

September 30, 2014

Sunday night on 60 Minutes the president blamed everyone else for his failure to understand the risks in the growth of jihadist strength in Iraq and Syria. Many of our favorites have comments. Streetwise Prof is first.

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I disagree with that assessment. The "either/or" is misplaced, most likely. I'm putting my money on "both", i.e., "the president doesn't read the intelligence and he's bullshitting." Because that's what he does.

Scott Johnson of Power Line with more.

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Ed Morrissey weighs in.

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... "Steve Kroft: What? How did they end up where they are in control of so much territory? Was that a complete surprise to you?"

*President Obama: Well I think, our head of the intelligence community, Jim Clapper, has acknowledged that I think **they underestimated what had been taking place in Syria** [emphasis mine]."*

"They"? If that's the case, why is Clapper still drawing a paycheck? After all, this is the same James Clapper that deliberately misled Congress about the NSA's domestic data trawling, so it's not as if he's a universally credible figure anyway. Now we seemed to have missed the emergence of one of the biggest terror threats since the Taliban in Afghanistan took over after we helped push the Soviets out, and Clapper still has a job. If the buck-passing has any credence at all, Obama would have canned him in June. ...

Jennifer Rubin says the critical mistake was unmentioned by President Who Me? Notice that the component of the Iraq situation Obama left out was the most critical — the withdrawal of our troops and the loss of influence over Maliki. That was foretold by numerous lawmakers, military men and outside experts who explained sectarian violence would reappear — precisely as it did.

Candidate for Senate in New Hampshire Scott Brown released a statement bashing Obama's buck-passing: "I'm disappointed that President Obama refused to accept responsibility for underestimating ISIS. Instead, he blamed James Clapper, his director of intelligence. Yet, it was President Obama who described ISIS as a 'Jayvee team' earlier this year. At some point, the man in charge has to answer for what happens on his own watch."

Many administration officials and lawmakers such as Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) had for years argued that our hands-off policy in Syria would create a radicalizing dynamic that would result in a terrorist sanctuary in the Middle East. This prediction was accurate and was informed not by some super-secret analysis McCain saw about the Islamic State, but by understanding regional dynamics and history. It's ironic that Obama, who won the presidency by deploring the Bush administration for following intelligence advice on weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, now hides behind the intelligence community.

Lots of people knew exactly what was brewing in Syria and Iraq. The Daily Beast reported that the collapse of Iraq to Islamic State forces was no surprise to those who were paying attention: ...

Remember Harry Truman who took responsibility by saying, "The buck stops here."? Seth Mandel says the president is the anti-Truman.

There are three ways to read Barack Obama's epic buck-passing from Sunday night's interview on 60 Minutes. There is the literal reading: Obama, in trying to fend off blame for his administration's failure regarding ISIS, said "Jim Clapper has acknowledged that I think they underestimated what had been taking place in Syria," referring to the intel community.

Then there is the classic Obama-is-disappointed-in-America-yet-again framing, which is not flattering to Obama but better than the truth. Both the New York Times and the Washington Post went this route. Here's the Times: "President Obama acknowledged in an interview broadcast on Sunday that the United States had underestimated the rise of the Islamic State militant group." And the Post: "The United States underestimated the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, President Obama said during an interview."

If you've followed the events of the past year, you'll notice that neither of those spin cycles is true and so there must be a third option. There is: the truth, which is that Barack Obama underestimated ISIS despite the intel community trying desperately to explain it to him since day one. And thus, tired of getting thrown under the bus, the intel community has pointed out to Eli Lake at the Daily Beast that what the president said is completely divorced from reality: ...

John Fund says one of the awful legacies of Holder is the elevation of Al Sharpton. *As Eric Holder prepares to leave as attorney general, there is a fierce debate over his six-year tenure. Many conservative senators who voted to confirm him in 2009 now regret it. Chuck Grassley of Iowa, the top Republican on the Judiciary Committee, now zings Holder's "lack of respect for Congress, the American taxpayer, and the laws on the books." Even some of his supporters agree he's been confrontational and polarizing. Juan Williams of Fox News rails against anti-Holder "scandalmongers" but then admits "the Justice Department has devolved into the heart of Washington darkness, the absolute pit of modern political polarization in my lifetime."*

One reason for that polarization is that, thanks to direct support from Holder and President Obama himself, the Reverend Al Sharpton has now become the nation's leading African-American civil-rights leader. Last month, Politico proclaimed Sharpton "the national black leader Obama leans on most."

"There's a trust factor with The Rev from the Oval Office on down," a White House official told Politico. The White House had early on concluded it didn't have much use for Jesse Jackson, a former top Obama adviser told Politico's Glenn Thrush: "We needed to have someone to deal with in the African-American community, and Sharpton was the next best thing, so, yeah, we sort of helped build him up." Egad, the equivalent of unleashing Typhoid Mary in a kitchen.

Today, Sharpton is at the center of presidential announcements and frequently texts or e-mails with Holder and top Justice officials. He vacationed this year at the Martha's Vineyard condo of uber-presidential adviser Valerie Jarrett, just up the road from where Obama himself was staying. Last month, he attended the funeral of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo., with the White House's blessing. "Michael Brown's blood is crying for justice," Sharpton told attendees. "Those police that are wrong need to be dealt with." ...

Kevin Williamson notes that abortion on demand is part of the left's war on the poor. *Ruth Bader Ginsburg, having decided for some inexplicable reason to do a long interview with a fashion magazine (maybe it is her celebrated collection of lace collars), reaffirmed the most important things we know about her: her partisanship, her elevation of politics over law, and her desire to see as many poor children killed as is feasibly possible.*

Speaking about such modest restrictions on abortion as have been enacted over the past several years, Justice Ginsburg lamented that "the impact of all these restrictions is on poor women." Then she added: "It makes no sense as a national policy to promote birth only among poor people."

This is not her first time weighing in on the question of what by any intellectually honest standard must be described as eugenics. In an earlier interview, she described the Roe v. Wade decision as being intended to control population growth, "particularly growth in populations that we don't want to have too many of." She was correct in her assessment of Roe; the co-counsel in that case, Ron Weddington, would later advise President Bill Clinton: "You can start immediately to eliminate the barely educated, unhealthy, and poor segment of our country," by making abortifacients cheap and universally available. "It's what we all know is true, but we only whisper it." ...

Streetwise Professor

[Obama Throws the Intelligence Community Under the Bus: Let the Leaks Begin!](#)

by Craig Pirrong

Yesterday on 60 Minutes, Obama blamed the intelligence community for underestimating ISIS. That's leadership for you. I guess the principle of presidential infallibility is now official doctrine even without the issuance of a bull. The daily bullshit proves it, though.

Let's overlook the fact that at the time Obama made the "JV" remark, you didn't need to be in intelligence analyst to evaluate ISIS's growing threat. You just had to read the effing paper or follow Twitter. By that time, ISIS had irrupted into Fallujah and Ramadi, and had for months been in the news for its battles in Syria. You might recall that in late-2013 and early-2014, the rest of the Syrian opposition united in a failed attempt to throw back ISIS.

Obama's channeling of Chuck Berry's "[It wasn't me!](#)" followed by a few days [Director of National Intelligence James Clapper's admission that US intelligence had underestimated ISIS](#). I wonder what Obama threatened Clapper with to get him to throw himself under the bus a few days before Obama's 60 Minutes appearance.

Other presidents have paid a price for attempting to dump blame onto the intel community. Such attempts typically result in a deluge of damaging leaks: the IC fights back, and fights back hard and dirty, usually.

I wonder if that typical script will play out this time. [I suspect it will, because what's already in the public domain makes Obama's statement risible](#). One early example, from an ex-Pentagon official: "Either the president doesn't read the intelligence he's getting or he's bullshitting."

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Power Line

[An embarrassment of Democrats: Obama edition](#)

by Scott Johnson

President Obama famously disparaged the Islamic State terrorist group as the terrorist JV to his apostle David Remnick in an interview for the New Yorker late last year (Remnick's article is [here](#)). It sounded good at the time, but the words come back to haunt Obama. They mark him indelibly as the jv president.

Asked about it last night by Steve Kroft on 60 Minutes, Obama passed the buck to his intelligence functionaries. John posted the video [here](#). Daily Beast reporter Eli Lake [followed up](#) last night:

Nearly eight months ago, some of President Obama's senior intelligence officials were already warning that ISIS was on the move. In the beginning of 2014, ISIS fighters had defeated Iraqi forces in Fallujah, leading much of the U.S. intelligence community to assess they would try to take more of Iraq.

But in an interview that aired Sunday evening, the president told 60 Minutes that the rise of the group now proclaiming itself a caliphate in territory between Syria and Iraq caught the U.S. intelligence community off guard. Obama specifically blamed James Clapper, the current director of national intelligence: “Our head of the intelligence community, Jim Clapper, has acknowledged that, I think, they underestimated what had been taking place in Syria,” he said.

Reached by The Daily Beast after Obama’s interview aired, one former senior Pentagon official who worked closely on the threat posed by Sunni jihadists in Syria and Iraq was flabbergasted. “Either the president doesn’t read the intelligence he’s getting or he’s bullshitting,” the former official said.

I think that judgment applies to Obama’s 60 Minutes interview *in toto* — I have long held Obama to be a sophomoric BS artist — but this was egregious.

Hot Air

Obama: “They underestimated” ISIS

by Ed Morrissey

The Commander in Chief [made an appearance on 60 Minutes](#) last night to reassure everyone that he’s in charge during this fight against Islamist terror ... at least *now*. When Steve Kroft asked Obama how ISIS went from the “jayvees” in January to a 40,000-man army sweeping across the Syrian-Iraqi desert in June, Obama explained that the buck stopped, oh, at the office of James Clapper. Using testimony from earlier this week from the DNI, Obama shifted the blame for the surprise this spring to American intelligence:

Steve Kroft: Two years ago, in the White House, in this building, you talked about al Qaeda being decimated. You talked about al Qaeda being back on its heels. Two years later, you’ve got al Qaeda affiliates and al Qaeda offshoots controlling huge chunks of both Iraq and Syria. And you have militias, Islamic radical militias in control of Libya.

President Obama: If you’ll recall, Steve, you had an international network in al Qaeda between Afghanistan and Pakistan, headed by Bin Laden. And that structure we have rendered ineffective. But what I also said, and this was two years ago and a year ago, is that you have regional groups with regional ambitions and territorial ambitions. And what also has not changed is the kind of violent, ideologically driven extremism that has taken root in too much of the Muslim world. And this week, in my speech to the United Nations General Assembly, I made very clear we are not at war against Islam. Islam is a religion that preaches peace and the overwhelming majority of Muslims are peaceful. But in the Muslim world right now, there is a cancer that has grown for too long that suggests that it is acceptable to kill innocent people who worship a different God. And that kind of extremism, unfortunately, means that we’re going to see for some time the possibility that in a whole bunch of different countries, radical groups may spring up, particularly in countries that are still relatively fragile, where you had sectarian tensions, where you don’t have a strong state security apparatus. That’s why what we have to do is rather than play whack-a-mole and send U.S. troops wherever this occurs, we have to build strong partnerships. We have to get the international community to recognize this is a problem. We’ve got to get Arab and Muslim leaders to say very clearly, “These folks do not represent us. They do not represent Islam,” and to speak out forcefully against them.

Steve Kroft: I understand all the caveats about these regional groups. But this is what an army of 40,000 people, according to some of the military estimates I heard the other day, very well-trained, very motivated.

President Obama: Well, part of it was that...

Steve Kroft: What? How did they end up where they are in control of so much territory? Was that a complete surprise to you?

President Obama: Well I think, our head of the intelligence community, Jim Clapper, has acknowledged that I think **they underestimated what had been taking place in Syria** [emphasis mine].

“They”? If that’s the case, why is Clapper still drawing a paycheck? After all, this is the same James Clapper that deliberately misled Congress about the NSA’s domestic data trawling, so it’s not as if he’s a universally credible figure anyway. Now we seemed to have missed the emergence of one of the biggest terror threats since the Taliban in Afghanistan took over after we helped push the Soviets out, and Clapper *still* has a job. If the buck-passing has any credence at all, Obama would have canned him in June.

Besides, as Kroft immediately points out, that’s actually not what Clapper said anyway. His testimony regarded the collapse of the Iraqi army, not the rise of ISIS:

Steve Kroft: I mean, he didn’t say that, just say that, “We underestimated ISIL.” He said, “We overestimated the ability and the will of our allies, the Iraqi army, to fight.”

President Obama: That’s true. That’s absolutely true. And I...

Steve Kroft: And these are the people that we’re now expecting to carry on the fight?

Obama then offers a lengthy discourse on Nouri al-Maliki’s failings and the need to teach tolerance in Arab nations, but never gets around to mentioning the role Obama played in Maliki’s power grab. Obama wanted to get out of Iraq, and Maliki made it easy for him to do so. Once the US packed up and left, Maliki had no further reason to work with the Sunnis and started purging them from the government and from the military. The US military and intelligence communities warned that would happen if we took the zero option in Iraq, so in that sense no one underestimated the threat except Obama himself.

It didn’t take long for the intel community to react to Obama’s claims. Just hours after the *60 Minutes* interview ran, Eli Lake’s sources [provided the response at The Daily Beast](#). It seems “they” have a few things to say about the President who usually loves to say “I,” and offered this blunt rebuttal:

Reached by The Daily Beast after Obama’s interview aired, one former senior Pentagon official who worked closely on the threat posed by Sunni jihadists in Syria and Iraq was flabbergasted. “Either the president doesn’t read the intelligence he’s getting or he’s bullshitting,” the former official said. ...

In [prepared testimony](#) before the annual House and Senate intelligence committees’ threat hearings in January and February, Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, the recently departed director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, said the group would likely make a grab for land before the end of the year. ISIS “probably will attempt to take territory in Iraq and Syria to exhibit its strength in

2014.” Of course, the prediction wasn’t exactly hard to make. By then, Flynn noted, ISIS had taken the cities of Ramadi and Fallujah, and the demonstrated an “ability to concurrently maintain multiple safe havens in Syria.”

January ... wasn’t that when Obama called the ISIS threat akin to “jayvees” who put on Kobe Bryant uniforms and think they’re the Lakers? [Why, yes it was.](#)

The ability of ISIS to hold that territory will depend on its “resources, local support, as well as the responses of [Iraqi security forces] and other opposition groups in Syria,” Flynn added. He noted that while many Sunnis likely opposed ISIS, “some Sunni tribes and insurgent groups appear willing to work tactically with [ISIS] as they share common anti-government goals.”

Flynn was not alone. Clapper himself in that hearing warned that the three most effective jihadist groups in Syria—one of which he said was ISIS—presented a threat as a magnet for attracting foreign fighters. John Brennan, Obama’s CIA director, said he thought both ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra, al Qaeda’s formal franchise in Syria, presented a threat to launch external operations against the West.

In other words, don’t look around long to find out who “they” are. “They” in this case is a grammatically-incorrect replacement for the first person singular pronoun that otherwise occupies so much of Obama’s speech:

[Ron Fournier](#) ✓ [@ron_fournier Follow](#)

I, me, my. It's their fault. I, me, my ...

[Even the New York Times didn't buy it:](#)

In citing Mr. Clapper, Mr. Obama made no mention of any misjudgment he may have made himself. Critics have repeatedly pointed to his comment last winter characterizing groups like the Islamic State as a “JV team” compared with the original Al Qaeda.

The buck stops ... somewhere over there.

Right Turn

Obama’s false ‘intelligence failure’ claim

by Jennifer Rubin

The president is nothing if not reliable when it comes to avoiding responsibility for his gross foreign policy errors. Asked in his “60 Minutes” interview if he had been surprised by the rise of the Islamic State, he replied:

“Well I think, our head of the intelligence community, Jim Clapper, has acknowledged that I think they underestimated what had been taking place in Syria. . . .

Well, here’s what happened in Iraq. When we left, we had left them a democracy that was intact, a military that was well equipped, and the ability then to chart their own course. And that opportunity was squandered over the course of five years or so because the prime minister, Maliki, was much more interested in consolidating his Shiite base and very suspicious of the Sunnis and the Kurds, who make up the other two-thirds of the country. So what you did not see was a government that had built a sense of national unity.

Really? This is exhibit A for why Congress needs to shut down the Benghazi select committee, which is obsessing over one small aspect of the larger and much more critical issue here: *How did the president allow jihadism to flourish and lose several Middle East countries?*

Notice that the component of the Iraq situation Obama left out was the most critical — the withdrawal of our troops and the loss of influence over Maliki. That was foretold by numerous lawmakers, military men and outside experts who explained sectarian violence would reappear — precisely as it did.

Candidate for Senate in New Hampshire Scott Brown released a statement bashing Obama’s buck-passing: “I’m disappointed that President Obama refused to accept responsibility for underestimating ISIS. Instead, he blamed James Clapper, his director of intelligence. Yet, it was President Obama who described ISIS as a ‘Jayvee team’ earlier this year. At some point, the man in charge has to answer for what happens on his own watch.”

Many administration officials and lawmakers such as Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) had for years argued that our hands-off policy in Syria would create a radicalizing dynamic that would result in a terrorist sanctuary in the Middle East. This prediction was accurate and was informed not by some super-secret analysis McCain saw about the Islamic State, but by understanding regional dynamics and history. It’s ironic that Obama, who won the presidency by deploring the Bush administration for following intelligence advice on weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, now hides behind the intelligence community.

Lots of people knew exactly what was brewing in Syria and Iraq. [The Daily Beast reported](#) that the collapse of Iraq to Islamic State forces was no surprise to those who were paying attention:

[I]nterviews with a dozen U.S. and Iraqi intelligence officials, diplomats, and policy makers reveal a very different story. A catastrophe like the fall of Mosul wasn’t just predictable, these officials say. They repeatedly warned the Obama administration that something like this was going to happen. With seemingly no good choices to make in Iraq, the White House wasn’t able to listen. . . . While the policy process in Washington was frozen, U.S. intelligence analysts still filed their warnings about major weaknesses in Iraq’s military. Both the CIA and the Defense Intelligence Agency have issued reported analysis for nearly a year warning that Iraq’s military would not be able to stand up against a sustained campaign from ISIS.

The president either was derelict in his failure to heed warnings or — **just like in Benghazi, Libya** — he was unwilling to give credence to reports that would have meant he had let jihadists out of their box and American withdrawal was proving to be a disaster. Administration officials were telling Congress in 2013 how dire things had become:

Brett McGurk, a deputy assistant secretary of state and the Obama administration’s senior U.S. official in Baghdad since the crisis began last month, presented to Congress a similarly dark

warning. ISIS was launching upwards of 40 suicide bombers a month, he said, encouraged in part by the weakness of Maliki's military and the aggressively anti-Sunni policies of the Shi'ite prime minister. It was the kind of ominous report that American intelligence agencies had been delivering privately for months. McGurk added that ISIS had "benefited from a permissive operating environment due to inherent weaknesses of Iraqi security forces, poor operational tactics, and popular grievances, which remain unaddressed, among the population in Anbar and Nineweh provinces."

Whether in Syria or Iraq, a chorus of voices tried to sound the alarm including [Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn](#), who recently confirmed he had been sounding the alarm for some time that jihadism was growing:

I think we collectively felt that way. We said many times, "Hey, we need to get this intelligence in front of the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of State, the National Security adviser! The White House needs to see this intelligence picture we have!"

We saw all this connective tissue developing between these [proliferating] terrorist groups. So when asked if the terrorists were on the run, we couldn't respond with any answer but 'no.' When asked if the terrorists were defeated, we had to say 'no.' Anyone who answers 'yes' to either of those questions either doesn't know what they are talking about, they are misinformed, or they are flat out lying.

If only Obama had heard about the [Foreign Policy Initiative Summit in October 2013](#), which discussed the rise of Syrian militants in depth.

[Sens. McCain and Lindsey Graham \(R-S.C.\)](#) recently set out the numerous opportunities when Obama could have acted to check the rise of the Islamic State, which they argue "was neither inevitable nor unpredictable." They recall that in the summer of **2012**:

President Obama's entire senior national-security team — Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, CIA Director David Petraeus, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Martin Dempsey — identified the threat posed by radicalization in Syria and recommended a proposal to arm and train elements of the moderate Syrian opposition. At the time, extremist elements and al-Qaeda-affiliated forces that later became ISIS were weak and the balance of power strongly favored more moderate opposition forces. A properly empowered moderate Syrian opposition could have stymied the growth of ISIS and prevented President Bashar al-Assad's massacre of tens of thousands of innocent men, women, and children.

By ignoring [experts](#) outside his circle of toadies and discounting unspinnable media, Obama apparently missed [warning](#) after [warning](#) after [warning](#) about the rise of Islamists in Syria, like the ones The Post [columnists](#) and [editorial board](#) have [given](#) over the [years](#). If Obama did not see the consequences of American withdrawal and the growing threat of Islamists it was because he chose not to. (Hillary Clinton wasn't hampered by "bad" intelligence and argued for U.S. action. Only Obama was given misleading intelligence?)

Obama's excuse that this was an intelligence failure is pure bunk. It was a leadership failure. It was Obama's failure.

Contentions

Obama, the Anti-Truman

by Seth Mandel

There are three ways to read Barack Obama's epic buck-passing from Sunday night's interview on *60 Minutes*. There is the literal reading: Obama, in trying to fend off blame for his administration's failure regarding ISIS, [said](#) "Jim Clapper has acknowledged that I think they underestimated what had been taking place in Syria," referring to the intel community.

Then there is the classic Obama-is-disappointed-in-America-yet-again framing, which is not flattering to Obama but better than the truth. Both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* went this route. Here's [the Times](#): "President Obama acknowledged in an interview broadcast on Sunday that the United States had underestimated the rise of the Islamic State militant group." And [the Post](#): "The United States underestimated the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, President Obama said during an interview."

If you've followed the events of the past year, you'll notice that neither of those spin cycles is true and so there must be a third option. There is: the truth, which is that *Barack Obama* underestimated ISIS *despite* the intel community trying desperately to explain it to him since day one. And thus, tired of getting thrown under the bus, the intel community has [pointed out](#) to Eli Lake at the Daily Beast that what the president said is completely divorced from reality:

Nearly eight months ago, some of President Obama's senior intelligence officials were already warning that ISIS was on the move. In the beginning of 2014, ISIS fighters had defeated Iraqi forces in Fallujah, leading much of the U.S. intelligence community to assess they would try to take more of Iraq. ...

Reached by The Daily Beast after Obama's interview aired, one former senior Pentagon official who worked closely on the threat posed by Sunni jihadists in Syria and Iraq was flabbergasted. "Either the president doesn't read the intelligence he's getting or he's bullshitting," the former official said.

Is the president reading his intelligence reports? He must be. The more likely explanation of the two is that Obama knows exactly what happened—he messed up, royally—and is blaming others because it's unpalatable for him to admit that six years into his presidency, he's older but no wiser.

The *Times* does carefully draw attention to this fact:

In citing Mr. Clapper, Mr. Obama made no mention of any misjudgment he may have made himself. Critics have repeatedly pointed to his comment last winter characterizing groups like the Islamic State as a "JV team" compared with the original Al Qaeda.

Right. Though "any misjudgment he may have made" actually refers to this particular misjudgment, which he's blaming on others, that we know for sure he made.

Just as interesting is *why* he made that egregious mistake. Part of it, surely, is his utter lack of knowledge of world history and politics. But that's not enough of a reason, especially considering the fact that the U.S. intel community has been trying to remedy that by laying it all out there for him. Knowledge has been accumulated and summarily dismissed by Obama as distinctly unimportant. What matters to him is his cloistered worldview and fealty to ideology.

Later in the interview, Obama said:

Now the good news is that the new [Iraqi] prime minister, Abadi, who I met with this week, so far at least has sent all the right signals. And that's why it goes back to what I said before, Steve, we can't do this for them. We cannot do this for them because it's not just a military problem. It is a political problem. And if we make the mistake of simply sending U.S. troops back in, we can maintain peace for a while. But unless there is a change in how, not just Iraq, but countries like Syria and some of the other countries in the region, think about what political accommodation means. Think about what tolerance means.

One hopes the president isn't holding his breath. Obama returns to this trope time and again: it's a political solution that's needed, not a military solution. But security, as always, must precede any political solution. And that doesn't come about by telling the warring parties to "Think about what tolerance means."

Here, for example, is the lede of the *New York Times* [story](#) on a truly momentous occasion out of Afghanistan: "Ashraf Ghani, the former World Bank technocrat and prominent intellectual, on Monday became the first modern leader of Afghanistan to take office in a peaceful transfer of power."

It was far from inevitable. The election Ghani won produced a bitter accusation of fraud and a threat to plunge the country into what would essentially be a new civil war. What made the difference? As our Max Boot has written, the crucial distinction between Afghanistan and other such conflicts in which the U.S. played a role is the fact that when John Kerry flew in to broker a solution to the crisis, there were tens of thousands of American troops in the country. "That," Max [wrote](#), "gives any American diplomat a lot of leverage should he choose to use it."

President Obama doesn't like to face up to the fact that his obsession with getting out of Iraq played a role in undermining the very "political solution" he hoped for. Now ISIS is collapsing borders and beheading Westerners, and they surely can't be expected to "Think about what tolerance means." The president made policy based on what he wanted to be true, in all likelihood knowing full well it wasn't. He continues to be the anti-Truman, passing blame around when he deserves the lion's share of it.

National Review

[Al Sharpton Empowered](#)

Eric Holder's legacy: Enabling Sharpton's "I have a scheme" civil-rights agenda

by John Fund & Hans von Spakovsky

As Eric Holder prepares to leave as attorney general, there is a fierce debate over his six-year tenure. Many conservative senators who voted to confirm him in 2009 now regret it. Chuck Grassley of Iowa, the top Republican on the Judiciary Committee, now zings Holder's "lack of respect for Congress, the American taxpayer, and the laws on the books." Even some of his supporters agree he's been confrontational and polarizing. Juan Williams of Fox News [rails against](#) anti-Holder "scandal mongers" but then admits "the Justice Department has devolved into the heart of Washington darkness, the absolute pit of modern political polarization in my lifetime."

One reason for that polarization is that, thanks to direct support from Holder and President Obama himself, the Reverend Al Sharpton has now become the nation's leading African-American civil-rights leader. Last month, *Politico* proclaimed Sharpton "the national black leader Obama leans on most."

"There's a trust factor with The Rev from the Oval Office on down," a White House official told *Politico*. The White House had early on concluded it didn't have much use for Jesse Jackson, a former top Obama adviser told *Politico's* Glenn Thrush: "We needed to have someone to deal with in the African-American community, and Sharpton was the next best thing, so, yeah, we sort of helped build him up." Egad, the equivalent of unleashing Typhoid Mary in a kitchen.

Today, Sharpton is at the center of presidential announcements and frequently texts or e-mails with Holder and top Justice officials. He vacationed this year at the Martha's Vineyard condo of uber-presidential adviser Valerie Jarrett, just up the road from where Obama himself was staying. Last month, he attended the funeral of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo., with the White House's blessing. "Michael Brown's blood is crying for justice," Sharpton told attendees. "Those police that are wrong need to be dealt with."

Even Jackson, a sometime rival of Sharpton's, is in awe: "He's the man who's the liaison to the White House; he's the one who's talking to the Justice Department." Sharpton himself responded to Holder's resignation announcement by crowing he is "engaged in immediate conversations with the White House on deliberations over a successor."

Eric Holder was instrumental in papering over Sharpton's fiery record of polarization and racial incitement. In 2012, he opened Sharpton's National Action Network convention in New York by praising him "for your partnership, your friendship, and your tireless efforts to speak out for the voiceless, to stand up for the powerless, and to shine a light on the problems we must solve, and the promises we must fulfill."

Holder lavished his praise on Sharpton at the same time "The Rev" was leading rallies in Florida against George Zimmerman, the shooter in the Trayvon Martin case. Sharpton called for civil disobedience and an "occupation" of Sanford if an arrest wasn't made. After Zimmerman's acquittal, Sharpton called the verdict "an atrocity."

Far from becoming the "refined agitator" his apologists now claim him to be, the 59-year-old Sharpton is merely an older rabble-rouser using slightly new tricks. At heart, he hasn't changed. Al Sharpton has never apologized to Steven Pagones, the assistant district attorney he falsely accused of raping Tawana Brawley, a black teenager, in 1987. The "dastardly deed" Sharpton accused Pagones of was found by a grand jury to be a complete fabrication. In 1998, Sharpton was found liable for seven defamatory statements he'd made against Pagones and ordered to pay \$66,000.

Earlier in the 1990s, Sharpton had become famous exacerbating racial tensions in New York's Crown Heights neighborhood. Speaking at the funeral of a boy who had been run over by a Hasidic-Jewish driver, Sharpton railed against Jewish "diamond merchants" who did business with apartheid South Africa. Four days of subsequent rioting by mostly black Crown Heights residents ended with the murder of Yankel Rosenbaum, a visiting Jewish student from Australia.

Sharpton didn't learn from that incident. In 1995, he denounced the owners of Freddy's Fashion Mart in Harlem as "bloodsuckers" and "white interlopers" over a rent dispute the business had with tenants. A short time later, a man entered Freddy's and told all the black people present to leave. Once they did, the man firebombed the building, killing seven people — including a black security

guard. Sharpton insisted that he bore no responsibility for the incident, saying it was only a tenant/landlord dispute that had escalated out of control.

Last April, after reviewing his entire career, both past and present, Michael Goodwin, a *New York Post* columnist who has praised Sharpton at times, ruefully concluded: “For the majority, he remains a pariah, an object of mistrust and hostility. He hasn’t been forgiven for the past, but neither has he sought forgiveness.”

Sharpton certainly still seeks the limelight wherever it happens to shine. Take Louisiana, where Sharpton was quickly on the ground in 2007, leading 15,000 protesters in shutting down the town of Jena.

Nooses had been hung at the local Jena high school after an argument between black and white students. Weeks later, six black teens were arrested for their role in the beating of a white classmate named Justin Barker, who ended up in the emergency room. Sharpton demanded the “Jena Six” be freed.

In the end, the Jena Six didn’t turn out to be the story of oppression Sharpton had trumpeted. Mychal Bell, who was 16 at the time, was the only one of the Jena Six to be tried. He ultimately pleaded guilty to a second-degree battery charge and received an 18-month sentence. The other five pleaded no contest to simple battery, accepting a plea deal that gave them seven days’ probation, a \$500 fine, and court costs. A lawsuit against the Jena Six was settled with the defendants paying their victim, Barker, an undisclosed sum of money. In subsequent years, three of the Jena Six have been arrested on charges ranging from causing bodily injury to simple battery.

As visible as Al Sharpton was at Jena, he was nowhere to be seen in Louisiana in 2013, when the Obama Justice Department sued the state to stop it from distributing scholarships to kids seeking to escape failing schools. Despite Sharpton’s professed support for charter programs that allow students to attend non-traditional public schools, he was silent on Justice’s outrageous lawsuit.

State education superintendent John White wasn’t; he noted that the program had been declared constitutional by Louisiana’s supreme court and that any participating schools were banned from getting any of the scholarship vouchers if they practiced segregation or discrimination.

A survey last year by the Louisiana Federation for Children and the Black Alliance for Educational Options found that nearly 93 percent of parents were happy with their child’s scholarship school. But Sharpton was deaf to pleas that he intercede with the Obama administration to stop echoing George Wallace’s infamous 1963 “standing in the schoolhouse door” defiance — but this time preventing kids from *leaving* failing schools rather than entering those they were legally entitled to attend.

Many principled liberals are privately appalled that President Obama and Eric Holder have exalted the status of Al Sharpton, and they fear that any new attorney general will also be in thrall to him. Some have even gone public. Liberal journalist Margaret Carlson of *Bloomberg News* wrote last year: “We’ve gone from Martin Luther King to the Reverend Al Sharpton, and . . . it’s very dispiriting.”

Indeed, in King’s famous 1963 speech at the Washington Mall, he told of his “dream” that his four children would “one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.”

That dream remains as noble as ever, but it won't be advanced by the Reverend Sharpton and his "I have a scheme" method of activism. One of the saddest legacies of the Obama-Holder years will be that while they claimed MLK's mantle as their own, they left the country more racially polarized than before and cynically worked overtime to give credibility to the Al Sharptons of the world.

National Review

'We Only Whisper It'

Justice Ginsburg sings another verse of "Kill the Poor."

by Kevin D. Williamson

Ruth Bader Ginsburg, having decided for some inexplicable reason to do a long interview with a fashion magazine (maybe it is her celebrated collection of lace collars), reaffirmed the most important things we know about her: her partisanship, her elevation of politics over law, and her desire to see as many poor children killed as is feasibly possible.

Speaking about such modest restrictions on abortion as have been enacted over the past several years, Justice Ginsburg lamented that "the impact of all these restrictions is on poor women." Then she added: "It makes no sense as a national policy to promote birth only among poor people."

This is not her first time weighing in on the question of what by any intellectually honest standard must be described as eugenics. In an earlier interview, she described the *Roe v. Wade* decision as being intended to control population growth, "particularly growth in populations that we don't want to have too many of." She was correct in her assessment of *Roe*; the co-counsel in that case, Ron Weddington, would later advise President Bill Clinton: "You can start immediately to eliminate the barely educated, unhealthy, and poor segment of our country," by making abortifacients cheap and universally available. "It's what we all know is true, but we only whisper it."

In 1980, the punk band the Dead Kennedys released a song called "Kill the Poor." In it, singer Jello Biafra considers the many benefits to be had from the policy he is singing about: the elimination of "unsightly slums," the lowering of welfare taxes, reduction of overcrowding, reduction in crime, etc. "The sun beams down on a brand new day," he declares, "Jane Fonda on the screen today convinced the liberals it's okay." To be sure, Mr. Biafra wasn't singing about abortion; his tongue-in-cheek proposal was for the relatively antiseptic measure of striking poor neighborhoods and housing projects with neutron bombs, eliminating the populations but preserving property values. A ghastly and satirical proposal, to be sure, but not really so different from the case that Justice Ginsburg and others of her ilk make for eliminating those "populations that we don't want to have too many of."

"We only whisper it."

The economist Steven Levitt, for example, has argued that abortion helped to bring down crime rates; that probably isn't true, but it has not stopped abortion enthusiasts from incorporating crime-reduction into their case for killing the poor. Abortion as a tool of population control remains very much in vogue, particularly with international organizations: "To avoid a world with deteriorating social, economic, and political stability, with the concomitant loss of personal and national security, we must ensure that safe abortion is made available," writes the American population-control activist and academic Steven Mumford, who also advocates mass sterilizations.

There are two ways to account for humans beings: as assets, or as liabilities. For those who see the world the way Justice Ginsburg does — which is also the way Barack Obama does, along with most of his party — human beings are a liability. That is why they fundamentally misunderstand challenges such as employment; if you see people as a liability, then you see labor in terms of “creating jobs,” i.e. neutralizing that liability with a check every two weeks. It does not matter whether that labor produces anything valuable; if the liability is being met with a sufficient paycheck, problem solved. It should go without saying that Barack Obama et al. do not see themselves as liabilities. They see themselves as assets, which is how left-wing activists and Democratic functionaries justify their own enormous paychecks.

And they don't see their own children as liabilities, either — just *your* kids, loser.

The alternative is to view human beings as having inherent value. In economics, that means thinking of every worker as having something potentially valuable to contribute. In broader terms, that means thinking of every person as a full member of the human family, no matter if they are healthy or sick, running marathons or profoundly disabled, Bill Gates rich or Bangladesh poor.

“Kill the Poor” was a satire, not a political platform. And it sure as hell wasn't guidance for the Supreme Court, which would be much improved by the absence of Ruth Bader Ginsburg.





