

September 4, 2014

The president is pretty laid back when dealing with enemies like Putin, ISIS, and Hamas. But he's "enraged" with our ally Israel. Bret Stephens notes the disconnect. *Barack Obama "has become 'enraged' at the Israeli government, both for its actions and for its treatment of his chief diplomat, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry. " So reports the Jerusalem Post, based on the testimony of Martin Indyk, until recently a special Middle East envoy for the president. The war in Gaza, Mr. Indyk adds, has had "a very negative impact" on Jerusalem's relations with Washington.*

Think about this. Enraged. Not "alarmed" or "concerned" or "irritated" or even "angered." Anger is a feeling. Rage is a frenzy. Anger passes. Rage feeds on itself. Anger is specific. Rage is obsessional, neurotic.

And Mr. Obama—No Drama Obama, the president who prides himself on his cool, a man whose emotional detachment is said to explain his intellectual strength—is enraged. With Israel. Which has just been hit by several thousand unguided rockets and 30-odd terror tunnels, a 50-day war, the forced closure of its one major airport, accusations of "genocide" by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, anti-Semitic protests throughout Europe, general condemnation across the world. This is the country that is the object of the president's rage.

Think about this some more. In the summer in which Mr. Obama became "enraged" with Israel, Islamic State terrorists seized Mosul and massacred Shiite soldiers in open pits, Russian separatists shot down a civilian jetliner, Hamas executed 18 "collaborators" in broad daylight, Bashar Assad's forces in Syria came close to encircling Aleppo with the aim of starving the city into submission, a brave American journalist had his throat slit on YouTube by a British jihadist, Russian troops openly invaded Ukraine, and Chinese jets harassed U.S. surveillance planes over international waters.

Mr. Obama or his administration responded to these events with varying degrees of concern, censure and indignation. But rage? ...

One of our current problems is we have a president who is truly ignorant of history.

Victor Davis Hanson is our guide.

... What explains Obama's confusion?

A lack of knowledge of basic history explains a lot. Obama or his speechwriters have often seemed confused about the liberation of Auschwitz, "Polish death camps," the political history of Texas, or the linguistic relationship between Austria and Germany. Obama reassured us during the Bowe Bergdahl affair that George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Franklin Roosevelt all similarly got American prisoners back when their wars ended — except that none of them were in office when the Revolutionary War, Civil War, or World War II officially ended.

Contrary to Obama's assertion, President Rutherford B. Hayes never dismissed the potential of the telephone. Obama once praised the city of Cordoba as part of a proud Islamic tradition of tolerance during the brutal Spanish Inquisition — forgetting that by the beginning of the Inquisition an almost exclusively Christian Cordoba had few Muslims left.

A Pollyannaish belief in historical predetermination seems to substitute for action. If Obama believes that evil should be absent in the 21st century, or that the arc of the moral universe must always bend toward justice, or that being on the wrong side of history has consequences, then he may think inanimate forces can take care of things as we need merely watch.

In truth, history is messier. Unfortunately, only force will stop seventh-century monsters like the Islamic State from killing thousands more innocents. Obama may think that reminding Putin that he is now in the 21st century will so embarrass the dictator that he will back off from Ukraine. But the brutish Putin may think that not being labeled a 21st-century civilized sophisticate is a compliment.

In 1935, French foreign minister Pierre Laval warned Joseph Stalin that the Pope would admonish him to go easy on Catholics — as if such moral lectures worked in the supposedly civilized 20th century. Stalin quickly disabused Laval of that naiveté. “The Pope?” Stalin asked, “How many divisions has he got?” ...

Ron Fournier gets a turn too.

... Instead of clarity, we get condescending lectures, like the one Obama gave rich supporters about a messy world and social media.

Rather than decisiveness, the White House stalls with defensive spin, such as this gem from senior adviser Dan Pfeiffer: “There’s no timetable for solving these problems that’s going to meet the cable-news cycle.” As if the enemy is CNN, and not ISIS, which has proven to be more nimble and quick than Obama.

The White House public relations staff must think Americans are pretty dumb. How else do you explain the way chief spokeswoman Jennifer Palmieri defended Obama for playing golf immediately after an address about the slaughter of journalist James Foley? “His concern for the Foleys and Jim,” Palmieri said, “was evident to all who saw and heard his statement.” Yes, just as evident as what else the world saw that day: the president’s golf cart, his golf clothes, and his wide, sporty smile.

The racially charged protests in Ferguson brought more second-guessing of Obama, as conservative and liberal partisans objected to his balanced approach. I found his tone [refreshing](#) in describing the conflict between a mostly African-American community and a majority-white police department, but Obama seems less clear-eyed about the international stage.

He tries to manage the world as he hopes it will be, rather than lead the world as it is. Yes, foreign policy is hard. These issues are both historic and existential. The American public is fickle. Congress is all but useless. And our allies in Europe are loathe to lead—or even to pay a fair price for fighting threats closer to their borders than our own.

But that’s why only one person gets to be president of the United States, and, presumably, that’s why Obama asked twice to be elected. He wanted the job. He knew its challenges (including the existence of social media). He thought he could lead. When does he get started?

Ron Fournier used to be a certified media liberal, but he is no more. But, the NY Times' Frank Bruni is still a card carrier. What does he think of his hero?
There are things that you think and things that you say.

There's what you reckon with privately and what you utter publicly.

There are discussions suitable for a lecture hall and those that befit the bully pulpit.

These sets overlap but aren't the same. Has President Obama lost sight of that?

It's a question fairly asked after his statement last week that "we don't have a strategy yet" for dealing with Islamic extremists in Syria. Not having a strategy, at least a fixed, definitive one, is understandable. The options aren't great, the answers aren't easy and the stakes are enormous.

But announcing as much? It's hard to see any percentage in that. It gives no comfort to Americans. It puts no fear in our enemies.

Just as curious was what Obama followed that up with.

Speaking at a fund-raiser on Friday, he told donors, "If you watch the nightly news, it feels like the world is falling apart." He had that much right.

But it wasn't the whole of his message. In a statement of the obvious, he also said, "The world has always been messy." And he coupled that with a needless comparison, advising Americans to bear in mind that the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, the rapacity of Putin, the bedlam in Libya and the rest of it were "not something that is comparable to the challenges we faced during the Cold War." ...

Michael Barone posts on the president who is uninterested in other people.

Some time ago I contrasted the reaction a conservative would get if he were in the same room with the two most consequential politicians of the 1990s, Bill Clinton and Rudy Giuliani.

If you were in a room with Bill Clinton, he would discover the one issue out of 100 on which you agreed; he would probe you with questions, comments, suggestions; and he would tell you that you enabled him to understand it far better than he ever had before.

If you were in a room with Rudy Giuliani, he would discover the one issue out of 100 on which you disagreed; he would ask pointed questions and pepper you with objections; he would tell you that you are wrong on the facts and wrong on the law, and that you needed to admit you were utterly mistaken.

The difference is partly a matter of personality and temperament, and of regional style: Southern affability, New York prickliness. ...

... The ability to read other people comes more easily if you're interested in others, curious to learn what makes them tick. It comes harder or not at all if you're transfixed with your image of yourself.

Which seems to be the case with Barack Obama. Not only is he not much interested in the details of public policy, as Jay Cost argues persuasively in a recent article for the *Weekly Standard*. He is also, as even his admirers concede, not much inclined to schmooze with other politicians, even his fellow Democrats. ...

... Obama critics have pointed out his fondness for the first person singular. He said "I," "me," or "my" 63 times in his 1,631-word eulogy for Hawaii Sen. Daniel Inouye. He spoke twice as long about his own family experiences as the heroism for which Inouye was awarded the Medal of Honor.

Bill Clinton and Rudy Giuliani succeeded in large part because they were curious about other people different from themselves. Barack Obama prefers to look in the mirror.

Another liberal, Dana Milbank, is unnerved by the president's happy talk. Obama has been giving Americans a pep talk, essentially counseling them not to let international turmoil get in the way of the domestic economic recovery. "The world has always been messy," he said Friday. "In part, we're just noticing now because of social media and our capacity to see in intimate detail the hardships that people are going through."

So we wouldn't have fussed over Russia's invasion of Ukraine if not for Facebook? Or worried about terrorists taking over much of Syria and Iraq if not for Twitter? This explanation, following Obama's indiscrete admission Thursday that "we don't have a strategy yet" for military action against ISIS, adds to the impression that Obama is disengaged.

In short, Americans would worry less if Obama worried more.

A poll released last week by the nonpartisan Pew Research Center found that 54 percent of the public thinks Obama is "not tough enough" in foreign policy. Americans are not necessarily asking for more military action — Pew's polls also have found a record number of Americans saying the United States should mind its own business — but they seem to be craving clarity. As National Journal's Ron Fournier put it: "While people don't want their president to be hawkish, they hate to see him weakish."

Richard Fernandez posts in the Belmont Club about the urgency in putting out fires. ... One of the most interesting things about the Battle of Midway in 1942 was that it was just as much lost by the Japanese firemen as it was won by USN aviators. The most powerful ship in the Japanese fleet was the Akagi. It was hit by only one bomb, a 1,000 pounder dropped by Lt. Richard Best. No one on the bridge at first believed that a single hit could pose a serious danger to the huge ship. The fire it started just under the smashed deck elevator was for some minutes unobserved — until the gasoline which had been sloshing around the hanger from punctured gas tanks reached it. And then a deadly chain initiated. The fire set off one armed aircraft after

the other, like a string of Chinese firecrackers. All of a sudden the blaze was out of control. The fiery fingers of the conflagration crept ever downward to the magazines and gasoline fuel tanks. By dawn the next day the Akagi was nothing but a lump of slag and scuttled by the escorting destroyers.

The main reasons for the Akagi's loss were later ascribed to the early destruction of its fire isolation curtains and the absence of a working foam suppression system. They didn't smother the blaze when they had the chance. Then they ran out of time. And then they ran out of ship. When facing a fire, the golden rule is hit it as hard as you can while it is small. Once you start playing the "fierce minimalist" with fire, it is apt to get away from you.

During the worst part of the fire season in southern California, strong Santa Ana winds will blow carpets of burning embers across eight-lane freeways. During the 1988 fires in Yellowstone National Park, hot embers managed to cross the Lewis Canyon, a natural canyon up to a mile wide and 600 feet (180 m) deep. In Australia, firebreaks are less effective against eucalyptus forest fires, since intense fires in tinder-dry eucalyptus forest spread through flying embers, which can be carried by the winds to trigger new blazes several kilometres away.

This almost exactly describes the problem the president finds himself in. Every blaze we now see around us appeared to be only a humble ember until recently. Only two years ago Obama was ridiculing Romney for thinking Russia would be a problem. Only this year he was describing ISIS as a junior varsity team. Today the Ukraine is being invaded. Islamists are swimming in the U.S. Embassy pool in Libya. Just yesterday ISIS posted video of a second beheaded American journalist on YouTube. And those thousands of "American", "British" and "Australian" jihadis drifting back — those are your sparks right there.

What happened? Somehow yesterday's gentle campfires are now raging conflagrations. It would seem that of the two presidents, Franklin Roosevelt may have had the better understanding of fire. The president may think he's in control. But maybe he's not. The important thing is for the president's supporters to stop kidding themselves. They've wasted enough time already without getting lost in catchphrases like "fierce minimalist."

We like to close the week with late night humor from Andy Malcolm. But, he has not posted yet so for humor, Mr. Malcolm quotes the president and then follows with his thoughts in bold type.

*Obama on Russia's invasion of Ukraine: "We are not taking military action to solve the Ukrainian problem." **Did anyone in Negotiation 101 ever mention that leaders rarely get what they want by announcing out of the gate what they will not do?***

"President Putin and Russia have repeatedly passed by potential off-ramps to resolve this diplomatically. And so in our consultations with our European allies and partners, my expectation is that we will take additional (sanction) steps primarily because we have not seen any meaningful action on the part of Russia to actually try to resolve this in diplomatic fashion.

*"And I think that the sanctions that we've already applied have been effective." **How exactly have they been effective if you've seen no 'meaningful action on the part of Russia'?***

And what evidence do you have of Russian suffering from your sanctions? "Are there long lines of people trying to emigrate into Russia?"

*We saved for last a quote from Vice President Joe Biden's speech to Detroit union members on Monday: "So, folks, it's time to take back America!" **Wait! What? From whom? You and Barack have been in charge these past 2,052 days.***

WSJ

Obama's Curious Rage

Calm when it comes to Putin, ISIS and Hamas, but furious with Israel.

by Bret Stephens

Barack Obama "has become 'enraged' at the Israeli government, both for its actions and for its treatment of his chief diplomat, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry." So reports the Jerusalem Post, based on the testimony of Martin Indyk, until recently a special Middle East envoy for the president. The war in Gaza, Mr. Indyk adds, has had "a very negative impact" on Jerusalem's relations with Washington.

Think about this. *Enraged*. Not "alarmed" or "concerned" or "irritated" or even "angered." Anger is a feeling. Rage is a frenzy. Anger passes. Rage feeds on itself. Anger is specific. Rage is obsessional, neurotic.

And Mr. Obama—No Drama Obama, the president who prides himself on his cool, a man whose emotional detachment is said to explain his intellectual strength—is enraged. With Israel. Which has just been hit by several thousand unguided rockets and 30-odd terror tunnels, a 50-day war, the forced closure of its one major airport, accusations of "genocide" by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, anti-Semitic protests throughout Europe, general condemnation across the world. *This* is the country that is the object of the president's rage.

Think about this some more. In the summer in which Mr. Obama became "enraged" with Israel, Islamic State terrorists seized Mosul and massacred Shiite soldiers in open pits, Russian separatists shot down a civilian jetliner, Hamas executed 18 "collaborators" in broad daylight, Bashar Assad's forces in Syria came close to encircling Aleppo with the aim of starving the city into submission, a brave American journalist had his throat slit on YouTube by a British jihadist, Russian troops openly invaded Ukraine, and Chinese jets harassed U.S. surveillance planes over international waters.

Mr. Obama or his administration responded to these events with varying degrees of concern, censure and indignation. But rage?

Here, for instance, is the president in early August, talking to the New York Times's Tom Friedman about Russia and Ukraine:

"Finding an off-ramp for [[Vladimir Putin](#)] becomes more challenging. Having said that I think it is still possible for us, because of the effective organization that we have done with the Europeans around Ukraine, and the genuine bite that the sanctions have had on the Russian economy, for us to arrive at a fair accommodation in which Ukrainian sovereignty and independence is still recognized but there is also recognition that Ukraine does have historic ties to Russia, the majority of their trade goes to Russia, huge portions of the population are Russian speaking, and so they are not going to be severed from Russia. And if we do that a deal should be possible."

This isn't even condemnation. It's an apology. For Mr. Putin. Benjamin Netanyahu should be so lucky.

Now think about what, specifically, has enraged the president about Israel's behavior. "Its actions and its treatment of his chief diplomat."

Actions? Hamas began firing rockets at Israel in June, thereby breaking the cease-fire it had agreed to at the end of the last war, in November 2012. The latest war began in earnest on July 7 when Hamas fired some 80 rockets at Israel. "No country can accept rocket fire aimed at civilians," White House spokesman Josh Earnest said the next day, "and we support Israel's right to defend itself against these vicious attacks."

On July 15 Israel accepted the terms of a cease-fire crafted by Egypt. Hamas violated it by firing 50 rockets at Israel. On July 17 Israel accepted a five-hour humanitarian cease-fire. Hamas violated it again. On July 20 Israel allowed a two-hour medical window in the neighborhood of Shujaiyeh. Hamas violated it. On July 26 Hamas announced a daylong cease-fire. It then broke its own cease-fire. On July 28 Israel agreed to a cease-fire for the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Fitr. The rocket attacks continued. On Aug. 1 Israel accepted a 72-hour cease-fire proposed by the U.S. Hamas violated it within 90 minutes. On Aug. 5 Israel agreed to Egypt's terms for another three-day cease-fire. Hamas violated it several hours before it was set to expire, after Israel announced it would agree to an extension.

If Hamas had honored any of these cease-fires it could have saved Palestinian lives. It didn't. Mr. Obama is enraged—but not with Hamas.

As for Israel's supposed ill-treatment of Mr. Kerry, the president should read Ben Birnbaum's and Amir Tibon's [account](#) of his secretary's Mideast misadventures in the July 20 issue of the New Republic. It's a portrait of a diplomat with the skills and style, but not the success, of Inspector Clouseau. Mr. Obama might also read Haaretz columnist Ari Shavit's assessment of Mr. Kerry's diplomacy: "The Obama administration," he wrote in July, "proved once again that it is the best friend of its enemies, and the biggest enemy of its friends."

Both Haaretz and the New Republic are left-wing publications, sympathetic to Mr. Obama's intentions, if not his methods.

Still, the president is enraged. At Israel. What a guy.

National Review

Obama's Hazy Sense of History

For the president, belief in historical predetermination substitutes for action.

by Victor Davis Hanson

President Obama doesn't know much about history.

In his therapeutic 2009 Cairo speech, Obama outlined all sorts of Islamic intellectual and technological pedigrees, several of which were undeserved. He exaggerated Muslim contributions to printing and medicine, for example, and was flat-out wrong about the catalysts for the European Renaissance and Enlightenment.

He also believes history follows some predetermined course, as if things always get better on their own. Obama often praises those he pronounces to be on the "right side of history." He also chastises others for being on the "wrong side of history" — as if evil is vanished and the good thrives on autopilot.

When in 2009 millions of Iranians took to the streets to protest the thuggish theocracy, they wanted immediate U.S. support. Instead, Obama belatedly offered them banalities suggesting that in the end, they would end up "on the right side of history." Iranian reformers may indeed end up there, but it will not be because of some righteous inanimate force of history, or the prognostications of Barack Obama.

Obama often parrots Martin Luther King Jr.'s phrase about the arc of the moral universe bending toward justice. But King used that metaphor as an incentive to act, not as reassurance that matters will follow an inevitably positive course.

Another of Obama's historical refrains is his frequent sermon about behavior that doesn't belong in the 21st century. At various times he has lectured that the barbarous aggression of Vladimir Putin or the Islamic State has no place in our century and will "ultimately fail" — as if we are all now sophisticates of an age that has at last transcended retrograde brutality and savagery.

In Obama's hazy sense of the end of history, things always must get better in the manner that updated models of iPhones and iPads are glitzier than the last. In fact, history is morally cyclical. Even technological progress is ethically neutral. It is a way either to bring more good things to more people or to facilitate evil all that much more quickly and effectively.

In the viciously modern 20th century — when more lives may have been lost to war than in all prior centuries combined — some 6 million Jews were put to death through high technology in a way well beyond the savagery of Attila the Hun or Tamerlane. Beheading in the Islamic world is as common in the 21st century as it was in the eighth century — and as it will probably be in the 22nd. The carnage of the Somme and Dresden trumped anything that the Greeks, Romans, Franks, Turks, or Venetians could have imagined.

What explains Obama's confusion?

A lack of knowledge of basic history explains a lot. Obama or his speechwriters have often seemed confused about the liberation of Auschwitz, "Polish death camps," the political history of Texas, or the linguistic relationship between Austria and Germany. Obama reassured us during the Bowe Bergdahl affair that George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Franklin Roosevelt all

similarly got American prisoners back when their wars ended — except that none of them were in office when the Revolutionary War, Civil War, or World War II officially ended.

Contrary to Obama's assertion, President Rutherford B. Hayes never dismissed the potential of the telephone. Obama once praised the city of Cordoba as part of a proud Islamic tradition of tolerance during the brutal Spanish Inquisition — forgetting that by the beginning of the Inquisition an almost exclusively Christian Cordoba had few Muslims left.

A Pollyannaish belief in historical predetermination seems to substitute for action. If Obama believes that evil should be absent in the 21st century, or that the arc of the moral universe must always bend toward justice, or that being on the wrong side of history has consequences, then he may think inanimate forces can take care of things as we need merely watch.

In truth, history is messier. Unfortunately, only force will stop seventh-century monsters like the Islamic State from killing thousands more innocents. Obama may think that reminding Putin that he is now in the 21st century will so embarrass the dictator that he will back off from Ukraine. But the brutish Putin may think that not being labeled a 21st-century civilized sophisticate is a compliment.

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There is little evidence that human nature has changed over the centuries, despite massive government efforts to make us think and act nicer. What drives Putin, Boko Haram, or ISIS are the same age-old passions, fears, and sense of honor that over the centuries also moved Genghis Khan, the Sudanese Mahdists, and the Barbary pirates.

Obama's naive belief in predetermined history — especially when his facts are often wrong — is a poor substitute for concrete moral action.

National Journal

[The Summer of Obama's Disconnect](#)

Hawkish or Weakish; Americans don't like either in a president.

by Ron Fournier

Wow. That was some summer. The Islamic State that President Obama dismissed as "JV" proved to be a virulent varsity—gobbling up gobs of the Middle East, beheading an American journalist, and threatening the United States. Russia invaded Ukraine. Ferguson burned. Obama shrugged.

"The truth of the matter is that the world has always been messy," the president told Democratic donors between meetings of his national security team and rounds of golf. "In part, we're just noticing now because of social media and our capacity to see in intimate detail the hardships that people are going through."

No, that's not it. The truth of the matter is that Americans have always noticed how messy the world can be. Somebody needs to tell Obama there was media before social media.

What's unique about our times is the nature of the threats—suicidal, homicidal, genocidal terrorists, well armed and organized, seeking the destruction of the United States. The other difference: the lack of Western leadership, starting with the president himself.

Obama's [acknowledgement](#) that "we don't have a strategy yet" in Syria could be forgiven if he hadn't help spawned the ISIS wave by publicly dithering on Syria; if he hadn't, less than a year ago, erroneously compared the terrorist state to a junior varsity club; and if he hadn't appeared incapable of leading anybody to a solution. His own team is divided, confused, perhaps broken.

Attorney General Eric Holder called ISIS "more frightening than anything I think I've seen as attorney general," and Secretary of State John Kerry vowed that the United States would confront the Islamic State "wherever it tries to spread its despicable hatred."

Their boss? Despite ordering airstrikes against ISIS targets, Obama doesn't seem to agree that Islamic extremists in Syria and Iraq pose an unprecedented threat to America. "Now, ISIL (the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) poses an immediate threat to the people of Iraq and to the people throughout the region," he said. "My priority at this point is to make sure that the gains of ISIL made in Iraq are rolled back."

Democrats had comforted themselves in polls showing that a majority of Americans want their country less involved in global affairs, particularly military conflicts. Belatedly, leading members of Obama's party are recognizing an inconvenient truth: While people don't want their president to be hawkish, they hate to see him weakish.

"I think I've learned one thing about this president, and that is: He's very cautious—maybe, in this instance, too cautious," Democratic Sen. Dianne Feinstein, who heads the Senate Intelligence Committee, [said Sunday](#)

On Ukraine, U.N. Ambassador Samantha Power accused the Russians of opening "a new front," and Democratic Sen. Robert Menendez, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, [described](#) Russia's actions as a "direct invasion."

Obama was unwilling to call an invasion an invasion. Contradicting Powers only hours after her remarks, the president said, "I consider the actions that we've seen in the last week a continuation of what's been taking place for months now it's not really a shift."

You could almost hear the eyes rolling in his Cabinet, not to mention in European capitals, where potential partners are gathering this week in a crisis-packed summit with Obama. In The Washington Post on Monday, veteran reporters [Karen DeYoung and Dan Balz wrote](#) that allies are "waiting to see whether Obama has the capacity to chart a clear, decisive course."

Americans are waiting, too. Instead of clarity, we get condescending lectures, like the one Obama gave rich supporters about a messy world and social media.

Rather than decisiveness, the White House stalls with defensive spin, such as this gem from senior adviser Dan Pfeiffer: "There's no timetable for solving these problems that's going to meet the cable-news cycle." As if the enemy is CNN, and not ISIS, which has proven to be more nimble and quick than Obama.

The White House public relations staff must think Americans are pretty dumb. How else do you explain the way chief spokeswoman Jennifer Palmieri defended Obama for playing golf immediately after an address about the slaughter of journalist James Foley? "His concern for the Foleys and Jim," Palmieri said, "was evident to all who saw and heard his statement." Yes, just as evident as what else the world saw that day: the president's golf cart, his golf clothes, and his wide, sporty smile.

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But that's why only one person gets to be president of the United States, and, presumably, that's why Obama asked twice to be elected. He wanted the job. He knew its challenges (including the existence of social media). He thought he could lead. When does he get started?

NY Times

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It's a question fairly asked after his statement last week that "we don't have a strategy yet" for dealing with Islamic extremists in Syria. Not having a strategy, at least a fixed, definitive one, is understandable. The options aren't great, the answers aren't easy and the stakes are enormous.

But *announcing* as much? It's hard to see any percentage in that. It gives no comfort to Americans. It puts no fear in our enemies.

Just as curious was what Obama followed that up with.

Speaking at a fund-raiser on Friday, [he told donors](#), "If you watch the nightly news, it feels like the world is falling apart." He had that much right.

But it wasn't the whole of his message. In a statement of the obvious, he also said, "The world has always been messy." And he coupled that with a needless comparison, advising Americans to bear in mind that the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, the rapacity of Putin, the bedlam in Libya and the rest of it were "not something that is comparable to the challenges we faced during the Cold War."

Set aside the question of how germane the example of the Cold War is. When the gut-twisting image stuck in your head is of a masked madman holding a crude knife to the neck of an American on his knees in the desert, when you're reading about [crucifixions in the 21st century](#), when you're hearing about [women sold by jihadists as sex slaves](#), and when British leaders have just raised the threat level in their country to "severe," the last thing that you want to be told is that it's par for the historical course, all a matter of perspective and not so cosmically dire.

Where's the reassurance — or the sense of urgency — in that?

And maybe the second-to-last thing that you want to be told is that technology and social media amplify peril in a new way and may be the reason you're feeling especially on edge. Obama said something along those lines, too. It's not the terror, folks. It's the tweets.

Is the president consoling us — or himself? It's as if he's taken his interior monologue and wired it to speakers in the town square. And it's rattling.

When he came along, many of us were fed up with misinformation and "Mission Accomplished" theatrics and bluster. America had paid a price for them in young lives.

And we were tired and leery of an oversimplified, Hollywood version of world affairs, of the Manichaeic lexicon of "evil empire" and "axis of evil." We longed for something less rash and more nuanced.

But there's plenty of territory between the bloated and bellicose rhetoric of then and what Obama is giving us now. He's adopted a strange language of self-effacement, with notes of defeatism, reminding us that "America, as the most powerful country on earth, still does not control everything"; that we must be content at times with singles and doubles in lieu of home runs; that not doing stupid stuff is its own accomplishment.

This is all true. It's in tune with our awareness of our limits. And it reflects a prudent disinclination to repeat past mistakes and overreach.

But that doesn't make it the right message for the world's lone superpower (whether we like it or not) to articulate and disseminate. That doesn't make it savvy, constructive P.R. And the low marks that Americans currently give the president, especially for foreign policy, suggest that it's not exactly what we were after.

In The Washington Post on Sunday, Karen DeYoung and Dan Balz [observed](#) that while Obama's no-strategy remark "may have had the virtue of candor," it in no way projected "an image of presidential resolve or decisiveness at a time of international turmoil."

And no matter what Obama ultimately elects to do, such an image is vital. But in its place are oratorical shrugs and an aura of hesitancy, even evasion, as he and John Kerry broadcast that

the United States shouldn't be expected to act on its own. Isn't that better whispered to our allies and negotiated behind closed doors?

Echoing Hillary Clinton to some degree, Senator Dianne Feinstein just [complained](#) that Obama was perhaps "too cautious."

Not in what he says, he's not. Not when he draws and then erases red lines. Not with his recent adjectives.

"Messy" is my kitchen at the end of a long weekend. What's happening in much of Syria and Iraq is monstrous.

Examiner

[The president who is uninterested in other people](#)

by Michael Barone

Some time ago I contrasted the reaction a conservative would get if he were in the same room with the two most consequential politicians of the 1990s, [Bill Clinton](#) and [Rudy Giuliani](#).

If you were in a room with Bill Clinton, he would discover the one issue out of 100 on which you agreed; he would probe you with questions, comments, suggestions; and he would tell you that you enabled him to understand it far better than he ever had before.

If you were in a room with Rudy Giuliani, he would discover the one issue out of 100 on which you disagreed; he would ask pointed questions and pepper you with objections; he would tell you that you are wrong on the facts and wrong on the law, and that you needed to admit you were utterly mistaken.

The difference is partly a matter of personality and temperament, and of regional style: Southern affability, New York prickliness.

But there's also an underlying similarity. Both Clinton and Giuliani are always curious about what others people think, determined to probe beneath the surface to understand what they really care about, sensitive to find areas of both agreement and disagreement.

They're good at reading people, an essential quality for an executive and especially for a president. Recent presidents have had that quality in varying degrees.

Clinton, as indicated, has an immense desire to win people over. Daniel Halper's bestselling *Clinton, Inc.*, shows how he went about winning the affection and respect of the Bush family.

The two Presidents George Bush, aware that presidents have the greatest leeway in foreign affairs, both devoted immense psychic energy in establishing relationships with foreign leaders.

[George W. Bush](#) admits in his memoir *Decision Points* that he initially misjudged [Vladimir Putin](#). But he established close personal rapport with leaders from wildly different backgrounds, from [British](#) Prime Minister Tony Blair to [Brazilian](#) President Lula da Silva.

As for George H. W. Bush, just about everyone now recognizes the brilliance of his diplomacy in response to the invasion of [Iraq](#) and the breakup of the [Soviet Union](#). That diplomacy depended on shrewd reading and handling of literally dozens of foreign leaders.

The seemingly aloof [Ronald Reagan](#) developed his capacity to understand negotiating partners, as his definitive biographer Lou Cannon made clear, when he was president of the Screen Actors Guild negotiating with studio bosses.

Reagan deployed that ability in establishing productive relations with allies such as British Prime Minister [Margaret Thatcher](#), with whom he was by no means always in agreement, and with adversaries like Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, whose character, strengths, and weaknesses he shrewdly assessed.

The ability to read other people comes more easily if you're interested in others, curious to learn what makes them tick. It comes harder or not at all if you're transfixed with your image of yourself.

Which seems to be the case with [Barack Obama](#). Not only is he not much interested in the details of public policy, as Jay Cost argues persuasively in a recent article for the *Weekly Standard*. He is also, as even his admirers concede, not much inclined to schmooze with other politicians, even his fellow Democrats.

That goes double for Republicans. House Speaker Rep. [John Boehner](#), R-Ohio, is one of the most transparent and least guileful politicians I've encountered. The late Sen. Edward Kennedy and liberal Rep. George Miller, D-Calif., had no difficulty reaching agreement with him on the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act.

But Obama has gotten nowhere with him. The president blew up the 2011 grand bargain negotiations by raising the ante late in the game; later budget agreements were left to Vice President [Joe Biden](#) and Senate Minority Leader [Mitch McConnell](#), R-Ky. Obama has taken to explaining Republican opposition as the result of "fever" or mental delusion.

Obama is also known to have frosty relations with most foreign leaders. He used to claim to be close to [Turkey's](#) Recep Tayyip Erdogan. That hasn't prevented Erdoğan from sidling up to the [Muslim Brotherhood](#) and exhibiting blatant anti-semitism.

Obama critics have pointed out his fondness for the first person singular. He said "I," "me," or "my" 63 times in his 1,631-word [eulogy](#) for Hawaii Sen. Daniel Inouye. He spoke twice as long about his own family experiences as the heroism for which Inouye was awarded the Medal of Honor.

Bill Clinton and Rudy Giuliani succeeded in large part because they were curious about other people different from themselves. Barack Obama prefers to look in the mirror.

Washington Post

[President Obama's unnerving happy talk](#)

President Obama is not worried. And that is unnerving.

by Dana Milbank

British Prime Minister David Cameron presented to parliament on Monday the [alarming conclusions](#) of European leaders who had met in Brussels over the weekend: “The European Council believes the creation of an Islamic caliphate in Iraq and Syria and the Islamist extremism and export of terrorism on which it is based is a direct threat to every European country.”

[Cameron added](#): “To confront the threat of Islamist extremism, we need a tough, intelligent, patient and comprehensive approach to defeat the terrorist threat at its source. We must use all the resources at our disposal, our aid, our diplomacy and our military.”

But three days earlier — the day Britain raised its [terrorism threat level to “severe”](#) — Obama delivered a very different message when he spoke to donors at a fundraiser in New York’s Westchester County. “Yes, the Middle East is challenging, but the truth is it’s been challenging for quite a while,” [he said](#). “I promise you things are much less dangerous now than they were 20 years ago, 25 years ago or 30 years ago. This is not something that is comparable to the challenges we faced during the Cold War.”

Speaking to another group of contributors that same day in Newport, R.I., [the president said](#) that the post-9/11 security apparatus “makes us in the here and now pretty safe” and that the threat from ISIS “doesn’t immediately threaten the homeland.”

I hope Obama’s chillax message turns out to be correct, but the happy talk is not reassuring. It’s probably true that the threat of domestic radicalization is greater in Europe than in the United States (hence the British plan to confiscate some passports) but Obama’s sanguinity is jarring compared to the mood of NATO allies Obama is meeting in Europe this week.

Obama has been giving Americans a pep talk, essentially counseling them not to let international turmoil get in the way of the domestic economic recovery. “The world has always been messy,” he said Friday. “In part, we’re just noticing now because of social media and our capacity to see in intimate detail the hardships that people are going through.”

So we wouldn’t have fussed over Russia’s invasion of Ukraine if not for Facebook? Or worried about terrorists taking over much of Syria and Iraq if not for Twitter? This explanation, following Obama’s indiscrete admission Thursday that “we don’t have a strategy yet” for military action against ISIS, adds to the impression that Obama is disengaged.

In short, Americans would worry less if Obama worried more.

A poll released last week by the nonpartisan Pew Research Center found that [54 percent of the public thinks Obama is “not tough enough”](#) in foreign policy. Americans are not necessarily asking for more military action — Pew’s polls also have found a record number of Americans saying the United States should mind its own business — but they seem to be craving clarity. As [National Journal’s Ron Fournier put it](#): “While people don’t want their president to be hawkish, they hate to see him weakish.”

Obama's remarks to donors about the troubles in Ukraine and in the Middle East were in the context of explaining why the mood of Americans isn't improving as the economy recovers. He cited three factors: that the economic gains haven't reached everybody; that Washington is broken; and that "if you watch the nightly news, it feels like the world is falling apart."

He's right about the first two, and it's true that Americans are worried about international threats. But the solution is not to tell them to keep calm — it's to reassure Americans that he's got a plan.

The president's happy talk is contradicted even by fellow Democrats ("I've learned one thing about this president, and that is he's very cautious, maybe in this instance too cautious," Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman [Dianne Feinstein told NBC's Andrea Mitchell](#)) and by figures in his own administration ([Attorney General Eric Holder said](#) the reported work in Syria on undetectable explosives is "more frightening than anything I think I've seen as attorney general").

In his pep talk to the donors, Obama spoke optimistically about U.S. influence in the world. "The good news is that American leadership has never been more necessary," he said, "and there's really no competition out there for the ideas and the values that can create the sort of order that we need in this world."

Yes. And the necessity of American leadership – in Ukraine, Syria and elsewhere – is precisely why Obama needs to show more of it.

Pajamas Media - Belmont Club

Ring of Fire

by Richard Fernandez

Peter Beinart's widely quoted article in the *Atlantic*, "[Actually, Obama Does Have a Strategy in the Middle East.](#)" has the tagline "the president is neither a dove nor a hawk. He's a fierce minimalist." Nowhere in the article does Beinart explain the meaning of this cryptic catchphrase, except as an allusion to the president's exquisite judgment. It seems an article of faith that Obama will neither bathe the world in blood like his predecessor nor remain passive, as conservative critics accuse him of doing. He will avoid excess and get it just right, like the Three Bears; neither too hot nor too cold. A fierce minimalist.

Unfortunately Beinart avoids defining what is just enough. Where is the Pole Star in this murk? No answer is attempted except that Obama will point it out and not because Beinart can explain where it is. He ends on a note of touching faith: "Barack Obama didn't become president by tilting at windmills."

No, Obama became president because people like Beinart believed he would take them to a different place than where they now stand, with each hour bringing a new humiliation and crisis. Roger Simon [wrote on Twitter](#): "Not a single #liberal friend of mine wants to discuss politics now. They're humiliated by Obama." But they still trust him. When the president declared al-Qaeda decimated, the War on Terror over and said ISIS was nothing but a jayvee team, Obama was

telling the base what they wanted to hear. What they thought Obama had achieved. People like Beinart believed it. Too bad it wasn't true.

But they still trust him.

One of the implicit assumptions of "fierce minimalism" is that action fuels the flames. Obama argued as much at an [American Legion](#) speech. He said, "the answer is not to send in large scale military deployments that over stretch our military, and lead for us occupying countries for a long period of time and end up feeding extremism." An alternative point of view using almost an identical metaphor was articulated by Franklin Roosevelt. "Suppose my neighbor's home catches fire, and I have a length of garden hose four or five hundred feet away. If he can take my garden hose and connect it up with his hydrant, I may help him to put out his fire."

The difference in the two presidential fire examples is the element of urgency. Roosevelt was aware that the fireman's enemy is time and one of the points of the hose story, which everyone in that era understood, was the importance of dousing the fire while it was still small. Obama, by contrast, lacks the dimension of time. His approach implicitly assumes he has the leisure to add an ounce here and an ounce there to achieve a nuanced outcome. Roosevelt understood that a crisis was urgent. In the current case, Obama is busy calibrating, thinking and golfing like he had all the time in the world.

What happens when a fierce minimalist meets a fierce fire?

One of the most interesting things about the Battle of Midway in 1942 was that it was just as much lost by the Japanese firemen as it was won by USN aviators. The most powerful ship in the Japanese fleet was the *Akagi*. [It was hit by only one bomb](#), a 1,000 pounder dropped by Lt. Richard Best. No one on the bridge at first believed that a single hit could pose a serious danger to the huge ship. The fire it started just under the smashed deck elevator was for some minutes unobserved — until the gasoline which had been sloshing around the hanger from punctured gas tanks reached it. And then a deadly chain initiated. The fire set off one armed aircraft after the other, like a string of Chinese firecrackers. All of a sudden the blaze was out of control. The fiery fingers of the conflagration crept ever downward to the magazines and gasoline fuel tanks. By dawn the next day the *Akagi* was nothing but a lump of slag and scuttled by the escorting destroyers.

The main reasons for the *Akagi's* loss were later ascribed to the early destruction of its fire isolation curtains and the absence of a working foam suppression system. They didn't smother the blaze when they had the chance. Then they ran out of time. And then they ran out of ship. When facing a fire, the golden rule is hit it as hard as you can while it is small. Once you start playing the "fierce minimalist" with fire, it is [apt to get away](#) from you.

During the worst part of the fire season in southern California, strong Santa Ana winds will blow carpets of burning embers across eight-lane freeways. During the 1988 fires in Yellowstone National Park, hot embers managed to cross the Lewis Canyon, a natural canyon up to a mile wide and 600 feet (180 m) deep. In Australia, firebreaks are less effective against eucalyptus forest fires, since intense fires in tinder-dry eucalyptus forest spread through flying embers, which can be carried by the winds to trigger new blazes several kilometres away.

This almost exactly describes the problem the president finds himself in. Every blaze we now see around us appeared to be only a humble ember until recently. Only two years ago Obama was ridiculing Romney for thinking Russia would be a problem. Only this year he was describing

ISIS as a junior varsity team. Today the Ukraine is being invaded. Islamists are swimming in the U.S. Embassy pool in Libya. Just yesterday ISIS posted video of a second beheaded American journalist on YouTube. And those thousands of “American”, “British” and “Australian” jihadis drifting back — those are your sparks right there.

What happened? Somehow yesterday’s gentle campfires are now raging conflagrations. It would seem that of the two presidents, Franklin Roosevelt may have had the better understanding of fire. The president may think he’s in control. But maybe he’s not. The important thing is for the president’s supporters to stop kidding themselves. They’ve wasted enough time already without getting lost in catchphrases like “fierce minimalist.”

Investors Business Daily

In his own words, the surreal world Obama inhabits

by Andrew Malcolm



He likes to watch.

People seem to be reading into President Obama's positions on ISIS pretty much whatever they want to see: He's wise and deliberate. He's indecisive. He's so far-sighted that ordinary Americans may be incapable of grasping his intellect. He's late, as always, inept and clueless about dangerous issues of grave national concern.

As Americans see countrymen beheaded on graphic videos, Obama and his team consistently seek to minimize spreading foreign violence as regional "challenges."

Now, as videos show militant Islamists frolicking in the swimming pool of the abandoned U.S. Embassy in Tripoli, Obama is also amending what he says he has so often said about al Qaeda being "on the run" or "decimated."

And then there's the economy, which most Americans believe is still in recession, and Obama sees as coming along rather nicely.

So, we've pulled together recent quotes from him and his people to try clarifying what the poor guy really means (*with our comments in italic*):

In an opening [news conference statement](#), Aug. 28: "There are reasons to feel good about the direction we're headed."

To a [Democrat fundraiser in New York](#) Aug. 29: "The one thing that I can say is that because of the incredible resilience and strength of the American people, but also because we made some good decisions even though they were tough at the time, we are better off as a country than we were when I came into office..."

"A lot of people still feel anxious. And the question then is, why is it that if things have gotten better, why are people anxious?....The truth of the matter is that the world has always been messy. In part, we're just noticing now because of social media and our capacity to see in intimate detail the hardships that people are going through." *That darned Twitter. Didn't Bush invent that? Could it be, sir, you're as wrong about the recovered economy as you were about keeping our health insurance and doctor?*

On al Qaeda, Obama told [the American Legion](#) last week: "Now, as I've always made clear, the blows we've struck against al Qaeda's leadership don't mean the end to the terrorist threat." *Actually, Mr. President, by media count, between the terrorist Benghazi murders on 9/11/12 and that November's election, you mentioned al Qaeda was "on the path to defeat" or similar phrasing [almost three dozen times](#) and warned of al Qaeda's resilience not once.*



He likes to watch.

On this ISIS menace, which Obama calls ISIL to avoid mentioning **Syria**: "As Commander-in-Chief, I will always do what is necessary to protect the American people and defend against

evolving threats to our homeland...Now, ISIL poses an immediate threat to the people of Iraq and to people throughout the region.....

"But I don't want to put the cart before the horse. We don't have a strategy yet." *How is that possible since the Pentagon plans for everything and Obama's been warned about ISIS for a full year of intelligence briefings?*

Obama on Tuesday's video of the beheading of a second American journalist: Silence. Then, the familiar "Justice will be served" line.

Secy. of Defense [Chuck Hagel on ISIS](#): "They're beyond just a terrorist group. They marry ideology, a sophistication of strategic and tactical military prowess. They are tremendously well-funded. Oh, this is beyond anything that we've seen...The defeat of ISIL is not only going to come at the hands of air strikes." *(Scroll down for a fuller video version of Hagel's remarks.)*

[Gen. Martin Dempsey](#), chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: ISIL "is an organization that has an apocalyptic, end-of-days strategic vision and which will eventually have to be defeated. To your question, can they be defeated without addressing that part of their organization which resides in Syria? The answer is no." *Have either of you guys mentioned this to Obama recently?*

Obama on Russia's invasion of Ukraine: "We are not taking military action to solve the Ukrainian problem." *Did anyone in Negotiation 101 ever mention that leaders rarely get what they want by announcing out of the gate what they will not do?*

"President Putin and Russia have repeatedly passed by potential off-ramps to resolve this diplomatically. And so in our consultations with our European allies and partners, my expectation is that we will take additional (sanction) steps primarily because we have not seen any meaningful action on the part of Russia to actually try to resolve this in diplomatic fashion.

"And I think that the sanctions that we've already applied have been effective." *How exactly have they been effective if you've seen no 'meaningful action on the part of Russia'?*

And what evidence do you have of Russian suffering from your sanctions? "Are there long lines of people trying to emigrate into Russia?"

We saved for last a quote from Vice President Joe Biden's speech to Detroit union members on Monday: "So, folks, it's time to take back America!" *Wait! What? From whom? You and Barack have been in charge these past 2,052 days.*

Power Line

Who Is the JayVee Team?

by John Hinderaker

You can put a spiffy uniform on a lousy player, and you can swear in a hopeless incompetent as president, but in either case, has a star been born? [Michael Ramirez](#) looks at the “jayvee” question from our enemies’ point of view. Suddenly, Obama’s analogy, which was dumb as applied to ISIS, makes sense.



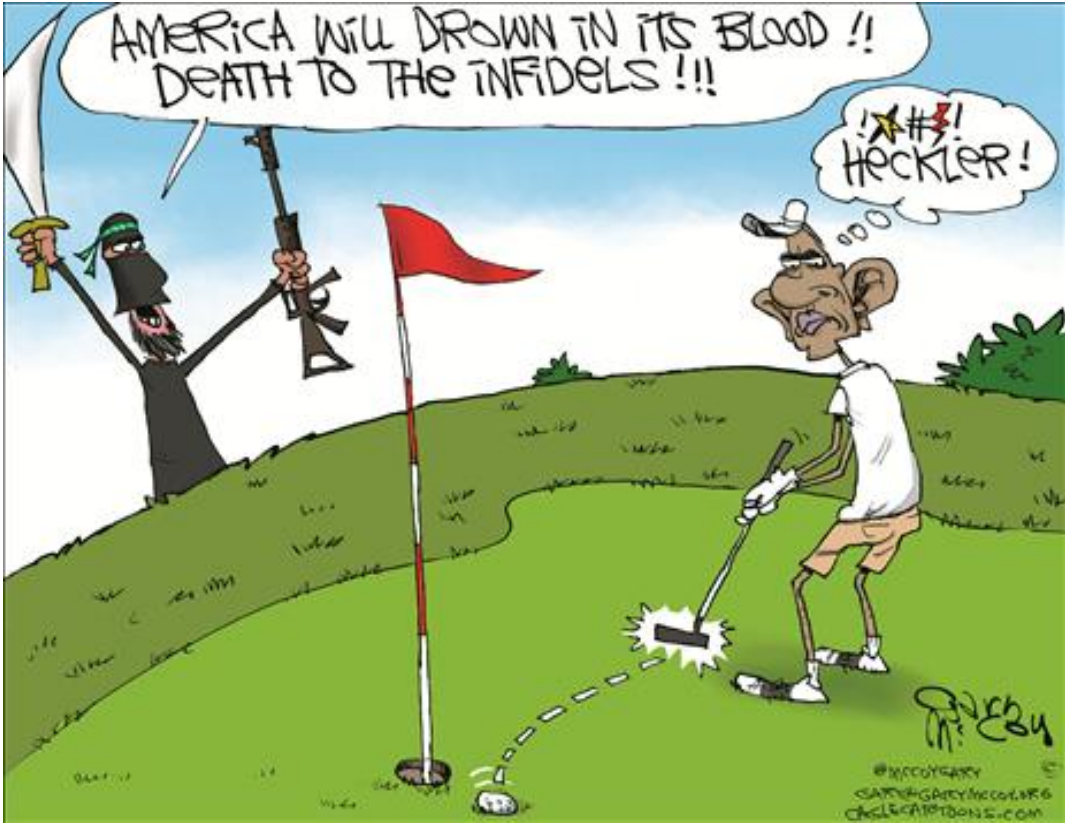
DON'T WORRY...
IT'S
JUST
THE
JV
TEAM.



ISIS? NO, WE
DON'T HAVE A
STRATEGY YET.







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