

November 21, 2015 - PRESIDENT PETULANT

After the Paris attacks the president got really angry - at Americans, says Michael Barone.

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But what really got him angry, as the transcript and video make clear, were reporters' repeated questions about the minimal success of his strategy against ISIS; Republicans' proposals for more active engagement in Syria and Iraq; and critics of his decision to allow 10,000 Syrians into the United States. ...

Robert Tracinski, at the Federalist, calls him the worst president ever.

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There's something different about what happened from Charlie Hebdo, and I think everybody would feel that. There was a sort of particularized focus and perhaps even a legitimacy in terms of—not a legitimacy, but a rationale that you could attach yourself to somehow and say, okay, they're really angry because of this and that. This Friday was absolutely indiscriminate. It wasn't to aggrieve one particular sense of wrong. It was to terrorize people.

To be sure, this sentiment didn't come from Obama himself. But he hired Kerry, who has a record of making horribly insensitive statements. He is the same guy who thought a James Taylor song was an appropriate response to the Charlie Hebdo massacre — and Obama apparently agreed that this would make up for skipping out on an international unity rally in support of France. So maybe we know now why the administration couldn't really get mobilized to show support for Charlie Hebdo: deep down, they thought the magazine had it coming.

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Obama is traumatized and overwhelmed by the job of being commander-in-chief, he can pop off to the golf course and clear the way for someone else to do it.

More from Peter Wehner.

We all know people of towering arrogance and we all know people of staggering incompetence, but Barack Obama is quite possibly the perfect package. No one on the scene today combines these two qualities in quite the same way as Mr. Obama.

On the incompetence side, and sticking just with the president's policies and record in the greater Middle East, there is Mr. Obama's mishandling of the rise of the Islamic State, which just last year he referred to as the "jayvee team" and just last week declared was "contained." Recall his threat to Syrian President Assad that if Assad used chemical weapons on his own people it would constitute crossing a "red line" (Assad did and Obama did nothing), and his stop-start-stop support for opposition forces in Syria.

Then there is the president's decision to pull out all American troops from Iraq, which had disastrous consequences; his failures in Afghanistan (including announcing a withdrawal date even as he was announcing a surge in troops); his bungled relations with Egypt; his failure to support the Green Revolution in Iran in 2009 and his nuclear deal with Iran in 2015, which Charles Krauthammer called "the worst agreement in U.S. diplomatic history." Add to that Mr. Obama declaring his policies in Libya, Yemen and Somalia to be models of success before things collapses in all three countries, his alienation and mistreatment of Israel, and his botched handling of relations with our Arab allies – not to mention policies that have allowed Russia a presence in the Middle East unlike any its had since Anwar Sadat expelled the Soviet Union from Egypt in the early 1970s – and you have a catastrophic foreign policy record. It was only in the summer of last year that the Wall Street Journal reported, "The breadth of global instability now unfolding hasn't been seen since the late 1970s" – and things are more disordered, chaotic and violent now than it was then. Things are so bad that the president has even lost CNN's Christiane Amanpour. ...

And Jonathan Tobin.

... the main takeaway from Obama's presser is not so much that he is unwilling to consider alternatives to an American strategy that offers little hope of defeating ISIS. Just as important is his dogged refusal to admit that he has failed in spite of the manifest evidence that American policy is an ongoing disaster. That's a terrible failing in any man, let alone a commander-in-chief. But it is particularly bad for Obama because, at least when viewed from this perspective, because it proves that the keynote of his entire presidency is a falsehood. Throughout the last seven years, Democrats have justified everything that Obama has done, good or bad, on the basis of the contrast with the supposedly failed administration of George W. Bush.

Most of us may agree that the decision to invade Iraq was a mistake and there is much else to criticize about the Bush presidency. But when faced with the disaster that the insurgency created after Saddam's fall, Bush did not pretend that all was well as Obama did today. Though he was no more eager to admit failure than anyone else, Bush did not double down on a strategy that was going nowhere. At the end of 2006 with the war at a stalemate, he faced up to facts. He sacked his secretary of defense and switched strategies allowing the troop surge that

would during the course of the next two years turn the war to America's favor. By the time that Obama came into office, he had inherited a stable situation that he could declare Iraq to be a war that had been won.

Obama threw away that victory by abandoning Iraq and opened the door for ISIS. ...

Using Leon Trotsky's admonition about war, [Noah Rothman](#) suggests how to proceed against ISIS.

... American policy has not been to eliminate it but to confine the Islamic State to its fluid borders. Barack Obama reluctantly swore to lead a multinational coalition designed to "degrade and destroy" the organization, but the practical effects of his nearly 18-month-long campaign have been to do what he admitted yesterday: to "contain" the Islamic State. The West is war-weary. We wanted nothing less than renewed war in the Middle East, but the resulting disengagement is precisely what allowed the ISIS threat to mature and to metastasize. Even if the Paris attack is linked to another terrorist network in the region, it is a clear indication that a terrorist incubator in Iraq and Syria cannot be allowed to survive. This is a proto-state that must be crushed, not only in service to the shared human values and treasures this organization has busily been destroying but in service to the preservation of national security.

No one wants perpetual war, but that is precisely what the West has invited with its displays of faltering resolution and its commitment to conduct a war with the smallest possible footprint. Meanwhile, Western values are slowly eroded as we grow more comfortable with soldiers on the streets, metadata retention programs, and theatrical displays like TSA airport screenings. There cannot be a "new normal" while one side of this conflict is continually reshaping what "normal" means. The Islamic State will not be destroyed from the air. The handful of Special Forces and U.S. advisors on the ground in Iraq and Syria cannot neutralize this threat. ISIS cannot be contained. Only an overwhelming force can accomplish the necessary task of destroying the Islamic State. What's more, it is the responsibility of the civilized world to destroy it. ...

The cartoonists have a field day.



Jewish World Review

[Obama Gets Really Angry ... at Americans](#)

by Michael Barone

Three days after the Islamic State terrorist attacks in Paris, Americans were primed to hear their president express heartfelt anger, which he did in his press conference in Antalya, Turkey, at the end of the G-20 summit. And they did hear him describe ISIS as "this barbaric terrorist organization" and acknowledge that the "terrible events in Paris were a terrible and sickening setback."

But what really got him angry, as the transcript and video make clear, were reporters' repeated questions about the minimal success of his strategy against ISIS; Republicans' proposals for more active engagement in Syria and Iraq; and critics of his decision to allow 10,000 Syrians into the United States.

The reporters did not seem this time to be absorbing his patient instruction. ISIS "controls less territory than it did before," he stated — but not much less, and it is still holding Iraq's second-largest city and a huge swath of Iraqi and Syrian desert.

Our military could dislodge them, he admitted, but explained that then we'd have to occupy and administer the places we capture. In other words, we'd be facing the kind of messy situations we faced in Iraq.

But in his self-described goal, "to degrade and ultimately destroy," the word "ultimately" looms uncomfortably large. Most Americans want people who behead Americans destroyed considerably sooner than that. They wonder why the world's greatest military can't do that.

Such action, Obama suggested, might be bad public relations. ISIS has "a twisted ideology" and we play into its "narrative" by treating it as a state and using "routine military tactics." ISIS "does not represent Islam" and treating it as a "Muslim problem" will lead to "greater recruitment into terrorist organizations over time." It's not clear why the significant minority of Muslims with positive feelings to ISIS will accept an American president's definition of their faith.

"A political solution is the only way to end the war in Syria," he said, looking forward to negotiations between Syrian factions, encouraged that "countries on all sides of the Syrian conflict agree on a process that is needed to end this war." But he felt obliged to acknowledge continuing disagreements over "the fate of Bashar Assad" — no small item.

He described Americans who counsel a different course as "folks (who) want to pop off" and who think their advisers are better than the Joint Chiefs or soldiers on the ground. This ignores the fact that Obama has repeatedly rejected the advice of career military leaders and his own appointed civilian leaders who recommended more active policies.

In Obama's defense it must be said that getting Middle East decisions right is hard. When he said, "Assad must go" in August 2011, many knowledgeable observers thought he soon would. His statement in the August 2012 campaign season that Assad's use of chemical weapons would be "a red line" seemed to many a reasonable deterrent.

In retrospect those statements were mistakes, unforced errors that led to acquiescence in Russian intervention in Syria in September 2013. And Obama's decision, in Walter Russell Mead's words, "to stand aside and watch Syria" by rejecting advisers' proposals to send in troops or enforce a no-fly zone, has led to the outflow of hundreds of thousands of refugees.

This is not a president who has prioritized human rights in Middle East policy, as evidenced by the cold shoulder given to Iran's Green Revolution protesters in June 2009 and by the long inaction in addressing the problems of Syrian refugees, now flowing into Europe.

All of which makes more grating Obama's denunciation of Americans critical of his call to admit 10,000 refugees here. In Antalya he accused them of closing their hearts to victims of violence and of being "not American" in suggesting prioritization of the Christian refugees who have been singled out for torture and murder.

He could have acknowledged people's qualms as legitimate and argued at greater length, as former Ambassador to Iraq and Syria Ryan Crocker did in the Wall Street Journal, that we have processes in place that would effectively screen out terrorists. Or have proposed, like Speaker Paul Ryan, a pause before accepting any.

But that would have meant not taking cheap shots against the political opposition at home — the people who really make him angry.

The Federalist

Barack Obama: Worst. President. Ever.

by Robert Tracinski

I still remember a lot of people telling me in 2006 that George W. Bush was the “worst president ever.”

They had no idea what they were talking about. *This* is what the “worst president ever” looks like. In his response to the attacks in Paris, Barack Obama has shown us a leader who is not just inadequate to his core responsibilities, but contemptuous of them.

It started Friday night with his first statement about the attacks. He was perfunctory, devoid of content, and utterly listless. His delivery was flat and without affect — expressing neither outrage nor sorrow — giving the impression that he had no desire to be in front of the cameras or to make any comment at all.

I don't demand much out of an early press conference like this. The president still knows too few facts about the case and has not had time to formulate a detailed response. But he should at least look as if he cares. If France is “our oldest ally” and “represents the timeless values of human progress,” shouldn't Obama be very engaged with what happens there?

By contrast, here was his same-day reaction to a mass shooting in Oregon six weeks earlier. **(You will need to follow the link)**

See especially the part about four minutes in. It's clear that the prospect of imposing gun control domestically gets Obama riled up. Fighting the enemies of America overseas does not. But the first of these goals is actually prohibited to him by the Constitution — while the second is *mandated* for him. I don't know if we've ever seen a president whose personal priorities are so out of sync with the actual demands of his office.

The administration's reaction has only gotten worse as it has had more days to respond. On Tuesday, Secretary of State John Kerry let out the howler that the terrorist attack in France earlier this year — wiping out the headquarters of a satirical magazine that had offended radical Muslims — was [kind of understandable](#).

There's something different about what happened from *Charlie Hebdo*, and I think everybody would feel that. There was a sort of particularized focus and perhaps even a legitimacy in terms of—not a legitimacy, but a rationale that you could attach yourself to somehow and say, okay, they're really angry because of this and that. This Friday was absolutely indiscriminate. It wasn't to aggrrieve one particular sense of wrong. It was to terrorize people.

To be sure, this sentiment didn't come from Obama himself. But he hired Kerry, who has a record of making horribly insensitive statements. He is the same guy who thought a [James Taylor song](#) was an appropriate response to the *Charlie Hebdo* massacre — and Obama apparently agreed that this would make up for [skipping out](#) on an international unity rally in support of France. So maybe we know now why the administration couldn't really get mobilized to show support for *Charlie Hebdo*: deep down, they thought the magazine had it coming.

Obama's administration can't even get the easy, symbolic stuff right. But the real problem is the substance of his response.

That brings us to Obama's petty, peevish [press conference](#) on Monday. This is the president who infamously dismissed the Islamic State as the junior varsity squad and described it as "contained" just hours before the attacks in Paris. So naturally, he faced a flurry of questions challenging him on that. At which point, as *Politico* [put it](#), "he appeared to lose patience with repeated questions about whether he underestimated the threat of the terror network."

Even Democrats are [concerned](#) that "at times he was patronizing, at other times he seemed annoyed and almost dismissive." Nothing was more dismissive than this comment:

If folks want to pop off and have opinions about what they think they would do, present a specific plan. If they think that somehow their advisors are better than the Chairman of my Joint Chiefs of Staff and the folks who are actually on the ground, I want to meet them. And we can have that debate. But what I'm not interested in doing is posing or pursuing some notion of American leadership or America winning, or whatever other slogans they come up with that has no relationship to what is actually going to work to protect the American people, and to protect people in the region who are getting killed, and to protect our allies and people like France. I'm too busy for that.

This was supposed to show that he doesn't give a damn what his critics think, but it just shows that he doesn't give a damn. This is the point inadvertently made by a blogger who [praised him](#) and put the issue in no uncertain terms, though I have bowdlerized it a bit to make it publishable on a family website.

We've kinda suspected it before, but President Obama genuinely gives no [damns] at this point. He is [damn] devoid. [Damn] deficient. [Damn] deprived. [Damn] destitute. His cupboard of [damns] is barren; his tank of [damns] has been depleted. You know how, on cloudy nights, you might look up into the vast and endless sky and not find any stars? The same thing would happen if you looked at Obama and searched for [damns]. And this, this total absence of [damns], is where pop off came from."

This is supposed to make Obama "cool," I guess, because it shows that he is defying the "haters" — those "haters" being his critics back home, not the guys shooting people on the streets of Paris. But it actually shows contempt for pretty much everybody. It's contemptuous of some of his political allies, like [Dianne Feinstein](#), who are concerned that the Islamic State is "not contained." It's contemptuous of the reporters who are asking him good, tough questions. And it's contemptuous of the American people, who are suddenly concerned that attacks like the one in Paris are going to start happening in our own cities and who want some kind of reassurance that the president of the United States is on the job. They don't want to be told that they are just "popping off," or that the president isn't taking their concerns seriously.

When Obama thinks of empty slogans, he thinks of 'America winning.'

What they really want to hear is that America is leading and America is going to win. And Obama told us that he is above such petty concerns. Sure, he phrases it as opposition to empty sloganeering, but it's revealing that when he thinks of empty slogans, he thinks of "America winning."

So was [this](#) also empty sloganeering?

You ask, what is our policy? I can say: It is to wage war, by sea, land and air, with all our might and with all the strength that God can give us; to wage war against a monstrous tyranny, never surpassed in the dark, lamentable catalogue of human crime. That is our policy. You ask, what is our aim? I can answer in one word: It is victory, victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory, however long and hard the road may be; for without victory, there is no survival.

Because that's the sort of thing we need our president to say — and not just to say it, but to mean it.

We've had presidents before who made big mistakes. I remember George W. Bush, who messed up the occupation of Iraq (but fought like hell to recover). We've had presidents who were incompetent and inadequate. I remember Jimmy Carter and Desert One, his bungled response to the Iran hostage crisis. But I don't know that we've ever had a president who didn't really care about America winning — and who announced it to the public.

To realize how seriously he takes this, consider the detail with which he describes his basic discomfort with the core responsibility of the commander-in-chief. In response to suggestions (which, in his typical style, he exaggerated) to increase our efforts against the Islamic State, he responded:

Let's assume that we were to send 50,000 troops into Syria. What happens when there's a terrorist attack generated from Yemen? Do we then send more troops into there? Or Libya, perhaps? Or if there's a terrorist network that's operating anywhere else—in North Africa, or in Southeast Asia?

If I were Obama, by the way, I wouldn't mention the idea of not sending troops to respond to a terrorist attack in Libya. Because he already did that, in Benghazi, and our ambassador and three other Americans died.

But the general point is a fair one. We can't send troops everywhere. Does that mean we send them nowhere? Isn't it his job to make those strategic allocations, to decide which threats are the most serious and require the most resources? And shouldn't he consider that the threat from the Islamic State is getting a lot more serious? But he sees only the costs of action, not the costs of inaction, and he is paralyzed by it.

[E]very few months I go to Walter Reed, and I see a 25-year-old kid who's paralyzed or has lost his limbs, and some of those are people I've ordered into battle. And so I can't afford to play some of the political games that others may.

This is patronizing to our service members, who signed up for the job of killing terrorists, not just to sit around on base. But in case we didn't get the point, he added:

[T]here are costs to the other side. I just want to remind people, this is not an abstraction. When we send troops in, those troops get injured, they get killed; they're away from their families; our country spends hundreds of billions of dollars.

Obama's outlook on national security is profoundly defeatist. He sees only the costs of action and regards victory as an illusion. Vox's Matt Yglesias offers an [essential explanation](#), from a sympathetic source, of how things look to Obama administration insiders.

Many senior administration officials at this point are part of the permanent national security apparatus, but the core group of real 'Obama people' has a surprisingly dovish self-conception, where they see themselves operating in a world in which demands for military intervention are constant and endless—from the media, from congressional Republicans, from foreign governments and their allies in Washington, and from the permanent security bureaucracy itself—but America's actual ability to engage in non-counterproductive interventions is quite limited.

Thus, Yglesias concludes, "the hardest problem in US counterterrorism policy is in some ways as much a speechwriting challenge as anything else. The next time something goes wrong and an attack hits the United States, how do you sell the American people on the idea of not really doing anything about it?"

So the hardest problem in counter-terrorism is how to write speeches, or better yet, how to write speeches about doing nothing?

Well, I supposed that's what we should expect from a president who got elected for his speeches and not for doing anything. And this, I suspect, is how he is going to end up being remembered as commander-in-chief: as the guy who, in a crisis, gave us petulant speeches about why he was doing nothing.

This is one of those moments when you almost appreciate the parliamentary system, which can hold a vote of no confidence in the chief executive. You want to talk about popping off? If Obama is traumatized and overwhelmed by the job of being commander-in-chief, he can pop off to the golf course and clear the way for someone else to do it.

Contentions

[Our Bitter and Graceless President](#)

by Peter Wehner

We all know people of towering arrogance and we all know people of staggering incompetence, but Barack Obama is quite possibly the perfect package. No one on the scene today combines these two qualities in quite the same way as Mr. Obama.

On the incompetence side, and sticking just with the president's policies and record in the greater Middle East, there is Mr. Obama's mishandling of the rise of the Islamic State, which just last year he referred to as the "jayvee team" and just last week declared was "contained." Recall his threat to Syrian President Assad that if Assad used chemical weapons on his own people it would constitute crossing a "red line" (Assad did and Obama did nothing), and his stop-start-stop support for opposition forces in Syria.

Then there is the president's decision to pull out all American troops from Iraq, which had disastrous consequences; his failures in Afghanistan (including announcing a withdrawal date even as he was announcing a surge in troops); his bungled relations with Egypt; his failure to

support the Green Revolution in Iran in 2009 and his nuclear deal with Iran in 2015, which Charles Krauthammer [called](#) "the worst agreement in U.S. diplomatic history." Add to that Mr. Obama declaring his policies in Libya, Yemen and Somalia to be models of success before things collapses in all three countries, his alienation and mistreatment of Israel, and his botched handling of relations with our Arab allies – not to mention policies that have allowed Russia a presence in the Middle East unlike any its had since Anwar Sadat expelled the Soviet Union from Egypt in the early 1970s – and you have a catastrophic foreign policy record. It was only in the summer of last year that the *Wall Street Journal* [reported](#), "The breadth of global instability now unfolding hasn't been seen since the late 1970s" – and things are more disordered, chaotic and violent now than it was then. Things are so bad that the president has even lost CNN's [Christiane Amanpour](#).

Now most of us, with this almost unblemished record of ineptness, might feel some embarrassment. We might show a touch of self-reflection. And we would at least resist the temptation to lecture others. But not Mr. Obama. In his [press conference](#) in Turkey earlier this week, the president was prickly, petulant, condescending and small-minded. Consider just these two paragraphs:

"But what we do not do, what I do not do is to take actions either because it is going to work politically or it is going to somehow, in the abstract, make America look tough, or make me look tough. And maybe part of the reason is because every few months I go to Walter Reed, and I see a 25-year-old kid who's paralyzed or has lost his limbs, and some of those are people I've ordered into battle. And so I can't afford to play some of the political games that others may.

We'll do what's required to keep the American people safe. And I think it's entirely appropriate in a democracy to have a serious debate about these issues. If folks want to pop off and have opinions about what they think they would do, present a specific plan. If they think that somehow their advisors are better than the Chairman of my Joint Chiefs of Staff and the folks who are actually on the ground, I want to meet them. And we can have that debate. But what I'm not interested in doing is posing or pursuing some notion of American leadership or America winning, or whatever other slogans they come up with that has no relationship to what is actually going to work to protect the American people, and to protect people in the region who are getting killed, and to protect our allies and people like France. I'm too busy for that."

If only the president could summon up this much passion and anger against oh, say, the Islamic State. Or the malevolent regimes of Iran and Syria. But no; it's the *Republicans* for whom Mr. Obama has special antipathy. What a lovely touch, too, using soldiers who are paralyzed and without limbs to try to shut his critics down. And since we're dealing with Obama, there is the requisite "my critics are playing political games while my motives are as pure as the new-driven snow."

By now it's all quite predictable and quite tiresome. Even the president's own peculiar psychological habits – his tendency to project, his narcissism and seething resentment in reaction to criticisms, his inability to see reality when reality conflicts with his rigid and dogmatic views – are tedious because they are so commonly on display.

Watching Mr. Obama deal with his manifold and multiplying failures is to watch a man grow more bitter and graceless by the day. It's a long, long way from hope and change.

Contentions

How Obama Became Worse Than Bush

by Jonathan S. Tobin

At a press conference held today in Turkey where he is attending the Group of 20 summit, President Obama was not in a mood to answer questions about the efficacy of his anti-terrorism strategy. Though the very day that Obama had said ISIS was "contained," the group pulled off a series of coordinated terror attacks in Paris that took the lives of 129 people, in his first press availability since then the president showed no signs of being chastened by events. If anything, he was annoyed. Annoyed at ISIS for demonstrating how ineffectual his efforts at defeating them have been. And he was clearly annoyed, as he often is when pressed about his failures, at the press for continuing to probe for any sign that he is willing to re-evaluate his approach to the issue.

The question about what is the smartest way to respond to the ISIS overseas offensive as well as how to rout them out of their stronghold in Iraq and Syria that is the size of a small country is both difficult and contentious. But the main takeaway from Obama's presser is not so much that he is unwilling to consider alternatives to an American strategy that offers little hope of defeating ISIS. Just as important is his dogged refusal to admit that he has failed in spite of the manifest evidence that American policy is an ongoing disaster. That's a terrible failing in any man, let alone a commander-in-chief. But it is particularly bad for Obama because, at least when viewed from this perspective, because it proves that the keynote of his entire presidency is a falsehood. Throughout the last seven years, Democrats have justified everything that Obama has done, good or bad, on the basis of the contrast with the supposedly failed administration of George W. Bush.

Most of us may agree that the decision to invade Iraq was a mistake and there is much else to criticize about the Bush presidency. But when faced with the disaster that the insurgency created after Saddam's fall, Bush did not pretend that all was well as Obama did today. Though he was no more eager to admit failure than anyone else, Bush did not double down on a strategy that was going nowhere. At the end of 2006 with the war at a stalemate, he faced up to facts. He sacked his secretary of defense and switched strategies allowing the troop surge that would during the course of the next two years turn the war to America's favor. By the time that Obama came into office, he had inherited a stable situation that he could declare Iraq to be a war that had been won.

Obama threw away that victory by abandoning Iraq and opened the door for ISIS. Yet Democrats can argue, with at least a little justice that the whole thing is Bush's fault for starting the Iraq war. The question of who is more to blame for the current mess is more one for the historians than policymakers. Instead, what we need to address today is whether the U.S. will persist in a half-hearted approach to fighting an enemy that is committed to expanding its caliphate in the Middle East while also bringing the war to the West as it just did in Paris.

The president continued to insist today that his effort to "degrade and destroy" ISIS is working. While conceding that the Paris attacks were a "terrible and sickening setback," he claims, "we have the right strategy and we're going to see it through."

But you don't have to be a security expert to understand that the U.S. doesn't have the right strategy. In the 15 months since the president was forced to declare his intention to fight ISIS, the group has more than held its own in the field in Iraq and Syria while repeatedly demonstrating the ability to inflict terror on Western targets. Wars are either being won or lost,

and ISIS's cadres can't be blamed for thinking that they are currently winning. Rather than inspiring Americans to do what is necessary to achieve victory, Obama's stand projects both weakness and defeatism to a world that has a right to look to the United States for leadership.

Obama came into office determined never to fight any more wars in the Middle East and that has colored his desultory effort against ISIS. The pinprick bombing attacks and the resolute refusal to apply the sort of massive force that only the U.S. can deploy makes it clear that the president's only real objective is to maintain the status quo until he is safely out of office. That's why the president sees the Paris attacks, criticism from Republican opponents and questions from the press about the obvious disconnect between his rhetoric and reality, as annoyances rather than a potent challenge to reassess his preconceptions.

For all of his manifold talents, President Obama's chief shortcoming remains a dogged refusal to ever consider the possibility that he might be mistaken. To an objective observer, the course of the war in Iraq and Syria, as well as the spread of Islamist terror on his watch, would at the very least call into question the president's strategy. Yet everything that has happened in the last seven years has only served to deepen Obama's conviction that he was right about everything in the first place. As much as it is hard for Bush to shake the reputation of a failed president, he had one characteristic that Obama lacks: the ability to admit error and change his mind to adapt to circumstances. Unless President Obama stops sniping at the press and develops the ability to emulate Bush in that respect, ISIS will continue to win placing the entire world and not just Iraq and Syria in jeopardy. That he is willing to stick to his preconceptions about the war in spite of the mounting evidence that he is not living up to his responsibilities to the American people is nothing short of a disgrace.

It is President Obama's great misfortune that the wars he wanted so much to end cannot be concluded by an executive order. The enemy has its own ideas and they have prospered as his focus abroad has been on appeasing Iran and picking fights with Israel. Like it or not, he must now concentrate on the war on ISIS that is obviously going badly. But if he persists in conducting a phony war against ISIS, the world that his successor will inherit will be far less safe than the one he was handed by Bush.

Contentions

War Is Interested in You

by Noah Rothman

The American-led experiment meant to determine whether the Western world could live with the existence of the virulent Islamic State ended in failure last night. It ended when at least eight men armed with automatic weapons and suicide belts conducted one of the most daring and coordinated attacks on a Western target the world has seen in over a decade. It ended when suicide bombers detonated their devices at a sporting event attended by the French president. It ended when the guests at posh restaurants and shopping centers were gunned down. It ended when more than one hundred Parisians taken hostage at a theater were methodically executed, some of them managing to get out a text message or two begging for police intervention before they met their fates. The targets were familiar; decadent, Western, civilizational. The perpetrators were familiar, too.

Much has yet to be confirmed about the terror strike that claimed at least 128 lives and wounded more than 200 others, many of them critically. What we know now is that the level of coordination in this attack indicates substantial and long-term planning, support, and a level of technological capability alien to European-based terror cells. This operation was conducted with foreign sponsorship. While one of the attackers allegedly professed to being a member of the radical Islamic proto-caliphate ISIS, and that organization has since [claimed responsibility](#) for the attack, the Islamic State's culpability will need to be more firmly established. In a way, however, the task ahead of the West is one that is not dependent on establishing ISIS's culpability. The West cannot exist alongside the Islamic State. As we know them, one or the other must cease to exist.

Lip service aside, American policy has not been to eliminate it but to confine the Islamic State to its fluid borders. Barack Obama reluctantly swore to lead a multinational coalition designed to "degrade and destroy" the organization, but the practical effects of his nearly 18-month-long campaign have been to do what he admitted yesterday: to "contain" the Islamic State. The West is war-weary. We wanted nothing less than renewed war in the Middle East, but the resulting disengagement is precisely what allowed the ISIS threat to mature and to metastasize. Even if the Paris attack is linked to another terrorist network in the region, it is a clear indication that a terrorist incubator in Iraq and Syria cannot be allowed to survive. This is a proto-state that must be crushed, not only in service to the shared human values and treasures this organization has busily been destroying but in service to the preservation of national security.

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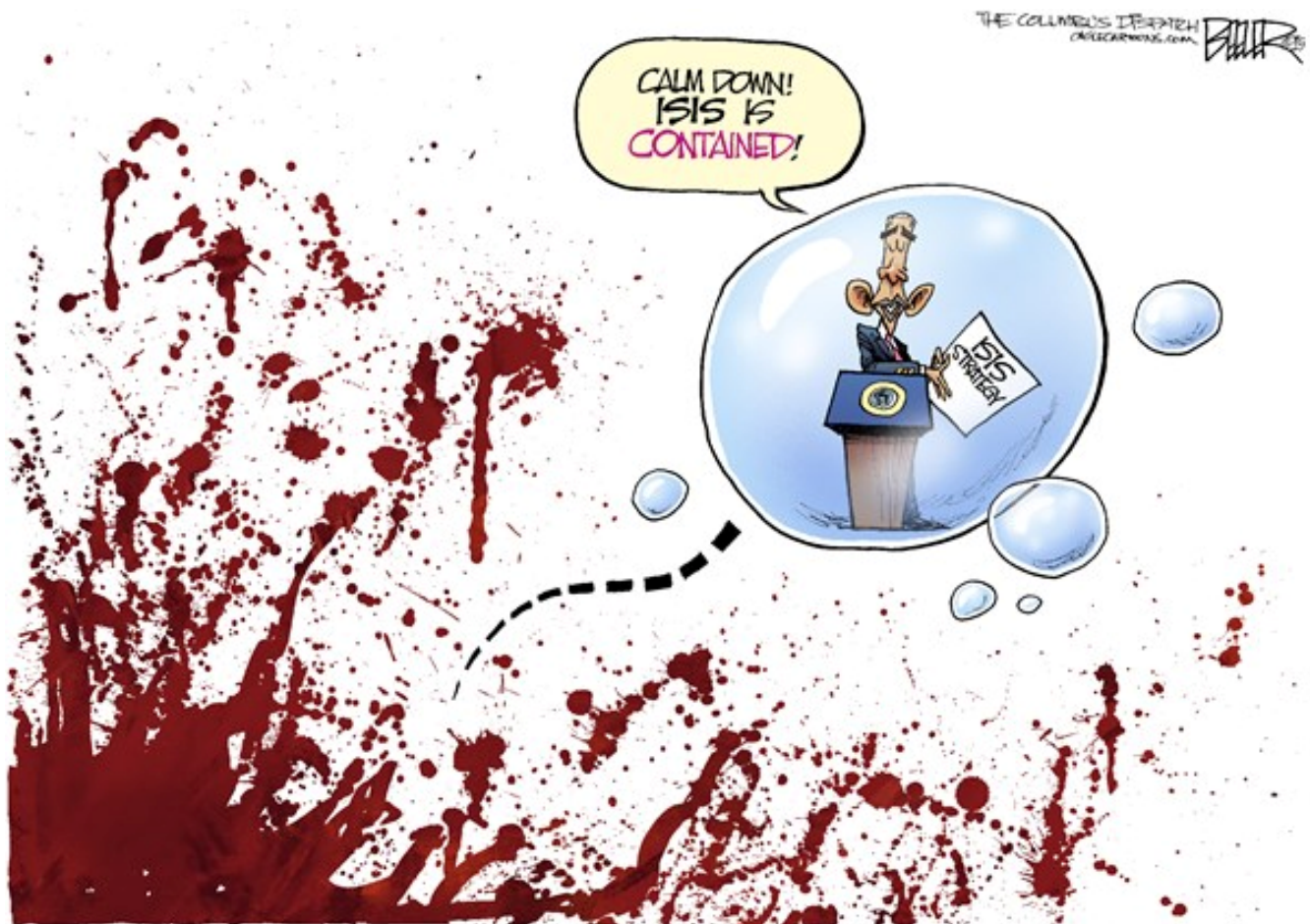
No one wants perpetual war, but that is precisely what the West has invited with its displays of faltering resolution and its commitment to conduct a war with the smallest possible footprint. Meanwhile, Western values are slowly eroded as we grow more comfortable with soldiers on the streets, metadata retention programs, and theatrical displays like TSA airport screenings. There cannot be a "new normal" while one side of this conflict is continually reshaping what "normal" means. The Islamic State will not be destroyed from the air. The handful of Special Forces and U.S. advisors on the ground in Iraq and Syria cannot neutralize this threat. ISIS cannot be contained. Only an overwhelming force can accomplish the necessary task of destroying the Islamic State. What's more, it is the responsibility of the civilized world to destroy it.

In solidarity, France did not hesitate to join the United States after it was attacked on the morning of September 11th. The United States and its European allies should not hesitate to come to France's defense, but Paris need not rely on the good will of its neighbors. "We are going to lead a war, and it will be pitiless," French President Francois Hollande [declared](#) while touring the scene of so much carnage last night. To ensure that this commitment to the restoration of international security is met with the full resolve of the West, Paris should invoke NATO's Article V triggering the alliance's collective defense provision.

There will be pressure on Hollande not to invoke such a powerful article, as the United States did after the September 11 attacks. That same pressure was applied to Turkey in 2012 when Ankara insisted it would invoke the treaty's mutual defense provision after their warplane was shot down over Syria, but that threat was inexplicably withdrawn days later. The cancer gestating in Syria is one the civilized world has been desperate to disregard, but it will not be ignored. Paris is the beginning. London, Moscow, Rome, Berlin, New York will be next. French President Hollande would be wise not to allow the West's indefatigable instinct to close its eyes to looming threats to return when the shock of this attack fades.

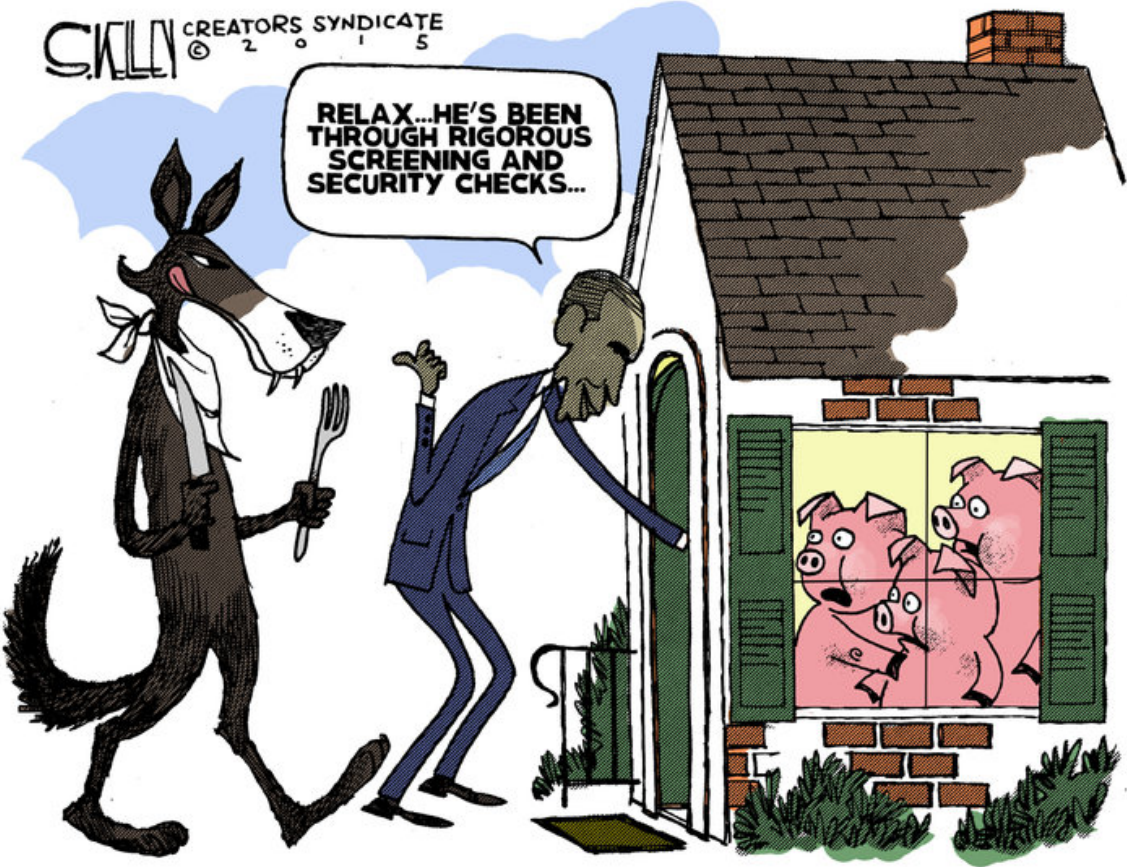
"You may not be interested in war, but war is interested in you," Lenin's Red Army commander, Leon Trotsky, is quoted as saying. This was both an admonition and a threat. Here was a man who knew how to make war. The West should no longer deceive itself with the notion that ISIS can be checked by a handful of perfunctory airstrikes. This is an international conflict, and France must internationalize it. This is not revenge; it is preventative and defensive. More blood will be shed, and the methods used to shed it may be even more sophisticated next time.

It's time for the West and America, in particular, to get serious. It's time to conduct this war with the purpose of ending it rather than tolerating a policy of perpetual containment. ISIS and the ideology it represents must be destroyed, or it will compel Western civilization to destroy itself in the hopeless effort to make itself a fortress. We are at war. It's time to start acting like it.





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