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The Wall Street Journal's Weekend Interview is with Thomas Sowell.

*Thomas Sowell turned 85 years old this summer, which means he has been teaching economics to Americans through his books and articles for some four decades. So it seems like a natural question: Have we learned anything? Has the level of economic thinking in political debate gone up at all?*

*"No—in fact, I'm tempted to think it's gone down," Mr. Sowell says, without much hesitation. "At one time you had a lot of people who hadn't had any economics saying foolish things. Now you have well-known economists saying foolish things." ...*

*... Why do we never seem to learn these economic lessons? "I think there's a market for foolish things," Mr. Sowell says—and vested interests, too. Once an organization such as the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission is created to find discrimination, no one should be startled when it finds discrimination. "There's never going to be a time when the EEOC will file a report saying, 'All right folks, there's really not enough discrimination around to be spending all this money,' " he says. "You're going to have ever-more-elaborate definitions of discrimination. So now, if you don't want to hire an ax murderer who has somehow gotten paroled, then that's discrimination." ...*

While our economy has a vacation from common sense, President Dilettante leads us in a vacation from history; all to the cheers of the Washington media clique.

We have some photographs, the juxtaposition of which illustrates the disconnect. Last week the president was on Alaska's Arctic shore enjoying a photo-op while a world away the body of a small boy washes up on Turkey's shore.

The event in Turkey comes about because our president has no courage, and stands for nothing save spending and borrowing our way to oblivion.

Noah Rothman posts on the boy.

*His was one of twelve bodies collected on a Turkish beach on Wednesday. It has become a tragically common site to see the corpses of refugees fleeing the proliferating conflicts in the Middle East wash up on Mediterranean shores. This latest was perhaps the most heartbreaking. A Syrian boy, maybe two or three-years-old lay motionless in the surf. He had only ever known war; a horrible war characterized by intense violence, the use of chemical weapons, the Islamic State and al-Nusra, Bashar al-Assad's thugs, and the various international actors who give these barbarians succor. He was, perhaps for the first time in his short and cruel life, at peace. Of all the appalling images to emerge from the Syrian conflict, this might have been the most soul crushing. ...*

*... It was President Barack Obama who declared the use of chemical weapons on civilians in Syria a "red line" for action, and it was President Barack Obama who flinched when it became clear that the regime in Damascus had ignored him. Soon, images began to filter into the Western press revealing the horrors wrought by these WMDs. Rooms full of bodies; people*

*seizing, foaming at the mouth; children contorted and writhing as they met their horrible, terrifying end. The West had to act, but it did not. ...*

*... In the years that followed Obama's shortsighted decision to abandon Syria (and the entire region, it would turn out) to violence, Europe would find itself in the midst of a refugee crisis. A great human tide has descended upon the continent as teeming masses of Middle Easterners and North Africans displaced by warfare take flight into Europe. ...*

*... Our Syrian boy was among those refugees who desperately sought to flee the horrors that prevailed at home. He was among the thousands who never made it to European shores. But the pressures that compelled his family to take to a violent sea will not abate. As a result of more Western cowardice, those pressures will likely intensify. ...*

**Michael Gerson** in the Washington Post has more.

*One little boy in a red T-shirt, lying face down, drowned, on a Turkish beach, is a tragedy. More than 200,000 dead in Syria, 4 million fleeing refugees and 7.6 million displaced from their homes are statistics. But they represent a collective failure of massive proportions.*

*For four years, the Obama administration has engaged in what Frederic Hof, former special adviser for transition in Syria, calls a "pantomime of outrage." Four years of strongly worded protests, and urgent meetings and calls for negotiation — the whole drama a sickening substitute for useful action. People talking and talking to drown out the voice of their own conscience. And blaming. In 2013, President Obama lectured the U.N. Security Council for having "demonstrated no inclination to act at all." Psychological projection on a global stage.*

*Always there is Obama's weary realism. "It's not the job of the president of the United States to solve every problem in the Middle East." We must be "modest in our belief that we can remedy every evil."*

*But we are not dealing here with every problem or every evil; rather a discrete and unique set of circumstances: The largest humanitarian failure of the Obama era is also its largest strategic failure. ...*

As does **Terry Glavin** in **Canada's National Post**.

*"The worst part of it is the feeling that we don't have any allies," Montreal's Faisal Alazem, the tireless 32-year-old campaigner for the Syrian-Canadian Council, told me the other day. "That is what people in the Syrian community are feeling."*

*There are feelings of deep gratitude for having been welcomed into Canada, Alazem said. But with their homeland being reduced to an apocalyptic nightmare — the barrel-bombing of Aleppo and Homs, the beheadings of university professors, the demolition of Palmyra's ancient temples — among Syrian-Canadians, there is also an unquenchable sorrow.*

*Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's genocidal regime clings to power in Damascus and the jihadist psychopaths of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) are ascendant almost everywhere else. The one thing the democratic opposition wanted from the world was a no-fly*

zone and air-patrolled humanitarian corridors. Even that was too much to ask. There is no going home now.

*But among Syrian-Canadians, the worst thing of all, Alazem said, is a suffocating feeling of solitude and betrayal. "In the Western countries, the civil society groups — it's not just their inaction, they fight you as well," he said. "They are crying crocodile tears about refugees now, but they have played the biggest role in throwing lifelines to the regime. And so I have to say to them, this is the reality, this is the result of all your anti-war activism, and now the people are drowning in the sea." ...*

*... But what we are all doing — Conservatives, Liberals and New Democrats, Americans, Canadians, and all the dominant elites of the United Nations and the NATO countries that cleave to that sophisticated indifference known in polite company as anti-interventionism — is a very straightforward thing. We are watching Syria die. We are allowing it to happen. ...*

Andrew Malcolm notes the discouraging misplaced priorities.

*Striving to maintain some political relevance as the nation's focus shifts to choosing his successor, Barack Obama is using a brief visit to Alaska to portray America -- indeed, the entire planet -- in imminent, disastrous danger from global warming.*

*The Democrat has long touted global warming as a serious threat. In May, he told military academy graduates that climate change is the greatest threat to U.S. national security. The president's analysis differs drastically from military leaders, who list Russia, North Korea, China and ISIS as the worst security threats facing the U.S. as Obama draws down its military forces.*

*Even as Russia annexes Crimea, foments rebellion in Ukraine, sells arms to Iran and aggressively develops Arctic commerce and energy, Obama sees no developing confrontation. Obama did note in Alaska that Russia in recent years has built a fleet of 40 heavy icebreakers. The United States has one in service. Obama suggests building another.*

*The president said addressing climate change is urgent and dismissed fears that more environmental controls and regulations would hurt the stumbling economy and jobs.*

*The pattern of talking up a crisis as a means to control the nation's political agenda and provide a distraction from other news has been very familiar during these interminable 2,416 days of Obama's White House occupancy. Even if, in the end, little useful action ever ensues on such issues. ...*

Pickerhead will have a vacation too. Next post will be in a few days.

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WSJ

## The March of Foolish Things

*The conservative sage on the decline of intellectual debate, Ta-Nehisi Coates, and what the welfare state has done to black America.*

by Kyle Peterson



Stanford, Calif.

Thomas Sowell turned 85 years old this summer, which means he has been teaching economics to Americans through his books and articles for some four decades. So it seems like a natural question: Have we learned anything? Has the level of economic thinking in political debate gone up at all?

“No—in fact, I’m tempted to think it’s gone down,” Mr. Sowell says, without much hesitation. “At one time you had a lot of people who hadn’t had any economics saying foolish things. Now you have well-known economists saying foolish things.”

The paradox is that serious economic discussion enjoys a wider platform than ever before. One of the great bounties of the Internet is the trove of archival news and debate footage that has been dumped onto YouTube and other websites. Anyone with a modem can now watch F.A. Hayek [discussing](#), in a soft and dignified German accent, the rule of law with Robert Bork in 1978. Or Milton Friedman at Cornell the same year, [arguing matter-of-factly](#) about colonialism with a young man in a beard, sunglasses and floppy sideways hat.

There is plenty of old footage of Mr. Sowell floating through the ether, too, and if one watches a few clips—say, his [appearance](#) on William F. Buckley, Jr.’s “Firing Line” in 1981—two things stand out. The first is how little Mr. Sowell has changed. The octogenarian who sits before me in an office at the Hoover Institution, where Mr. Sowell has been a senior fellow since 1980, has a bit of gray hair and a different set of glasses, but the self-assurance and the baritone voice are the same.

The second thing that strikes is how little the political debate has changed. Maybe economics isn't merely a dismal science, but a futile one.

Take the minimum wage. In 1981, a year in which the federally mandated hourly pay rose to \$3.35 from \$3.10 (in today's dollars that would be to \$8.79 from \$8.14), Mr. Sowell argued on "Firing Line" that the minimum wage increases unemployment by pricing unskilled workers— young minorities in particular—out of the job market. It's the same point he makes today, as activists call for a minimum wage of \$10.10, or even \$15.

"When looking back over my life, I think of the lucky things that happened to me. And one of the luckiest ones, I just realized recently, is that when I left home as a 17-year-old high-school dropout, the unemployment rate among black 17-year-old males was in single digits," Mr. Sowell says. "In 1948, the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 was 10 years old and it hadn't been changed. And there was huge inflation, and so it was as if there was no minimum wage." He got a series of jobs—delivering Western Union telegrams, working in a machine shop—that put him on the right path.

Which is not to say that life was easy: In his 2002 memoir, "A Personal Odyssey," Mr. Sowell describes how he once pawned a suit of clothes to buy food—a knish and an orange soda at a little restaurant on the Lower East Side in New York City. "Since then I've eaten at the Waldorf Astoria, I've eaten in Parisian restaurants and in the White House," he tells me. "But no meal has ever topped that knish and orange soda."

Or take "disparate impact," the idea that different outcomes among different groups—say, that there are more male CEOs than female—is ipso facto evidence of discrimination. The [Obama](#) administration has used disparate impact to charge racism in housing, employment and other matters. In the absence of discrimination, the theory goes, people naturally would be dispersed more or less at random. Nonsense, Mr. Sowell says. "In various books I've given lists of all the great disparities all over the world, and I recently saw a column by Walter Williams in which he added that men are bitten by sharks several times as often as women."

Differences in outcome is a matter that Mr. Sowell takes up in his new book, "Wealth, Poverty and Politics: An International Perspective," out Sept. 8. Its theme, he says, is that "in a sense, there was never any rational reason to believe that there would be this evenness that they presuppose." Some continents have more navigable rivers and deep water harbors than others. Some cultures value education highly, and some don't. Underwhelming as the conclusion might sound to those with the urge to reorder society, many disparities arise simply because people are different, and because they make different choices.

Another problem is that the "disparate impact" assumption misidentifies where group differences originate. He sets up an example: "If you have people in various groups in the country, and their kids are all raised differently, they all behave differently in school, they do differently in school. And now they're grown up and they go to an employer, and you're surprised to find that they're not distributed randomly by income." It's "just madness," he says, to assume "that because you collected the statistics there, that's where the unfairness originated."

Mr. Sowell, looking back, can count the lucky breaks that contributed to his own success. As a baby he was adopted into a household with four adults who talked to him constantly. When he was 9 years old, the family left the South, moving from North Carolina to Harlem in New York. A mentor there took him to a public library for the first time and told him how to transfer out of a bad school into a good one. Not everyone has that kind of luck.

"It is unjust—my God it's unjust," Mr. Sowell says. "And yet that doesn't mean that you can locate somebody who has victimized somebody else." In human affairs, happenstance reigns.

Why do we never seem to learn these economic lessons? "I think there's a market for foolish things," Mr. Sowell says—and vested interests, too. Once an organization such as the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission is created to find discrimination, no one should be startled when it finds discrimination. "There's never going to be a time when the EEOC will file a report saying, 'All right folks, there's really not enough discrimination around to be spending all this money,' " he says. "You're going to have ever-more-elaborate definitions of discrimination. So now, if you don't want to hire an ax murderer who has somehow gotten paroled, then that's discrimination."

It's a funny line—and an instance of what sets Mr. Sowell apart: candor and independence of mind. No one can suggest that he doesn't say what he thinks. In 1987, while testifying in favor of Judge Robert Bork's ill-fated nomination to the Supreme Court, he told [Joe Biden](#), a senator at the time, that he wouldn't have a problem with literacy tests for voting or with \$1.50 poll taxes, so long as they were evenly and fairly applied. When I ask whether he remembers this exchange, Mr. Sowell quips, "No, Joe Biden is forgettable."

In our interview he maintains that the 1964 Civil Rights Act should have stuck to desegregating buses and government services, and let market forces take care of integrating lunch counters. Mr. Sowell says that the precedent set by imposing integration on people like Lester Maddox, a segregationist governor of Georgia who also owned a chicken restaurant, has opened a Pandora's box. "If you say that Lester Maddox has to serve his chicken to blacks, you're saying that the Boy Scouts have to have gay scout masters. You're saying—ultimately—that the Catholic Church has to perform same-sex marriages."

Mr. Sowell is unsparing toward those who purport to speak for American blacks. I ask him about the unrest in Ferguson, Mo. "People want to believe what they want to believe, and the facts are not going to stop them," he says, adding that black leaders—from President [Obama](#) and former Attorney General [Eric Holder](#) down to [Al Sharpton](#)—"do all they can to feed that sense of grievance, victimhood and resentment, because that's where the votes are."

What about Ta-Nehisi Coates, the black writer whose new book, a raw letter to his son about race relations in the U.S., is stirring public intellectuals? I read Mr. Sowell a line from Mr. Coates's 15,000-word cover story for the Atlantic calling for reparations for slavery: "In America there is a strange and powerful belief that if you stab a black person 10 times, the bleeding stops and the healing begins the moment the assailant drops the knife."

"Ah . . . yes," Mr. Sowell sighs, as if recognizing a familiar tune. "What amazes me is not that there are assertions like this, but that there is no interest in checking those assertions against any evidence," he says. "One of the things I try to do in the book is to distinguish between what might be the legacy of slavery, and what's the legacy of the welfare state. If you look at the first 100 years after slavery, black communities were a lot safer. People were a lot more decent. But then you look 30 years after the 1960s revolution, and you see this palpable retrogression—of which I think the key one is the growth of the single-parent family."

Mr. Sowell says he cannot remember ever hearing a gunshot when he was growing up in Harlem, and he used to sleep on the fire escape to beat the summer heat. He cites changes in black enrollment at New York City's highly competitive Stuyvesant High School, which he attended. "In 2012, blacks [were 1.2%](#) of the students at Stuyvesant," he says. "Thirty-three years earlier, they were 12%."



Here's the point: Does anyone believe that racism and the legacy of slavery are stronger today than in the 1970s—or for that matter in 1945, when Mr. Sowell enrolled at Stuyvesant? “It’s not a question of the disproportion between blacks and whites, or Asians, but the disproportion between blacks of today and blacks of the previous generation,” he says. “And that’s what’s scary.”

He offers another statistic: “For every year from 1994 to the present, black married couples have had a poverty rate in [single digits](#),” Mr. Sowell says. “Those people who have not followed the culture—the ghetto culture—are doing fine.”

So how can the case for reform be made? Let’s say the Republican presidential nominee has a speech lined up at the historically black Howard University. What should the candidate say?

Mr. Sowell says he should tell the audience that “one of the worst things for blacks is the minimum wage. *The* worst thing,” he says, is “the public schools run by the teachers unions who will protect the most incompetent teacher there is, who will fight tooth and nail against your being able to make a choice and go to voucher schools.” Lay out the case, Mr. Sowell says, and “address them as if they’re adults. You’re not going to get 50-plus percent of the black vote. But good grief, if the Republicans got 20% of the black vote it would be a revolution.”

One can only hope that if such a day comes, Mr. Sowell, who has been making these arguments since Barack Obama was a teenager, is around to see it. He says he doesn’t intend to retire. The fifth edition of his 2000 book “Basic Economics” came out last December, and although his newest title isn’t on store shelves yet, he is already mulling a sequel. Mr. Sowell seems as sharp as ever, so I have to ask: Does he *feel* 85 years old?

Another answer with no hesitation. “Yes. Maybe 95 on some days,” he says, with a deep laugh. “When I think of the things that other people my age are going through, I really should feel so lucky.”







## Contentions

### What We Owe the Syrian Boy in the Surf

by Noah Rothman

His was one of twelve bodies collected on a Turkish beach on Wednesday. It has become a tragically common site to see the corpses of refugees fleeing the proliferating conflicts in the Middle East wash up on Mediterranean shores. This latest was perhaps the most heartbreaking. A Syrian boy, maybe two or three-years-old lay motionless in the surf. He had only ever known war; a horrible war characterized by intense violence, the use of chemical weapons, the Islamic State and al-Nusra, Bashar al-Assad's thugs, and the various international actors who give these barbarians succor. He was, perhaps for the first time in his short and cruel life, at peace. Of all the appalling images to emerge from the Syrian conflict, this might have been the most soul crushing. Yet we dare not look away. We must not. Western democracies had their chance to prevent his suffering, and they failed that Syrian boy. Though it has now been mercifully cut short, we own a portion of his lifetime of pain. We did not compel the boy's parents to make this final, ill-fated journey, but we have declined every opportunity to improve the conditions that led to his flight from war. It is well past time to look upon the face of our callousness and venality. It is the face of that child.

The West had its chance to intervene in the bloodshed in Syria when it began. Ample chance, in fact. Western democracies were, however, snakebit by their experience in Libya, where the NATO powers that intervened in that conflict had no plan for the post-Muammar Gaddafi environment and left behind them a vacuum filled by Islamist militants. The West learned all the wrong lessons from that experience. Rather than to embrace of circumspect interventions with forethought applied to the post-war environment, not to mention the nation building required the intervention's participating powers, the community of nations simply shielded its eyes from the terror that followed the Arab Spring.

It was President Barack Obama who declared the use of chemical weapons on civilians in Syria a "red line" for action, and it was President Barack Obama who flinched when it became clear that the regime in Damascus had ignored him. Soon, images began to filter into the Western press revealing the horrors wrought by these WMDs. Rooms full of bodies; people seizing, foaming at the mouth; children contorted and writhing as they met their horrible, terrifying end. The West had to act, but it did not.

Instead, jealous guardians of our comfort and privilege, Western governments opted for an off-ramp. Confronted by obstinate and recalcitrant voters both at home and in ostensibly allied states like Great Britain, Barack Obama declined to make the case for intervention in Syria. Instead, he made a case for a Trojan Horse. The Russian government had offered to preserve its client in Damascus in exchange for an unworkable plan to remove chemical weapons from Syria. Today, their client remains, but the chemical weapons were not entirely removed. Many of them are still in theater, and some have now fallen into the hands of ISIS – a terrorist enterprise of unfathomable brutality.

In reward for Obama's pliant response to Russian overtures, Moscow responded to turmoil on its Western border by invading and annexing sovereign territory in Europe for the first time since World War II. Today, the flames of war again lap at European heels.

In the years that followed Obama's shortsighted decision to abandon Syria (and the entire region, it would turn out) to violence, Europe would find itself in the midst of a refugee crisis. A

great human tide has descended upon the continent as teeming masses of Middle Easterners and North Africans displaced by warfare take flight into Europe. The Czech Republic and Hungary, finding themselves on the frontlines of the crushing mass of terrorized Syrians, have taken emergency measures. Prague revealed this week that it simply lacked the manpower to detain those refugees racing for Northern European havens. Budapest has shut down rail lines and has created de facto detention centers in order to cope with the crisis. Italy is prepared to re-impose border controls at Germany's request.

"It is clear the Schengen Agreement is crumbling," the far-right UKIP leader Nigel Farage told The Telegraph, referring to the European Union treaty that allows for passport-free travel between member states. More than any financial crisis triggered by debt-laden states in Southern Europe, this refugee crisis has the potential to shatter the union of European states – a dangerous condition with an irredentist Russia testing the EU's willingness to defined itself and hungrily eyeing the NATO-allied Baltics.

Our Syrian boy was among those refugees who desperately sought to flee the horrors that prevailed at home. He was among the thousands who never made it to European shores. But the pressures that compelled his family to take to a violent sea will not abate. As a result of more Western cowardice, those pressures will likely intensify.

Assad can only sustain his terrible war with the aid of foreign allies, and his most valuable benefactors are the mullahs in Tehran. On Wednesday, the final piece fell into place that would ensure the implementation of a nuclear accord with Iran that rewards the Islamic Republic with \$150 billion in sanctions relief, as well as the eventual lifting of all weapons and missile embargos on the terrorism-sponsoring regime. "The Obama administration is hopeful that the Iranians will use the windfall to build schools, hospitals, and roads. But there's an excellent chance that at least a healthy chunk of it will go to two U.S.-designated terrorist entities," wrote the regional experts Michael Weiss and Nancy Youssef. "[T]he Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps-Quds Force (IRGC-QC) and its proxy Lebanese Hezbollah, both of which are now in effect running Assad's scorched-earth warfare."

Syrian dissidents and regional specialists see few mechanisms available to the West that may dissuade Iran from escalating its support for Assad. It is reasonable to expect forces loyal to Damascus to share soon in Iran's windfall, and for there to be a commensurate escalation of the worst humanitarian crisis of the 21st Century.

The Syrian boy who washed up on a Turkish beach wearing a bright red t-shirt and shorts on Wednesday will not be the last. He is asleep now, and his suffering is over. Ours endures, and we must bear it. America and the West own a portion of the torment that characterized his short time on Earth. In our comfort, we allowed this great human catastrophe to metastasize. At the very least, it is incumbent upon us to look upon the face of the agony we permitted. Only then will it be possible to one day steel ourselves to the unpleasant task at hand. Only then will we eventually come to terms with the bloodletting we have abetted and to one day resolve to put an end to it. We owe that to that boy. Don't look away.

Washington Post

## The horrific results of Obama's failure in Syria

by Michael Gerson

One little boy in a red T-shirt, lying face down, drowned, on a [Turkish beach](#), is a tragedy. More than [200,000 dead](#) in Syria, [4 million](#) fleeing refugees and 7.6 million displaced from their homes are statistics. But they represent a collective failure of massive proportions.

For four years, the Obama administration has engaged in what Frederic Hof, former special adviser for transition in Syria, calls a "[pantomime of outrage](#)." Four years of strongly worded protests, and urgent meetings and calls for negotiation — the whole drama a sickening substitute for useful action. People talking and talking to drown out the voice of their own conscience. And blaming. In 2013, President Obama lectured the U.N. Security Council for having "[demonstrated no inclination to act at all](#)." Psychological projection on a global stage.

Always there is Obama's weary realism. "It's not the job of the president of the United States to [solve every problem](#) in the Middle East." We must be "[modest in our belief](#) that we can remedy every evil."

But we are not dealing here with every problem or every evil; rather a discrete and unique set of circumstances: The largest humanitarian failure of the Obama era is also its largest strategic failure.

At some point, being "modest" becomes the same thing as being inured to atrocities. President Bashar al-Assad's helicopters continue to drop "barrel bombs" filled with shrapnel and chlorine. In recent attacks on the town of Marea, Islamic State forces have used skin-blistering mustard gas and deployed, over a few days, perhaps 50 suicide bombers. We have seen starvation sieges, and kidnappings, and beheadings, and more than [10,000 dead children](#).

German Chancellor Angela Merkel has changed her country's asylum rules to welcome every Syrian refugee who arrives. Syrians have taken to calling her "Mama Merkel, Mother of the Outcasts." I wonder what they call the U.S. president.

At many points during the past four years, even relatively small actions might have reduced the pace of civilian casualties in Syria. How hard would it have been to destroy the helicopters dropping barrel bombs on neighborhoods? A number of options well short of major intervention might have reduced the regime's destructive power and/or strengthened the capabilities of more responsible forces. All were untaken.

This was not some humanitarian problem distant from the center of U.S. interests. It was a crisis at the heart of the Middle East that produced a vacuum of sovereignty that has attracted and empowered some of the worst people in the world. Inaction was a conscious, determined choice on the part of the Obama White House. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and CIA Director David Petraeus advocated arming favorable proxies. Sunni friends and allies in the region asked, then begged, for U.S. leadership. All were overruled or ignored.

In the process, Syria has become the graveyard of U.S. credibility. The chemical weapons "red line." "The tide of war is receding." "Don't do stupid [stuff]." These are global punch lines. "The analogy we use around here sometimes," said Obama of the Islamic State, "and I think is accurate, is [if a JV team puts on Lakers uniforms](#), that doesn't make them Kobe Bryant." Now

the goal to “degrade and destroy” the Islamic State looks unachievable with the current strategy and resources. “The time has come for President Assad [to step aside](#),” said Obama in 2011. Yet Assad will likely outlast Obama in power.

What explains Obama’s high tolerance for humiliation and mass atrocities in Syria? The Syrian regime is Iran’s proxy, propped up by billions of dollars each year. And Obama wanted nothing to interfere with the prospects for a nuclear deal with Iran. He was, as Hof has said, “[reluctant to offend](#) the Iranians at this critical juncture.” So the effective concession of Syria as an Iranian zone of influence is just one more cost of the president’s legacy nuclear agreement.

Never mind that Iran will now have tens of billions of unfrozen assets to strengthen Assad’s struggling military. And never mind that Assad’s atrocities are one of the main recruiting tools for the Islamic State and other Sunni radicals. All of which is likely to extend a war that no one can win, which has incubated regional and global threats — and thrown a small body in a red T-shirt against a distant shore.

## **National Post**

### **[Canada is watching Syria die](#)**

by Terry Glavin

“The worst part of it is the feeling that we don’t have any allies,” Montreal’s Faisal Alazem, the tireless 32-year-old campaigner for the Syrian-Canadian Council, told me the other day. “That is what people in the Syrian community are feeling.”

There are feelings of deep gratitude for having been welcomed into Canada, Alazem said. But with their homeland being reduced to an apocalyptic nightmare — the barrel-bombing of Aleppo and Homs, the beheadings of university professors, the demolition of Palmyra’s ancient temples — among Syrian-Canadians, there is also an unquenchable sorrow.

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s genocidal regime clings to power in Damascus and the jihadist psychopaths of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) are ascendant almost everywhere else. The one thing the democratic opposition wanted from the world was a no-fly zone and air-patrolled humanitarian corridors. Even that was too much to ask. There is no going home now.

But among Syrian-Canadians, the worst thing of all, Alazem said, is a suffocating feeling of solitude and betrayal. “In the Western countries, the civil society groups — it’s not just their inaction, they fight you as well,” he said. “They are crying crocodile tears about refugees now, but they have played the biggest role in throwing lifelines to the regime. And so I have to say to them, this is the reality, this is the result of all your anti-war activism, and now the people are drowning in the sea.”

Drowning in the sea: a little boy, no more than five-years-old, in a red T-shirt and shorts, found face-down in the surf. The toddler was among 11 corpses that washed up on a Turkish beach Tuesday. Last Friday, as many as 200 refugees drowned when the fishing boat they were being smuggled in capsized off the Libyan coast. At least 2,500 people, most of them Syrians, have drowned in this way in the Mediterranean already this year.



A year ago this week, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry emerged from a gathering on the sidelines of the NATO summit in Wales with commitments from nine NATO countries, including Canada, to join in a military effort to “degrade and ultimately destroy” ISIL. A few days after that Sept. 4, 2014, huddle, a half-dozen Arab states signed up. At least a dozen other countries are now also contributing in one way or another.

To say the American-led coalition effort has failed to stop the war in Syria would be true enough. It would also be disingenuous, for two reasons. The first is that to have allowed ISIL to expand the scope of its rampages would have meant war without precedent in 1,000 years of the Middle East’s bloody history. The second and most important is that the Obama administration never had any intention of stopping the war in the first place.

Assad, the Iranian ayatollahs’ Syrian proxy, has been allowed to persist in his relentless bombing of Syria’s cities and his dispatching of Shabiha and Hezbollah death squads. Assad has been allowed to violate Obama’s allegedly genius chemical-weapons pact as well, dozens of times. It is the toll from Assad’s war, not ISIL’s atrocities, that is the thing to notice: perhaps seven of every eight Syrian deaths (at least a quarter of a million people so far), almost all of Syria’s seven million “internally displaced” innocents and the overwhelming majority of the four million Syrian refugees who have fled the country.

The enormity of the Syrian catastrophe is at least partly what makes the tragedy so difficult to comprehend, but in Canada there is an added encumbrance. It is the delicate sensibilities of established opinion that require diplomacy to be privileged as an unimpeachable virtue and further require the United Nations to be understood as the sole means by which disasters of the Syrian kind are prevented, or at least resolved.

It makes no difference that no less an authority than António Guterres, the UN high commissioner for refugees, attributes Syria’s agonies primarily to a failure of diplomacy, or that the UN’s governing Security Council is a hostage of Russia’s Vladimir Putin and China’s Xi Jinping, or that the UN’s refugee budget is running well below the half-way mark — \$5.6 billion — for Syrian refugees. Funding is already two-thirds shy of anticipated refugee costs for 2015. The World Food Program has been rolling back its refugee food allowances year after year and in the coming weeks, more than 200,000 of the most desperate Syrian refugees are having their aid cut off entirely.

In Geneva, the International Organization for Migration reckons that about 237,000 people have set out across the Mediterranean in rickety ships headed for Europe this year, a number already exceeding last year’s total figure of 219,000. The main cohort consists of Syrian refugees, the largest refugee population on Earth. Europe is now facing a refugee crisis unlike anything since the Second World War.

In the Canadian context, the only comparable event is Black September, 1847, the darkest hour of the Irish famine, when roughly 100,000 mostly Irish refugees arrived in the Saint Lawrence River in dozens of coffin ships. Roughly 17,500 Irish drowned that year, or died on board ship, or in the fever sheds on the quarantine island of Gross Isle. The Syrians are the famine Irish of 21st century.

There’s another illustrative comparison worth making. Canada has settled roughly 20,000 Iraqi refugees since 2009 and last January, the Conservative government committed to taking in 10,000 Syrian refugees, on top of 1,300 welcomed in 2014. Last month, Prime Minister Stephen Harper promised that another 10,000 Syrians and Iraqis would be added to the mix. Here’s the

contrast: the kinder, gentler Obama administration has allowed only about 1,500 Syrian refugees to settle in the United States over the past four years.

Harper is right when he says the New Democratic Party's approach to the Syrian catastrophe amounts to little more than "dropping aid on dead people." The NDP is right when it points out the inordinately obtuse and incoherent accounting of just how many Syrian refugees have actually arrived in Canada. The Liberals are right, too, in their call to expedite family reunification visas, show more generosity and cooperation in private-sponsorship efforts, reduce processing times and allow Syrians on temporary visas to extend their stays in Canada and acquire citizenship.

But what we are all doing — Conservatives, Liberals and New Democrats, Americans, Canadians, and all the dominant elites of the United Nations and the NATO countries that cleave to that sophisticated indifference known in polite company as anti-interventionism — is a very straightforward thing. We are watching Syria die. We are allowing it to happen. And if you can comprehend that, you will know something of the sorrow that afflicts Faisal Alazem and all those other Syrian-Canadians these days.

### **Investor's Business Daily**

#### **Obama: Forget Iran, jobs, terror, doom looms from global warming**

by Andrew Malcolm

Striving to maintain some political relevance as the nation's focus shifts to choosing his successor, Barack Obama is using a brief visit to Alaska to portray America -- indeed, the entire planet -- in imminent, disastrous danger from global warming.

The Democrat has long touted global warming as a serious threat. In May, he [told military academy graduates](#) that climate change is the greatest threat to U.S. national security. The president's analysis differs drastically from military leaders, who list Russia, North Korea, China and ISIS as the worst security threats facing the U.S. as Obama draws down its military forces.

Even as Russia annexes Crimea, foments rebellion in Ukraine, sells arms to Iran and aggressively develops Arctic commerce and energy, Obama sees no developing confrontation. Obama did note in Alaska that Russia in recent years has built a fleet of 40 heavy icebreakers. The United States has one in service. Obama suggests building another.

The president said addressing climate change is urgent and dismissed fears that more environmental controls and regulations would hurt the stumbling economy and jobs.

The pattern of talking up a crisis as a means to control the nation's political agenda and provide a distraction from other news has been very familiar during these interminable 2,416 days of Obama's White House occupancy. Even if, in the end, little useful action ever ensues on such issues.

But Obama's remarks in Alaska this week were by far his most apocalyptic to date. [A sampling](#):

"There is such a thing as being too late," Obama warned. "That moment is almost upon us." Global warming, he said, is "a challenge that will define the contours of this century more dramatically than any other."

"Thawing permafrost destabilizes the earth on which 100,000 Alaskans live, threatening homes, damaging transportation and energy infrastructure, which could cost billions of dollars to fix."

"Warmer, more acidic oceans and rivers, and the migration of entire species, threatens the livelihoods of indigenous peoples, and local economies dependent on fishing and tourism. Reduced sea levels leaves villages unprotected from floods and storm surges. Some are in imminent danger; some will have to relocate entirely. In fact, Alaska has some of the swiftest shoreline erosion rates in the world."

"It is happening now. Climate change is already disrupting our agriculture and ecosystems, our water and food supplies, our energy, our infrastructure, human health, human safety -- now. Today. And climate change is a trend that affects all trends -- economic trends, security trends. Everything will be impacted. And it becomes more dramatic with each passing year."

"One new study estimates that Alaska's glaciers alone lose about 75 gigatons -- that's 75 billion tons -- of ice each year.... The pace of melting is only getting faster."

"Many of the fires burning today are actually burning through the permafrost in the Arctic. So this permafrost stores massive amounts of carbon. When the permafrost is no longer permanent, when it thaws or burns, these gases are released into our atmosphere over time, and that could mean that the Arctic may become a new source of emissions that further accelerates global warming."

"Temperatures in Alaska are projected to rise between six and 12 degrees by the end of the century, triggering more melting, more fires, more thawing of the permafrost....We're making progress; we're just not making it fast enough."

"There's always been an argument against taking action. The notion is somehow this will curb our economic growth. And at a time when people are anxious about the economy, that's an argument oftentimes for inaction. We don't want our lifestyles disrupted."

"In countries where there remains significant poverty, including here in the United States, the notion is, can we really afford to prioritize this issue? The irony, of course, is, is that few things will disrupt our lives as profoundly as climate change."

And Obama said all this *before* he actually saw a glacier.



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