

March 15, 2015

Jonathan Tobin posts on the Netanyahu treatment the administration is giving to Egypt. Makes sense; the president apparently dislikes this country so much that anyone wanting to be our ally is suspect.

In a Middle East where Islamist terror groups and the Iranian regime and its allies have been on the offensive in recent years, the one bright spot for the West in the region (other, that is, than Israel) is the way Egypt has returned to its old role as a bulwark of moderation and opposition to extremism. The current government led by former general Abdel Fattah el-Sisi has clamped down on Hamas terrorists and has been willing to deploy its armed forces to fight ISIS in Libya while also clamping down on a Muslim Brotherhood movement that seeks to transform Egypt into another Islamist state. Yet despite this, the Obama administration is unhappy with Egypt. Much to Cairo's consternation, the United States is squeezing its government on the military aid it needs to fight ISIS in Libya and Sinai terrorists. As the Israeli government has already learned to its sorrow, the Egyptians now understand that being an ally of the United States is a lot less comfortable position than to be a foe like Iran.

The ostensible reason for the holdup in aid is that the Egyptian government is a human-rights violator. Those concerns are accurate. Sisi's government has been ruthless in cracking down on the same Muslim Brotherhood faction that was running the country until a popular coup brought it down in the summer of 2013. But contrary to the illusions of an Obama administration that hastened the fall of Hosni Mubarak and then foolishly embraced his Muslim Brotherhood successors, democracy was never one of the available options in Egypt.

The choice in Egypt remains stark. It's either going to be run by Islamists bent on taking the most populous Arab country down the dark road of extremism or by a military regime that will keep that from happening. ...

Perhaps, says Craig Pirrong, the prez is channeling his inner Woodrow Wilson.

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Actually, this comparison is unfair. To Wilson. At least he submitted the treaty to the Senate for ratification. It failed because he refused to compromise on Article X. Obama in contrast, refuses to involve Congress in any way, least of all by submitting any agreement for ratification. He scorns the very idea.

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Kevin Williamson thinks it's just dandy the Senate is doing something.

What, exactly, is the point of that great big hulking building with the cast-iron faux Roman dome in Washington? Joe Biden worked there for many years, and Barack Obama worked there for about five minutes, and neither of them has figured it out.

“Biden Rebukes Senate Republicans over Letter to Iran,” harrumphs the New York Times, Gomer Pyle and Forrest Gump apparently having been otherwise occupied. Joe Biden is a national figure of fun, and it is difficult to remember that Barack Obama’s campaign brought him into the fold for his special brand of gravitas, which is, like the subtle notes of freshly cut grass and charred orange rind emanating from a freshly decanted bottle of fine wine, detectable only by the rarest breed of connoisseur and the most common sort of bulls–t artist. Before becoming president, Barack Obama’s main foreign-policy experience had been gazing wistfully at a Rand McNally desktop globe and trying to figure out which spot on earth would place him the farthest from the Rev. Jeremiah Wright. Joe Biden was added to the ticket purportedly to ease our national mind about the question of whose hand was on The Button. People joke that Biden’s real role in the Obama administration is acting as a human insurance policy against assassination, and, if you think about the key Democrat players of the Obama years — Biden, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Janet Napolitano, Eric Holder — there does seem to be a walk-tall-among-the-dwarves strategy in place.

Biden is tumescent with indignation because 47 senators reminded the president — by reminding the Iranians with whom he is engaged in nuclear negotiations — that the president does not have the authority to enter into a binding, long-term international agreement based on nothing more than his own juice. If he cuts a bad deal, Congress can reject it — something the Atomic Ayatollahs ought to have in mind.

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Rick Richman points out how obama has reneged on commitments made by the country during the Bush administration.

The White House “outrage” at the “open letter” to Iran signed by 47 senators, led by Sen. Tom Cotton, was reinforced by Vice President Biden’s formal statement, which intoned that “America’s influence depends on its ability to honor its commitments,” including those made by a president without a vote of Congress. Perhaps we should welcome Biden’s belated insight. As Jonathan Tobin notes, President Obama on taking office in 2009 refused to be bound by the 2004 Gaza disengagement deal in the letters exchanged between President George W. Bush and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. His secretary of state, Hillary Clinton, announced that such commitments were “unenforceable”—that they were non-binding on the new administration. In 2009, Obama disregarded previous commitments not only to Israel but also to Poland, the Czech Republic, and Georgia; he “fundamentally transformed” America’s previous commitments, as he likes to describe the essential element of his entire presidency. ...

And **John Hinderaker** reminds us how obama undercut the Bush administration's nuclear negotiations with Iran.

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The Iranians held firm to their position, perhaps because they knew that help was on the way, in the form of a new president. Barack Obama had clinched the Democratic nomination on June 3. At some point either before or after that date, but prior to the election, he secretly let the Iranians know that he would be much easier to bargain with than President Bush. Michael Ledeen reported the story last year:

"During his first presidential campaign in 2008, Mr. Obama used a secret back channel to Tehran to assure the mullahs that he was a friend of the Islamic Republic, and that they would be very happy with his policies. The secret channel was Ambassador William G. Miller, who served in Iran during the shah's rule, as chief of staff for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, and as ambassador to Ukraine. Ambassador Miller has confirmed to me his conversations with Iranian leaders during the 2008 campaign." ...

Thomas Freidman's Adelson Derangement Syndrome gets more attention from Jonathan Tobin.

Regular readers of Thomas Friedman's column in the New York Times are aware of the fact that he doesn't like the fact that a bipartisan pro-Israel coalition predominates in the U.S. Congress. Friedman is stuck in the conspiratorial world of the Walt-Mearsheimer "Israel Lobby" thesis that falsely alleges that backing for the Jewish state is purchased by the cash of pro-Israel donors. And the most conspicuous of those donors is casino magnate Sheldon Adelson, who seems to be occupying a rather large space in Friedman's head these days. Last week after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's speech to Congress, Friedman repeated the slurs against the pro-Israel community and Adelson that he first lobbed in 2011. That he doubled down on those charges in today's column is of little interest. But what is worth noting is Friedman's attack on Israel Hayom, the Israeli newspaper Adelson owns. According to the columnist, the paper is subverting Israeli democracy in the manner that Adelson and other donors are supposedly undermining American foreign policy. But what we really learn from this piece is that Friedman likes neither democracy nor freedom of the press.

Friedman believes the ovations Netanyahu received from Congress in 2011 and last week were "bought and paid for by the Israel Lobby." This is a profound misunderstanding of the way American democracy works. Members of Congress are pleased to accept contributions from pro-Israel donors, but those relationships help solidify the alliance. If that stand were not popular with the overwhelming majority of Americans, of whom more than 98 percent of are not Jewish, no amount of money could purchase it. ...

Contentions

Obama Gives Sisi the Netanyahu Treatment

by Jonathan S. Tobin

In a Middle East where Islamist terror groups and the Iranian regime and its allies have been on the offensive in recent years, the one bright spot for the West in the region (other, that is, than Israel) is the way Egypt has returned to its old role as a bulwark of moderation and opposition to extremism. The current government led by former general Abdel Fattah el-Sisi has clamped down on Hamas terrorists and has been willing to deploy its armed forces to fight ISIS in Libya while also clamping down on a Muslim Brotherhood movement that seeks to transform Egypt into another Islamist state. Yet despite this, the Obama administration is unhappy with Egypt. [Much to Cairo's consternation](#), the United States is squeezing its government on the military aid it needs to fight ISIS in Libya and Sinai terrorists. As the Israeli government has already learned to its sorrow, the Egyptians now understand that being an ally of the United States is a lot less comfortable position than to be a foe like Iran.

The ostensible reason for the holdup in aid is that the Egyptian government is a human-rights violator. Those concerns are accurate. Sisi's government has been ruthless in cracking down on the same Muslim Brotherhood faction that was running the country until a popular coup brought it down in the summer of 2013. But contrary to the illusions of an Obama administration that hastened the fall of Hosni Mubarak and then foolishly embraced his Muslim Brotherhood successors, democracy was never one of the available options in Egypt.

The choice in Egypt remains stark. It's either going to be run by Islamists bent on taking the most populous Arab country down the dark road of extremism or by a military regime that will keep that from happening. The obvious Western choice must be the latter, and Sisi has turned out to be an even better ally than Washington could have dreamed of, as he ensured that the Brotherhood would not return to power, took on Hamas in Gaza, and even made public calls for Muslims to turn against religious extremists.

But rather than that endearing him to the administration, this outstanding record has earned Sisi the Netanyahu treatment. Indeed, like other moderate Arab leaders in the Middle East, Sisi understands that President Obama has no great love for his country's allies. Besotted as he is by the idea of bringing Iran in from the cold, the American government has allied itself with Tehran in the conflicts in both Iraq and Syria. He also understands that both of those ongoing wars were made far worse by the president's dithering for years, a stance that may well have been motivated by a desire to avoid antagonizing Iran by seeking to topple their Syrian ally.

But those issues notwithstanding, one of the major changes that took place on President Obama's watch was a conscious decision to downgrade relations with Cairo, a nation that his predecessors of both parties had recognized as a lynchpin of U.S. interests in the region. The current weapons supply squeeze is not only a blow to the efforts of a nation that is actually willing to fight ISIS and other Islamist terrorists; it's a statement about what it means to be an American ally in the age of Obama.

As the Times of Israel reported:

On Monday Sisi was asked what he and the other Arab allies thought of U.S. leadership in the region. It is hard to put his response in words, mainly due to his prolonged silence.

“Difficult question,” he said after some moments, while his body language expressed contempt and disgust. “The suspending of US equipment and arms was an indicator for the public that the United States is not standing by the Egyptians.”

It turns out that although the American administration recently agreed to provide the Egyptian Air Force with Apache attack helicopters; it has been making it increasingly difficult for Cairo to make additional military purchases.

For example, the U.S. is delaying the shipment of tanks, spare parts and other weapons that the army desperately needs in its war against Islamic State.

This development raises serious questions not only about U.S.-Egyptian relations but the administration’s vision for the region.

This is, after all, a time when the administration is going all out to make common cause with Iran, an open enemy that is currently the leading state sponsor of terrorism in the world. President Obama is pursuing a diplomatic arrangement that will strengthen the Iranian regime and guarantee the survival of a nuclear program that moderate Arabs see as being as much of a threat to them as it is to Israel or the West.

The Egyptians understand that Washington isn’t interested in their friendship. Nor is the administration particularly supportive of Cairo’s efforts to rein in Hamas or to fight ISIS. Indeed, the Egyptians are now experiencing the same sort of treatment that has heretofore been reserved for the Israelis. That’s especially true in light of the arms resupply cutoff against Israel Obama ordered during last summer’s war in Gaza.

Despite flirting with Russia, Egypt may, like Israel, have no real alternative to the United States as an ally. Perhaps that’s why Obama takes it for granted. But if the U.S. is serious about fighting ISIS as opposed to just talking about it, Washington will have to start treating Egypt and its military as a priority rather than an embarrassment.

Streetwise Professor

Obama Channels Woodrow Wilson in His League of Nations Phase

by Craig Pirrong

I have compared Obama to a previous progressive president enamored of executive power and impatient with checks and balances: namely, Woodrow Wilson. Obama is now moving into the League of Nations phase of Wilson’s presidency, intent on ramming through a foreign policy deal in defiance of intense Senate opposition.

Actually, this comparison is unfair. To Wilson. At least he submitted the treaty to the Senate for ratification. It failed because he refused to compromise on Article X. Obama in contrast, refuses to involve Congress in any way, least of all by submitting any agreement for ratification. He scorns the very idea.

Today Obama stooped to a new low. In response to a letter from 47 Republican senators warning him that without ratification, Obama’s deal with the mullahs would not bind a future president or Congress, Obama responded by questioning their loyalty: “It’s somewhat ironic to see some members of Congress wanting to make common cause with the hardliners in Iran.”

Really. The hardliners oppose a deal because it might put a speed bump in the way of their race to develop an atomic weapon and the means to deliver it. The Republicans oppose the deal because they believe that the deal would not go nearly far enough to prevent, or even seriously delay Iran's building of the bomb.

See the difference? I knew you could. That people with radically opposed objectives both attack a proposed agreement doesn't mean it is just right. Indeed, the hardliners' opposition validates the Republicans' fear that the mullahs are hell-bent on getting the bomb as soon as possible.

Obama would be wise to heed the lesson of Wilson, whose obstinacy and refusal to compromise prevented him from achieving his the legacy-building agreement he craves so intensely. But we know that is not in his nature. It is not in the prog nature.

On the subject of Iran, I've been pondering the last couple of days what Putin wants to see here. My sense is that he would actually prefer that Obama fail. Another nuclear power on Russia's borders cannot be a comforting thought. What's more, Russia has long harbored imperial ambitions in Iran: the more insane nationalist elements in Russian (e.g., Zhirinovsky) are quite open in their ambitions to move south into Iran. A nuclear Iran would make those ambitions even less realistic than they already are.

But the main factor, at least in the short to medium term, is oil and gas. A deal that would expedite the elimination of sanctions that have limited Iran's oil sales, and which have kept its gas almost completely out of reach, would be adverse to Russia's economic interests. A substantial increase in Iranian oil output would put considerable downward pressure on prices. The elimination of sanctions would open Iran's vast gas reserves. In not too long, this gas could flow to Europe, where it would compete with Gazprom's.

It's hard to see an upside to Russia in a deal. Meaning that Putin will be trying to find a way to scupper it. Which will give Obama an opportunity to accuse the Republicans of being in league with Putin as well as the mullahs.

National Review

[The Letter and the Law](#)

Republican senators groping toward self-respect.

by Kevin D. Williamson

What, exactly, is the point of that great big hulking building with the cast-iron faux Roman dome in Washington? Joe Biden worked there for many years, and Barack Obama worked there for about five minutes, and neither of them has figured it out.

"Biden Rebukes Senate Republicans over Letter to Iran," harrumphs the *New York Times*, Gomer Pyle and Forrest Gump apparently having been otherwise occupied. Joe Biden is a national figure of fun, and it is difficult to remember that Barack Obama's campaign brought him into the fold for his special brand of gravitas, which is, like the subtle notes of freshly cut grass and charred orange rind emanating from a freshly decanted bottle of fine wine, detectable only by the rarest breed of connoisseur and the most common sort of bulls-t artist. Before becoming president, Barack Obama's main foreign-policy experience had been gazing wistfully at a Rand McNally desktop globe and trying to figure out which spot on earth would place him the farthest from the Rev. Jeremiah Wright. Joe Biden was added to the ticket purportedly to ease our national mind about

the question of whose hand was on The Button. People joke that Biden's real role in the Obama administration is acting as a human insurance policy against assassination, and, if you think about the key Democrat players of the Obama years — Biden, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Janet Napolitano, Eric Holder — there does seem to be a walk-tall-among-the-dwarves strategy in place.

Biden is tumescent with indignation because 47 senators reminded the president — by reminding the Iranians with whom he is engaged in nuclear negotiations — that the president does not have the authority to enter into a binding, long-term international agreement based on nothing more than his own juice. If he cuts a bad deal, Congress can reject it — something the Atomic Ayatollahs ought to have in mind.

Naturally, the Left is in convulsions: President Obama accused Republicans of making common cause with the hardline elements in an infamous state sponsor of terrorism. The progressive pompom squad, who the day before yesterday were beside themselves with horror at the thought that anybody would question whether a political rival was a patriot, began screaming that this is — their word — “treason.”

Which seems a bit much for giving Tehran a quick primer on American civics — one that Barack Obama might benefit from as well.

Congress is invested by the Constitution with many of the most important powers in foreign affairs: Only Congress can declare war. Only the Senate can approve a treaty for ratification. Secretaries of state and ambassadors are subject to Senate confirmation. (The Senate does not always take that as seriously as it should: President Obama is in the habit of appointing his financial benefactors, gentlemen with deep pockets and shallow minds, to embassies.) An international agreement entered into without congressional approval is only an executive order, subject to instant revision or being vacated entirely.

Biden sees things differently. He chided Republicans and advised them to keep in mind that “the vast majority of our international commitments take effect without congressional approval.” And that, of course, is the problem.

If you look up through the oculus in the Capitol dome, you will see a hideous piece of 19th-century kitsch called “The Apotheosis of Washington,” a fresco painted by Constantino Brumidi, whose work would be better suited to a vulgar Donald Trump interior than to the legislative seat of a republic. The message there is a pretty bad one: “Apotheosis” means deification, the Capitol itself is modeled on a Roman temple (and was, in fact, used as a house of worship for many years), and the word “capitol” itself deriving from Roman site of the temple to Jupiter Optimus Maximus. The apotheosis of Julius Caesar symbolically marks the end of the Roman republic and the beginning of the Roman empire. The apotheosis of Washington, seated upon a cloud and surrounded by gods and maidens, is a grotesque image in the context of a constitutional republic — and an image that has turned out to be tragically prescient, raising the president, godlike, above the mere mortals below engaged in the bland and unheroic business of making laws and being citizens instead of divinities.

Congress, being dominated for the moment by Republicans, may finally have been roused to check the arrogations of this president, individually. But the more important project is checking the arrogations of the president, categorically — reining in the presidency as such. The vice president is correct when he says that the “vast majority of our international commitments take effect without congressional approval.” Worse, the vast majority of our laws do, too: The law that most of us encounter is the administrative law, the regulatory output of the executive branch. The model for that is the so-called Affordable Care Act, essentially an enabling act instructing the executive

branch to create a health-care system to the president's liking. By 2013, there were 30 words of regulation for every one word of law in the ACA, which itself is thousands of pages long. Congress hasn't bothered declaring a war since after Pearl Harbor, and its current open-ended version of that — authorizations for the use of military force — are so liberal as to amount to *carte blanche*. Not only in the matter of health care, but on other critical domestic concerns, its instinct is to pass a dog's breakfast of a bill and empower the president and his minions to do with it what they will.

It has often been observed that the presidency attracts gasbags, and students of physics know that a gas — be it oxygen or hydrogen cyanide — will expand to fill its container. Executive power is always and everywhere — even in the most finely wrought constitutional systems — opportunistic. Where Congress retreats, the presidency will encroach. When such encroachments are allowed to stand long enough, they acquire a patina of respectability.

We can have three equal branches of government, or we can have a chaotic quasi-monarchy run on four-year intervals. If it takes a little partisan self-interest to inspire Congress toward a degree of institutional self-respect, so be it.

Contentions

[Presidential Commitments Then and Now](#)

by Rick Richman

The White House "outrage" at the "open letter" to Iran signed by 47 senators, led by Sen. Tom Cotton, was reinforced by [Vice President Biden's formal statement](#), which intoned that "America's influence depends on its ability to honor its commitments," including those made by a president without a vote of Congress. Perhaps we should welcome Biden's belated insight. As Jonathan Tobin [notes](#), President Obama on taking office in 2009 refused to be bound by the [2004 Gaza disengagement deal](#) in the [letters](#) exchanged between President George W. Bush and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. His secretary of state, Hillary Clinton, announced that such commitments were "unenforceable"—that they were non-binding on the new administration. In 2009, Obama disregarded previous commitments not only to Israel but also to Poland, the Czech Republic, and Georgia; he "fundamentally transformed" America's previous commitments, as he likes to describe the essential element of his entire presidency.

The Gaza disengagement deal was (1) approved by Congress; (2) included in the Gaza disengagement plan presented to the Israeli Knesset, and (3) relied on by Israel in withdrawing from Gaza later in 2005. The history of the deal (which the current secretary of state endorsed at the time as a U.S. "commitment") is [set forth here](#), and the reason Obama sought to undo it [is discussed here](#). In 2009, the Obama administration refused at least 22 times to answer whether it considered itself bound by the deal; in 2011 it openly [renegeed on key aspects](#) of it.

President Obama is currently negotiating an arms control agreement in secret, refusing to disclose the details of the offers his administration has made to Iran, a terrorist state according to his own State Department, and a self-described enemy of the United States since 1979. He has opposed not only a congressional debate before he concludes the deal but also a congressional vote afterwards. If he closes a deal with Iran on that basis, it will not be binding on any future president—at least not if that president chooses to follow the precedent Obama himself set in 2009.

If the administration is now seeking to restore the credibility of presidential commitments, the president might consider taking two steps: (1) acknowledge that the U.S. is bound by the

disengagement deal negotiated by President Bush with Israel, endorsed by a vote of Congress; and (2) promise to put his prospective deal with Iran to a similar congressional vote once the deal is done. If not, perhaps a reporter at his next press conference will ask how he reconciles his position that (a) he could ignore President Bush's congressionally approved deal with his view that (b) future presidents must honor the non-congressionally approved one he is negotiating now.

Power Line

[How Barack Obama Undercut Bush Administration's Nuclear Negotiations With Iran](#)

by John Hinderaker

In 2008, the Bush administration, along with the "six powers," was negotiating with Iran concerning that country's nuclear arms program. The Bush administration's objective was to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. On July 20, 2008, the [New York Times](#) headlined: "Nuclear Talks With Iran End in a Deadlock." What caused the talks to founder? The Times explained:

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The Iranians held firm to their position, perhaps because they knew that help was on the way, in the form of a new president. Barack Obama had clinched the Democratic nomination on June 3. At some point either before or after that date, but prior to the election, he secretly let the Iranians know that he would be much easier to bargain with than President Bush. [Michael Ledeen](#) reported the story last year:

During his first presidential campaign in 2008, Mr. Obama used a secret back channel to Tehran to assure the mullahs that he was a friend of the Islamic Republic, and that they would be very happy with his policies. The secret channel was Ambassador William G. Miller, who served in Iran during the shah's rule, as chief of staff for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, and as ambassador to Ukraine. Ambassador Miller has confirmed to me his conversations with Iranian leaders during the 2008 campaign.

So Obama secretly told the mullahs not to make a deal until he assumed the presidency, when they would be able to make a better agreement. Which is exactly what happened: Obama abandoned the requirement that Iran stop enriching uranium, so that Iran's nuclear program has sped ahead over the months and years that negotiations have dragged on. When an interim agreement in the form of a "Joint Plan of Action" was announced in late 2013, Iran's leaders [exulted in the fact](#) that the West had acknowledged its right to continue its uranium enrichment program:

"The (nuclear) program will continue and all the sanctions and violations against the Iranian nation under the pretext of the nuclear program will be removed gradually," [Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif] added. ...

"Iran's enrichment program has been recognized both in the first step and in the goals section and in the final step as well," Zarif said.

“The fact that all these pressures have failed to cease Iran’s enrichment program is a very important success for the Iranian nation’s resistance,” he added.

So Obama delivered the weak agreement that he had secretly promised the mullahs.

In view of these events, it is deeply ironic that the Democrats are accusing 47 Republican senators of undermining Obama’s position in the negotiations for a final agreement. Unlike Obama, they have done nothing in secret. They have published an “open letter” that is intended for the Obama administration and the American people as much as for Iran’s leaders. The letter spells out basic truths relating to our Constitution and the Senate’s role in ratifying treaties. Unlike Obama’s secret overture to Iran, the GOP senators aren’t discouraging Iran from dealing with Obama so that they can get a better deal later. On the contrary, their letter strengthens Obama’s bargaining position. He can say, “Even if I wanted to, I can’t give in on nuclear enrichment. It would never get through the Senate.” But of course, that isn’t what Obama wants to do. He wants to agree to a weak deal that will allow Iran to become a nuclear power. The Democrats are upset because the senators’ letter shines the light of truth on the Obama administration’s plan to give away the store.

Contentions

Friedman’s Adelson Derangement Syndrome and Democracy

by Jonathan S. Tobin

Regular readers of Thomas Friedman’s column in the *New York Times* are aware of the fact that he doesn’t like the fact that a bipartisan pro-Israel coalition predominates in the U.S. Congress. Friedman is stuck in the conspiratorial world of the Walt-Mearsheimer “Israel Lobby” thesis that falsely alleges that backing for the Jewish state is purchased by the cash of pro-Israel donors. And the most conspicuous of those donors is casino magnate Sheldon Adelson, who seems to be occupying a rather large space in Friedman’s head these days. Last week after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s speech to Congress, Friedman [repeated the slurs against the pro-Israel community and Adelson](#) that he first lobbed in 2011. That he doubled down on those charges [in today’s column](#) is of little interest. But what is worth noting is Friedman’s attack on *Israel Hayom*, the Israeli newspaper Adelson owns. According to the columnist, the paper is subverting Israeli democracy in the manner that Adelson and other donors are supposedly undermining American foreign policy. But what we really learn from this piece is that Friedman likes neither democracy nor freedom of the press.

Friedman believes the ovations Netanyahu received from Congress in 2011 and last week were “bought and paid for by the Israel Lobby.” This is a profound misunderstanding of the way American democracy works. Members of Congress are pleased to accept contributions from pro-Israel donors, but those relationships help solidify the alliance. If that stand were not popular with the overwhelming majority of Americans, of whom more than 98 percent of are not Jewish, no amount of money could purchase it. That doesn’t please liberals like Friedman who would like Congress to be more like President Obama when it comes to a predilection for unreasonable pressure on Israel and support for détente with Iran. But the fault lies not so much with Adelson as with the basic sympathy of most Americans for Israel and their skepticism about the Palestinians and Islamist regimes like that in Iran.

But, as Friedman notes, stringent Israeli campaign-finance laws prevent Adelson or anyone like him from having much say in their elections. That those laws, like the attempts of American liberals

to impose campaign-finance rules on our elections, are aimed at suppressing political speech rather than enhancing democracy is an argument for another day. But Adelson is not voiceless in Israel. He owns *Israel Hayom*, the largest circulation paper in a country that is addicted to newspapers.

Like many on the Israeli left, Friedman thinks there's something wrong with this. He believes *Israel Hayom* isn't kosher because it is a free circulation paper. But what he really hates about it is its pro-Netanyahu bias.

Friedman is right about *Israel Hayom* favoring the prime minister and also right when he says it is putting financial pressure on the mass circulation *Yediot Aharonoth* and the hard-left *Haaretz* (which dubs itself Israel's *New York Times*, though all the two papers have in common is bias against the Jewish state). But the reason for this isn't because it's free.

It has often been said of Fox News that its success is due to the fact that its founders sought to fill an underserved niche of the news market. But that audience for that niche happened to consist of approximately half of the American public, making it the most watched cable news network. [That a recent poll found it to be the most trusted television news source](#) might strike its left-wing critics as absurd but it's actually quite logical. Unlike its liberal mainstream media competitors, Fox doesn't pretend to be objective. Therefore no one is deceived by either its generally outstanding straight news coverage or its successful opinion shows.

The same might be said of *Israel Hayom*. Though Friedman thinks it's not fair that *Yediot* and *Haaretz's* main competitor these days is pro-Netanyahu, the reason why so many people read it is because it provides a rare antidote to the uniformly anti-Netanyahu and pro-left wing party coverage in the rest of the Israeli media. Like Rupert Murdoch's Fox, Adelson found an underserved market that made up a large percentage of the Israeli electorate. [As *Israel Hayom* pointed out in a study they published](#), *Yediot* is every bit as biased against the prime minister as Adelson's paper is on the other side. Of course, it goes without saying that if Friedman really disliked biased newspapers, especially with regard to Israel, he'd have to denounce his own *New York Times* in every column.

Just as Friedman would like to shut up and shut down pro-Israel activists like Adelson and marginalize AIPAC, so, too, would he and his left-wing Israeli friends like to do the same to *Israel Hayom*. They may well succeed too if Labor wins the upcoming election as it is pledged to support a bill that would seek to put Adelson's paper out of business by burdening it with regulations. Israel's lack of First Amendment protections for the press—something that Friedman would rightly fight to the death to protect here—may make this possible.

Adelson's money couldn't buy his friend Newt Gingrich the Republican presidential nomination in 2012 any more than it helped Mitt Romney to defeat Barack Obama in the general election. Nor will the bully pulpit of *Israel Hayom* ensure that Netanyahu wins reelection. Money helps, but it doesn't guarantee any results in a democracy. But what foes of Israel like Friedman are really against isn't so much money in politics as its use on behalf of causes or candidates they dislike. Which is to say, his problem, like that of many liberals, isn't just a bad case of Adelson derangement syndrome, but with the democratic system in both countries.



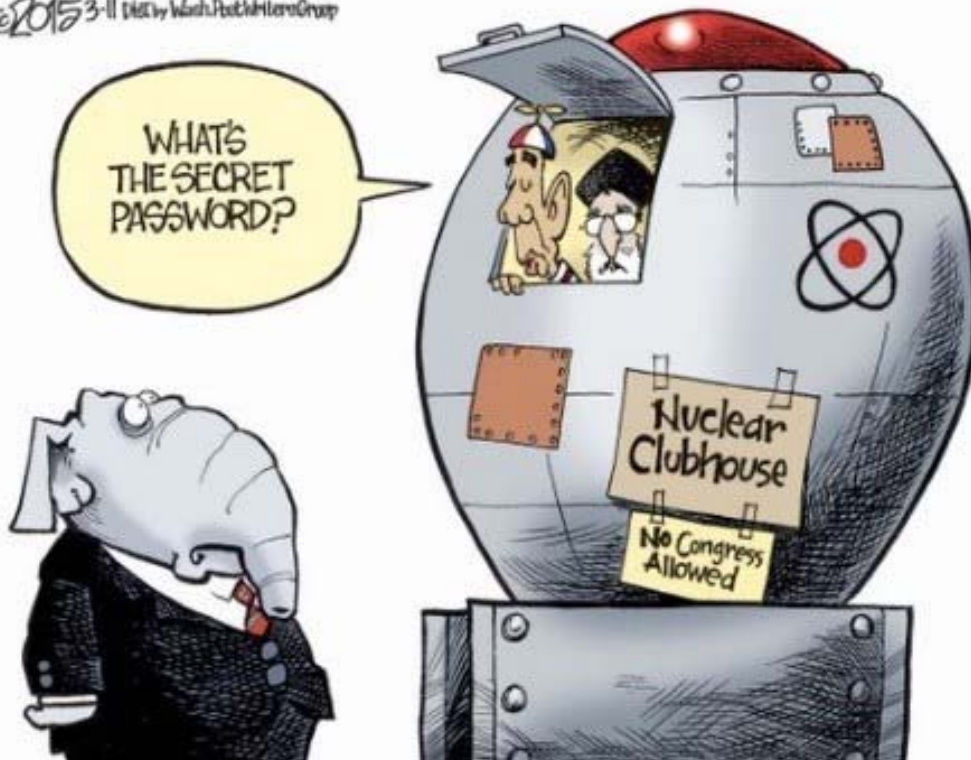
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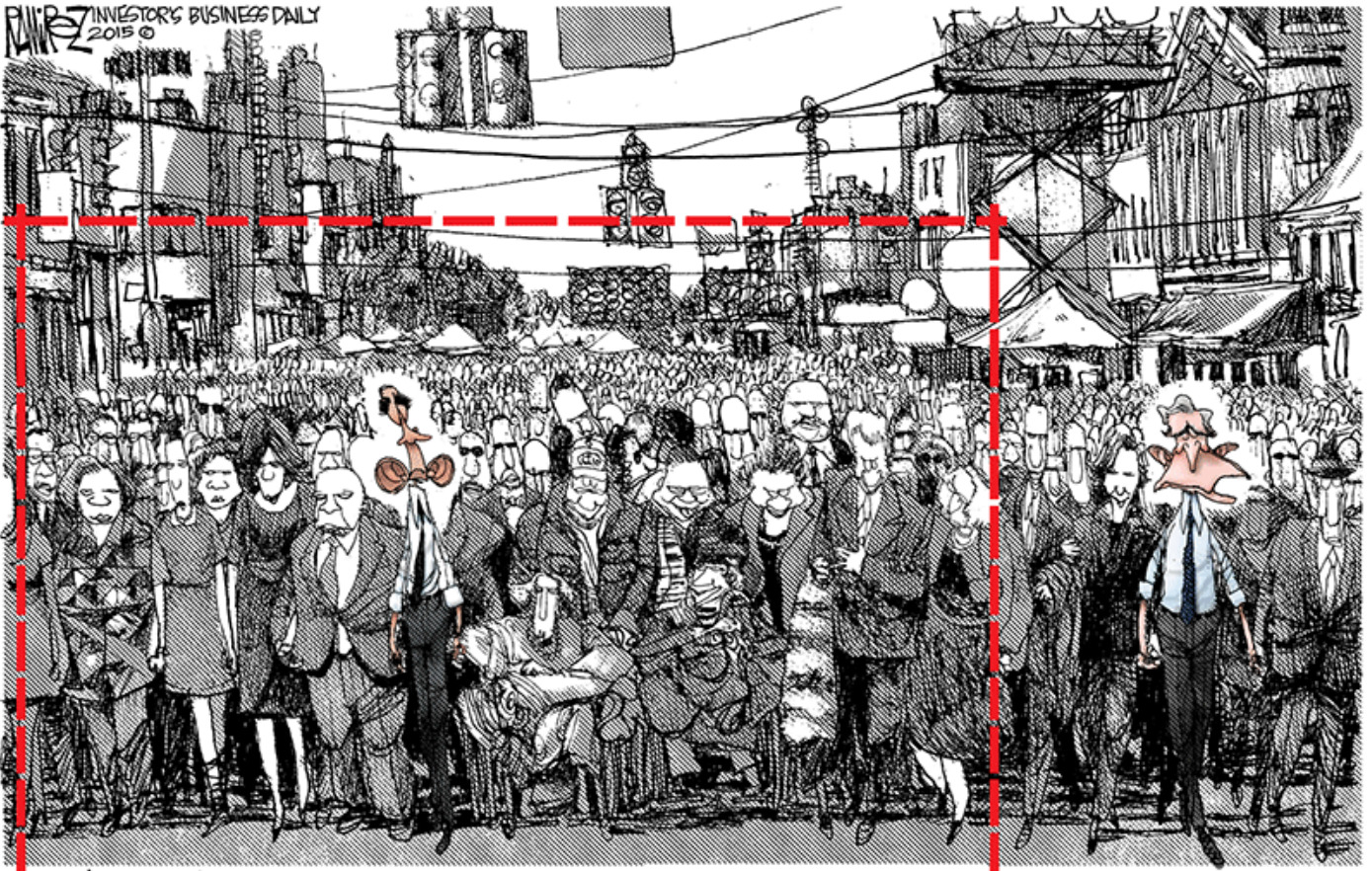
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