locks, five at the Atlantic end and four at the Pacific end. And that meant a large and reliable water supply. Every ship passing through the Panama Canal needs 53 million gallons of water to operate the locks. The Chagres River could supply the water, but the river, low in the dry season, becomes a raging torrent during the rainy months.

To solve the problem the Chagres was dammed near where it empties into the Caribbean by Gatun Dam, then the largest dam in the world. Gatun Lake, which formed behind it, was then the world's largest artificial lake and became a major part of the canal.

The other major engineering challenge was the Culebra Cut, an artificial valley, through the continental divide. It involved the removal and disposal of 100 million cubic yards of spoil, 30 million of which was caused by the frequent landslides brought on by the rainy seasons. It took

nine years, 6,000 workers, hundreds of trains a day, and 27,000 tons of dynamite, equivalent to about 4.5 Hiroshima atomic bombs.

But once done, the canal proved an immense boon to shipping by eliminating the need to round the Horn through some of the most treacherous waters in the world. Today, well over 14,000 ships a year pass through the canal, and many more will when new, larger locks are completed in 2015, allowing the passage of modern container ships.

It was also of the utmost strategic importance to the United States. As a sign of the canal's importance to the Navy, American battleships never had a beam greater than 108 feet, allowing them to transit the locks with a foot to spare on either side.

John Steele Gordon has written several books on business and financial history, the latest of which is the revised edition of [Hamilton's Blessing: The Extraordinary Life and Times of Our National Debt](#).



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