

March 31, 2015

We continue examining the detritus left in the wake of decisions by Empty Suit. The desertion charges against Bergdahl and the collapse of the government in Yemen are two current examples of the results of his foolishness.

Tom Bevan is first on Bergdahl.

Travel back with me, dear reader, to a magical and sunny time. It was only 10 months ago, on a glorious June morning when President Obama called the White House press corps together in the Rose Garden. There, our smiling president proudly announced that the United States had secured the release of an American serviceman held captive in Afghanistan for five years.

Flanked by the grateful parents of returning Army Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl, the president lauded his administration's "ironclad commitment to bring our prisoners of war home."

The soldier's father, Bob Bergdahl, read a prayer; the young man's mother, Jani, hugged the president. It was a story that could please all Americans: parenthood (quite properly) trumping partisanship.

Yet even as White House image-makers touted the picture of a concerned commander-in-chief looking out for the troops, a nagging bit of foreshadowing interjected itself into the narrative. For starters, the senior Bergdahl's prayer was delivered in Arabic and began with a blessing from the Koran. While his son was in captivity Bob Bergdahl had grown his hair and beard long, Taliban-style, and now he also sprinkled his remarks from the White House lectern with a few words of Pashto, the language of Bowe Bergdahl's captors.

More disconcerting still were the terms of the deal securing the soldier's release, which the president referred to only fleetingly. ...

The Daily Beast says "everything the White House told you about Bowe Bergdahl was wrong."

His release was supposed to be the political masterstroke in the last days of the war. But the war is still going, and Bergdahl is going to court.

In the space of nine months, he went from being heralded at the White House to facing prison for life.

On Wednesday, the U.S. military charged Sergeant Bowe Bergdahl, the former Taliban captive who was freed in exchange for five Guantanamo Bay detainees, with desertion and misbehaving before the enemy.

His capture, release and now charge became a parable of how narratives about the war in Afghanistan did not pan out. The soldier whose service Susan Rice, U.S. national security adviser, once characterized as "honorable" and whose release came at the price of five prisoners could now himself end up in an American prison for life. The prison exchange that some political operatives thought would be heralded was instead widely condemned. And the

war that was supposed to be ending with no soldier left behind has now been extended for five months.

Bergdahl's case will now go before an Article 32 hearing, the equivalent of a grand jury in civilian court, to determine how the case should proceed. ...

Jonah Goldberg has a great take on the Bergdahl flap. Later his post morphs into a discussion of the disaster in Yemen.

What I find interesting about the Bergdahl story is that it is the quintessential Obama fiasco. If you were compiling a checklist of all the things that drive conservatives crazy -- and by conservatives I basically mean people who are (a) paying attention and (b) not enthralled in the Obama cult of personality -- the Bergdahl story would achieve a near-perfect score.

The Obama M.O. remains remarkably consistent. He announces some initiative, policy, or presidential action. The public rationale for the move is always rhetorically grounded in some deep, universally shared principle, even if the real agenda is something far more ideological or partisan. The facts driving the decision are never as the White House presents them. Indeed, the more confident the White House appears to be about the facts, the more likely it is they're playing games with them.

Sometimes the facts are simply made up. There are millions of "shovel ready jobs" right around the corner! "You can keep your doctor!" The Benghazi attack was "about a video!" "One in five women are raped!" "The Islamic State isn't Islamic!" ...

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Invoking high-minded principle? Check!

Really motivated by partisan and ideological agenda? Check!

Made-up facts? Check!

Critics denounced as partisan ideologues opposed to high-minded principle? Check!

Group-think-driven White House's failure to anticipate the political downsides? Check!

Flagrant contempt for Congress and its laws? [Check!](#)

The high-minded-principle part is obvious. We leave no one behind. Who can disagree with that?

But it was obvious long ago that Obama had other priorities in mind. "It could be a huge win if Obama could bring him home," a senior administration official [told](#) Rolling Stone in a 2012 piece on Bergdahl. "Especially in an election year, if it's handled properly."

The other major priority was to use the marching band and fireworks celebration of Bergdahl's return to [hasten the shuttering of Gitmo](#). Dump the worst of the worst anywhere you can and the political rationale for keeping the place open evaporates. So trading five hardened Taliban commanders for one deserter was a win-win.

Then there's the thumbless grasp of political reality. Maybe the president didn't think going AWOL was that big a deal. Maybe he thought it was understandable. Maybe he assumed everyone shared his take on things. Maybe he thought he could just bluster through because the American people are idiots. Who knows?

The fact remains they knew Bergdahl had been AWOL and yet still thought this would be a clear-cut "huge win," particularly in the context of winding down the War in Afghanistan. They had no idea this fiasco would blow up in their faces, though I like to think some of the savvier political operatives on the Obama team had at least a moment of doubt when they saw Bergdahl's dad show up with his Johnny Taliban beard. When the elder Bergdahl started speaking Arabic and Pashto in the Rose Garden, I like to imagine that David Axelrod's bowels stewed just a little bit. (Every political pro I know who watched that announcement responded pretty much the same way you or I would if we saw a polar bear pooping a live hamster on a bus made of graham crackers; "What the Hell am I looking at?") ...

Peter Wehner thinks the real motivation was to free five terrorists from Gitmo.

... But what made this particular case even more problematic is that Bergdahl was freed in exchange for five high-value Taliban figures who had been held captive in Guantanamo Bay. As several outlets and individuals have pointed out, getting back a soldier who was almost certainly a deserter was simply a pretext. The main goal of President Obama is to empty Guantanamo Bay. It is something the president declared he wanted to do during his first day in office and it's something he is committed to doing before his last day in office. Swapping Bergdahl for five Taliban leaders—several of whom are trying to return to the battlefield so they can kill more Americans—was the convenient (if explosively contentious) excuse. The Wall Street Journal [reminds us](#) that Mr. Obama told NBC that emptying Gitmo "is going to involve, on occasion, releasing folks who we may not trust but we can't convict."

So we have a president with at least two obsessions: One of them is attacking the Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, and weakening the Jewish State of Israel; the second is to empty Guantanamo Bay and release terrorists committed to killing as many Americans as possible.

We've never seen anything quite like this president.

Walter Russell Mead posts on our "comprehensive failure" in Yemen.

Over the weekend, several C-17 transport planes transported [a reported 350](#) U.S. Special Operations forces out of Yemen as the country stood on the precipice of civil war. The Wall Street Journal has [a trenchant summary](#) of just how President Obama's policy has gone up in smoke:

What happened in Yemen, according to descriptions by current and former officials and experts, was a miscalculation about the changes unleashed by the Arab Spring revolutions. It involved an overreliance by Washington on a promising new leader who ultimately was unable to hold off rival forces and tensions, they said.

As a result, a country President Barack Obama last year cited as a model of American counterterrorism success has now descended into chaos, with U.S. influence and drone strikes no match for at least four sides at war with one another.

Jennifer Rubin posts on the presser where Josh Earnest continued to pretend Yemen is a "template that has succeeded."

... Josh Earnest had his talking point and was sticking with it (just like the talking point that Obama meant what he said when he called the shooting of innocents in a French kosher market "random"). For over three minutes Earnest refused to acknowledge their model was not a mess. Pressed again, he insisted this is still a "template that has succeeded." An incredulous Jonathan Karl of ABC News continued to press him, but Earnest refused to admit the obvious, namely that the administration had failed in its leading from behind, light footprint.

It was embarrassing and unbelievable. But it was also instructive. The administration is failing as far as the eye can see. Iraq and Syria are infested with jihadists from the Islamic State. The civil war in Syria has killed 200,000 and, because of our failure to come to their aid in a timely and effective manner, the Free Syrian Army is in dismal shape. Iran is pulling the strings in Syria, Yemen and Lebanon while its fighters are doing what we will not, combating the Islamic State in Iraq. Our Sunni allies and Israel are exasperated with our passivity and willingness to appease Iran. The "peace process" is a joke. So the president bashes our closest ally and tells us Yemen is a success.

Consider what would have happened if President George W. Bush refused to believe the Iraq War was going poorly, denied any strategy change was necessary and never implemented the surge. Ironically, critics accused him of being stubborn or cut off from reality. Right diagnosis, wrong president.

The administration at this point plainly has no regard for the facts or else no elementary judgment. When it comes to a monumental deal with Iran or a "shift" in U.S. policy toward Israel at the United Nations, it is becoming increasingly clear this crowd cannot be trusted. Congress must step in not only where Iran is concerned but also in demanding a coherent and accurate accounting of events. ...

We close with Roger Simon, who always has a way of providing a telling summary of events. Roger wonders if President Petulant is the crazy pilot.

... Obama and his minions are huddled wherever they're huddled, busy destroying the Western World with their bizarre policies and eagerness to make a deal with Iran that is so desperate it makes the word pathetic seem pathetic. The results of this desperation have been wretched, a fascistic new Persian Empire emerging from Libya to Yemen with Obama auditioning for the role of Cyrus the Great – or is it Ahmadinejad Junior? Whatever the case, it's horrible. Even those same Democrats know it. They're embarrassed – and they should be. But for the most part

they don't have the guts to say anything. This is the kind of administration that exchanges a creepy sociopath like Bergdahl for five Islamic homicidal maniacs and expects praise for being humanitarian. And everyone walks away shaking their heads.

It's hard to know why Obama is doing it all. I know it sounds like a rude overstatement but in a way he reminds me of that crazy German pilot flying that plane into that alpine cliff, only the plane is us (America and the West). Does he hate us all that much – or is it just Netanyahu? Whatever the explanation, it's mighty peculiar. At this point almost no one in the Congress appears to be backing him up – and yet he continues. Who knows what will happen next?

The cartoonists have another field day.

Real Clear Politics

[Obama's Bergdahl Fairy Tale Has Unhappy Ending](#)

by Tom Bevan



Travel back with me, dear reader, to a magical and sunny time. It was only 10 months ago, on a glorious June morning when President Obama called the White House press corps together in the Rose Garden. There, our smiling president proudly announced that the United States had secured the release of an American serviceman held captive in Afghanistan for five years.

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More disconcerting still were the terms of the deal securing the soldier's release, which the president referred to only fleetingly.

"As part of this effort, the United States is transferring five detainees from the prison in Guantanamo Bay to Qatar," Obama said. "The Qatari government has given us assurances that it will put in place measures to protect our national security."

By the time National Security Adviser Susan Rice appeared on the Sunday talk shows the following morning to defend the administration's swap of five hardened terrorists for Bergdahl, voices could be heard on Capitol Hill, not all of them belonging to Republicans, complaining that the White House had reneged on its promise to consult with Congress on the terms of a trade. Even more disquieting, uncomfortable questions were already bubbling up about the precise circumstances of Bergdahl's capture in 2009.

Rice assured those watching on national television that Bergdahl had served the United States with "honor and distinction." This claim only invited scrutiny—and was immediately challenged by members of Bergdahl's unit, the 2nd Platoon, Blackfoot Company, 1st Battalion, 501st Regiment.

"What would it look like if I got lost in the mountains?" one former comrade recalled Bergdahl saying. "Do you think I could make it to China or India on foot?"

Another soldier in the company said flatly that Bergdahl had not been captured in any conventional sense—that he had left his post voluntarily, putting others in danger.

"I served in the same battalion in Afghanistan and participated in the attempts to retrieve him throughout the summer of 2009," wrote Nathan Bradley Bethea. "After we redeployed, every member of my brigade combat team received an order that we were not allowed to discuss what happened to Bergdahl for fear of endangering him. He is safe, and now it is time to speak the truth. And that the truth is: Bergdahl was a deserter, and soldiers from his own unit died trying to track him down."

And that father who praised Obama and prayed aloud for his son's deliverance? Well, after his release, Bowe wouldn't talk to Bob Bergdahl. One reason may have been revealed by war correspondent Michael Hastings, who has since died. Writing in *Rolling Stone* magazine in 2012, Hastings revealed that Bergdahl, then a private first class, emailed his parents three days before his 2009 disappearance expressing his disillusionment with the U.S. war effort in Afghanistan. "The future is too good to waste on lies," he wrote. "And life is way too short to care for the damnation of others, as well to spend it helping fools with their ideas that are wrong. I have seen their ideas and I am ashamed to even be American."

In the subject line of his reply, Bob Bergdahl wrote from his home in Idaho, “OBEY YOUR CONSCIENCE.”

Fast-forward to yesterday afternoon, when the Army announced the result of its much anticipated investigation into Bergdahl’s disappearance. Far from serving with honor and distinction, Bergdahl was charged with desertion and misbehavior before the enemy. The charges carry a maximum sentence of life in military prison.

Perhaps that’s what’s really going on here: The military brass wants to correct the record, at least the one created by Obama and Susan Rice. If that’s what is going on, the Army’s legal system will sort out the excesses, if there were any. But more is at stake than political reputations.

In the ensuing 10 months since their release, we’ve learned that at least one of the five prisoners remanded to Qatar from Guantanamo Bay as part of the original swap has been caught making phone calls to the Taliban.

Qatar’s “strict monitoring” of the Taliban 5—if it ever really existed—is set to expire this spring, effectively allowing them to roam free. Lt. Gen. Vincent Stewart, director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, told the House Armed Services Committee earlier this year that there is “very little” his agency can do to prevent them from returning to the battlefield and trying to kill American soldiers.

So, far from the fairy tale of a hero’s homecoming that President Obama tried to spin for the American people that Saturday morning 10 months ago, this story doesn’t have a happy ending for America. In his effort to empty the Gitmo detainee facility, the president traded five hard-core terrorists for a man who now stands officially accused of abandoning his fellow soldiers. He very may well be court-martialed and spend a good deal of his life behind bars. It’s the Taliban 5 who, beginning in just a few short weeks, get to live happily ever after.

Daily Beast

[Everything The White House Told You About Bowe Bergdahl Was Wrong](#)

by Nancy Youssef

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His capture, release and now charge became a parable of how narratives about the war in Afghanistan did not pan out. The soldier whose service Susan Rice, U.S. national security adviser, once characterized as “honorable” and whose release came at the price of five prisoners could now himself end up in an American prison for life. The prison exchange that some political operatives thought would be heralded was instead widely condemned. And the war that was supposed to be ending with no soldier left behind has now been extended for five months.

Bergdahl’s case will now go before an Article 32 hearing, the equivalent of a grand jury in civilian court, to determine how the case should proceed. While many soldiers in the U.S. military’s history have served long sentences for such crimes, many are highly dubious he will serve a life sentence. There is a sense that there is no interest in handing out a long sentence to a soldier who may not have passed muster had the nation not been so desperate for troops when he joined in 2007—the height of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

That said, there are many in the military who remain tremendously [angry at Bergdahl](#). They believe he was a deserter and that the five-year search for him endangered other troops.

Army Colonel Daniel King announced at a nationally televised press conference out of Fort Bragg, North Carolina, that Bergdahl was charged with one count of desertion and one count of misbehavior before the enemy—“endangering the safety of a command, unit, or place.” The former carries a maximum five-year penalty, the reduction of rank down to private, the forfeiture of all military compensation, and a dishonorable discharge. The latter could result in the same punishment—plus a life-in-prison sentence.

Bergdahl, who turns 29 years-old Saturday, disappeared in June 2009 from Paktika province in eastern Afghanistan while serving as a private from the 25th Infantry Division. The U.S. military devoted an enormous amount of resources in the search for him, particularly after videos appeared showing him in custody. In addition, his family and their hometown of Hailey, Idaho, fought to keep attention on Bergdahl’s case. In May 2014, Bergdahl was released in exchange for five Taliban members held at Guantanamo Bay who were subsequently transferred to Qatari custody for a year.

President Obama made the announcement of Bergdahl’s release in a Rose Garden ceremony flanked by Bergdahl’s parents, even as the circumstances of his disappearance were shrouded in uncertainty and charges that he abandoned his post and troops. Politically, the administration celebrated negotiating his release after years of failed bids by both the current and former administration, at least one attempted escape by Bergdahl and countless patrols searching for him. Photos released by the White House showed the president walking arm-in-arm with Bergdahl’s parents. Many called the timing key as many hoped the U.S. was winding down its war in Afghanistan.

But the political benefits and the timing of the war both proved incorrect. The president faced immediate backlash for heralding a soldier suspected of abandoning his post. That was only further fueled when, in a June 2014 interview with CNN, Rice said [Bergdahl served with “honor and distinction.”](#)

Rice’s comments could work in Bergdahl’s favor, should the convening authority looking at his case recommend a court martial, military officials conceded. It could counter the suggestion that he “is guilty of cowardly conduct,” a clause in the misbehavior-before-the-enemy charge.

And just this week, the president announced that the U.S. military would delay its drawdown to 9,800 troops for another five months at the request of newly elected Afghan President Ashraf Ghani. U.S. forces are seeking to train 352,000 Afghan security forces before leaving and now are about 20,000 shy of that figure.

National Review

Anatomy of an Obama Failure

by Jonah Goldberg

What I find interesting about the Bergdahl story is that it is the quintessential Obama fiasco. If you were compiling a checklist of all the things that drive conservatives crazy -- and by conservatives I basically mean people who are (a) paying attention and (b) not enthralled in the Obama cult of personality -- the Bergdahl story would achieve a near-perfect score.

The Obama M.O. remains remarkably consistent. He announces some initiative, policy, or presidential action. The public rationale for the move is always rhetorically grounded in some deep, universally shared principle, even if the real agenda is something far more ideological or partisan. The facts driving the decision are never as the White House presents them. Indeed, the more confident the White House appears to be about the facts, the more likely it is they're playing games with them.

Sometimes the facts are simply made up. There are millions of "shovel ready jobs" right around the corner! "You can keep your doctor!" The Benghazi attack was "about a video!" "One in five women are raped!" "The Islamic State isn't Islamic!" "These exclamation points are totally necessary!" At other times, the facts are selectively deployed. "Something something tax breaks for corporate jets mumble mumble poor Warren Buffet's secretary's tax bill blah blah Spain is winning the future with solar panels" and, course, "core al-Qaeda has been decimated" (in which "core al-Qaeda" is defined as "the bits of al-Qaeda that have been decimated").

The Obama response to all opposition is to either attack the motives of his critics or to dismiss the objections as mere politics or ideology. When Obama met with congressional leaders back in 2009, Eric Cantor and Paul Ryan made substantive critiques of Obamacare, and Obama responded by waving away their objections as mere "talking points" -- as if any facts written on a sheet of paper suddenly become untrue if you can call them "talking points."

Republican 1: "It is unsafe to smoke cigarettes around the propane tank."

Republican 2: "Mass collectivization of agriculture has not worked well in the past."

Republican 3: "You should not feed salmon to grizzly bears using your lap as a plate."

Obama: "Those are just talking points.....Ahhhhh! Get this bear off of me!"

When Senate Democrats, led by Bob Menendez (now conveniently under the Department of Justice's thumb), expressed concerns about Obama's overtures to Iran, Obama reportedly sympathized, [saying he understood their plight, what with the pressure from "donors."](#) The insinuation, obviously, is that Obama is doing the right thing, while those opposed were motivated by fear of nefarious unnamed "donors" cracking their whips (between servings of lox

and bagels, no doubt). Only Obama's motivations are pure, noble, and fact-driven. Only his opponents are ideologues incapable of "putting politics aside for the good of the American people," as he likes to say.

There are other anatomical features of an Obama outrage. A few come to mind:

1. He has a tendency to frame issues in such a way that America is the villain and America's enemies have a point.
2. He has an outsized faith -- fueled equally by ego and the media's eagerness to take his side - in his ability to persuade the public not to believe their lying eyes.
3. Since Obama sees himself as the People's Tribune and the sole champion of what is right and good, he has little to no use for Congress or legal or constitutional requirements to work with it.
4. And, of course, there's the incompetence factor -- amplified by groupthink in the White House bunker. They may think Obama is the smartest guy in the room, but they also all think they're geniuses who just happen to agree with each other. This creates a near total blindness to facts, data, and opinions that don't line up with their worldview.

Enter Bergdahl

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Václav Havel? [Czech!](#)

The high-minded-principle part is obvious. We leave no one behind. Who can disagree with that?

But it was obvious long ago that Obama had other priorities in mind. "It could be a huge win if Obama could bring him home," a senior administration official [told](#) *Rolling Stone* in a 2012 piece on Bergdahl. "Especially in an election year, if it's handled properly."

The other major priority was to use the marching band and fireworks celebration of Bergdahl's return to [hasten the shuttering of Gitmo](#). Dump the worst of the worst anywhere you can and the political rationale for keeping the place open evaporates. So trading five hardened Taliban commanders for one deserter was a win-win.

Then there's the thumbless grasp of political reality. Maybe the president didn't think going AWOL was that big a deal. Maybe he thought it was understandable. Maybe he assumed everyone shared his take on things. Maybe he thought he could just bluster through because the American people are idiots. Who knows?

The fact remains they knew Bergdahl had been AWOL and yet still thought this would be a clear-cut "huge win," particularly in the context of winding down the War in Afghanistan. They had no idea this fiasco would blow up in their faces, though I like to think some of the savvier political operatives on the Obama team had at least a moment of doubt when they saw Bergdahl's dad show up with his Johnny Taliban beard. When the elder Bergdahl started speaking Arabic and Pashto in the Rose Garden, I like to imagine that David Axelrod's bowels stewed just a little bit. (Every political pro I know who watched that announcement responded pretty much the same way you or I would if we saw a polar bear pooping a live hamster on a bus made of graham crackers; "What the Hell am I looking at?")

Caught off guard by their own incompetence and arrogance, they immediately responded by attacking the motives of the critics. This is a very human reaction. If you think you've thought through all of the legitimate responses to your actions, it's natural to assume the critical responses you didn't anticipate are illegitimate.

On background they started claiming that Bergdahl was being "swiftboated." This spin was a *pas de deux* of asininity since "swiftboating" itself is a b.s. term for telling embarrassing and inconvenient truths. Much like John Kerry's old comrades, it was members of Bergdahl's own unit who blew the whistle on him. Blindsided by this utterly predictable reaction, the White House doubled down by marrying arrogant invocation of principle to made-up facts, which is pretty much Susan Rice's *métier*. So they sent her out to the Sunday shows to insist that Bergdahl "served with honor and distinction" -- words that actually have quite a bit of meaning to people who, you know, served with honor and distinction.

On Twitter, lowahawk had the [pithiest summation](#) of the Obama team's assault:

"What kind of scum would slander this fine brave patriotic US soldier!"

"His platoon mates."

"And you actually believe those baby killers?"

Hacky Psaki

Jen Psaki, bless her heart, is sticking with the party line. Asked by Megyn Kelly whether the trade was worth it, Psaki responded: "We have a commitment to our men and women serving overseas, or in our military, defending our national security every day, that we will do everything we can to bring them home, and that's what we did in this case."

I agree with that entirely, in principle. But the key phrase there is "everything we can." It implies that there is a limiting principle to what we can do. It's a bit like the [ten-guilty-men fallacy](#). What if the Taliban asked for ten, 20 or 100 Gitmo detainees in exchange for Bergdahl? Would Obama have agreed to that? What if the Taliban demanded all of the detainees, the state of Ohio, and the left thumbs of the starting line-up of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers? Without a limiting principle, our answer would have to be "Yes." But once sweet reason tags into the ring,

we understand that such demands are ridiculous even if Bergdahl were the greatest and most patriotic soldier who ever lived.

Free Fall

I was just about to get all various and sundry on your ass when my friend Shannen Coffin -- recently catapulted by *National Review* and Megyn Kelly into the role of America's foremost expert on State Department paperwork -- forwarded me this spectacularly depressing piece by [Politico's Michael Crowley](#). The whole thing is worth reading, but I have a couple quick observations.

Crowley writes:

"If there's one lesson this administration has learned, from President Obama's 2009 Cairo speech through the Arab Spring, it's that when it comes to this region, nothing happens in a linear way — and precious little is actually about us, which is a hard reality to accept," said a senior State Department official.

Not everyone is so forgiving. "We're in a goddamn free fall here," said James Jeffrey, who served as Obama's ambassador to Iraq and was a top national security aide in the George W. Bush White House.

First, free fall sounds like a perfect term for the mess we're in.

Second, it's hard to make out exactly what this senior State Department official is trying to say with his head so far past his sphincter. In the abstract, I'm fine with the notion that nothing happens in the region in a linear way. I'm also fine with the idea that not everything that happens in the Middle East is about us. But taken in the context of the last SIX years, the takeaway is that Obama simply never had any idea what he was doing, and as a result he rationalizes doing little to nothing as hard-won wisdom. It's not *him*, it's *them*.

Here's the thing to remember: Beyond ending the Iraq War by any means necessary and closing Gitmo, Obama's Cairo speech was Obama's Middle East foreign policy. He thought his middle name, a few apologies, and not being George W. Bush, combined with the awesome awesomeness of his awesomosity, would be enough to transform the region.

Then there's this:

For years, members of the Obama team have grappled with the chaotic aftermath of the Arab Spring. But of late they have been repeatedly caught off-guard, raising new questions about America's ability to manage the dangerous region.

What the what? Again, I think the piece on the whole is good. But did you catch the sudden change in subject here? The *Obama team* has been grappling and was caught off guard, and this raises new questions about *America's* ability to manage the region? *Why America's?* These are Team Obama's foul-ups. Shouldn't they raise new questions about *Team Obama's* abilities? Maybe I'm still high on airplane glue, but I'm pretty sure that when the Bush team was grappling and getting caught off guard, it "raised questions" about Bush, not *America*.

This is a microscopic example of one of my longstanding beefs. Whenever things are going bad for liberalism, the blame falls on either America or conservatives, never on liberals. As I wrote in *Liberal Fascism*:

In the liberal telling of America's story, there are only two perpetrators of official misdeeds: conservatives and "America" writ large. Progressives, or modern liberals, are never bigots or tyrants, but conservatives often are. For example, one will virtually never hear that the Palmer Raids, Prohibition, or American eugenics were thoroughly progressive phenomena. These are sins America itself must atone for. Meanwhile, real or alleged "conservative" misdeeds — say, McCarthyism — are always the exclusive fault of conservatives and a sign of the policies they would repeat if given power. The only culpable mistake that liberals make is failing to fight "hard enough" for their principles. Liberals are never responsible for historic misdeeds, because they feel no compulsion to defend the inherent goodness of America. Conservatives, meanwhile, not only take the blame for events not of their own making that they often worked the most assiduously against, but find themselves defending liberal misdeeds in order to defend America herself.

Then there's this:

Obama officials were surprised earlier this month, for instance, when the Iraqi government joined with Iranian-backed militias to mount a sudden offensive aimed at freeing the city of Tikrit from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. Nor did they foresee the swift rise of the Iranian-backed rebels who toppled Yemen's U.S.-friendly government and disrupted a crucial U.S. counterterrorism mission against Al Qaeda there.

Wait a second. I was with you on the whole "the Middle East isn't linear" thing. But if this White House was caught off guard by Iran's backing of Houthi (and blowfish) militias and coziness with the Shiite government in Baghdad, that's not proof of the region's non-linear inscrutability, it's further proof that the Obama foreign-policy team drives to work in a clown car. It's like the s*** has been hitting the fan for so long over there, they think that's just the best way to paint the walls of the situation room an earthy brown.

All Is Dwell

Finally, there's the final paragraph, which is a quote from the same State Department official who wears his own ass like a hat:

"The truth is, you can dwell on Yemen, or you can recognize that we're one agreement away from a game-changing, legacy-setting nuclear accord on Iran that tackles what every one agrees is the biggest threat to the region," the official said.

Sigh. Where to begin?

Remember all that stuff earlier about groupthink and the inability to anticipate or even recognize inconvenient data and facts? Well, here's this guy saying: Don't dwell on Yemen's disintegration or on America's hasty withdrawal from it. Don't dwell on the fact this administration touted it -- and continues to tout it! -- as a model of a successful counter-terror strategy. Don't dwell on the fact that it is now the frontline of a regional sectarian war between Arab Sunnis and Iran and Iranian client Shiites. Don't dwell on the fact that Yemen is in fact just the latest piece of concrete evidence that the whole region is going tits-up, with total bloody chaos in Libya, Syria,

and much of Iraq, thanks in large part to Iran's decades-long ambition to become a regional hegemon by any means necessary -- including terrorism.

No, don't dwell on any of that stuff, because we're going to get a piece of paper that will probably put Iran on a path to getting a bomb rather than prevent it. But even if the terms are exactly as the White House will spin them, the agreement will still depend entirely on the good faith and trustworthiness of Iran's rulers, who've been violating every international law you can think of and who chant, every week, "death to America." I mean, what could go wrong?

Contentions

Obama's Two Obsessions: Weaken Israel and Empty Gitmo

by Peter Wehner

We learned on Wednesday that the United States Army is going to charge Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl with desertion and misbehavior before the enemy. If convicted, Mr. Bergdahl could face life in prison.

This charge hardly came as a surprise to those who served with Bergdahl; they had immediately suspected him of desertion when he left his post in Afghanistan in 2009. Both President Obama and Susan Rice surely must have known all this before (a) Mr. Obama celebrated the deal [in the Rose Garden last May](#) with Bergdahl's parents and (b) National Security Adviser Susan Rice [declared](#) Bergdahl had served his country with "honor and distinction." Only if you believe desertion and misbehavior before the enemy is honorable and a mark of moral distinction.

But what made this particular case even more problematic is that Bergdahl was freed in exchange for five high-value Taliban figures who had been held captive in Guantanamo Bay. As several outlets and individuals have pointed out, getting back a soldier who was almost certainly a deserter was simply a pretext. The main goal of President Obama is to empty Guantanamo Bay. It is something the president declared he wanted to do during his first day in office and it's something he is committed to doing before his last day in office. Swapping Bergdahl for five Taliban leaders—several of whom are trying to return to the battlefield so they can kill more Americans—was the convenient (if explosively contentious) excuse. The *Wall Street Journal* [reminds us](#) that Mr. Obama told NBC that emptying Gitmo "is going to involve, on occasion, releasing folks who we may not trust but we can't convict."

So we have a president with at least two obsessions: One of them is attacking the Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, and weakening the Jewish State of Israel; the second is to empty Guantanamo Bay and release terrorists committed to killing as many Americans as possible.

We've never seen anything quite like this president.

American Interest

[A Comprehensive Failure in Yemen](#)

by Walter Russell Mead

Over the weekend, several C-17 transport planes transported [a reported 350](#) U.S. Special Operations forces out of Yemen as the country stood on the precipice of civil war. The *Wall Street Journal* has [a trenchant summary](#) of just how President Obama's policy has gone up in smoke:

What happened in Yemen, according to descriptions by current and former officials and experts, was a miscalculation about the changes unleashed by the Arab Spring revolutions. It involved an overreliance by Washington on a promising new leader who ultimately was unable to hold off rival forces and tensions, they said.

As a result, a country President Barack Obama last year cited as a model of American counterterrorism success has now descended into chaos, with U.S. influence and drone strikes no match for at least four sides at war with one another.

The long record of Administration miscalculations in the Middle East should give anyone pause: a policy that sought peace, reconciliation and stability finds itself with a region increasingly engulfed in flames, with one U.S. plan after another going awry. The Obama strategy of leaving Iraq and winning in Afghanistan has been a failure in both countries. Working with moderate Islamists to defuse terrorism and support democracy failed in both Egypt and Turkey. Libyan intervention and Syrian abstention both led to chaos and promoted the rise of jihadi groups.

And now in Yemen, the core of the United States' counterterrorism strategy has failed and has been hastily rolled up.

Nobody would have gotten all of this 100 percent right. The Middle East is a very difficult environment for U.S. foreign policy, and neither of this president's two predecessors covered themselves in glory in their approaches. Nevertheless, this record of comprehensive, continuing failure and miscalculation is in a league of its own. It does not, however, appear to have caused much head-scratching at the White House, where confidence in President Obama's strategic genius appears undiminished.

Right Turn

[Believe Josh Earnest or your lying eyes](#)

by Jennifer Rubin

[Reuters reports](#), "Houthi militia forces in [Yemen](#) backed by allied army units seized an air base on Wednesday and appeared poised to capture the southern port of Aden from defenders loyal to President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, local residents said. After taking al-Anad air base, the Houthis and their military allies, supported by heavy armor, advanced to within 20 km (12 miles) of Aden, where Hadi has been holed up since fleeing the Houthi-controlled capital Sanaa last month." This is another instance in which Iranian-backed forces have destabilized a government reasonably friendly to the West. Just a few months ago President Obama held Yemen up as a success story.

Naturally the White House press corps wanted the press secretary to acknowledge things had not gone as planned. But no. Josh Earnest had his talking point and was sticking with it (just like the talking point that Obama meant what he said when he called the shooting of innocents in a French kosher market “random”). For [over three minutes](#) Earnest refused to acknowledge their model was not a mess. Pressed again, he insisted this is still a “template that has succeeded.” An incredulous Jonathan Karl of ABC News continued to press him, but Earnest refused to admit the obvious, namely that the administration had failed in its leading from behind, light footprint.

It was embarrassing and unbelievable. But it was also instructive. The administration is failing as far as the eye can see. Iraq and Syria are infested with jihadists from the Islamic State. The civil war in Syria has killed 200,000 and, because of our failure to come to their aid in a timely and effective manner, the Free Syrian Army is in dismal shape. Iran is pulling the strings in Syria, Yemen and Lebanon while its fighters are doing what we will not, combating the Islamic State in Iraq. Our Sunni allies and Israel are exasperated with our passivity and willingness to appease Iran. The “peace process” is a joke. So the president bashes our closest ally and tells us Yemen is a success.

Consider what would have happened if President George W. Bush refused to believe the Iraq War was going poorly, denied any strategy change was necessary and never implemented the surge. Ironically, critics accused him of being stubborn or cut off from reality. Right diagnosis, wrong president.

The administration at this point plainly has no regard for the facts or else no elementary judgment. When it comes to a monumental deal with Iran or a “shift” in U.S. policy toward Israel at the United Nations, it is becoming increasingly clear this crowd cannot be trusted. Congress must step in not only where Iran is concerned but also in demanding a coherent and accurate accounting of events. And as for Hillary Clinton, one wonders if she thinks Yemen is a success or if she would leave Iran with thousands of centrifuges, an incomplete inspection system and a 10-year sunset clause. If she does not want to deny reality, she will either have to acknowledge the policies she helped put into place have failed or accuse Obama and John Kerry of screwing things up. Maybe that is why she spent an hour with Obama Monday. There is an awful lot of spin that will need to be concocted for Clinton to present her tenure as a success. Maybe, like Yemen, it is a “template for success,” in other words, a disaster.

Roger L. Simon **[Obama the Crazy Pilot](#)**

In the roughly ten years since I helped found PJ Media, I have been back and forth between LA and DC a fair amount of times. I am on a plane at this moment, returning to my California home once again, but never have I been more disturbed by my trip. Our nation’s capital has become strange, surreal and disquieting. It’s hard to have a lot of hope.

Long gone, thankfully, are the endless booths selling Obamabilia. But replacing that falsely optimistic atmosphere is an empty, bleak feeling. Yes, Washington is still the capital of posh, with celebrity chefs aplenty and ever-escalating real estate, the money having drained from the rest of the country down to Foggy Bottom, but nobody seems to be having much fun from it anymore, not even the Democrats.

Obama and his minions are huddled wherever they're huddled, busy destroying the Western World with their bizarre policies and eagerness to make a deal with Iran that is so desperate it makes the word pathetic seem pathetic. The results of this desperation have been wretched, a fascistic new Persian Empire emerging from Libya to Yemen with Obama auditioning for the role of Cyrus the Great – or is it Ahmadinejad Junior? Whatever the case, it's horrible. Even those same Democrats know it. They're embarrassed – and they should be. But for the most part they don't have the guts to say anything. This is the kind of administration that exchanges a creepy sociopath like Bergdahl for five Islamic homicidal maniacs and expects praise for being humanitarian. And everyone walks away shaking their heads.

It's hard to know why Obama is doing it all. I know it sounds like a rude overstatement but in a way he reminds me of that crazy German pilot flying that plane into that alpine cliff, only the plane is us (America and the West). Does he hate us all that much – or is it just Netanyahu? Whatever the explanation, it's mighty peculiar. At this point almost no one in the Congress appears to be backing him up – and yet he continues. Who knows what will happen next?

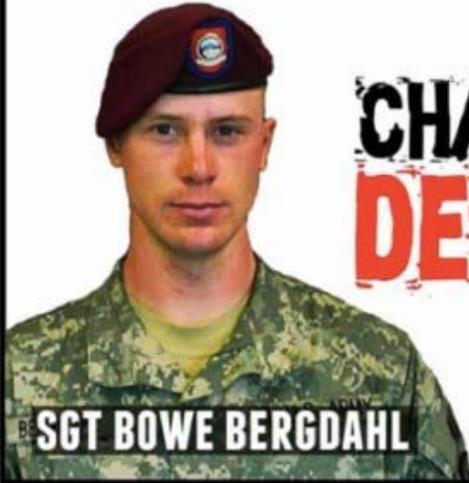


**"HE SERVED...
WITH HONOR
AND
DISTINCTION."**

JUNE 1, 2014



SUSAN RICE



SGT BOWE BERGDAHL

**CHARGED WITH
DESERTION**

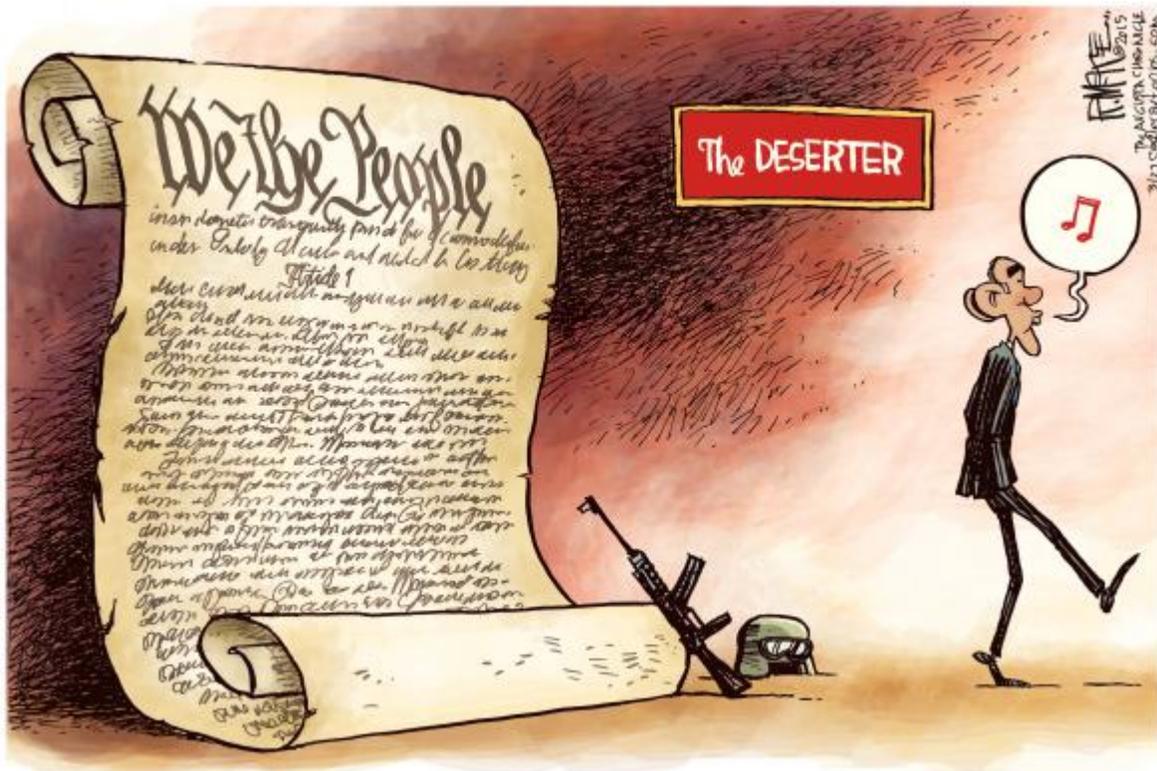
MARCH 25, 2015

DISGRACED



Glenn Kessler

pwh.com/a/click





CHARGED with "MISBEHAVIOR BEFORE the ENEMY & ENDANGERING the SAFETY of a COMMAND?"



MURKY POPPINS

JENNY, I MAY NOT BE A SMART MAN



BUT AT LEAST I DIDN'T VOTE FOR OBAMA