

September 13, 2015

Even the media's bien pensants can make the connection between the dead on Turkey's shore and President Feckless. Here's **Edward Luce** of the Financial Times. *When historians weigh President Barack Obama's record, the word Syria looks set to be a negative. It is four years since Mr Obama called for Bashar al-Assad's ejection from power. The US president did almost nothing to follow through on it — and the little he tried arguably tightened Mr Assad's grip.*

*More than 200,000 deaths and 4m refugees later, it is hard to distinguish America's response from that of other western democracies. With the notable exceptions of Germany and Sweden, the west has denied succour to Syria's fleeing masses.*

*Mr Obama should be wary. Syria is not some footnote to a respectable diplomatic legacy. It is an indictment. ...*

*... Second, America's brand in the Middle East is as tarnished under Mr Obama as it was under George W Bush. It may be unfair to compare them. Mr Bush's were errors of commission — chiefly in his Iraq invasion. Mr Obama's are errors of omission in how he has handled Mr Bush's legacy. But their costs are real.*

*From imprisoned democrats in Egypt, to Libyans fleeing their country's disintegration, the US is no beacon under Mr Obama. The feeling — once articulated by the president himself — that the US could disentangle itself is mocked every day by the hordes escaping Syria and elsewhere. The spillover does not stop at Europe. In today's world no region is an island, let alone the Middle East. ...*

And a **Foreign Policy Magazine** op-ed destroys the latest administration excuses. *"Stop them damn pictures. I don't care what the papers write about me. My constituents can't read. But, damn it, they can see the pictures."* Change "can't" to "don't" or "rarely," and the plaintive words of the corrupt William Magear "Boss" Tweed in reaction to the scathing cartoons of Thomas Nast in 1870s New York City might just as easily be placed on the lips of President Barack Obama, as images of dead Syrian children washing up on Turkish beaches awaken a dormant American public to a humanitarian abomination and policy catastrophe. For an administration relying on public indifference to sustain a policy rich in rhetoric and devoid of action, the pictures are a damnable inconvenience.

*Faced by reporters suddenly jolted out of Syria fatigue, White House spokesman Josh Earnest recently followed his boss's formula in defending the indefensible. Yes, Earnest admitted, there may have been alternatives to doing nothing as Iran and Russia helped Syrian President Bashar al-Assad do his worst to 23 million Syrians. But, according to Earnest, they "would have subjected the United States to a whole host of more significant risks, including more significant outlays of funds to fund essentially a war in Syria. It certainly would have put tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of American troops in harm's way on the ground in [Syria]."*

*Is it possible that anyone in this administration really believes that invasion would have been the inevitable consequence of accepting the 2012 recommendation of Leon Panetta, Hillary Clinton, David Petraeus, and Martin Dempsey — then the defense secretary, secretary of state, CIA director, and chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, respectively — that the United States take the*

*lead in training and equipping Syrian nationalists capable of fighting both Bashar al-Assad and a growing al Qaeda presence in Syria?*

*Does any administration official — including the president — think that if the United States had destroyed the Assad regime's instruments of mass murder two years ago, after the Syrian regime had crossed Obama's chemical red line for the 14th time, that U.S. ground forces would have been obliged to occupy Syria? ...*

**Garry Kasparov**, Russian Grandmaster, is in the WSJ with an essay on the "Rewards of the Obama Doctrine." Since he is a chess player, Kasparov can entertain many thoughts at once. Our president can only handle two; spend more and borrow more.

*A quick glance at the latest headlines suggests a jarring disconnect from the stream of foreign-policy successes touted by the Obama White House and its allies. President Obama has been hailed by many as a peacemaker for eschewing the use of military force and for signing accords with several of America's worst enemies. The idea that things will work out better if the U.S. declines to act in the world also obeys Mr. Obama's keen political instincts. A perpetual campaigner in office, he realizes that it is much harder to criticize an act not taken.*

*But what is good for Mr. Obama's media coverage is not necessarily good for America or the world. From the unceasing violence in eastern Ukraine to the thousands of Syrian refugees streaming into Europe, it is clear that inaction can also have terrible consequences. The nuclear agreement with Iran is also likely to have disastrous and far-reaching effects. But in every case of Mr. Obama's timidity and procrastination, the response to criticism amounts to this: It could have been worse.*

*Looking at the wreckage of the Middle East, including the flourishing of Islamic State, it takes great imagination to see how things would be worse today if the U.S. had acted on Mr. Obama's "red line" threat in 2013 and moved against Syria's Bashar Assad after he defied the U.S. president and used chemical weapons. ...*

*... Power abhors a vacuum, and as the U.S. retreats the space is being filled. After years of the White House leading from behind, Secretary of State John Kerry's timid warning to the Kremlin this week to stay out of Syria will be as effective as Mr. Obama's "red line." Soon Iran—flush with billions of dollars liberated by the nuclear deal—will add even more heft to its support for Mr. Assad.*

*Dead refugee children are on the shores of Europe, bringing home the Syrian crisis that has been in full bloom for years. There could be no more tragic symbol that it is time to stop being paralyzed by the Obama-era mantra that things could be worse—and to start acting instead to make things better.*

A blog called **The Wilderness** has a long Jeremiad on the subject. We'll have the normal pull quotes and then an abridgement. Follow the link if you want to read it all. Flash back to 2011, and far as presidencies are concerned, it feels like a millennium ago. Barack Obama was basking in the fullness of the Arab Spring, posing as the personal midwife to

a New Birth of Freedom as he polished his Peace Prize in front of the world. Truly this was a man who could not lose: it seemed like all he had to do was demand some former ally steeped in domestic conflict bow to his diplomatic omnipotence and boom: Instant Democracy. The media tactfully aided Obama by moving on from covering these international hotspots almost immediately after President Santa had finished gifting them with new regimes, so we wouldn't have to trouble ourselves with any messy details about their aftermaths (until Ambassador Stevens found himself in the wrong place at the wrong time a year later, that is). The afterglow was unfaded. Barack Obama was still the fresh-faced President Hope and Change. Oprah was still crying. But as it all fell to pieces, Obama received a brutal education in the truth that community organizing on the South Side of Chicago is light years away from an attempt to community organize the Middle East.

Which brings us to Bashar al-Assad, of course.

When Barack Obama demanded Assad step down in 2011, he took immediate ownership of any consequences to follow. Assad — not being much more than a photo-op for Nancy Pelosi or a dinner date for John Kerry, and owing us utterly nothing (unlike Mubarak or Khaddafi) — told Obama to get bent around a tree, ...

... A foreign policy based on hoping that no one will call your bluff is dangerous and disastrous. As it turns out, not only was Bashar al-Assad's use of chemical weapons against civilians not a true "red line," ISIS's use of them now multiple times doesn't seem to be either. ISIS's use of chemical weapons has been barely reported or acknowledged for the same reasons that much of ISIS's activity overall never makes it to our own media shores — because it's ugly, it's inconvenient, and thanks to Obama's "flexibility" it's now an unsolvable Problem from Hell.

That's always been this President's problem: his complete inability to deal with the world at hand, as it exists right in front of his face. When the world forces Barack Obama off his script, he simply retreats to a golf course, ESPN, or most recently the remote wilds of Alaska.

Nowhere was this more evident than when his habit of diplomatic detachment inconveniently washed up on the shores of the Greek island of Kos last week when a boat carrying Syrian refugees capsized. While President Jor-El embarked on a magical mystery end-of-summer climate cruise to call attention to Alaskan glacier-melt in summer, the world was suddenly captivated by the lifeless body of Aylan Kurdi lying face down in front of rescue workers. ...

... Once again world events inconsiderately interrupted Obama's semi-retirement and he was left holding a fish and taking selfies for an audience of himself and a business-as-usual press corps just happy to be along for the sights.

It's fitting in a way: it is the photograph of a young boy washed up on a Turkish beach that encapsulates the consequences of what happens when a coddled President, content to do as little as possible before turning over a world spinning off its axis to his successor, is allowed to distract himself with selfies in Alaska. Barack Obama's successor will almost certainly bear most of the brunt and the blame of his inaction. In Hillary Clinton's case it would be most deservedly so. ...

... It wasn't "the United States" that let Obama get away with declaring "[I didn't set that red line, the world did](#)" only to have him to walk out the door like a dejected child needing an afternoon snack and media-induced nap. No, that was our media: rather than hold him accountable for his own declarations of removing Assad and setting a "red line," they simply shrugged, muttered a

word or two about how war Totally Sucks Anyway, and went back to writing think pieces on the cultural impact of the President's NCAA tournament bracket.

Because of DC media's nerd-prom infatuation at the thought of being a part, any part, of this socially cool West Wing Presidency, we have to turn to other sources in calling out this ridiculous clipboard hashtag foreign policy. ...

**Max Boot** posts on the charge the white house has been cooking the books on ISIS intelligence.

*Is the U.S. winning the war against ISIS? To listen to administration spokesmen, you would think so. Never mind that the terror group controls an area the size of the United Kingdom or that its hold on Mosul, Fallujah, and Ramadi remains unshaken. Never mind that ISIS continues to draw large numbers of foreign recruits, that it continues to destroy antiquities, enslave women, and commit numerous other atrocities. "ISIS is losing," John Allen, the retired marine general who coordinates the anti-ISIS campaign, proclaimed in July.*

*So strong is the spin coming from the White House that now some 50 intelligence analysts who work for U.S. Central Command are alleging that their superiors have twisted their findings to put lipstick on the pig that is Operation Inherent Resolve. As Shane Harris and Nancy Youssef report at The Daily Beast, the Pentagon's inspector general has opened an investigation into complaints of "alleged manipulation of intelligence." The complaint describes a "Stalinist" climate within CENTCOM in which bad news is no news.*

*Of course, a full investigation will be required to assess the validity of these charges, but I find the complaint eminently reasonable for two reasons. ...*

**Investor's Business Daily editors** get a laugh from the Dem presidential campaigner's digs on obama's economy.

*... Every single one of those scathing attacks came from Labor Day remarks by Hillary Clinton, Bernie Sanders and Vice President Joe Biden.*

*Their prognosis is dead-on. As we've pointed out repeatedly, the recovery that started a few months after Obama took office has been the worst since the Great Depression, with GDP and employment growth far below the average post-World War II recoveries.*

*Median family incomes have declined, millions are working part-time jobs because there isn't full-time work, 13 million have dropped out of the labor force entirely. Millions more are poor and on food stamps. And the latest IBD/TIPP poll shows 46% think we're still in a recession and 52% say it's not improving.*

*Naturally, neither Biden, Clinton nor Sanders mentioned Obama, much less blamed him for the current state of affairs. But lest they forget, it was Obama who presided over the largest Keynesian stimulus in history and signed the job-killing ObamaCare law.*

*And it was Obama who succeeded in getting multiple tax hikes on the "rich." And it was his administration that has imposed massive regulations on banking, health care, energy suppliers, employers and just about every other corner of the private economy. ...*

Turning our attention to other elected left wing fools, [Noah Rothman](#) says liberals do not deserve the benefit of the doubt.

*... Amid a refugee crisis, the American left will give no credit to European conservatives like Angela Merkel and David Cameron, who have committed to taking in the displaced from North Africa and the Middle East. Those same liberals will point to a handful of Republican presidential candidates who have opted to burnish their anti-illegal immigrant credibility by opposing calls to absorb some of these refugees into the United States. Their self-indulgent back patting is undeserved. Truly mitigating this crisis means making hard choices about war and peace. Truly saving the future means stemming the flow of migrants into a continent that can scarcely employ or provide services for its own citizens. The left congratulates itself for evincing an abundance of empathy. It's a poor substitute for embracing policies that end crises. In power, the left presides over triage, mitigates the harshest effects of their shortsighted policies, and is congratulated by fellow travelers in the press for their courage.*

*The left scarcely deserves the benefit of the doubt they receive from the public. Their hearts may be in the right place, but their hearts are distinctly poor governors. It is time for liberals to take stock of their disastrous records, and that can only happen when the public and the press stops excusing the left's abject failures because they believe their intentions are noble.*

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## Financial Times

### [Barack Obama's debt to Syria's huddled masses](#)

***This is not some footnote to a respectable diplomatic legacy. It is an indictment***

by Edward Luce

When historians weigh President Barack Obama's record, the word Syria looks set to be a negative. It is four years since Mr [Obama called for Bashar al-Assad's ejection from power](#). The US president did almost nothing to follow through on it — and the little he tried arguably tightened Mr Assad's grip.

More than 200,000 deaths and 4m refugees later, it is hard to distinguish America's response from that of other western democracies. With the notable exceptions of Germany and Sweden, the west has denied succour to [Syria's fleeing masses](#).

Mr Obama should be wary. Syria is not some footnote to a respectable diplomatic legacy. It is an indictment.

America's abstention so far from Syria's human crisis can be measured in numbers. Germany has put its European neighbours to shame by [saying](#) it will process up to 800,000 refugee applications — a multiple of the rest of Europe put together. Since the start of Syria's civil war, the US has taken just 1,434.

There was a period when the US was deporting more Mexican immigrants than that every day. Money only goes so far to make up. The US has spent \$4bn on humanitarian relief, which is considerably more than Europe.

But it pales against the costs Syria's neighbours are bearing. One in five people in Lebanon is now a Syrian refugee. Turkey is overwhelmed.

The case for the US to open its doors to many more Syrians is compelling. First, there is little else the US can do to alleviate Syria's suffering. As Mr Obama discovered, calling for Mr Assad's departure is not the same thing as bringing it about. That was then.

Today, it is unclear whether Mr Assad's ejection would even be desirable. The revenge of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (Isis) against Alawite and other non-Sunni supporters of the Assad regime could put today's slaughter into the shade. Nor is there the slightest chance the US-led training of the moderate Syrian Free Army will produce an effective force before Mr Obama leaves office.

The US-led bombing campaign may stem the human exodus in some parts of Syria — Isis has generated as many refugees as Mr Assad. But it will not lead to a political settlement.

Second, America's brand in the Middle East is as tarnished under Mr Obama as it was under George W Bush. It may be unfair to compare them. Mr Bush's were errors of commission — chiefly in his Iraq invasion. Mr Obama's are errors of omission in how he has handled Mr Bush's legacy. But their costs are real.

From imprisoned democrats in Egypt, to Libyans fleeing their country's disintegration, the US is no beacon under Mr Obama. The feeling — once articulated by the president himself — that the US could disentangle itself is mocked every day by the hordes escaping Syria and elsewhere. The spillover does not stop at Europe. In today's world no region is an island, let alone the Middle East.

The moral case for the US to accept more asylum seekers is long overdue. Since the 2003 invasion, the US has taken 157,000 Iraqis and a fraction the number of Afghans.

Thousands of those who worked for the US military, as interpreters, guides, and fixers, have failed to get visas — even though their lives are in danger from Isis, the Taliban and others. The Obama administration deserves some blame for this. The special visa for former Iraqi and Afghan employees of the US military only came into effect in 2008. For those who have made it to the US, the process took years. For those left stranded, the message is clear: America is capable of abandoning you. It is hard to think of a worse signal, or one more easily rectified.

In this case, US politics is not to blame. Congress has passed laws with large bipartisan majorities to allow former Iraqi and Afghan employees into the country.

The problem is bureaucratic constipation. The fear of letting in one terrorist clearly outweighs the benefit of letting in thousands of deserving innocents. Applicants must wade through a morass of the State Department, the Department of Homeland Security, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and others. The hold up is in the executive branch. Only Mr Obama has the power to unclog it. Likewise, only he has the power to take the lead on the Syrian refugee crisis.

What is stopping him? Again, it is not politics. Evangelical groups have called on the US to take in more Syrian Christians, who make up a large share of Isis victims. A group of senators urged Mr Obama this year to take in 65,000 Syrian refugees of whatever background.

Mr Obama's response was to say the US would take in up to 8,000 more in 2016, a number too paltry to have much effect. Even Donald Trump said last week that an exception could be made for Syria because its crisis was "so horrible". The human cost is there on our smart phones. It is worth noting that Steve Jobs, Apple's founder, was the son of a Syrian immigrant.

It is clear Mr Obama's humanitarian instincts are strong. But he is standing back on Syria. Whenever Bill Clinton is asked about his presidential regrets, he brings up his failure to stop the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Unless Mr Obama changes tack, Syria will come to haunt him too.

## Foreign Policy

### Obama, Open Your Eyes

***The dead children washing up on Turkey's shores are a direct result of the Obama administration's failure to stop Bashar al-Assad's killing machine.***

by Frederic C. Hof

"Stop them damn pictures. I don't care what the papers write about me. My constituents can't read. But, damn it, they can see the pictures."

Change "can't" to "don't" or "rarely," and the plaintive words of the corrupt William Magear "Boss" Tweed in reaction to the scathing [cartoons](#) of Thomas Nast in 1870s New York City might just as easily be placed on the lips of President Barack Obama, as images of dead Syrian children washing up on Turkish beaches awaken a dormant American public to a humanitarian abomination and policy catastrophe. For an administration relying on public indifference to sustain a policy rich in rhetoric and devoid of action, the pictures are a damnable inconvenience.

Faced by reporters suddenly jolted out of Syria fatigue, White House spokesman Josh Earnest recently followed his boss's formula in defending the indefensible. Yes, Earnest admitted, there may have been alternatives to doing nothing as Iran and Russia helped Syrian President Bashar al-Assad do his worst to 23 million Syrians. But, [according](#) to Earnest, they "would have subjected the United States to a whole host of more significant risks, including more significant outlays of funds to fund essentially a war in Syria. It certainly would have put tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of American troops in harm's way on the ground in [Syria]."

Is it possible that anyone in this administration really believes that invasion would have been the inevitable consequence of accepting the 2012 recommendation of Leon Panetta, Hillary Clinton, David Petraeus, and Martin Dempsey — then the defense secretary, secretary of state, CIA director, and chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, respectively — that the United States take the lead in training and equipping Syrian nationalists capable of fighting both Bashar al-Assad and a growing al Qaeda presence in Syria?

Does any administration official — including the president — think that if the United States had destroyed the Assad regime's instruments of mass murder two years ago, after the Syrian regime had crossed Obama's chemical red line for the 14th time, that U.S. ground forces would have been obliged to occupy Syria?

As the president considers furtively backing into some manner of protection for Syrian civilians as a by-product of the fight against the Islamic State, does he really think he is now on the cusp of war with what is left of Assad's Syria?

The Obama administration believes none of this. It caricatures opposing viewpoints and misrepresents policy alternatives because it simply cannot acknowledge error. Having decided to leave millions of Syrians subject to barrel bombs, starvation sieges, mass terrorism, and collective punishment so as not to offend Iran, the administration (or more precisely, Europe) now reaps the whirlwind of hundreds of thousands of refugees. Yet instead of changing course, it whines about how much worse things would have been had other decisions been taken.

It comforts Europeans not at all to hear Earnest tell them that "the United States certainly stands with our European partners." And yet, how many European leaders over the past four years have upbraided Obama for not making good on his own words? How many have challenged the rote recitation of the argument that "there is no military solution for Syria" as a substitute for an objectives-driven Syria strategy? How many have demanded that Washington join them in addressing the problem at its source by throwing sand into the gears of Assad's mass murder machine?

France has consistently urged its American ally to change course. Precious few other European leaders, however, have stepped up to push Washington to adopt a more effective Syria policy.

The failure of the West to offer a modicum of protection for Syrian civilians is not cost-free. That which today passes for "the West" was content to see the crisis fester and metastasize so long as it stopped at Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon. But now Europeans see the price in terms of desperate humanity surging in their direction. The cost to the United States is even more profound: Its reputation is being threatened like never before. Will anyone even feign surprise if [reports](#) of Russian military intervention on behalf of Assad prove accurate? Precisely which aspects of Obama's Syria performance over the past four years would now dissuade Russian President Vladimir Putin from making such a move?

One can imagine the Obama administration will respond to Russian intervention by blandly saying that war is not the answer to the Syrian crisis and that Assad has lost all legitimacy and really ought to do the decent thing and step aside. Yet those talking points will not alter the cruel reality of facts on the ground: Assad's continued unlimited war against civilians in areas dominated by nationalist rebels will strengthen the hemorrhage of humanity toward Europe while driving more and more Syrians into the arms of the Islamic State. Yes, Russian combat support for Assad will finally put the lie to the Kremlin's claim of being opposed to the Islamic State, just as Iran's support for the atrocities of its client, Assad, has [revealed](#) Tehran's actual position toward the terrorist group's bogus "caliph," Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

But where does this leave an American president committed militarily to degrading and destroying the Islamic State? Will he continue to chase and implore Russia in search of a political solution that would throw Moscow's man out of the presidential palace? Will he continue to assure Iran that nothing the United States does in Syria should be construed as anti-Assad? How can he do these things and win the battle against the Islamic State? Every barrel bomb dropped is a victory for the caliph — and a gift from his best friend, Bashar al-Assad.

The administration may be on the verge of affording a degree of protection to Syrian civilians, as an unannounced by-product of protecting the troubled "Islamic State-free zone" adjoining the Turkish border. Anti-Islamic State coalition aircraft will be operating with greater intensity in northern Syria, and Syria regime aircraft should stay clear of areas in which they have a long history of barrel bombing civilian residential neighborhoods. But "should" is not synonymous with

“must.” What if regime aircraft defy coalition warnings? Will they be grounded? Or will another red line have been crossed?

The Obama administration does not want pictures of dead children stirring up public outrage over what is happening in Syria. But those “damned pictures” might oblige it to offer real protection to defenseless Syrian civilians — even if it does so furtively, fearfully, and grudgingly. And if Europeans now believe, at long last, that the problem they are facing needs to be addressed at its source, they should plan on doing more than just holding Uncle Sam’s coat. They, after all, are dealing with the living problem, not just pictures of dead children.

*Frederic C. Hof is senior fellow at the Atlantic Council's Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East. He worked on Syria-related matters in the U.S. Department of State from April 2009 until September 2011.*

**WSJ**

### **The Rewards of the Obama Doctrine**

***Offering a helping hand to America’s enemies in Iran, Russia and Cuba will ruin lives and many more will die.***

by Gary Kasparov

A quick glance at the latest headlines suggests a jarring disconnect from the stream of foreign-policy successes touted by the Obama White House and its allies. President Obama has been hailed by many as a peacemaker for eschewing the use of military force and for signing accords with several of America’s worst enemies. The idea that things will work out better if the U.S. declines to act in the world also obeys Mr. Obama’s keen political instincts. A perpetual campaigner in office, he realizes that it is much harder to criticize an act not taken.

But what is good for Mr. Obama’s media coverage is not necessarily good for America or the world. From the unceasing violence in eastern Ukraine to the thousands of Syrian refugees streaming into Europe, it is clear that inaction can also have terrible consequences. The nuclear agreement with Iran is also likely to have disastrous and far-reaching effects. But in every case of Mr. Obama’s timidity and procrastination, the response to criticism amounts to this: *It could have been worse.*

Looking at the wreckage of the Middle East, including the flourishing of Islamic State, it takes great imagination to see how things would be worse today if the U.S. had acted on Mr. Obama’s “red line” threat in 2013 and moved against Syria’s Bashar Assad after he defied the U.S. president and used chemical weapons.

Or farther east, one would need to have believed Moscow’s overheated nuclear threats to think that Ukraine would be worse off now if NATO had moved immediately to secure the Ukrainian border with Russia as soon as [Vladimir Putin](#) invaded Crimea in 2014.

Over the past year, especially in the past few months, Mr. Obama’s belief that American force in the world should be constrained and reduced has reached its ultimate manifestation in U.S. relations with Iran, Russia and Cuba. Each of these American adversaries has been on the receiving end of the president’s helping hand: normalization with Cuba, releasing Iran from

sanctions, treating the Putin Ukraine-invasion force as a partner for peace in the futile Minsk cease-fire agreements.

In exchange for giving up precisely nothing, these countries have been rewarded with the international legitimacy and domestic credibility dictatorships crave—along with more-concrete economic benefits.

When dealing with a regime that won't negotiate in good faith, the best approach is to use a position of strength to pry concessions from the other side. But instead the White House keeps *offering* concessions—while helping its enemies off the mat. That such naïveté will result in positive behavior from the likes of Ayatollah Khamenei, Vladimir Putin and the Castro brothers should be beyond even Mr. Obama's belief in hope and change.

Dictatorships, especially the one-man variety like Russia's, are unpredictable, but they do operate on logical underlying principles. They often come to power with popular support and a mandate to solve a crisis. Once a firm grip on power is achieved, the junta or supreme leader blames his predecessors for any problems, and he cracks down on rights. With democracy dead and civil society hunted to extinction, the only way left to make a legitimate claim on power is confrontation and conflict. Propaganda is ratcheted up against mythical fifth columnists and the usual scapegoats, like immigrants and minorities.

The next and usually final phase arrives when other tricks have become stale. Domestic enemies are never threatening enough—and eventually there is no one left to persecute, as in the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin—so the dictator looks abroad, inevitably finding a “national interest” to defend across a convenient border.

This external-conflict phase is especially dangerous because there are very few examples of aggressor nations moving away from it peacefully. War and revolution are the more frequent ways it burns itself out. The Soviet Union altered its confrontational course after Stalin's death, but it was a unique and gigantic superpower with enough resources for its leadership to believe that it could compete with the Free World instead of declaring war on it.

As it turned out, the Soviets were wrong, something that more-recent autocrats, including Mr. Putin, no doubt understand. They have watched and learned that their people will eventually begin to compare living standards and see the truth if left unmolested by war and strife. This window on the Free World is even larger in the Internet age, so the conflicts and propaganda have to be even more extreme.

Iran has been operating in the confrontational phase for years, with America and Israel as the main targets, in addition to Tehran's regional Sunni rivals. Mr. Putin moved into confrontation mode with the invasion of Ukraine and he cannot afford to back down.

The dictatorship that Nicolás Maduro inherited from [Hugo Chávez](#) in Venezuela is approaching the final stage as well, as seen from the country's recent launch of a border and immigrant conflict with Colombia. The emptier the shelves in Venezuelan supermarkets, the more threatening the Colombians must be made to seem. China has relied on tremendous growth to forestall internal unrest for human rights, but if its economy falters substantially, last week's giant military parade in Beijing will be seen as prelude, not posturing. Taiwan, always in China's sights, has good reason to be troubled by the West's feeble responses in Syria and Ukraine.

Power abhors a vacuum, and as the U.S. retreats the space is being filled. After years of the White House leading from behind, Secretary of State John Kerry's timid warning to the Kremlin

this week to stay out of Syria will be as effective as Mr. Obama's "red line." Soon Iran—flush with billions of dollars liberated by the nuclear deal—will add even more heft to its support for Mr. Assad.

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*Mr. Kasparov, chairman of the New York-based Human Rights Foundation, is the author of "Winter Is Coming: Why Vladimir Putin and the Enemies of the Free World Must Be Stopped," out next month from PublicAffairs.*

## **The Wilderness**

### **The Boy on the Beach**

#### ***Obama's Foreign Policy Failures Go Viral***

by Stephen Green

Flash back to 2011, and far as presidencies are concerned, it feels like a millennium ago. Barack Obama was basking in the fullness of the Arab Spring, posing as the personal midwife to a New Birth of Freedom as he polished his Peace Prize in front of the world. Truly this was a man who could not lose: it seemed like all he had to do was demand some former ally steeped in domestic conflict bow to his diplomatic omnipotence and boom: Instant Democracy. The media tactfully aided Obama by moving on from covering these international hotspots almost immediately after President Santa had finished gifting them with new regimes, so we wouldn't have to trouble ourselves with any messy details about their aftermaths (until Ambassador Stevens found himself in the wrong place at the wrong time a year later, that is). The afterglow was unfaded. Barack Obama was still the fresh-faced President Hope and Change. Oprah was still crying. But as it all fell to pieces, Obama received a brutal education in the truth that community organizing on the South Side of Chicago is light years away from an attempt to community organize the Middle East.

Which brings us to Bashar al-Assad, of course.

When Barack Obama demanded Assad step down in 2011, he took immediate ownership of any consequences to follow. Assad — not being much more than a photo-op for Nancy Pelosi or a dinner date for John Kerry, and owing us utterly nothing (unlike Mubarak or Khaddafi) — told Obama to get bent around a tree, and from that point onward the administration's strategy has been one long essay into the question of how best to manage an Asshole Who May Still Be Preferable To Outright Anarchy. Obama hedged military action against Assad and against his (now obviously disastrous) decision to withdraw from Iraq and the impending nuclear deal with Iran. When his declaration that Assad Must Go went ignored (and thus became problematic), he simply crossed it off his list, told a nefarious Vladimir Putin to handle it, and went golfing. When his administration realized that any military intervention in Syria would complicate his Iran nuclear deal, he folded. Except the world didn't fold with him.

When reports emerged that Assad had utilized chlorine gas against both rebels and civilians, Obama was suddenly boxed into a world which preceded his ascension and more importantly, didn't give a damn about what he thought. Obama and his famously anti-war Secretary of State John Kerry reaped the consequences of spending the prior five years demonizing the difficult decisions made by their predecessors, either unaware or unfazed by the idea that they might one day have to rally the country and the world around a "Red Line" they themselves had set, and as it turns out weren't very good or very interested in necessitating either.

A foreign policy based on hoping that no one will call your bluff is dangerous and disastrous. As it turns out, not only was Bashar al-Assad's use of chemical weapons against civilians not a true "red line," [ISIS's use of them now multiple times doesn't seem to be either](#). ISIS's use of chemical weapons has been barely reported or acknowledged for the same reasons that much of ISIS's activity overall never makes it to our own media shores — because it's ugly, it's inconvenient, and thanks to Obama's "flexibility" it's now an unsolvable [Problem from Hell](#).

That's always been this President's problem: his complete inability to deal with the world at hand, as it exists right in front of his face. When the world forces Barack Obama off his script, he simply retreats to a golf course, ESPN, or most recently the remote wilds of Alaska.

Nowhere was this more evident than when his habit of diplomatic detachment inconveniently washed up on the shores of the Greek island of Kos last week when a boat carrying Syrian refugees capsized. While President Jor-El embarked on a magical mystery end-of-summer climate cruise to call attention to Alaskan glacier-melt in summer, the world was suddenly captivated by the lifeless body of Aylan Kurdi lying face down in front of rescue workers.

Photographs of Aylan Kurdi went viral and his name started trending on Twitter behind the hashtag [#KiyiyaVuranInsanlik](#) which translates to "Humanity washed ashore." Within the day, several cartoonists and artists began interpreting [their own renditions of the young boy rocked in by the surf](#). Some were very poignant, some unsettling. But the images themselves were no less striking and commanded a viral audience large enough for media to shake themselves out of apathy of reporting the horrors being committed on a daily basis in Libya, Syria and Iraq. Playing upon our visceral reaction, media pounced at the opportunity to show us the tragedy of a dead child, yet, without asking any serious questions about the circumstances behind it (Aylan Kurdi was on a raft with others, including his brother, fleeing ISIS in Kobane). ISIS burning bodies, destroying archaeological monuments, enslaving women and girls as sex-objects, butchering men barely registers enough outrage. When Obama refused to take responsibility for chemical weapon attacks against civilians, the media dutifully let him off the hook. But this was different.

Once again world events inconsiderately interrupted Obama's semi-retirement and he was left holding a fish and taking selfies for an audience of himself and a business-as-usual press corps just happy to be along for the sights.

It's fitting in a way: it is the photograph of a young boy washed up on a Turkish beach that encapsulates the consequences of what happens when a coddled President, content to do as little as possible before turning over a world spinning off its axis to his successor, is allowed to distract himself with selfies in Alaska. Barack Obama's successor will almost certainly bear most of the brunt and the blame of his inaction. In Hillary Clinton's case it would [be most deservedly so](#).

Up until the point that the pictures of young Aylan, carried in by the tide, were snapped, our media was all too happy to keep Syria and ISIS out of the headlines in the interest of

securing their chosen President's legacy. When accompanying pictures of thousands of refugees marching across Europe also went viral, the administration didn't even bother to attach a hashtag this time. While Obama hiked his way across (the warmest part of) Alaska, the narrative shaming was once again left to dutiful acolytes in the media, to shine a light on a great human rights crisis just bright enough to stop anyone from asking him any questions about it. As thousands sought asylum in Germany, Austria, Denmark and elsewhere, the leader of the free world sought it in the most remote part of the country for another stop on his ongoing Retirepalooza Tour of Meaningless Firsts.

While Obama was posing for glorious-leader-make-wonderful-country photos in front of mountains, John Kerry, in one of many ongoing reminders of just how right this country got it in 2004, used the occasion not to address this very real catastrophe splashed all over social media and newspapers, [but to hedge it against an imaginary possible future migrant crisis due to global warming](#). Addressing the world as it exists now means confronting more photos of his dinner-date with Bashar al-Assad ("a real reformer" – Hillary Clinton, 2011) and excusing away the faulty campaign promises of a President content to give Iraq up to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. It wasn't climate change that caused refugees, including Aylan Kurdi and several others, to wash up on a Turkish beach. The message is clear — Obama and his State Department are not going to be shaken off their climate paranoia narrative. When Obama vehemently denied he ever called for a red line of action in Syria, he blamed "The world" and he's content to let "the world" handle it now in any attempt to repudiate any further responsibility. What do 300,000 refugees and the whole of Europe matter when there is a glacier in the Arctic that needs staring at.

As Obama occupies himself with uncertain visions of the how the world will be in the distant future, he ignores it as it exists in the present day at our peril for the conflicts we face now. ...

... If this White House can't address a problem in the world with a Twitter meme or a hashtag, it simply ignores it. And the media, charged with the duty of making sure these things cannot and should not be ignored, gladly tolerates it. ...

... The *New York Times*, for instance, [attributes responsibility to some mysterious governing entity known as "The United States"](#) and scorches the country as whole for ignoring Syria and ISIS, yet manages somehow not to mention the names Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton or the terms "JV" and "Red Line" once in about 1,500 words.

It wasn't "the United States" that let Obama get away with declaring ["I didn't set that red line, the world did"](#) only to have him to walk out the door like a dejected child needing an afternoon snack and media-induced nap. No, that was our media: rather than hold him accountable for his own declarations of removing Assad and setting a "red line," they simply shrugged, muttered a word or two about how war Totally Sucks Anyway, and went back to writing think pieces on the cultural impact of the President's NCAA tournament bracket.

Because of DC media's nerd-prom infatuation at the thought of being a part, any part, of this socially cool *West Wing* Presidency, we have to turn to other sources in calling out this ridiculous clipboard hashtag foreign policy. Earlier this year in a brief appearance during Jon Stewart's *Night of Too Many Stars*, and much to the horror of the crowd, stand up comedian Bill Burr tore into Michelle Obama over the White House's penchant for doing nothing to stop these events except guilt-shaming us with puppydog eyes:

Eastern Ukraine is still occupied by Putin and "our girls" have still not been returned and beyond hashtagvism, an administration far more interested in mobilizing mobs at home has all but failed

to mobilize allies abroad. The repercussions of this President's media-abetted lethargy and diplomatic ADHD will echo for generations and the same click-driven SEO Wizards of Trends that tell us now not to look away at the horrors flooding Europe will immediately torch the next Republican President for being boxed into intervening there. The Warmongering Neocon cliches will flood social media via progressive outlets like an undimmed tide, and passed off as the same interventionism nonsense by the Sunday morning peacock mafia. ...

... So for the next 14 months, let's make a deal: when the same media that shields this President from his own remarks begins paying attention to the human atrocities he chose to walk away from, **so will we**.

Because we're through with the standard song-and-dance routine, where the media guilt-trips us for a week or two and then goes back to winking and nodding at Obama as he sits down for comedy podcasts and interviews with people who enjoy soaking themselves in bathtubs full of cereal. This is a president out of apparently out of hashtags and out of fucks to give. When media rejects shameless [propaganda pandering over Presidential selfies](#), boat trips and puppy snuggles, **so will we**. When our media doesn't let the Obama Administration stick to a defective and outdated campaign promise and turn away from ISIS torching human beings and destroying 2,000 year old temples, **neither will we**. What the Syrian refugee crisis has laid bare, for those beyond traditional media trying to plug the dam, is that this is an administration incapable and indifferent in backing up their melodramatic, rhetorical, Pepsi Cola sloganeering.

And the results of that indifference have just washed up on shore.

## Contentions

### Staggering Corruption at the Heart of Obama's ISIS Intelligence Scandal

by Max Boot

Is the U.S. winning the war against ISIS? To listen to administration spokesmen, you would think so. Never mind that the terror group controls an area the size of the United Kingdom or that its hold on Mosul, Fallujah, and Ramadi remains unshaken. Never mind that ISIS continues to draw large numbers of foreign recruits, that it continues to destroy antiquities, enslave women, and commit numerous other atrocities. "[ISIS is losing](#)," John Allen, the retired marine general who coordinates the anti-ISIS campaign, proclaimed in July.

So strong is the spin coming from the White House that now some 50 intelligence analysts who work for U.S. Central Command are alleging that their superiors have twisted their findings to put lipstick on the pig that is Operation Inherent Resolve. As Shane Harris and Nancy Youssef report at [The Daily Beast](#), the Pentagon's inspector general has opened an investigation into complaints of "alleged manipulation of intelligence." The complaint describes a "Stalinist" climate within CENTCOM in which bad news is no news.

Of course, a full investigation will be required to assess the validity of these charges, but I find the complaint eminently reasonable for two reasons.

First, as I noted in this [Foreign Affairs](#) article last fall, military commanders have a built-in propensity to over-optimism — witness the reports from General George Casey and General John Abizaid during the darkest days of the Iraq War that the U.S. was actually making

progress. All too few senior officers are willing to speak truth to power; most prefer to tell policymakers what they want to hear.

Second, this administration has a long history of happy talk on Iraq. On Twitter, Yair Rosenberg of Tablet Magazine reminds us of the comments of *New York Times* Baghdad bureau chief Tim Arango a year ago in an online chat on Reddit. [Arango wrote](#):

It's not my job to rate the Obama administration's actions in Iraq. But I will tell you that after 2011, the administration basically ignored the country. And when officials spoke about what was happening there, they were often ignorant of the reality. They did not want to see what was really happening because it conflicted with their narrative that they left Iraq in reasonably good shape. In [2012](#), as violence was escalating, I wrote a story, citing U.N. statistics, that showed how civilian deaths from attacks were rising. Tony Blinken, who was then Vice President Joseph R. Biden's national security guy, pushed back, even wrote a letter to the editor saying that violence was near historic lows. That was not true. Even after Falluja fell to ISIS at the end of last year, the administration would push back on stories about Mr. Maliki's sectarian tendencies, saying they didn't see it that way. So there was a concerted effort by the administration to not acknowledge the obvious until it became so apparent — with the fall of Mosul — that Iraq was collapsing.

If this were happening under the Bush administration, it would be called "politicizing" intelligence and it would be a big scandal. (In fact, numerous investigations disproved allegations that President Bush and his aides twisted the intelligence on Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction — that was a real if false belief among intelligence analysts). But because it's President Obama and his aides who are accused of making intelligence conform to their worldview, the mainstream press has been paying almost no attention to this story. The House and Senate Intelligence Committees need to get to the bottom of this possible scandal.

## **IBD - Editors**

### **[Look Who's Bashing Obama's Economy Now](#)**

**2016:** Presidential candidates, both announced and prospective, used Labor Day to fire off some pretty harsh criticisms of President Obama's [economy](#). That's not [news](#). What is news is who was doing the firing.

Just listen to some of the heated rhetoric about the results that seven long years of Obamanomics have produced:

"I am hot. I am mad, I am angry."

"There is something profoundly wrong when ... the average American is working longer hours for lower wages and we have shamefully the highest rate of child poverty of any major country on earth."

"It used to be when productivity went up in America, everybody got to share."

"Every month government comes out with a statistic on unemployment. Last statistic said that official unemployment was 5.3%. But what they forgot to tell you is that statistic doesn't include

those people who have given up looking for work, those people who are working part time. Add it all together and real unemployment is over 10%."

"How many people in your own neighborhoods are in trouble, can look their kids in the eyes and say with heart, 'Honey, it's going to be OK?' Not enough! Not enough!"

"I've got the vision, the policies, the skills, the tenacity and the determination to get us back on the right track."

This is all just typical Obama-hating rhetoric from hard-right Republicans, right? And besides, isn't the [economy](#) doing just fine? That's what we keep reading in the mainstream press, anyway.

Well, not exactly.

Every single one of those scathing attacks came from Labor Day remarks by Hillary Clinton, Bernie Sanders and Vice President Joe Biden.

Their prognosis is dead-on. As we've pointed out repeatedly, the recovery that started a few months after Obama took office has been the worst since the Great Depression, with GDP and employment growth far below the average post-World War II recoveries.

Median family incomes have declined, millions are working part-time jobs because there isn't full-time work, 13 million have dropped out of the labor force entirely. Millions more are poor and on food stamps. And the latest IBD/TIPP poll shows 46% think we're still in a recession and 52% say it's not improving.

Naturally, neither Biden, Clinton nor Sanders mentioned Obama, much less blamed him for the current state of affairs. But lest they forget, it was Obama who presided over the largest Keynesian stimulus in history and signed the job-killing ObamaCare law.

And it was Obama who succeeded in getting multiple tax hikes on the "rich." And it was his administration that has imposed massive regulations on banking, health care, energy suppliers, employers and just about every other corner of the private economy.

Still, give these Democrats credit for recognizing what's going on, and acknowledging that voters aren't happy about it. That's more than the mainstream press has been willing to admit.

It's just too bad Obama's would-be successors are all proposing to prescribe more of the same.

## Contentions

### Liberalism Doesn't Deserve the Benefit of the Doubt

by Noah Rothman

Sure, their approach to governance may be of dubious efficacy, but their hearts are in the right place. Judging the left by their intentions and not whether their policy prescriptions succeed on their own terms is how liberalism has managed to avoid critical introspection and soul-searching for much of the modern era – even when it is cast into the political wilderness by the electorate.

As the Obama era comes to a close and liberalism faces another time out of the public's favor, its contemporary leaders seem fit to ignore the lessons of its period in ascendance. Liberalism is utterly undeserving of the benefit of the doubt from which it has so unduly profited. That was always the case, but this summer has so plainly demonstrated this reality that it would be pathologically self-deceptive for the left to continue to ignore it.

Carey Gabay, a Harvard-educated lawyer and aide to New York Governor Andrew Cuomo was walking with his brother down a Brooklyn street near a well-traveled parade route [when he was shot](#) over the weekend. Gabay was caught in the crossfire that erupted between two rival gangs in Brooklyn. It is a spate of violence that had already taken the life of a 24-year-old man who was fatally stabbed in that same part of Brooklyn just hours earlier. Gabay remains in critical condition as of this writing. No arrests have been made in either his shooting or the deadly stabbing incident.

Hopefully, Gabay's family was not watching MSNBC on Tuesday morning. If they were, they would have seen the city's callous and indifferent Mayor Bill de Blasio affirming the tranquility of his city. "Crime is down almost five percent over last year," a smiling de Blasio averred. "We have had the safest summer in over 20 years." While overall crime is lower than in previous years, the murder rate is not. By mid-August, killings had risen by almost 10 percent over last year. De Blasio's New York is not alone in experiencing a substantial increase in the homicide rate. [In America's Democrat-led metropolises](#), the murder rate is almost uniformly up from last year. Chicago is up 20 percent; New Orleans is up 22 percent; Washington D.C. is up 56 percent. Baltimore and St. Louis – two cities that were rocked by racial violence over the course of the last year – are up 56 and 60 percent respectively. Milwaukee has experienced a staggering 76 percent increase in the murder rate.

It was, however, on the matter of homelessness that de Blasio sounded his most out of touch. No New York City resident or commuter can pretend not to notice it. There has been a dramatic increase in the number of people sleeping on the streets, begging on corners, nodding off with an outstretched hand amid an opioid-fueled stupor.

"This is a historic problem, decades old," de Blasio [said in his own defense](#). "The fact is, the Great Recession led to something we hadn't seen before." The mayor's attempt to blame the city's homelessness spike on a recession that began six years before he took office was exposed as naked scapegoating when he was asked if Barack Obama's economy remained subpar. "The economy's not worse, it's better," he said in direct contradiction to his earlier pronouncement. The mayor sought to inoculate himself against attacks on his record by noting that his administration has transitioned 15,000 out of city shelters and into affordable housing. "Putting people in a shelter costs their lives a lot," [he added](#). It's unlikely that those souls who spend their days laying face-first on a sidewalk in Manhattan's Herald Square being literally [stepped over by morning commuters](#) would agree.

"A city with homeless on its streets is a city that has no love of its people," former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani recently wrote. "A city that lets people sleep in the streets doesn't care." The [city's homeless population](#) is up by an estimated 59 percent over 2013. Calls from concerned citizens about the homeless population have spiked by 35 percent in the same period. In response to Giuliani's stinging admonition, de Blasio called him "delusional" and suggested the rise in awareness of the city's homeless problem was due only to the media's renewed interest in the subject. Apparently, the mayor thinks his city's residents are "delusional," too.

De Blasio's administration might have presided over the return of the bad old days, but he gets credit from the left and in the press for [advocating preferred philosophies](#). The mayor has positioned himself as a progressive icon. He crafts progressive manifestos and presides over self-gratifying summits with wealthy liberal actors and business leaders with the mission of forcing the nation's politics to the left. Rather than abandon their champion amid a humanitarian crisis, liberals have rushed to de Blasio's defense.

Gothamist's Ben Yakas called the former mayor's rebuke of the current mayor's accommodation of the destitute "[faux-humanitarianism](#)" and was soon reduced to spouting a stream of four-letter words in his denunciation of the former mayor. [Vox.com and Media Matters for America](#) have taken to attacking Fox News Channel's Bill O'Reilly for noticing the city's homeless crisis and using it to "take political shots at a mayor he doesn't like." [We have seen this before](#). "It's not a crime to sit or sleep on a public street," said New York Civil Liberties Union Norman Siegel near the end of Giuliani's mayoralty in 1999. "It's not that these people have a right to freeze to death on the streets," Mary Brosnahan, the executive director of the Coalition for the Homeless, added. "It's that they don't have enough housing." Today, the city's shelters have an average of [36 percent more single adults](#) staying in city shelters per night than they did when Brosnahan complained of a funding shortage.

These responses expose an indifference and callousness to the plight of the destitute, the mentally ill, and to those who are threatened by their menacing presence. Advocates for the homeless fast become advocates for liberalism and defenders of the status quo when these crises invariably erupt under progressive executives.

The crisis of homelessness and crime is progressivism's fruits on a micro level. The shallow indifference to the human condition writ large is evident in the tide of humanity now descending on Europe. An epidemic of teary Western eyes greeted the images of Aylan Kurdi, the two-year-old Syrian refugee who [washed up on a Turkish beach](#) after the boat in which he fled war-torn shores capsized in the Mediterranean. Once again, the left howled feebly that the West must "do something." But when the opportunity to intervene in a rapidly worsening civil war in Syria not only presented itself but also became a moral imperative in 2013, it was the West's liberals who promoted paralysis.

Amid a refugee crisis, the American left will give no credit to European conservatives like Angela Merkel and David Cameron, who have committed to taking in the displaced from North Africa and the Middle East. Those same liberals will point to a handful of Republican presidential candidates who have opted to burnish their anti-illegal immigrant credibility by opposing calls to absorb some of these refugees into the United States. Their self-indulgent back patting is undeserved. Truly mitigating this crisis means making hard choices about war and peace. Truly saving the future means stemming the flow of migrants into a continent that can scarcely employ or provide services for its own citizens. The left congratulates itself for evincing an abundance of empathy. It's a poor substitute for embracing policies that end crises. In power, the left presides over triage, mitigates the harshest effects of their shortsighted policies, and is congratulated by fellow travelers in the press for their courage.

The left scarcely deserves the benefit of the doubt they receive from the public. Their hearts may be in the right place, but their hearts are distinctly poor governors. It is time for liberals to take stock of their disastrous records, and that can only happen when the public and the press stops excusing the left's abject failures because they believe their intentions are noble.

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