

October 30, 2014

Now even the liberal media folks are in on the jokes. The jokes that the country's joke president picked for our government. Politico writes on the Susan Rice and Chuck Hagel calling them the "Team of Bumpers."

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*... Indeed, the Syrian-rebel incident recalled a more famous instance of White House surprise tactics a year earlier, when after a stroll on the White House lawn with chief of staff Denis McDonough, Obama embarrassed Kerry by abruptly deciding to ask for congressional approval for bombing the regime of Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad—only hours after Kerry had publicly declared that Assad was facing imminent action. (Ironically, after Congress quickly balked at approval, humiliating Obama, it was Kerry who rescued the president by securing an agreement with Russian help to force Assad to dismantle the chemical weapons that had prompted the threatened U.S. strike in the first place.)*

*In their recent memoirs, former defense secretaries Robert Gates and Leon Panetta also have described the White House-centric foreign policy of the Obama administration—in Panetta's case, a White House that he said was so "eager to rid itself of Iraq" it rejected Pentagon advice about the need for residual troops in Iraq after 2011, opening the way for ISIL. Gates was even more pointed, writing that "suspicion and distrust of senior military officers by senior White House officials—including the president and vice president—became a big problem for me." ...*

*... McKeon himself says he was astonished when Rice found no time to sit down with him after he returned from a trip to the Middle East and meetings with key foreign leaders, and later when he realized that the White House had sent the administration's request to arm the Syrian rebels to his committee without getting prior input from the Pentagon on the legislative language. Rice is rarely heard in public except when she very occasionally appears on the Sunday talk shows—and then more times than not, it seems, in a bumbling way. (Most recently, by saying Turkey would supply bases for strikes against ISIL, only to be undercut by Ankara's denial hours later; that followed a much-criticized performance describing former Taliban captive Bowe Bergdahl's Army service as "honorable" despite the murky circumstances of his disappearance and capture; and her now-infamous explanation of the 2012 attacks in Benghazi, after which she was blasted by Republicans for appearing to play down terrorism links.) ...*

*... But what might be missing most from the administration—at least according to its critics—is a forceful strategist who is able to push the president (who remains, for the most part, his own No. 1 strategist) to be more decisive. It is not unreasonable to suppose that Rice feels somewhat snake-bit by her long and traumatic public trial over Benghazi, and the difficulties she has long had in her dealings with Capitol Hill. After her TV appearance on Benghazi, she sought to preserve her candidacy for secretary of state with a series of strikingly unsuccessful meetings on Capitol Hill in which she failed to impress even moderate Republicans such as Sen. Susan Collins of Maine. She also found herself facing resistance from foreign-policy elites who questioned her temperament and her record, including her past close relations with African dictators such as Paul Kagame of Rwanda. ...*

**Bret Stephens**, in a timely piece, writes on the crisis in our relationship with Israel.

*... The latest eruption of pettiness—when marriages are in trouble, it's always the petty things that tell—was the very public refusal of John Kerry and Joe Biden to meet with Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Yaalon during his visit to Washington last week. Mr. Yaalon was quoted earlier this year saying some impolitic things about the U.S. secretary of state, including that he was “obsessive and messianic” and that “the only thing that can save us is if Kerry wins the Nobel Prize and leaves us alone.”*

*The comments were made privately but were leaked to the press. Mr. Yaalon apologized for them. His meeting with Chuck Hagel at the Pentagon last week was all smiles. Asked by the Washington Post's Lally Weymouth about the Kerry kerfuffle, he replied, “We overcame that.”*

Or not.

*“Despite the fact that Yaalon's requests to meet with the senior members of the Obama administration were declined over a week ago, Washington waited until the visit ended before making the story public in order to humiliate the Israeli defense minister,” Ha'aretz reported. ...*

An article in The Atlantic shows how timely **Bret Stephens** was. John Hinderaker posts; *In case you missed it, the Obama administration (a “senior administration official”) has gone on record calling Benjamin Netanyahu a “chickenshit.” Somehow, that seems like a poor—not to mention vulgar—turn of phrase. The Netanyahu family is not known for its “chickenshit” qualities. Let's just say that in his youth, Benjamin did not belong to a “Choom Gang.” ...*

**Hinderaker** has more.

*... But consider: the “senior Obama administration official” made the comment in a conversation with a reporter, Goldberg, who was working on a story about the strained relationship between the Obama and Netanyahu governments. He must have known that the “chickenshit” characterization would be quoted, albeit anonymously. He must have wanted it to be quoted. He must have known that it would garner a great deal of attention. And Goldberg, who spends a lot of time talking with members of the Obama administration about Israel, considered the remark “representative” of the ways in which members of the two governments talk about each other.*

*So was the Obama administration's repudiation of the senior official's remarks merely pro forma? It would seem so. Today reporters asked both John Earnest, on behalf of the White House, and Jen Psaki, on behalf of the State Department, whether the administration will try to identify the senior official and set him straight. The answer? No, of course not. ...*

And **Jennifer Rubin** comments.

*... The immature and deplorable insult is nothing all that new. Whether it is former negotiator Martin Indyk accusing Israel of killing the peace process or the president off-mike complaining about having to deal with Netanyahu constantly, the administration's animosity is never far from the surface. That such a senior official could feel so confident in his slur says volumes about the environment at the White House. Even more telling, a White House spokesman would only say that the comments were "inappropriate and counterproductive," not false or unfair or outrageous.*

*This is yet one more reason to rebuke the president, his foreign policy and his staff. If the president were truly upset about the speech, he would find the staff member who made the remarks and fire that person. By the White House's initial statement, however, it seems like business as usual around there. ...*

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## Politico

### Team of Bumpers?

***Are Susan Rice and Chuck Hagel equal to today's new national-security challenges?***

by Michael Hirsh



When President Obama, after months of equivocation over how to respond to the takeover of parts of Iraq and Syria by radical militants, announced in September that the United States would “lead a broad coalition to roll back this terrorist threat,” the White House swung quickly into action, sending proposed legislation to train and equip Syrian rebels to Capitol Hill that same day.

Unfortunately, the White House failed to consult with the Pentagon—which would be doing most of the rolling back—on the timing or details of the announcement.

According to multiple sources, behind the scenes a few things went badly awry in the launch of Obama’s new policy. First, the Pentagon was surprised by the president’s timing, according to a senior defense official. “We didn’t know it was going to be in the speech,” he said, referring to Obama’s Sept. 10 address to the nation. Second, the White House neglected to give Pentagon lawyers a chance to revise and approve the proposed legislative language before it went to the Hill, which is considered standard practice. Staffers working for Rep. Buck McKeon, the Republican chairman of the Armed Services Committee, said they were appalled by what they saw: language so sloppy that it failed to mention adequate protections against so-called “green-on-blue” attacks by trainees on American troops, and effectively left the Defense Department liable for funding the mission against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)—even though the president was telling members of Congress he didn’t need money for this new mission, since the Saudis were putting it up. “What came over would have not have been a mission the DoD could have executed,” says a senior Republican committee staffer.

The Armed Services Committee later went directly to the Pentagon and worked out new language, the White House approved it, and Obama signed the legislation as part of a new Continuing Resolution on Sept. 19. But that was hardly the first instance in recent months when the White House failed to consult with the Pentagon. The office of Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel was taken by surprise as well last July, when national security adviser Susan Rice sent a letter to House Speaker John Boehner requesting a withdrawal of the Authorization for the Use of Military Force (AUMF) passed in 2002 to enable U.S. military action in Iraq. This letter came after Mosul, a key northern Iraqi city, had already fallen to ISIL and the scale of the threat was becoming clear. The letter was never acted on, and in fact the AUMF that Rice wanted withdrawn is now part of the very authority the administration says it is operating under, along with the 2001 AUMF against al Qaeda. The Pentagon was not given a heads-up about that letter either, according to multiple sources. “We didn’t know it was going over there, and there were significant concerns about it,” said the senior defense official. “We had these authorities to go into Iraq under the 2002 AUMF, which is what she wanted repealed. We believed the authorities were still needed.”

National Security Council spokesman Patrick Ventrell said the Pentagon was informed of the new plan against ISIL before it went to Congress, and that in fact Hagel and Dempsey were with the president the morning of the speech. Although he indicated it was not clear exactly what details of the new strategy were shared with the Pentagon and when, Ventrell said that coordination between the NSC and other agencies is ongoing and extensive, that Rice regularly hosts lunches with Hagel and Secretary of State John Kerry. They “have a good, solid working relationship,” Ventrell said.

But it’s clear the finger-pointing between the White House and Pentagon reflects no mere technicality. Both examples cited to me by well-placed sources close to the Defense Department offer new evidence of a criticism that has dogged this administration for most of its six and a half years: that Barack Obama’s White House is so insular and tightly controlled it often avoids “outside” consultation—including with its own cabinet secretaries and agencies. That’s especially true when the issue is one of this president’s least favorite things: opening up new hostilities in foreign lands. To his critics—and I spoke with several for this article inside Obama’s administration

as well as recent veterans of it—it's all a reflection of the slapdash way a president so vested in "ending wars" has embraced his new one.

Indeed, the Syrian-rebel incident recalled a more famous instance of White House surprise tactics a year earlier, when after a stroll on the White House lawn with chief of staff Denis McDonough, Obama embarrassed Kerry by abruptly deciding to ask for congressional approval for bombing the regime of Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad—only hours after Kerry had publicly declared that Assad was facing imminent action. (Ironically, after Congress quickly balked at approval, humiliating Obama, it was Kerry who rescued the president by securing an agreement with Russian help to force Assad to dismantle the chemical weapons that had prompted the threatened U.S. strike in the first place.)

In their recent memoirs, former defense secretaries Robert Gates and Leon Panetta also have described the White House-centric foreign policy of the Obama administration—in Panetta's case, a White House that he said was so "eager to rid itself of Iraq" it rejected Pentagon advice about the need for residual troops in Iraq after 2011, opening the way for ISIL. Gates was even more pointed, writing that "suspicion and distrust of senior military officers by senior White House officials—including the president and vice president—became a big problem for me."

"I think this is the most insular White House national security team in recent history," says Jim Thomas, vice president of the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments and a former senior Pentagon official, who added that the president's most recent big decision, picking an "Ebola czar," was "symptomatic of the problem." The choice: former Joe Biden chief of staff Ron Klain, picked by a White House seemingly unconcerned over the dubious optics of naming a Beltway politico to battle a deadly international disease.

The Ebola crisis has underscored what many of Obama's critics—including those in his party—have been saying with increasing urgency in recent months, that the White House's approach to national security does not instill confidence and seems more questionable than ever in the face of the muscular new challenges on the scene. Tongues wagged in Washington after David Ignatius, who is generally simpatico with Obama's restrained foreign policy, called gently in an Oct. 7 *Washington Post* [column](#) for "new blood" on the president's national-security team.

But others are less gentle with their criticism. "It's a pathetically weak team," says one retired general who was in a senior command position, and who faults Hagel as much as Rice for some of the problems. The general said that military professionals were buzzing over Hagel's absence from the recent public exchange between the White House and Dempsey, who in congressional testimony on Sept. 16 appeared to undercut the president's vow to put no boots on the ground in Iraq by suggesting that "close combat advisers" might be needed. Hagel, a Vietnam-warrior-turned-dove known to be extremely reluctant to send any new troops abroad, stayed silent in the dispute. "Guys like Dempsey saying the things they do—they wouldn't get away with it with other secretaries," the general said. Mostly what critics remark upon is Hagel's low visibility at a time of high-visibility threats, whether from ISIL or from Russian President Vladimir Putin, who has invaded Ukraine and remains defiant in the face of Western-imposed sanctions, warning Washington last week to "remember the risks that a spat between major nuclear powers incurs for strategic stability." "There's no energy, no sense that the OSD stands for anything," says one administration official, referring to the Office of the Secretary of Defense. "It's all coming out of the Joint Chiefs."

Hagel is by nature self-effacing, and many other observers I spoke with—including some congressional Republicans who once opposed him, like McKeon—praised his performance as SecDef. "He's got an untenable job because I don't think he gets much support out of the White

House,” said McKeon. “I have very strong admiration for Hagel. He’s a good soldier. He never complains. He never says anything negative about the president; he’s trying to carry out policy.”

Part of the problem facing Obama’s national security team, perhaps, is that so much in the international environment has changed for the worse in the two years since the president, in a surprise move, nominated Hagel. At the start of his second term in January 2013, before the rise of ISIL and Russia’s annexation of Crimea, it was clear the president was looking for a peacetime consigliere at the Pentagon, having declared more than once that he “was elected to end wars, not start them” and was “doing everything” he could “to reduce our reliance on military power.” The retired Nebraska senator, who appeared even more leery than the president of putting new boots on the ground abroad—he opposed not only George W. Bush’s invasion and “surge” in Iraq, but Obama’s own 2009 surge in Afghanistan—seemed just the choice to reduce the Pentagon’s profile to a vanishing point.

The following June, when Obama made Rice his national security adviser, it came across more or less as a consolation prize—one handed to her as much for her loyalty as for any widespread belief in Washington that she would make a great national security chief. Rice had mainly been an Africa expert and diplomat, working her way up in Democratic national security circles after a stint in the Clinton administration NSC and State Department and serving for four years as Obama’s ambassador to the United Nations. She took a bullet for the president over her jumbled explanation of the 2012 Benghazi attacks that killed a U.S. ambassador and three other Americans, and after Republicans jumped on that TV debacle she withdrew her name as secretary of state—the job Obama said he wanted her to do.

But in the last eight months or so, a new array of fast-moving threats has arisen, from the advance of ISIL to Putin’s martial moves in Eastern Europe to the Ebola contagion in West Africa, raising ever-mounting questions about whether the administration could do with less caution and a little more forward leaning. Although Hagel has proved, by many accounts, extremely effective in pushing internal reform at the Pentagon, reassuring allies in Asia and elsewhere—as well reaching out to Capitol Hill—some question whether he has become too quietly vested in not sending troops abroad over the course of his career, despite his frank acknowledgement that the United States is now engaged in a new “war” against ISIL. With ISIL still on the move in Iraq and Syria, and the air strikes that Obama announced on Sept. 10 proving to be of dubious effectiveness, many military experts say this is the moment to beef up the U.S. presence with close combat advisers and spotters on the ground who can guide in heavier and more precise airstrikes, as well to provide more U.S. trainers. But the president’s “no boots on the ground” pledge has paralyzed discussion, despite Dempsey’s lonely effort to open the door slightly to the possibility of bringing in such advisers.

“An unlikely consensus is emerging across the ideological spectrum about the war against the Islamic State: President Obama’s strategy to ‘degrade and eventually destroy’ the terrorist entity is unworkable,” the *Washington Post* wrote in an editorial on Sunday. The most that can be achieved with the limited military means Obama has supplied so far is some kind of containment, but the Post editors said that won’t work because “the infection of the Islamic State is spreading. Militant groups around the region are rallying to its cause, volunteers continue to travel to Syria, and popular support for it is dangerously evident in countries such as Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan.” Or as House Intelligence Committee Chairman Mike Rogers, R-Mich., put it Sunday on “Face the Nation,” the U.S. effort now amounts to mere “pecks at a big problem,” and allies remain baffled by the lack of a larger U.S. strategy.

Hagel, nonetheless, has reaffirmed the administration’s restrained approach. “We’re not changing our policy,” he said last week. “We think it’s working.” Pentagon spokesman John Kirby, in a

telephone interview on Sunday, said that the administration believes that Iraqi security forces and Kurdish peshmerga fighters are beginning to make headway against ISIL. “It is slow, and it is not steady, but they have an offensive plan,” he said. “They are advancing on Baiji [an oil refinery town held by ISIL], they have pushed out in Anbar [Province], and they are stiffening their defenses around Baghdad.” The peshmerga, he said, “have taken back more than 20 towns and villages.” Still, Kirby acknowledged, ISIL has aggressively retaliated with IEDs and other tactics, and retaking “Mosul is a long way away.”

While Hagel defends the status quo, Rice continues to stumble in her infrequent TV appearances and to alienate potential Hill allies – as well as the Pentagon—with what critics describe as poor outreach to Republicans and coordination of policy with the Defense Department. “Our experience has been that the DoD and Capitol Hill are often taken by surprise at same time and on same issues” by the White House, says the senior Armed Services Committee staffer.

McKeon himself says he was astonished when Rice found no time to sit down with him after he returned from a trip to the Middle East and meetings with key foreign leaders, and later when he realized that the White House had sent the administration’s request to arm the Syrian rebels to his committee without getting prior input from the Pentagon on the legislative language. Rice is rarely heard in public except when she very occasionally appears on the Sunday talk shows—and then more times than not, it seems, in a bumbling way. (Most recently, by saying Turkey would supply bases for strikes against ISIL, only to be undercut by Ankara’s denial hours later; that followed a much-criticized performance describing former Taliban captive Bowe Bergdahl’s Army service as “honorable” despite the murky circumstances of his disappearance and capture; and her now-infamous explanation of the 2012 attacks in Benghazi, after which she was blasted by Republicans for appearing to play down terrorism links.)

Despite an NSC staff that’s grown from 50 under George H.W. Bush to more than 300 under Obama—in part because White House support and Homeland Security staffs have been folded into the NSC—“there is a sense that the NSC is run a little like beehive ball soccer, where everyone storms to wherever the ball is moving around the field,” according to another recently departed senior administration official. “They are managing by crisis rather than strategy.... It’s Syria one day, Iraq the next, North Korea the next, and so on. The NSC is finding multitasking very hard these days.

“In her defense some of that was there before, and I would say probably no president in recent times has faced the variety of threats that confront the United States right now, and the speed with which they’re emerging,” this former official said. “But she certainly hasn’t cured that problem. ... There has always been centralization inside the White House in this administration, but in the first term there was more consultation across the inter-agency [process] and more decisiveness. Now there appears to be less consultation and less decisiveness.”

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**In the end, of course,** it’s the president who must do the deciding. Hagel’s defenders say that, as secretary of defense, he can only be expected to step up to the podium and become the voice of the administration when the president decides to threaten or use force – the implementation of which then becomes the job of the Pentagon —and that’s been infrequent at best in this administration. Hagel’s supporters also say that he has shown his toughness when necessary, for example pushing the White House to send two B-52s over disputed islands in the East China Sea after Beijing unilaterally declared it was imposing an air-identification zone there in late 2013. Hagel was, in addition, a key voice arguing for last week’s drop of arms and supplies to Kurdish rebels fighting near the Syrian border town of Kobane, the senior defense official says.

“Chuck is superlatively qualified,” says Sen. Jack Reed of Rhode Island, who will take over the Senate Armed Services Committee chairmanship from the retiring Carl Levin if the Democrats manage to hang on in November. “He’s one of the few secretaries who’s actually been an infantryman in combat. He’s established great credibility with the troops. The rapport is genuine and obvious.” And it was Hagel, says Reed, who at an April conference with Gulf defense ministers “laid the foundation for collaboration we’re seeing in last several weeks against ISIL. For the first time they’re sending aircraft up with our aircraft.”

Hagel has drawn a tough hand: He is the first secretary in recent years to deal with a declining budget, as Reed notes—and even Republicans like McKeon told me they appreciate the defense secretary’s willingness to hear out their concerns. Recently, Hagel pressured Congress to reverse the \$500 billion in Pentagon budget cuts over 10 years mandated under sequestration, saying they put soldiers’ lives at risk at a time of growing threats, and he has sought to preserve combat readiness by taking on traditional “third rails” in DoD budgeting like base and housing allowances.

“He’s a reformer over here. And the record bears that out,” says the senior defense official, noting initiatives such as Hagel’s reviews of the military health-care system in the wake of the Veterans Affairs scandal, his intense focus on sexual assault within the military and his “holistic review” of America’s aging nuclear weapons complex. Hagel has surprised even some skeptics about his long-term defensive vision, most recently calling for a new generation of game-changing “offset” technologies—like the smart bombs developed in the late ‘70s—to outpace nations such as China and Russia; he’s pushing hard for progress in robotics, advanced computing, miniaturization and 3-D printing.

Even so, according to the federal government’s [2014 personnel survey](#), civilian defense employees have grown increasingly dissatisfied with their jobs, with ratings dropping in 47 of 84 categories from last year. And the larger question is whether Hagel’s mostly inward focus on budget and morale issues at the Pentagon is the right focus now—instead of helping to project American power abroad amidst spiraling global crises.

As for Rice and the NSC, Reed says that the criticism one hears “is almost kind of ritualistic.” With a few exceptions like Brent Scowcroft, George H.W. Bush’s much-admired national security adviser, few people in that position over recent decades have escaped criticism, including Rice’s predecessors, Jim Jones and Tom Donilon, who were both faulted at various times for poor coordination and inadequate strategic vision.

Asked to comment on the criticism of Rice, White House Chief of Staff McDonough said the president was totally behind her. “At a time when we are confronting complex challenges on the global stage, Susan is leading a disciplined, rigorous, and effective foreign policy process to tee up the best options for the president, and then implement and deliver on his decisions,” McDonough said in an email. “The president values Susan’s counsel because she always offers unvarnished facts and advice. He appreciates her frank, no-nonsense style, unmatched work ethic, and sharp intellect.”

But what might be missing most from the administration—at least according to its critics—is a forceful strategist who is able to push the president (who remains, for the most part, his own No. 1 strategist) to be more decisive. It is not unreasonable to suppose that Rice feels somewhat snake-bit by her long and traumatic public trial over Benghazi, and the difficulties she has long had in her dealings with Capitol Hill. After her TV appearance on Benghazi, she sought to preserve her candidacy for secretary of state with a series of strikingly unsuccessful meetings on Capitol Hill in which she failed to impress even moderate Republicans such as Sen. Susan Collins of Maine. She also found herself facing resistance from foreign-policy elites who questioned her temperament

and her record, including her past close relations with African dictators such as Paul Kagame of Rwanda.

Of course, no one knows Obama's thinking on national security better than Rice, who has been with him longer than any senior official in the administration with the exception of McDonough, his chief of staff. And as we've discovered during six-plus years of studying Obama's MO, that counts for a lot with this president. Keeping America out of any more disastrous wars is his mission, and it may well be that his allegedly bumbling team is doing nothing more than implementing his desires. Whether that is any longer a policy appropriate to the times, given the resilience of ISIL—and whether he's getting the kind of advice he needs to hear, rather than the kind he wants to hear—is another question, one for the pundits to debate.

But as one former senior Pentagon official puts it, "When you select for personal loyalty, that may be all you get."

**WSJ**

### **Bibi and Barack on the Rocks**

***The White House's resort to petty insults risks a strategic relationship.***

by Bret Stephens



*Benjamin Netanyahu and Barack Obama in the Oval Office, Sept. 30.*

The relationship between the [Obama](#) administration and the government of Israel is beginning to look like one of those longtime marriages you encounter all the time. Maybe you're in one yourself.

He feels, Rodney Dangerfield-like, that he gets no respect. She'd be happy to offer some—if only she could find something to respect.

The solution is a trial separation. Give this couple time apart to figure out what, if anything, still draws them together.

The latest eruption of pettiness—when marriages are in trouble, it's always the petty things that tell—was the very public refusal of [John Kerry](#) and [Joe Biden](#) to meet with Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Yaalon during his visit to Washington last week. Mr. Yaalon was quoted earlier this year saying some impolitic things about the U.S. secretary of state, including that he was “obsessive and messianic” and that “the only thing that can save us is if Kerry wins the Nobel Prize and leaves us alone.”

The comments were made privately but were leaked to the press. Mr. Yaalon apologized for them. His meeting with Chuck Hagel at the Pentagon last week was all smiles. Asked by the Washington Post's Lally Weymouth about the Kerry kerfuffle, he replied, “We overcame that.”

Or not.

“Despite the fact that Yaalon's requests to meet with the senior members of the Obama administration were declined over a week ago, Washington waited until the visit ended before making the story public in order to humiliate the Israeli defense minister,” Ha'aretz reported. Mr. Yaalon is now said to be under an Obama administration “quarantine” until he performs additional penance, perhaps by recanting his hard-line views about the advisability of a nuclear deal with Iran or a peace deal with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

The good news here is that at least there's one kind of quarantine this administration believes in. The bad news is that it seems to give more thought to pursuing personal vendettas against allies like Israel than it does to waging effective military campaigns against enemies like ISIS.

The administration also seems to have forgotten that two can play the game. Two days after the Yaalon snub, the Israeli government announced the construction of 1,000 new housing units in so-called East Jerusalem, including 600 new units in the Ramat Shlomo neighborhood that was the subject of a 2010 row with Joe Biden. Happy now, Mr. Vice President?

The real problem for the administration is that the Israelis—along with all the other disappointed allies—are learning how little it pays to be on Barack Obama's good side. Since coming to office in 2009, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has agreed, against his own inclination and over the objections of his political base, to (1) [recognize](#) a Palestinian state; (2) enforce an unprecedented 10-month settlement [freeze](#); (3) release [scores](#) of Palestinian prisoners held on murder charges; (4) embark on an ill-starred effort to reach a final peace [deal](#) with the Palestinians; (5) refrain from taking overt [military](#) steps against Iran; and (6) agree to every [possible](#) cease-fire during the summer's war with Hamas.

In exchange, Mr. Kerry [publicly](#) blamed Israel for the failure of the peace effort, the White House held up the delivery of [munitions](#) at the height of the Gaza war, and Mr. Obama is [hellbent](#) on striking whatever deal the Iranians can plausibly offer him.

Oh, and Mr. Kerry also attributes the rise of Islamic State to the [Israeli-Palestinian](#) conflict. Maybe if the Israelis grovel a bit more, Mr. Obama will oblige them by recognizing a Palestinian state as his parting act as president. Don't discount the possibility.

Which brings me to the concept of a trial separation.

Last year, Mustafa Alani, a Saudi foreign policy analyst, observed of Riyadh's evolving attitude toward Washington: "We are learning from our enemies now how to treat the United States." Sure enough it wasn't long after the Saudis turned down a seat on the Security Council and threatened a fundamental re-evaluation of their ties to the U.S. that Messrs. Kerry and Obama went [bowing](#) and [scraping](#) to King Abdullah when they needed the kingdom's help against ISIS.

At least the Saudis understand the value of showing they're prepared to be, as someone once wrote, co-dependent no more. The administration likes to make much of the \$3 billion a year it provides Israel (or, at least, U.S. defense contractors) in military aid, but that's now less than 1% of Israeli GDP. Like some boorish husband of yore fond of boasting that he brings home the bacon, the administration thinks it's the senior partner in the marriage.

Except this wife can now pay her own bills. And she never ate bacon to begin with.

It's time for some time away. Israel needs to look after its own immediate interests without the incessant interventions of an overbearing partner. The administration needs to learn that it had better act like a friend if it wants to keep a friend. It isn't as if it has many friends left.

## Power Line

### [Who's a Chickenshit?](#)

by John Hinderaker

In case you missed it, the Obama administration (a "senior administration official") has [gone on record](#) calling Benjamin Netanyahu a "chickenshit." Somehow, that seems like a poor—not to mention vulgar—turn of phrase. The Netanyahu family is not known for its "chickenshit" qualities. Let's just say that in his youth, Benjamin did not belong to a "Choom Gang." Mark Hemingway responds on Twitter:

So who can resist bringing back this famous juxtaposition? Not me:



Another pathetic sally by an increasingly risible administration.

## Power Line

### Who's a Chickenshit? Part Two

by John Hinderaker

We have written [here](#) and [here](#) about the “senior Obama administration official” who called Benjamin Netanyahu a “chickenshit” in an interview with the [Atlantic's Jeffrey Goldberg](#). This is the full context:

The other day I was talking to a senior Obama administration official about the foreign leader who seems to frustrate the White House and the State Department the most. “The thing about Bibi is, he's a chickenshit,” this official said, referring to the Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, by his nickname.

This comment is representative of the gloves-off manner in which American and Israeli officials now talk about each other behind closed doors....

Today the Obama administration [tried to distance itself](#) from the “chickenshit” comment.

“Certainly that's not the Administration's view, and we think such comments are inappropriate and counter-productive,” Alistair Baskey, a spokesman for the National Security Council, stated Wednesday.

But consider: the “senior Obama administration official” made the comment in a conversation with a reporter, Goldberg, who was working on a story about the strained relationship between the Obama and Netanyahu governments. He must have known that the “chickenshit” characterization would be quoted, albeit anonymously. He must have wanted it to be quoted. He must have known that it would garner a great deal of attention. And Goldberg, who spends a lot of time talking with members of the Obama administration about Israel, considered the remark “representative” of the ways in which members of the two governments talk about each other.

So was the Obama administration's repudiation of the senior official's remarks merely *pro forma*? It would seem so. Today reporters asked both John Earnest, on behalf of the White House, and Jen Psaki, on behalf of the State Department, whether the administration will try to identify the senior official and set him straight. The answer? No, of course not.

#### Here is Ms. Psaki:

REPORTER: Is the administration trying to figure out who made those inappropriate and counterproductive comments?

PSAKI: No.

REPORTER: Why not?

PSAKI: There are anonymous sources in all of your sources every single day. If we spent all of our time focused on that effort we wouldn't be working on diplomacy.

#### And Mr. Earnest:

EARNEST: ... I will say that as a general matter that I am not aware of who made those comments to Mr.[Jeffery] Goldberg. I do not know if the president knows who made those comments. I would be surprised if he did. ...

Which tends to confirm that the senior official was indeed speaking for his boss, the president. But, either way, what sense did it make to call Netanyahu a crude epithet? What purpose could possibly have been served? The outburst, whether it represented Obama's own views or not, was childish and petulant, at best. Viewed from any direction, the episode reveals, once more, an administration in disarray.

## Right Turn

### Cursing Israel's prime minister

Jennifer Rubin

In a new low in U.S.-Israel relations and, for that matter, a new low in U.S. foreign policy, a senior White House official too cowardly to go on record told [Jeffrey Goldberg](#) in an interview that prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu is a “chickens—” because he allegedly won't stand up to his party on a peace deal with the Palestinian Authority. The unnamed White House adviser, forgetting Israel's recent war with Hamas, declared: “The good thing about Netanyahu is that he's scared to launch wars. The bad thing about him is that he won't do anything to reach an accommodation with the Palestinians or with the Sunni Arab states. The only thing he's interested in is protecting himself from political defeat. He's not [Yitzhak] Rabin, he's not [Ariel] Sharon, he's certainly no [Menachem] Begin. He's got no guts.” The Palestinian Authority, you will recall, is in a unity government with Hamas and via its president at the United Nations accused Israel of genocide.

The statement is ignorant or an intentionally false accusation on so many different levels it is hard to know where to begin. Netanyahu has confirmed Israel will pursue a two-state solution, voluntarily entered into a housing freeze and has been willing to negotiate without precondition. Moreover, it is not simply the far right but the large majority of Israelis who now see the Oslo process as a failure. From the Labor Party to Likud, the political spectrum in Israel on this issue is in sync. And finally, Israel is getting along fine with the Sunni states, better than the latter are with the Obama administration, since both understand the threat posed by Iran and its surrogates.

Speaker of the House John Boehner (R-Ohio) issued a long statement denouncing the “disrespectful rhetoric used time and again by this administration with respect to the special relationship the United States has with the state of Israel”:

The administration has tried to convince Congress and the American people that we should trust the president's pursuit of a nuclear deal with the government of Iran while refusing to address substantive concerns about the regime's sponsorship of terrorism and abysmal human rights record. The administration scoffs at the enduring willingness of members of both parties to maintain commitments to our friends and allies, contending that those commitments are mere sentiment, while all the while the administration and the president himself are taken aback that friends and allies won't support him when he ignores them and, in some cases, belittles them. . . . I am tired of the administration's apology tour. The president sets the tone for his administration. He either condones the profanity and disrespect used by the most senior members of his administration, or he does not. It is time for him to get his house in order and tell the people that can't muster professionalism that it is time to move on.

House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.) added: "I am profoundly concerned about reports that senior Administration officials are attacking the character of Israeli Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu, our closest ally in the Middle East. Unfortunately, these are not isolated insults; they are part of a pattern of disrespectful and profoundly counterproductive behavior that has strained the critical alliance between the United States and Israel. I call on President Obama to firmly repudiate these views."

Rep. Tom Cotton (R-Ark.), who is running for Senate, issued a statement, which read:

I'm appalled at recent media reports suggesting the Obama administration is seeking 'détente' with Iran, while unnamed administration officials disparage Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu with vulgar *ad hominem* attacks. I call upon President Obama to renounce these reports and disclose the names of these officials and fire them. Iran remains our worst enemy and Israel our closest ally. The Obama administration's weak behavior will only embolden Iran to continue its headlong rush to nuclear weapons and terror campaigns against America and our allies, while destabilizing the region and further eroding our interests.

Finally, for the record, I must note that Prime Minister Netanyahu in his youth was a member of Israel's elite special-operations forces, where he displayed great courage. He and his family have made grave sacrifices in the fight against our common enemies. On behalf of all Arkansans, I want to thank Mr. Netanyahu for his bravery and service.

Rabbi Marvin Hier of the Simon Wiesenthal Center told Right Turn: "We are talking about one of America's great friends. Who can we trust in the Middle East long-term but the democratic, dynamic and free state of Israel? Yet someone hiding behind a desk is taking pot shots at Israel's prime minister." Comparing the language used toward Iran, he says, "Who do we manage to curse? Our friend. And who do we laud that we should be cursing?"

Likewise, Republican National Committee Chairman Reince Priebus issued a written statement, reading in part: "Americans should not accept this. We should never betray our ally Israel. We need a foreign policy that is focused, not fumbling. The country is increasingly concerned about our national security, yet the administration is not inspiring confidence. Our country deserves better. Republicans will continue to work to keep this country safe. That means respecting our allies, going after our enemies, protecting our homeland, and supporting our veterans and men and women in uniform."

Unfortunately, Democratic staffers whom I reached out to would not comment. Perhaps they would benefit from repudiating the remark, lest they be seen as condoning it.

The immature and deplorable insult is nothing all that new. Whether it is former negotiator Martin Indyk accusing Israel of killing the peace process or the president off-mike complaining about having to deal with Netanyahu constantly, the administration's animosity is never far from the surface. That such a senior official could feel so confident in his slur says volumes about the environment at the White House. Even more telling, a White House spokesman would only say that the comments were "inappropriate and counterproductive," not false or unfair or outrageous.

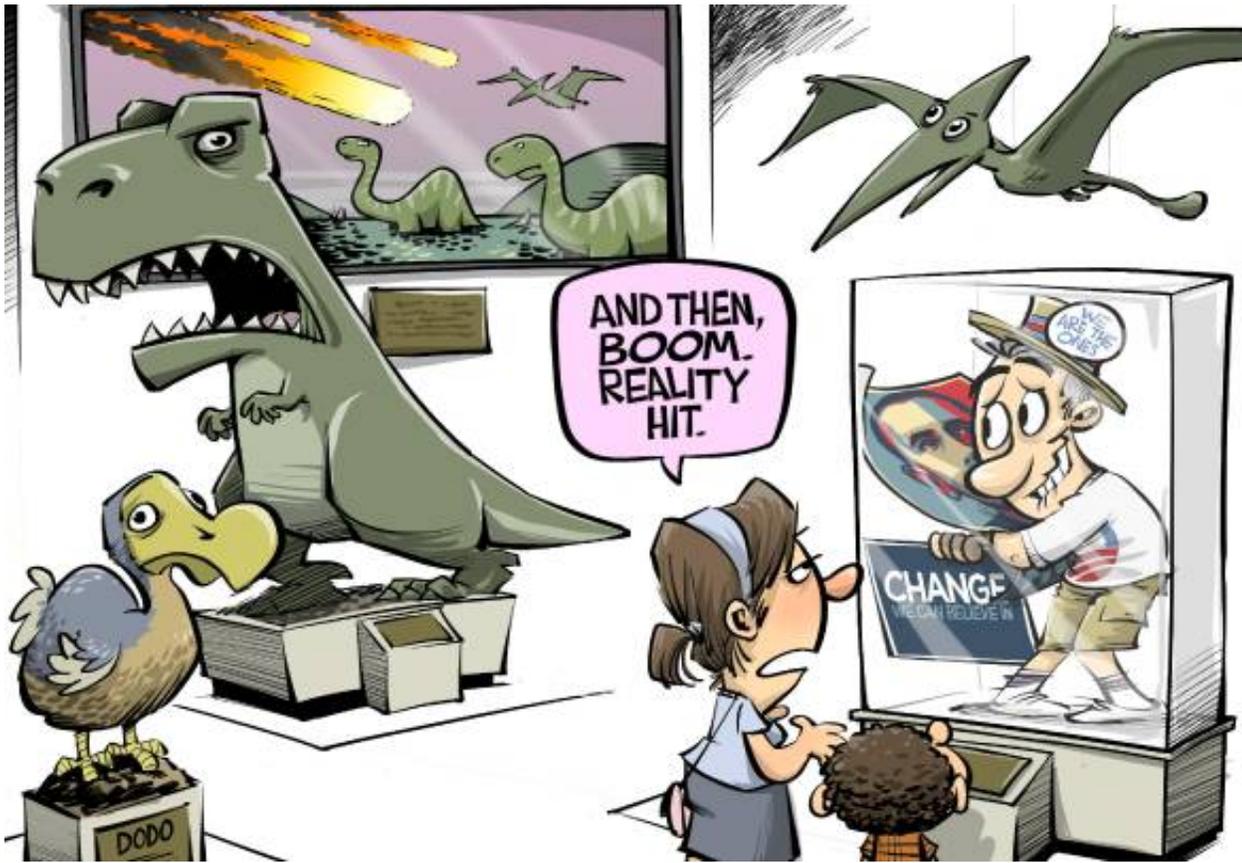
This is yet one more reason to rebuke the president, his foreign policy and his staff. If the president were truly upset about the speech, he would find the staff member who made the remarks and fire that person. By the White House's initial statement, however, it seems like business as usual around there.

**UPDATED:** [Rep. Eliot Engel \(D-N.Y.\) has now commented:](#) "I am getting tired of hearing about the leaks and denials. This ought to be the last time we hear of such talk because it is getting to a point where nobody believes the denials anymore." He is a lonely voice on the Democratic side, though an advertisement for why it is important to elect representatives and senators who are willing to stand up to the White House.



"AAAUGHHHHHHH!"





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I WAS NAMED after  
SIR EDMUND  
HILLARY.



LET BOSNIA, MC  
LANDED UNDER  
SNIPER FIRE



I LEARNED how to  
MAKE A KILLING in  
FUTUREs by trading  
the WALL STREET  
JOURNAL.



The RESET  
BUTTON.



BENGHAZI WAS  
CAUSED by a  
VIDEO.



I WAS DEAD  
BROKE.



I didn't REALLY  
mean BUSINESSs  
DONT CREATE  
JOBs.



WHAT DIFFERENCE,  
at this POINT, does  
IT MAKE?



CLEAN UP  
ON AISLE  
SIXTEEN!!



"DON'T LET ANYBODY  
TELL YOU THAT CORPORATIONS  
AND BUSINESSES  
CREATE JOBS"



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