

August 27, 2014

**Matthew Kaminski** says the West forgets history while Putin repeats it.

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And **Streetwise Professor** says Merkel has told Poroshenko to save Putin's face while Putin moons Merkel by grabbing more of Ukraine.

*If you just fell off the cabbage truck, you might be stunned to learn that a couple of days after Merkel visited Ukraine to deliver Poroshenko the message that Ukraine needed to back down from its attack on Russian forces in Donbas in order to save Putin's face, that Putin opened a new front in Russia's invasion of Ukraine.*

*Time and again, the hand-wringers in the west, Obama, Cameron, and especially Merkel, have desperately offered Putin ways out of Donbas. And time and again, Putin has taken these offers as a sign of weakness, and an invitation to escalate. The more aggressive he is, the more assiduously the hand-wringers try to appease him. The equilibrium in this game isn't hard to figure out. ...*

Before we get to more of our DC mess, [David Bernstein of Volokh](#) posts on Yale's Episcopal chaplain who thinks the last war is Israel's fault because they won't agree to the "two state" solution.

*... Next on Rev. Shipman's bucket list: blaming women who dress provocatively for rape, blaming blacks for racism because of high crime rates, and blaming gays for homophobia for being "flamboyant."*

*If Rev. Shipman had made analogous comments about any other "ism," he'd be out of a job. And if it were any group but Jews, their student organization would be occupying his office and demanding it.*

We get a look at some of the president's spinners. First from [Jennifer Rubin](#). [Bill Burton](#), former Obama aide and current spinner for the White House, is miffed that people are upset about President Obama's vacations. Well, if Burton learned anything from Obama, it is how to make a straw-man argument.

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*First, Burton should know better than anyone that the visual juxtaposition of commenting (but doing nothing more than issuing empty platitudes) on the savage murder of James Foley and yet another round of golf is jarring. Actually, it's in poor taste (like Bill Clinton laughing as he exited his longtime friend Ron Brown's funeral, before realizing he was on camera). In case Burton is genuinely confused (as opposed to faking obliviousness), it demonstrates a lack of real remorse to be seen indulging in fun-loving activities directly after such a grave announcement. It suggests a lack of true empathy and unwillingness to forgo personal pleasures even in somber situations. But surely Burton knows this, right? ...*

Then from [Peter Wehner](#) who says the latest lying spin is that the president was not referring to ISIS as the "jayvee."

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*The latest effort is in the White House's attempt to have us believe that the president, in his now infamous "jayvee" analogy, didn't have ISIS in mind. Here's [an exchange](#) between NBC's Peter Alexander and White House press secretary Josh Earnest that took place on Monday: ...*

*... That claim—"the president was not singling out ISIL"—is simply not true. And it's demonstrably untrue. To prove this assertion, it's helpful to cite the relevant portion of the [January 27, 2014 story by David Remnick in the New Yorker](#):*

*At the core of Obama's thinking is that American military involvement cannot be the primary instrument to achieve the new equilibrium that the region so desperately needs. And yet thoughts of a pacific equilibrium are far from anyone's mind in the real, existing Middle East. In*

the 2012 campaign, Obama spoke not only of killing Osama bin Laden; he also said that Al Qaeda had been “decimated.” I [Remnick] pointed out that the flag of Al Qaeda is now flying in Falluja, in Iraq, and among various rebel factions in Syria; Al Qaeda has asserted a presence in parts of Africa, too.

“The analogy we use around here sometimes, and I think is accurate, is if a jayvee team puts on Lakers uniforms that doesn’t make them Kobe Bryant,” Obama said, resorting to an uncharacteristically flip analogy. “I think there is a distinction between the capacity and reach of a bin Laden and a network that is actively planning major terrorist plots against the homeland versus jihadists who are engaged in various local power struggles and disputes, often sectarian.” ...

**Wehner** also covers our success in Libya.

Think back with me, if you will, to a time not all that long ago when the American intervention in Libya was held up as a model by President Obama.

“Forty-two years of tyranny was ended in six months. From Tripoli to Misurata to Benghazi — today, Libya is free,” Mr. Obama told the United Nations on September 21, 2011. “Yesterday, the leaders of a new Libya took their rightful place beside us, and this week, the United States is reopening our embassy in Tripoli. This is how the international community is supposed to work — nations standing together for the sake of peace and security, and individuals claiming their rights.”

So Libya is how it’s supposed to work, is it? That is the example the president likes to hold up when he referred to “smart diplomacy” and the virtues of America “leading from behind”?

So how are things going in Libya?

For one thing, the United States shut down its embassy in Libya earlier this summer and evacuated its diplomats to neighboring Tunisia under U.S. military escort amid a significant deterioration in security in Tripoli. “Due to the ongoing violence resulting from clashes between Libyan militias in the immediate vicinity of the US embassy in Tripoli, we have temporarily relocated all of our personnel out of Libya,” a State Department spokeswoman, Marie Harf, said.

**Larry Sabato** looks at the Senate races.

So where’s the wave? This is President Obama’s sixth-year-itch election. The map of states with contested Senate seats could hardly be better from the Republicans’ vantage point. And the breaks this year—strong candidates, avoidance of damaging gaffes, issues such as Obamacare and immigration that stir the party base—have mainly gone the GOP’s way, very unlike 2012.

Nonetheless, the midterms are far from over. In every single one of the Crystal Ball’s toss-up states, (Alaska, Arkansas, Iowa, Louisiana and North Carolina), the Republican Senate candidate has not yet opened up a real polling lead in any of them. Democratic nominees have been running hard and staying slightly ahead, or close to, their Republican foes.

Earlier this year, we published a “wave chart” giving the range of Senate election outcomes, from ripple to tsunami. Sometimes tidal waves, such as the 2006 Democratic swell that gave the

party control of both houses of Congress, develop in late September or October. That's certainly still a possibility for the GOP in 2014. However, the summer is waning, and as Labor Day approaches our estimate remains a Republican gain of four to eight seats, with the probability greatest for six or seven seats—just enough to put Republicans in charge of Congress' upper chamber. The lowest GOP advance would fall two seats short of outright control; the largest would produce a 53-47 Republican Senate. ...

Here's a feel good story. It's a [NY Times book review](#) covering the failed attempt to impose the metric system on our country.

*In the 1970s, children across America were learning the metric system at school, gas stations were charging by the liter, freeway signs in some states gave distances in kilometers, and American metrication seemed all but inevitable. But Dean Krakel, director of the National Cowboy Hall of Fame in Oklahoma, saw things differently: "Metric is definitely Communist," he solemnly said. "One monetary system, one language, one weight and measurement system, one world — all Communist." Bob Greene, syndicated columnist and founder of the WAM! (We Ain't Metric) organization, agreed. It was all an Arab plot "with some Frenchies and Limeys thrown in," he wrote.*

*Krakel and Greene might sound to us like forerunners of the Tea Party, but in the 1970s meter-bashing was not limited to right-wing conservatives. Stewart Brand, publisher of the Whole Earth Catalog, advised that the proper response to the meter was to "bitch, boycott and foment," and New York's cultural elite danced at the anti-metric "Foot Ball." Assailed from both right and left, the United States Metric Board gave up the fight and died a quiet death in 1982.*

*In his entertaining and enormously informative new book, "Whatever Happened to the Metric System?," John Bemelmans Marciano tells the story of the rise and fall of metric America. ...*

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## WSJ

### [The West Forgets History. Putin Repeats It](#)

***By outsourcing the Ukraine problem to Germany, the U.S. echoes 19th century mistakes that led to repeated conflicts.***

by Matthew Kaminski

Hapless in response to [Vladimir Putin](#)'s wars, successive American leaders are left puzzling over the Russian's place in time. "Such an action is unacceptable in the 21st century," said President George W. Bush in August 2008, after Russia's invasion of Georgia. When the Russian force of "little green men" took Ukraine's Crimea last February, Secretary of State [John Kerry](#) exclaimed, "You just don't in the 21st century behave in 19th-century fashion by invading another country on completely trumped up pretext."

Mr. Putin has proved impervious to complaints about his outdated behavior. On Monday morning, Ukraine reported that a column of 10 Russian tanks and a couple of armored vehicles charged over Ukraine's southeastern border into areas held by Russian rebels. Russian artillery

now fire at Ukrainian military positions from inside Ukraine's territory, NATO said on Friday. Ignoring objections from Kiev, Russia announced its intentions to send a second "humanitarian aid" convoy in a week of military trucks dressed in white, bringing and taking who knows what.

As the military pressure grows on the pro-Western government in Kiev, the Europeans are adding their own. Plainly anxious that these latest escalations risk a replay of 20th century wars, Germany's Chancellor [Angela Merkel](#) on Saturday turned up in Kiev to push for an accommodation with Moscow. The chancellor pressed the Ukrainians to cease fire and ruled out new EU sanctions against Russia. So Mr. Putin comes into talks Tuesday in Minsk with Ukraine's President Petro Poroshenko with fresh leverage.

The crisis in Ukraine revives one of the oldest clashes in the heart of Europe—the "bloodlands," to use Timothy Snyder's phrase—between autocracy and liberalism. For centuries this region was shaped by "the Polish Question"—what should happen to the difficult, independent-minded people between Russia and Germany. With the end of communism, and EU and NATO membership, Poland was taken off the chessboard. Ukraine is now on it.

Ukraine's Orange Revolution in 2004 against a fraudulent election and this winter's overthrow of a corrupt and hated president in Kiev resemble the Polish uprising against Russian rule in the 19th century. When the Poles revolted in 1830, the reactionary Czar Nicholas I, who froze Russian domestic reforms after a brief spell of opening, declared, "Russia or Poland must now perish."

To rephrase for the Putin age, either he or Ukraine's young democracy will survive—not both. Pyotr Chaadayev, a Russian writer, witnessed the 1830 uprising and Nicholas's eventual victory. "Russia is a whole world apart—submissive to the will, the arbitrariness, the despotism of one man," he wrote in 1836. "Contrary to the laws of coexistence, Russia only moves in the direction of her own enslavement, and the enslavement of all neighboring peoples."

With every Polish crisis up to World War II and into the Cold War, Europe's realists feared disturbing the balance of power and favored an understanding with autocrats in Moscow and, most famously, Berlin. Commercial interests were a factor.

In his magisterial history of Poland, "God's Playground," Norman Davies writes about the leader of the 1863 uprising, who concluded, after a fruitless tour of European capitals to seek help, that the West viewed Russia as "a gold mine for capitalists." This is the current sanctions debate in the EU.

Mr. Davies writes that the Poles "were a living rebuke to all the myths and legends on which the Russian Empire had been built. Together with the Jews, in whose company they had been incorporated into Russia, they were the advocates of a vibrant democratic culture, and as such were the natural opponents of Autocracy."

Today's realists blame NATO's and the EU's voluntary spread across Europe for Mr. Putin's outbursts. But Russia's autocratic battles against liberalizing influences from abroad predate all of that.

The Soviets moved into Czechoslovakia to snuff out the Prague Spring in 1968. In 1991 the hard-liners around Russian President Boris Yeltsin, led by his deputy Gen. Aleksander Rutskoi, pushed for military action to keep Ukraine's nearly 50 million Slavs within a reconstituted Soviet Union. Yeltsin rebuffed them and accepted Soviet republic borders as the new international

frontiers, likely sparing the U.S.S.R. the bloody fate of Milosevic's Yugoslavia. Mr. Putin's long-standing fear and distaste for democracy in neighboring countries, principally Ukraine, unwinds this settlement. Over 2,000 people have died this year in Ukraine.

This is an existential struggle for the current, freely elected and popular president in Kiev too. Mr. Poroshenko has resisted past German-initiated entreaties to stop his recently successful military advance and cut a deal. As he seems to know, nothing short of recovered Ukrainian control over its territory will fly at home. He needs to win this war on the ground. The likeliest result of a premature cease-fire is a festering "frozen conflict," backlash from hardened national opinion, instability and trouble for years to weaken Ukraine's democracy and European ambitions. In that case, Mr. Putin wins

Distracted by the Middle East, Washington has outsourced the Ukrainian file to Germany. Whoever thinks that another German-Russian understanding will calm Europe's bloodlands has a historical tin ear.

Since the Cold War ended, only those fortunate enough to choose their political systems and allies have found peace and stability in Europe. Ukraine wants to join them. Cold War architect George Kennan, so beloved by America's realists for his opposition to NATO enlargement, once wrote: "Russia can have at its borders only vassals or enemies." The problem isn't with the neighbors but with Russia itself. The Kennan rule will hold as long as a tyrant rules in Moscow.

John Kerry's rejection of Mr. Putin's 19th century moves can only come with the victory of liberalism over autocracy in Europe's east. A muddled compromise over Ukraine would be a moral and a strategic calamity for Europe and America.

*Mr. Kaminski is a member of the Journal's editorial board.*

## **Streetwise Professor**

### **[Merkel Tells Poroshenko to Save Putin's Face. In Return, Putin Moons Merkel](#)**

by Craig Pirrong

If you just fell off the cabbage truck, you might be stunned to learn that a couple of days after Merkel visited Ukraine to deliver Poroshenko the message that Ukraine needed to back down from its attack on Russian forces in Donbas in order to save Putin's face, that [Putin opened a new front in Russia's invasion of Ukraine](#).

Time and again, the hand-wringers in the west, Obama, Cameron, and especially Merkel, have desperately offered Putin ways out of Donbas. And time and again, Putin has taken these offers as a sign of weakness, and an invitation to escalate. The more aggressive he is, the more assiduously the hand-wringers try to appease him. The equilibrium in this game isn't hard to figure out.

Merkel's appeasing stance is overdetermined, but one of the contributing causes is her economic anxiety, and the wails of pain from German business. [Today Merkel whinged about the economic costs of the Ukrainian crisis](#): the German economy contracted by .2 percent! Oh! The humanity!

Tell it to the Ukrainians, who are looking at a decline of about 50 times as big.

Merkel just wants the Ukraine crisis to go away. She knows that just washing her hands, Pilot-like, would look bad. So she mouths a few platitudes, and goes through the motion of playing bad cop with Putin, but does nothing serious to aid Ukraine (a piddling 500 mm Euros to support reconstruction of Donbas is a joke, especially when unaccompanied by military support), and through word and deed undermines Poroshenko and gives aid and comfort to Putin.

Putin knows this, which is why he continues to escalate, *especially* right after Merkel weighs in on Ukraine. She makes it clear to him that he will pay no real price.

Anybody heard anything about MH17 lately? No? Huh.

I've said this before. Ukraine, you are on your own, and your ostensible friends are no friends at all.

### **Volokh Conspiracy**

#### **[Episcopal chaplain at Yale: Jews are to blame for anti-Semitism for not making peace with genocidal enemy](#)**

by David Bernstein

Speaking of [moral obtuseness](#) (or how "[Palestine makes you dumb.](#)") I reprint for you in full Rev. Shipman's letter [as published today in the New York Times](#):

To the Editor:

[Deborah E. Lipstadt](#) makes far too little of the relationship between Israel's policies in the West Bank and Gaza and growing anti-Semitism in Europe and beyond.

The trend to which she alludes parallels the carnage in Gaza over the last five years, not to mention the perpetually stalled peace talks and the continuing occupation of the West Bank.

As hope for a two-state solution fades and Palestinian casualties continue to mount, the best antidote to anti-Semitism would be for Israel's patrons abroad to press the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for final-status resolution to the Palestinian question.

(Rev.) BRUCE M. SHIPMAN  
Groton, Conn., Aug. 21, 2014

*The writer is the Episcopal chaplain at Yale.*

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## RightTurn

### Obama in the rough

By Jennifer Rubin

[Bill Burton](#), former Obama aide and current spinner for the White House, is miffed that people are upset about President Obama's vacations. Well, if Burton learned anything from Obama, it is how to make a straw-man argument.

Few people object to the president getting downtime. What they object to is three-fold:

First, Burton should know better than anyone that the visual juxtaposition of commenting (but doing nothing more than issuing empty platitudes) on the savage murder of James Foley and yet another round of golf is jarring. Actually, it's in poor taste (like Bill Clinton laughing as he exited his longtime friend Ron Brown's funeral, before realizing he was on camera). In case Burton is genuinely confused (as opposed to faking obliviousness), it demonstrates a lack of real remorse to be seen indulging in fun-loving activities directly after such a grave announcement. It suggests a lack of true empathy and unwillingness to forgo personal pleasures even in somber situations. But surely Burton knows this, right?

President George W. Bush surely understood this, which is why he gave up golf during the war. It just struck him as inappropriate to be gallivanting around a golf course when young men and women were dying. But then Barack Obama is no George W. Bush.

Second, criticism about Obama's time away from the job also focuses on incessant fundraising, sometimes in lieu of performing his job. He went fundraising, but not to the border in Texas. He went to a Las Vegas fundraiser, rather than stay in the White House to oversee the aftermath of the attack in Benghazi, Libya. In that case, it appeared a vain effort to distance himself from the scene of a foreign policy debacle.

But the root of the problem, as Burton concedes, is whether you are "doing your job." And that's the rub. The president, [about 60 percent of the public](#) agrees, [isn't doing his job](#), especially in his most important role as commander in chief. If he had not done a 180, erased his own red line and passively allowed events to unfold in Syria and the Islamic State to expand, few would care about his golf game. If he had moved swiftly, enacted sector-wide sanctions and refused to accept Russia's annexation of Crimea, the media probably wouldn't focus on his golf game. Had he left troops in Iraq and maintained the stable environment his predecessor handed him, the golf griping would be minimal.

The media like visuals and easily understood symbolism (isn't that how Obama got himself elected twice?), so the golf game becomes a metaphor, if you will, for his lackadaisical and irresponsible approach to national security. Sometimes a golf game is just a golf game, but sometimes it visually encapsulates a failing president who is in over his head and lacks the humility and honesty to recognize failure and correct course.

Burton is doing the president no favors in continuing the transparent spinning. The president has an abundance of zealous sycophants. What he needs is tough love from people on whom he has relied. If Burton really cared about the Obama legacy, he'd stop playing into the president's weakness for self-pity and instead dispense some basic advice: *Hire new advisers. Develop in concert with the House and Senate a strategy for destroying the Islamic State. Level with the*

American people about the threat we face. Fund the military sufficiently to address the world as it is. Now, that would be a service to the president and to the country.

## Contentions

### [The White House Press Secretary Isn't Telling the Truth. And I Can Prove It.](#)

by Peter Wehner

One of the notable things about the Obama administration isn't simply that its key figures often make misleading claims, but that they do so in ways that can be so easily disproven.

The latest effort is in the White House's attempt to have us believe that the president, in his now infamous "jayvee" analogy, didn't have ISIS in mind. Here's [an exchange](#) between NBC's Peter Alexander and White House press secretary Josh Earnest that took place on Monday:

PETER ALEXANDER, NBC: Did the president underestimate ISIS when he referred to them in an interview only a couple months ago as a JV squad and making a reference to National Basketball Association basketball teams like the Lakers?

JOSH EARNEST, WHITE HOUSE: Well, I thought somebody might ask this question today so I wanted to pull the transcript of the interview because it's important to understand the context in which this was delivered. So let me just read [the full quote](#) and then we can talk about it just a little bit. The president said quote:

*I think there is a distinction between the capacity and reach of a bin Laden and a network that is actively planning major terrorist plots against the homeland versus jihadists who are engaged in various local power struggles and disputes, often sectarian.*

So the president was not singling out ISIL [aka ISIS], he was talking about the very different threat that is posed by a range of extremists around the globe. Many of them do not have designs on attacking the West or attacking the United States, and that is what puts them in stark contrast to the goals and capability of the previously existing al Qaeda core network that was led by Osama bin Laden.

That claim—"the president was not singling out ISIL"—is simply not true. And it's demonstrably untrue. To prove this assertion, it's helpful to cite the relevant portion of the [January 27, 2014 story by David Remnick in the New Yorker](#):

At the core of Obama's thinking is that American military involvement cannot be the primary instrument to achieve the new equilibrium that the region so desperately needs. And yet thoughts of a pacific equilibrium are far from anyone's mind in the real, existing Middle East. In the 2012 campaign, Obama spoke not only of killing Osama bin Laden; he also said that Al Qaeda had been "decimated." *I [Remnick] pointed out that the flag of Al Qaeda is now flying in Falluja, in Iraq, and among various rebel factions in Syria; Al Qaeda has asserted a presence in parts of Africa, too.*

"The analogy we use around here sometimes, and I think is accurate, is if a jayvee team puts on Lakers uniforms that doesn't make them Kobe Bryant," Obama said, resorting to an uncharacteristically flip analogy. "I think there is a distinction between the capacity and reach of

a bin Laden and a network that is actively planning major terrorist plots against the homeland versus jihadists who are engaged in various local power struggles and disputes, often sectarian.

“Let’s just keep in mind, Falluja is a profoundly conservative Sunni city in a country that, independent of anything we do, is deeply divided along sectarian lines. And how we think about terrorism has to be defined and specific enough that it doesn’t lead us to think that any horrible actions that take place around the world that are motivated in part by an extremist Islamic ideology are a direct threat to us or something that we have to wade into.” [emphasis added]

So we’ve established beyond any doubt that the president’s answer, which Josh Earnest quoted, is in response to David Remnick’s comment about the al-Qaeda flag flying in Falluja. And whose al-Qaeda flag in particular happened to be flying over Falluja at the time of the interview? For that answer, let’s go to [a January 3, 2014 story in the New York Times](#), which begins this way:

Black-clad Sunni militants of Al Qaeda destroyed the Falluja Police Headquarters and mayor’s office, planted their flag atop other government buildings and decreed the western Iraqi city to be their new independent state on Friday in an escalating threat to Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, whose forces were struggling to retake control late into the night. *The advances by the militants — members of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS — came after days of fighting in Falluja, Ramadi and other areas of Anbar Province.* [emphasis added]

What we’ve shown, then, is that several weeks before the *New Yorker* story was published, the al-Qaeda flag flying over Falluja belonged to ISIS/ISIL. The president knew it. There is therefore only one possible interpretation: the president had ISIS/ISIL in mind when he made his “jayvee” reference. And there’s only one possible conclusion about what Mr. Earnest said: It’s false. He’s distorting the truth in order to exonerate his boss, the president, from having made a statement that was deeply and dangerously misinformed.

The White House press corps should vigorously pursue this matter with the White House press secretary; and he in turn should admit what he said was false. If Mr. Earnest doesn’t do so in light of this evidence, then his claim will move from the category of being false to being a lie. That would trouble me; and I would think it would trouble them.

## Contentions

### [Obama’s Libya Debacle](#)

by Peter Wehner

Think back with me, if you will, to a time not all that long ago when the American intervention in Libya was held up as a model by President Obama.

“Forty-two years of tyranny was ended in six months. From Tripoli to Misurata to Benghazi — today, Libya is free,” Mr. Obama [told the United Nations on September 21, 2011](#). “Yesterday, the leaders of a new Libya took their rightful place beside us, and this week, the United States is reopening our embassy in Tripoli. This is how the international community is supposed to work — nations standing together for the sake of peace and security, and individuals claiming their rights.”

So Libya is how it's supposed to work, is it? *That* is the example the president likes to hold up when he referred to "smart diplomacy" and the virtues of America "leading from behind"?

So how are things going in Libya?

For one thing, the United States shut down its embassy in Libya earlier this summer and evacuated its diplomats to neighboring Tunisia under U.S. military escort amid a significant deterioration in security in Tripoli. "Due to the ongoing violence resulting from clashes between Libyan militias in the immediate vicinity of the US embassy in Tripoli, we have temporarily relocated all of our personnel out of Libya," a State Department spokeswoman, Marie Harf, [said](#).

And today, on the front page of the *New York Times*, is a story by David Kirkpatrick titled, "[Strife in Libya Could Presage Long Civil War.](#)" According to Mr. Kirkpatrick:

Three years after the NATO-backed ouster of Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi, the violence threatens to turn Libya into a pocket of chaos destabilizing North Africa for years to come. Libya is already a haven for itinerant militants, and the conflict has now opened new opportunities for Ansar al-Shariah, the hard-line Islamist group involved in the assault on the American diplomatic Mission in Benghazi in 2012... In a broad series of interviews on a five-day trip across the chasm now dividing the country — from the mountain town of Zintan, through Tripoli to the coastal city of Misurata — many Libyans despaired of any resolution. "We entered this tunnel and we can't find our way out," said Ibrahim Omar, a Zintani leader. Towns and tribes across the country are choosing sides, in places flying the flags of rival factions, sometimes including the black banners of Islamist extremists.

The story goes on to say this:

Even the first years after Colonel Qaddafi's ouster were better, said Hisham Krekshi, a former Tripoli councilman, savoring a few hours of uninterrupted electricity in the upscale cafe that he owns, its tables and the street deserted. "This is a war, and a lot of innocent people are dying."

The reason the debacle in Libya isn't getting more attention is because there are so many other catastrophes that are unfolding in the rest of the world—Iraq, Syria, Gaza, Afghanistan, Crimea, Ukraine, the South China Sea, *et cetera*—that we are at the point where they are overloading our ability to process it all. Call it the geopolitical version of sensory overload.

These disaster aren't all Mr. Obama's fault, of course; but his policies have in every instance made things worse, and in some cases they have made things far worse. As bad as things seem now, they are probably worse than we imagine. It will take years, and in some cases probably decades, to undo the damage of the Obama era. The sheer breadth and scope of his incompetence in the world arena—virtually no continent and very few countries have been spared—is quite remarkable. It almost makes one long for the days of Jimmy Carter.

## Politico [Surf's Up](#)

### ***Will there be a GOP wave in the Senate—or a wipeout?***

by Larry J. Sabato

So where's the wave? This is President Obama's sixth-year-itch election. The map of states with contested Senate seats could hardly be better from the Republicans' vantage point. And the breaks this year—strong candidates, avoidance of damaging gaffes, issues such as Obamacare and immigration that stir the party base—have mainly gone the GOP's way, very unlike 2012.

Nonetheless, the midterms are far from over. In every single one of the *Crystal Ball's* toss-up states, (Alaska, Arkansas, Iowa, Louisiana and North Carolina), the Republican Senate candidate has not yet opened up a real polling lead in any of them. Democratic nominees have been running hard and staying slightly ahead, or close to, their Republican foes.

Earlier this year, we published a “wave chart” [giving the range of Senate election outcomes](#), from ripple to tsunami. Sometimes tidal waves, such as the 2006 Democratic swell that gave the party control of both houses of Congress, develop in late September or October. That's certainly still a possibility for the GOP in 2014. However, the summer is waning, and as Labor Day approaches our estimate remains a Republican gain of four to eight seats, with the probability greatest for six or seven seats—just enough to put Republicans in charge of Congress' upper chamber. The lowest GOP advance would fall two seats short of outright control; the largest would produce a 53-47 Republican Senate.

A year ago, it was not hard to find Republican leaders who privately believed the party could score a dramatic breakthrough in the Senate, with the GOP emerging with perhaps 55 or 56 seats. This objective was vital not just for the jousting during President Obama's final two years in the White House. At least as important is the fact that the GOP sees a [much less friendly Senate map](#) in 2016, when it will have to defend 24 of 34 seats, including incumbents elected in 2010 in Democratic states such as Illinois, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. In addition, presidential year turnouts usually draw far more minority and young voters to the polls, most of whom reliably vote Democratic from top to bottom of the ballot. A thin GOP Senate majority created this November could turn out to be very short-lived.

As we've said [many times](#), 2014 should be a Republican year, with GOP gains in both houses of Congress. Yet Republicans have a [terrible record of beating incumbent Democratic senators](#), going back to their last good year in this category, 1980. There is no obvious way for the GOP to gain the six seats necessary for control without taking down some incumbent Democrats, a task at which Republicans have struggled—they haven't beaten more than two Democratic Senate incumbents since that huge 1980 landslide.

This year, it is generally conceded that Republicans will grab three open seats. In West Virginia, Rep. Shelley Moore Capito (R) has consistently led Secretary of State Natalie Tennant (D) to replace retiring Sen. Jay Rockefeller (D). Even Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid [has admitted](#) that former Gov. Mike Rounds (R) will take South Dakota's open seat. And in Montana, Rep. Steve Daines (R) appears destined to inherit the position being warmed by appointed Sen. John Walsh (D), whose plagiarism scandal forced his withdrawal a few weeks ago. A little-known state legislator, Amanda Curtis, is the last-minute, substitute Democratic nominee.

Democrats are hoping to play offense in Georgia and Kentucky, two states that remain close but where Republican voters appear to be coming home to their nominees (although Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell's lead is still [less than three points](#)).

Assuming the GOP holds all its current seats and wins Montana, South Dakota and West Virginia, the party needs three more to take the Senate. At the moment, Republicans appear to have their best chances in these six states, roughly in this order: Arkansas, Iowa, Louisiana, North Carolina, Alaska and Colorado.

Sen. Mark Pryor (D-Ark.) has proven that he's no Blanche Lincoln, the Democratic senator from the Razorback State swamped in 2010. Given that landslide and other pro-GOP trends, Republicans expected their 2014 nominee, Rep. Tom Cotton, to make short work of Pryor. The incumbent has hung around, keeping this a tied race (or better), but nonetheless the political odds may be stacked against him—he's an underdog, if only a slight one, because of deep anti-Obama sentiment in the state.

The Hawkeye election to replace retiring Sen. Tom Harkin is a surprise, though perhaps it shouldn't be given the state's usual competitive nature. This race is close, and candidate performance could decide it. Rep. Bruce Braley, the Democrat, has suffered from foot-in-mouth disease, although Democrats are [convinced that they have the ammo](#) to paint state Sen. Joni Ernst, the Republican, as too far right. If Ernst's image remains defined by [folksiness](#)—meaning the Democratic attacks don't do much damage—she has the inside track here.

Sen. Mary Landrieu (D-La.) has a very narrow path to avoid a December runoff in the Pelican State, while Rep. Bill Cassidy (R) might not, given the presence of Sarah Palin-backed former Air Force Col. Rob Maness (R) in the race. Louisiana's unique "jungle primary" system has every candidate for the office run at the same time, which often means that two or more candidates from the same party are on the ballot together (e.g. Cassidy and Maness in 2014). To win the seat, someone has to garner a majority of the vote. If no one wins over 50 percent, the top two finishers advance to face each other—an outcome that may well happen, especially if problems continue to mount for Landrieu. Most recently, she has brought to mind Missouri Sen. Claire McCaskill's (D) "Air Claire" [controversies](#) from last cycle: The Louisiana Democrat has had to [reimburse the government](#) for fundraising trips on private chartered planes that were initially billed to taxpayers. Whether it matters is debatable, but it seems clear that Cassidy—derided by many Republicans as a "boring" candidate—won't self-immolate like McCaskill's 2012 opponent, Todd Akin. There's an upside to being bland.

NY Times

Not Giving an Inch

*'Whatever Happened to the Metric System?' by John Bemelmans Marciano*

by Amir Alexander



*American metrication, 1979.*

In the 1970s, children across America were learning the metric system at school, gas stations were charging by the liter, freeway signs in some states gave distances in kilometers, and American metrication seemed all but inevitable. But Dean Krakel, director of the National Cowboy Hall of Fame in Oklahoma, saw things differently: “Metric is definitely Communist,” he solemnly said. “One monetary system, one language, one weight and measurement system, one world — all Communist.” Bob Greene, syndicated columnist and founder of the WAM! (We Ain’t Metric) organization, agreed. It was all an Arab plot “with some Frenchies and Limeys thrown in,” he wrote.

Krakel and Greene might sound to us like forerunners of the Tea Party, but in the 1970s meter-bashing was not limited to right-wing conservatives. Stewart Brand, publisher of the Whole Earth Catalog, advised that the proper response to the meter was to “bitch, boycott and foment,” and New York’s cultural elite danced at the anti-metric “Foot Ball.” Assailed from both right and left, the United States Metric Board gave up the fight and died a quiet death in 1982.

In his entertaining and enormously informative new book, “Whatever Happened to the Metric System?,” John Bemelmans Marciano tells the story of the rise and fall of metric America. With a keen ear for anecdotes and a sharp eye for human motivations, Marciano brings to life the fight over the meter, its champions and its enemies. The 1970s bookend his narrative, but the reader soon finds the struggle lasted not a decade but centuries. And in what was to me the book’s greatest revelation, the meter — that alleged vehicle of international Communism — turns out to be American through and through.

The father of American metrication was none other than Thomas Jefferson, who in the 1780s turned his attention to replacing the menagerie of doubloons, pistoles and Spanish dollars then in use in the states. Jefferson proposed minting a new dollar, but whereas the European coins were divided into halves, eighths, sixteenths, etc., the American coin would be divided into tenths, hundredths and thousandths. When Jefferson’s plan was approved by Congress, the United States became the first country to adopt the decimal system for its currency.

That money is related to measurement might seem counterintuitive today. But as Marciano points out, until very recently the value of coins was ultimately dependent on their weight in gold or silver, which means the divisions of a currency imply a division of weight. And so, when Jefferson arrived in Paris as a diplomat in 1784, he joined forces with French luminaries in promoting a complete reform of weights and measures. Their opportunity came only a few years later, when at the height of the French Revolution its leaders cast away all traditional measures and replaced them with the new meter, kilogram and liter. Jefferson, who had returned home in 1789, was convinced the new system would be promptly adopted in America.

It didn't turn out that way. As France descended into terror and war, the metric system became entangled in a worldwide struggle over its legacy. To its supporters it stood for reason and democracy; to its detractors, godlessness and the guillotine. It was not until the aftermath of World War II, when new global institutions were established and a host of new nations adopted the meter, that its place as the near-universal measure was secured.

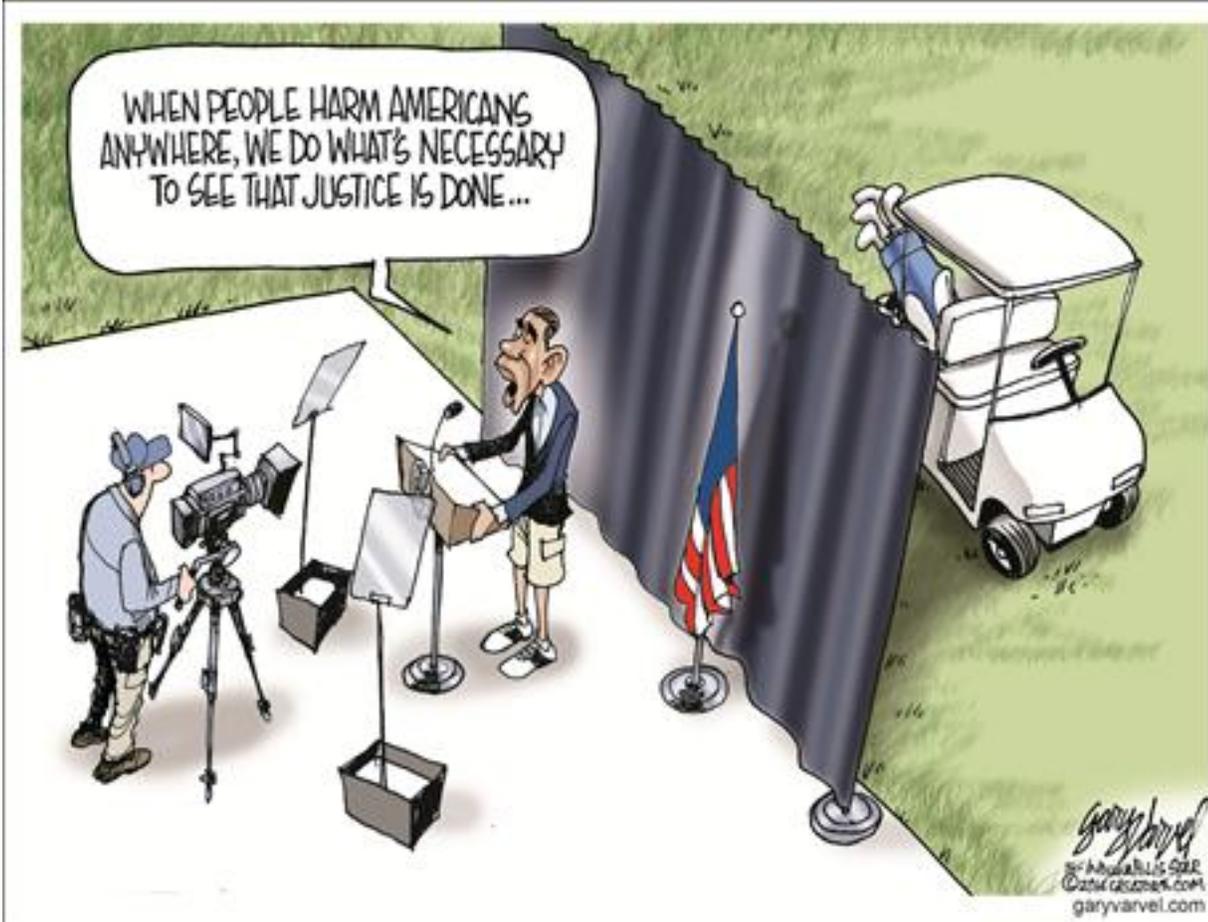
In America, however, repeated efforts at metrification, from Jefferson to Jimmy Carter, were scuttled by a formidable combination of hostility and indifference. According to Marciano the debate is now over, since the digital revolution has made conversion instantaneous and a change of system pointless. Still, as his book beautifully shows, clashes over the meter were more often about ideology, not utility. And so, as long as the struggle continues over reason and faith, universalism and tradition, I wouldn't count the meter out.

## **WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE METRIC SYSTEM?**

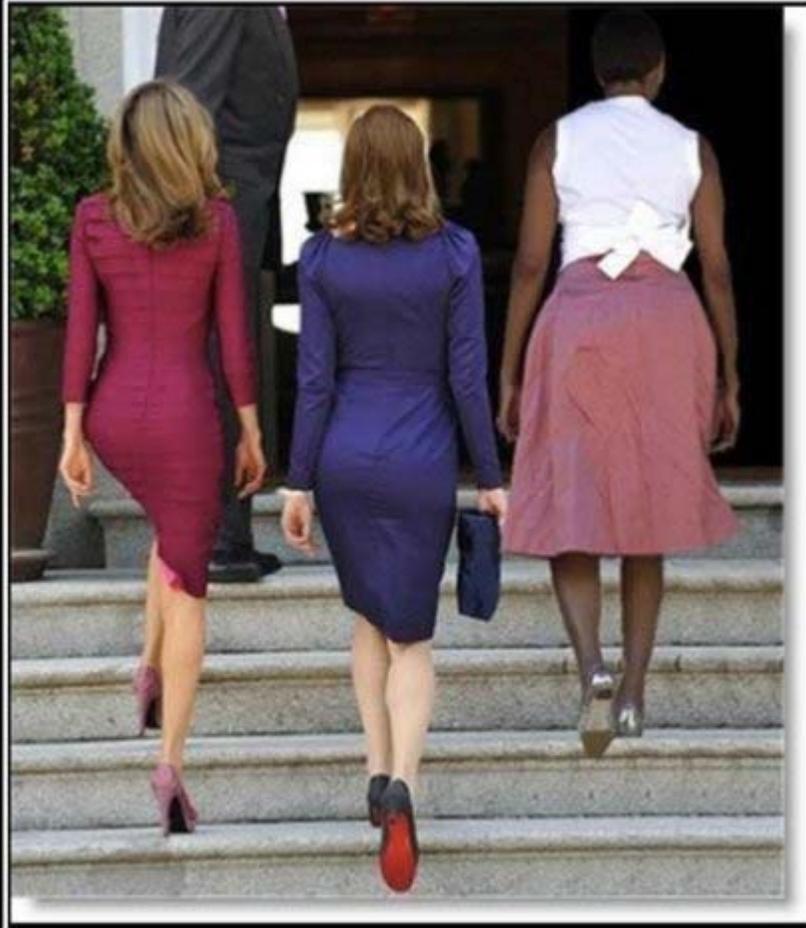
### **How America Kept Its Feet**

By John Bemelmans Marciano

Illustrated. 310 pp. Bloomsbury. \$26.







## LIBERAL HYPOCRITE MICHELLE OBAMA

Princess Letizia of Spain, Carla Bruni of France and our first lady Michelle Obama  
Which one says we have to watch our fats?

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