

February 23, 2010

In Contentions, [Max Boot](#) responds to concerns about the rules of engagement in Afghanistan. *...The only way to win in a counterinsurgency — or just about any other war, for that matter — is to send infantrymen with rifles to occupy the enemy's strongholds. In Afghanistan, those strongholds are among the population. That's where our troops need to go. In the process of driving the insurgents out of the population centers, it is strategically smart to minimize civilian casualties because that will help us to win the allegiance of the wavering population. That is not an untested theory; it is the reality of successful counterinsurgency campaigns from Malaya to Iraq.*

*And, yes, our troops will be placed at risk in the process of protecting the population and defeating the insurgents. There is no other way to achieve our goals. In Iraq from 2003 to 2007, we tried the alternative approach of putting our troops into giant Forward Operating Bases and employing copious firepower. Because this strategy failed to defeat the insurgency, it actually resulted in more American casualties. Conversely the surge strategy of 2007, which placed our troops in more exposed Combat Outposts and Joint Security Stations in Iraqi neighborhoods, incurred more casualties in the short run but saved American (and Iraqi) lives in the long run by actually pacifying Iraq. That strategy is also our best bet in Afghanistan. That's something that Gen. McChrystal realizes and that Stateside naysayers fail to grasp.*

[Charles Krauthammer's take](#) on the Afghan ROE.

*... So even though I'm sort of instinctively very suspicious and worried about these very constraining rules of engagement, I would defer to the military here because they are making a calculation that this is the best way to win the war.*

[David Warren](#) believes that Greece is only the first nation to reach a financial crisis.

*...today the problem is that freely elected governments of socialist tendency have spent the country into perdition. ...*

*...This is the reality, yet Europe's finance ministers are still blathering assurance that the Greeks somehow "deserve" to be saved. This not out of any compassion, but from fear the whole European Union will begin unravelling when Greece comes apart.*

*Yet in this respect Greece is nothing special: a vast, unionized public bureaucracy, which is, under quaint Greek arrangements, paid 14 months a year (12 calendar months plus two of guaranteed annual bonus). The civil servants are going berserk because the Socialist government of George Papandreou is trying to cut them back to 13 months of payment. (And can't afford that.) We have the spectacle of customs officials on strike, and tax collectors threatening to follow; of their trades union umbrella group declaring that the government's austerity measures are "an act of war."*

*...it is rather necessary to run a structural surplus, to prepare for the long rain of basic demographic facts: the usual aging population. ...*

In the National Journal, [Clive Crook](#) contrasts the US financial situation with that of Greece.

Setting aside his assumption that tax increases will help, he has some interesting analysis.

*...Perhaps that figure I just mentioned for U.S. general government debt struck you as high. The measure of public debt usually quoted in the U.S. excludes the debts of state and local governments. This and other statistical differences give you a debt ratio for 2010 of just over 60 percent -- the figure you might be familiar with -- not 90 percent. But it is not obvious why you would want to exclude the debts of state and local governments. Doing so is not standard international practice. If some states approach default, which is by no*

means unthinkable, some of those debts may end up on the federal government's books anyway. Even if it does not come to that, the debts are still public obligations, and most countries would fold them into their overall measure of public debt.

Moreover, tunnel into the fiscal practices of America's state and local governments and you find (as in most countries) plenty of "financial innovation." Revenue bonds, for instance, securitize future cash flows from taxes, lease payments, lottery profits, federal aid, and what have you. Borrowing against these future income streams can be used to keep spending off the books: Lack of transparency is often part of the attraction. The maneuver also gets around constitutional and other restrictions on borrowing using general obligation bonds. While you're at it, throw in generous tax advantages for state and local debt. And let's not forget states' unfunded pension and health insurance obligations. ...

...Perhaps handing the problem off to a commission is as much as the politics will allow. President Obama has promised not to raise taxes on the middle class. He will have to break that promise. Realistically, this cannot happen before November's elections, and when it does, Obama will need all the political cover he can find. Perhaps the budget commission can provide some. The president has said that the commission should consider all options: As it starts its work, he is not taking tax increases off the table. ...

[Christopher Hitchens](#) has a send off for Al Haig.

"Nobody has a higher opinion of General [Alexander Haig](#) than I do," I once wrote. "And I think he is a homicidal buffoon." I did not then realize that this view of mine was at least partly shared by so many senior figures on the American right.

When I moved to Washington in the very early years of Ronald Reagan's tenure, I was pretty sure that Haig, then secretary of state, was delusional (and not even in a good way). What I would not have believed then was what has become apparent since—that his boss, Ronald Reagan, often felt the same way. According to Douglas Brinkley's [splendid edition of the president's diaries](#), Reagan wrote as early as March 24, 1981: ...

Global analysis by Stratfor's George Friedman is in Pickings sometimes. In [Tablet Magazine](#), [David Goldman](#) (AKA Spengler) analyzes Stratfor's work product. He is not impressed.

... Friedman is not selling sophistication. Subscribers to his premium service get more items in their inbox than the most avid geopolitics junkie could digest. Friedman's private CIA, for that matter, isn't much different from the official version. My old boss from Ronald Reagan's National Security Council, Norman Bailey, always read the press himself to make sure he caught key items that the CIA analysts missed. Most of the cubicle-dwellers in the CIA's Directorate of Intelligence are academics who didn't get tenure and chose the government's health and pension benefits over the uncertainties of adjunct teaching.

For all his commercial focus, Friedman does not pander to his readers' prejudice. *The Next 100 Years* dismisses the stuff of scare scenarios—Islam taking over Europe, China confronting the United States, a failed Mexican state dumping its surplus millions over the American border—and offers an idiosyncratic vision that will leave most readers confused. Forget Russia and China, Friedman insists: they will collapse of their own weight during the next generation. The great powers of the future are Japan, Turkey, Mexico, and Poland. The great crisis of the mid-21st century, he believes, will be a war between the United States and a fearsome Turkish-Japanese alliance. ...

...Warfare no longer depends on demographics, Friedman explains with exquisite patience. With precision-guided munitions and battlefield robotics, Japan can project military power without a large army. Israel, after all, is the biggest military power in the Middle East, and its demographic presence is trivial. "One computer scientist is worth a great many soldiers," Friedman says. ...

*...I ask how many doctorates in computer science Mexico graduates each year. Friedman doesn't know. The correct answer is nine. Japan is going to be a world power despite its vanishing population because it's got the computer scientists, and Mexico is going to threaten the United States despite its lack of computer scientists because of its large unskilled population.*

*Doesn't all of this seem inconsistent? "Not at all," Friedman answers. "I look at the discrepancy between economic status and economic potential and draw conclusions from there." And that, in essence, is what his method entails. He looks for countries with a high growth rate, like Turkey or Mexico, and projects this forward 50 years in a straight line. He is not trying to be sensational; he is simply being academic. Why a country like India, which now produces more graduate students in math and sciences than the United States, does not figure into Friedman's vision of the future is perplexing. "You can't speak of India as a unified country," he says. "They have marvelous technology in Mumbai, and a hundred miles away they have Maoist guerillas. India was invited by the British. It has vast political diversity."*

*The fact that India and China are graduating millions of bright young people trained at the cutting edge of technology and conversant with Western culture...doesn't matter, for Friedman takes for granted that the world's two largest nations will turn into failed states, while Mexico will become America's geopolitical rival.*

...

A Corner post by [Bill Burck and Dana Perino](#) gives us the importance of the closing of the investigation parts of Bush's legal team.

*On February 19, Attorney General Eric Holder took part in the time-honored Washington tradition of dumping undesired news on Friday afternoons or evenings. After weeks of leaks, the Justice Department officially exonerated Bush-era lawyers John Yoo and Jay Bybee, the authors of the original legal opinions on the lawfulness of the CIA interrogation program, which are known pejoratively as the "torture memos" to critics.*

*This is bad news for Holder and certain other Obama appointees at Justice — it undermines the story they've been telling for years that the lawyers who found the CIA program lawful were sadistic criminals committed to torturing poor souls such as Khalid Sheik Muhammad — but it is a vindication of an important principle that, prior to the Holder reign, had been adhered to across administrations: honestly held legal and policy opinions are not cause for prosecution or professional discipline.*

*For years now this principle has been under sustained attack by hard-core left-wing congressional partisans such as Rep. John Conyers and Sen. Patrick Leahy. It's not much of a stretch to imagine some of the more wild-eyed among them searching for ways to revoke the law licenses of conservative Supreme Court justices. Fortunately, this country is not Venezuela — at least not yet; we should not rest easy.*

*This was a very narrow escape that came down to the brave decision of a long-time career official at Justice named David Margolis. ...*

In the [Times, UK](#), [Christina Lamb](#) looks at the trouble with the Obami.

*...Obama relies on five people, four of whom are Chicagoans. They are Rahm Emanuel, his chief of staff, David Axelrod and Jarrett, his political advisers, and Michelle, while the fifth kitchen cabinet member is Robert Gibbs, his chief spokesman, who comes from Alabama.*

*The president consults them on everything. Military commanders were astounded when they participated in Afghanistan war councils and referred to them as the "Chicago mafia". ...*

...The problem may go deeper. Douglas Schoen, former pollster for Bill Clinton, believes the Obama team misinterpreted victory as an endorsement of his liberal agenda when it was really a reaction against George W Bush and the credit crisis. "They need to recognise there is only one fundamental issue in America: jobs," he said.

What no one disputes is that Obama is extremely clever. Were it not for losing the Kennedy seat and with it the Democrats' 60-seat super-majority in the Senate, Obama would probably have signed healthcare into law by now. ...

---

---

---

## Contentions Realities of War

by Max Boot

Sigh. I feel like I'm playing whack-a-mole with the argument that General Stanley McChrystal has promulgated rules of engagement that place our troops at needless risk. As I soon as I take a whack at the argument in one place — most recently in a *New York Times* op-ed by someone named Lara Dadkhah — it appears somewhere else. The most recent incarnation is this [article](#) by Nolan Finley, editorial editor of the *Detroit News*. He offers a particularly over-the-top and un-nuanced version of the argument articulated by a few other conservatives:

Every American soldier should be pulled out of Afghanistan today. It's immoral to commit our troops — our children — to a war without doing everything possible to protect their lives.

That's not happening in Afghanistan.

The politicians and generals have decided to make the safety of Afghan citizens a higher priority than avoiding American deaths and injuries.

Where to start? Perhaps with the observation that war involves risk. You cannot win a war without putting your troops in harm's way. Finley writes with approval: "Harry Truman rained down hellfire on Japan's civilian population to spare the lives of a half-million allied troops." That's true, but U.S. troops also suffered huge casualties in WWII — unimaginable by today's standards — in missions like storming heavily defended Pacific islands and bombing heavily defended German cities. Their commanders sent men toward almost certain death or injury because they knew there was no alternative. McChrystal is guided by the same realization in Afghanistan.

The only way to win in a counterinsurgency — or just about any other war, for that matter — is to send infantrymen with rifles to occupy the enemy's strongholds. In Afghanistan, those strongholds are among the population. That's where our troops need to go. In the process of driving the insurgents out of the population centers, it is strategically smart to minimize civilian casualties because that will help us to win the allegiance of the wavering population. That is not an untested theory; it is the reality of successful counterinsurgency campaigns from Malaya to Iraq.

And, yes, our troops will be placed at risk in the process of protecting the population and defeating the insurgents. There is no other way to achieve our goals. In Iraq from 2003 to 2007, we tried the alternative approach of putting our troops into giant Forward Operating Bases and employing copious firepower. Because this strategy failed to defeat the insurgency, it actually resulted in more American casualties. Conversely the surge strategy of 2007, which placed our troops in more exposed Combat Outposts and Joint Security Stations in Iraqi neighborhoods, incurred more casualties in the short run but saved American

(and Iraqi) lives in the long run by actually pacifying Iraq. That strategy is also our best bet in Afghanistan. That's something that Gen. McChrystal realizes and that Stateside naysayers fail to grasp.

## The Corner

### [Krauthammer's Take](#) [NRO Staff]

On the restrictive rules of engagement in Afghanistan:

Look, it's clear, as Steve indicated, that when you are under these constraints and these restraints and these rules, you're increasing the danger to our troops. There is no doubt about it.

The question for me is: Is that decision made by the political types who want to appease world public opinion, who want to make it easy to get applause when you are addressing a crowd abroad, to preen about how good soldiers we are?

I don't think that is the case here.

If it were, I would be really strongly against it and I think it would be scandalous — risking the lives of our soldiers in order to garner the applause of people whose applause we don't need.

But it seems pretty obvious that in this case the decision is a military one by the commanders on the ground. We heard McChrystal here — [and] General Petraeus — they made a military calculation that in order to achieve the mission, you have to increase the risk by acting in this restrained way.

It's the equivalent of looking at two hills and deciding that you're going to send a company up to take the harder hill, thinking that that strategic position will give you a better chance of winning the war. The harder hill here is restraint, because it's a guerrilla war and has to do with hearts and minds.

So even though I'm sort of instinctively very suspicious and worried about these very constraining rules of engagement, I would defer to the military here because they are making a calculation that this is the best way to win the war.

## Ottawa Citizen

### [Going the way of the Greeks](#)

by David Warren

The question of whether Turkey should be added to the European Union is rapidly being replaced by the question of whether Greece should remain inside it. The meltdown of government finances in the great stewpot of public debt has made the country an ungovernable shambles, even by its own demanding standards.

Yet while Greece is a special case -- every country is a special case, and every one has its ungovernable-shambles aspect, as visitors to every country have observed-- it is also a typical, democratic country in the sense that its freely elected governments have gradually assembled a universe of financial entitlements which its taxpayers can no longer keep up with.

I will be writing about this issue more generally tomorrow, but for the moment, let's just stare at Greece.

In the olden days, when people were fairly free with national, ethnic, racial, and religious stereotypes, the Greeks carried a few. "The problem with stereotypes is that they're all true," as a socialist acquaintance once uttered in frustration; but as a rightwing stereotype, I had to correct him. The problem with that statement may be found in the sheer number of stereotypes, for any given nation, ethnicity, race, religion; or

sexual orientation for that matter. There are stereotypes within stereotypes, and making sense of the world requires patience in observing this complexity.

Still, people who might consciously reject the old stereotype of the Greeks as a volatile people, who live for the day, will nevertheless casually and unconsciously declare that Greece is not a typical European country.

It is indeed not, in the deep historical sense: it is not part of "the West" in the strict sense of having been part of western Christendom, and was under Muslim rule for many centuries. Modern Greece is an artifact. Its independence from the Ottoman empire was secured by European interventions, and it was constituted as a state in no continuous relation with Byzantine and Hellenic antecedents. Modern Greece is a nation created from one patch of Balkan ethno-geography. Her cultural roots and tendencies remain, in many ways, Middle Eastern, even to the food on her table.

It is important to grasp this, because it is the beginning of wisdom in understanding her modern mess. It begins with tortured romantic pride, no different from that found in many states across Africa and Asia, whose independence was a product of external forces. This comes with the sense that others were always to blame for her fate, and must still be to blame.

A claim to powerlessness, to being the victim of dark conspiracies, was as evident in the 1970s when the supposed masters were "the CIA and their Generals," as it is today when the supposed masters are "German financiers and their Euro." Tomorrow there may be other supposed masters; but today the problem is that freely elected governments of socialist tendency have spent the country into perdition.

Worse, as Angela Merkel has been hinting, the Germans have their own deficits and debts, and will not bail the Greeks out. Polls in Germany show the very idea of trying is a non-starter. If there were polls in France and Britain they would show the same: it's "every sick man of Europe for himself" under present fiscal constraints.

This is the reality, yet Europe's finance ministers are still blathering assurance that the Greeks somehow "deserve" to be saved. This not out of any compassion, but from fear the whole European Union will begin unravelling when Greece comes apart.

Yet in this respect Greece is nothing special: a vast, unionized public bureaucracy, which is, under quaint Greek arrangements, paid 14 months a year (12 calendar months plus two of guaranteed annual bonus). The civil servants are going berserk because the Socialist government of George Papandreou is trying to cut them back to 13 months of payment. (And can't afford that.) We have the spectacle of customs officials on strike, and tax collectors threatening to follow; of their trades union umbrella group declaring that the government's austerity measures are "an act of war."

The central bankers are not telling the Greek government to cut its unmanageable public debt, but merely to cut its current budgetary deficit from something over one-eighth of the national income to something more like one-twelfth. Imagine if they'd told them a hard fact of life: no annual structural deficit is sustainable. That bad as that may sound, it is rather necessary to run a structural surplus, to prepare for the long rain of basic demographic facts: the usual aging population.

For deep historical reasons, Greece may have moved farther and faster into crisis, but that crisis will be the same everywhere. It is a country that belongs to its bureaucracy, created by elected governments who now can't face that bureaucracy down.

America Should Pay Attention To Greece

*The differences between Greece's financial condition and America's are not as vast as one would wish.*

by Clive Crook

How seriously should Americans take what is happening in Europe? The European Union is in turmoil over a crisis of confidence in Greece, which faces the possibility of having to default on its debts.

Whatever happens, Greece is going to have to raise taxes and cut spending in the midst of a recession. In recent days, this new financial emergency has hammered the euro on currency exchanges and buoyed the dollar as investors have again turned to U.S. Treasury bonds as a safe asset.

But Greece is not unique. It has put the risk of wider government debt defaults at the front of lenders' minds. Could the U.S. soon face a similar crisis of confidence, with all its dire consequences?

It depends on what you mean by "soon." At the moment, the United States is borrowing with no great sign of stress. Far from coming under pressure, the dollar is still strong, and the cost of U.S. government borrowing (the interest rate on Treasury bonds) shows no sign of spiking. Greece, to be sure, has some problems all its own. Where it leads, the United States need not follow. Yet one should not dismiss the parallel too blithely. Sentiment in financial markets can change abruptly, and the differences between Greece's financial condition and America's are not as vast as one would wish.

This year, the U.S. budget deficit will be on the order of 11 percent of gross domestic product. Greece's deficit is forecast to be bigger, but not much, at 13 percent. The underlying "cyclically adjusted" Greek budget deficit -- the number you get if you subtract the automatic effects of the recession on revenues and outlays -- is about 10 percent. America's is 9 percent.

Greece's ratio of public debt to GDP stands at 120 percent of output. On the similar measure of "general government debt," which includes the debts of state and local governments as well as the federal government, the figure for the U.S. is about 90 percent. In 2011, this will rise to around 100 percent. In the White House budget forecasts, the ratio keeps going up.

True, there is no fixed threshold at which deficits or debts get too big. Countries with smaller debts than America's -- Ireland and Spain, for instance -- can still get into severe fiscal difficulty. And countries with much bigger debts can avoid a public finance crunch.

Japan's ratio of general government debt to GDP will be nearly 200 percent this year. But nobody in his right mind could call the medium-term outlook for U.S. government finances healthy. The Obama administration itself terms the situation "unsustainable."

A lot of commentary this week has concentrated on the way the Greek government cooked its budget books -- with help (needless to say) from Goldman Sachs and other financial advisers. This made Greece an exceptionally bad case, it is argued. The dramatic upward revision of deficit estimates as its various ruses in public finance were uncovered certainly added to the panic. That could never happen in the United States, right?

I wish I could be so sure. Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac in their prime were the biggest off-balance-sheet vehicles in the world, and they set pretty impressive standards for imaginative, not to say imaginary, accounting. Is everything in the government-sponsored enterprises now out in the open? We'll see.

Perhaps that figure I just mentioned for U.S. general government debt struck you as high. The measure of public debt usually quoted in the U.S. excludes the debts of state and local governments. This and other statistical differences give you a debt ratio for 2010 of just over 60 percent -- the figure you might be familiar

with -- not 90 percent. But it is not obvious why you would want to exclude the debts of state and local governments. Doing so is not standard international practice. If some states approach default, which is by no means unthinkable, some of those debts may end up on the federal government's books anyway. Even if it does not come to that, the debts are still public obligations, and most countries would fold them into their overall measure of public debt.

Moreover, tunnel into the fiscal practices of America's state and local governments and you find (as in most countries) plenty of "financial innovation." Revenue bonds, for instance, securitize future cash flows from taxes, lease payments, lottery profits, federal aid, and what have you. Borrowing against these future income streams can be used to keep spending off the books: Lack of transparency is often part of the attraction. The maneuver also gets around constitutional and other restrictions on borrowing using general obligation bonds. While you're at it, throw in generous tax advantages for state and local debt. And let's not forget states' unfunded pension and health insurance obligations.

If the United States does face a fiscal crisis at some point, expect to see a surge of alarm about these pools of debt, hidden in plain sight, and plenty of wisdom in hindsight about fiscal recklessness -- not that different from what people are now saying about Greece.

The biggest differences between Greece and the United States are size, of course, and the dollar: Together these allow the United States to tap a far deeper global pool of investors. The dollar's unrivaled standing as a global reserve currency is crucial, and so is the fact that the dollar can fall in value if need be.

Greece is locked into the euro system. It has no currency or monetary policy of its own. As with the other struggling southern European "PIGS" (Portugal, Italy, Greece, Spain; geography notwithstanding, Ireland is now often included as an extra "I"), it cannot devalue, which would make its exports more competitive and cut real wages by making imports dearer. Instead, that adjustment will have to happen through falling wages in cash terms -- a wrenching process.

These are important differences, but the U.S. should not get too complacent. If, one day, a much lower dollar does help the economy to adjust, the remedy may seem almost as bad as the sickness. A gradual depreciation is one thing -- and much to be desired, in fact. A run on the currency is quite another. That is the kind of shock that can shake loose a lot of other problems and cause a cascade of economic difficulties. Devaluing at the measured pace you would prefer is not something you can always do.

Greece has the advantage that the E.U. is there to bail it out. Its European partners are not happy about this, as you can imagine. Many, especially Germany, are reluctant to help, because they have problems of their own and they worry that a rescue mission might encourage fiscal recklessness elsewhere in the Union. In the end, though, they will have no choice.

Outright default by Greece might well start a run of other European financial collapses, as additional stressed and overborrowed economies are put to the test. Pushing Greece out of the euro zone would run the risk of an even bigger financial mess. The best course would be for the International Monetary Fund to step in. But the E.U. cannot just turn its back, even if it might like to; it has too much at stake.

America's size makes a Greek-style crisis less likely, but should it somehow happen, that asset will become a liability. There is no vastly larger, richer entity to which the U.S. can turn for help.

All of which underlines the need for the U.S. to start confronting its long-term fiscal problem. As I have previously argued, short-term stimulus is still needed. It would be a big mistake to withdraw fiscal support for the economy too soon. But it is not too soon for the Obama administration to start explaining how longer-term borrowing is going to be brought under control in 2012 and beyond. This is something its budget should have done. For the second year, the problem was kicked down the road. A bipartisan budget commission is being tasked to do the hard work, the White House said. This week, the co-chairmen of this panel were announced: Erskine Bowles, a White House chief of staff under President Clinton, and Alan Simpson, a Republican eminence and former senator.



Perhaps handing the problem off to a commission is as much as the politics will allow. President Obama has promised not to raise taxes on the middle class. He will have to break that promise. Realistically, this cannot happen before November's elections, and when it does, Obama will need all the political cover he can find. Perhaps the budget commission can provide some. The president has said that the commission should consider all options: As it starts its work, he is not taking tax increases off the table.

Good. That is something. But the problem of delay remains. So does the difficulty of getting agreement on a plan, once the commission has reported. Meanwhile, the fiscal danger keeps growing.

## **Slate's fighting words**

### **Death of a Banana Republican**

***Al Haig was a neurotic narcissist with an unquenchable craving for power.***

By Christopher Hitchens

"Nobody has a higher opinion of General [Alexander Haig](#) than I do," I once wrote. "And I think he is a homicidal buffoon." I did not then realize that this view of mine was at least partly shared by so many senior figures on the American right.

When I moved to Washington in the very early years of Ronald Reagan's tenure, I was pretty sure that Haig, then secretary of state, was delusional (and not even in a good way). What I would not have believed then was what has become apparent since—that his boss, Ronald Reagan, often felt the same way. According to Douglas Brinkley's [splendid edition of the president's diaries](#), Reagan wrote as early as March 24, 1981:

Later in day a call from Al Haig, all upset about an announcement that George B. is to be chairman of the Crisis Council. Historically the chairman is Nat.Sec.Advisor [Richard V. Allen]. Al thinks his turf is being invaded. We chose George *because* Al is wary of Dick. He talked of resigning. Frankly, I think he's seeing things that aren't there.

A bit more than a year later, on June 25, 1982, after Haig had been largely responsible for the historic calamity that had allowed Menachem Begin and Ariel Sharon to occupy Beirut, Reagan decided to do what he'd clearly already decided to do if Haig talked about resignation again—grab the chance!

Today was the day—I told Al H I had decided to accept his resignation. He didn't seem surprised but he said his differences were on policy and then said we didn't agree on China or Russia etc. ... This has been a heavy load. Up to Camp David where we were in time to see Al read his letter of resignation on TV. I'm told it was his 4<sup>th</sup> re-write. Apparently his 1<sup>st</sup> was pretty strong—then he thought better of it. I must say it was OK. He gave only one reason and did say there was a disagreement on foreign policy. Actually the only disagreement was over whether I made policy or the Sec of State did.

The result was a terse one-page letter from Reagan to Haig, letting him go.

Just a few days after his president had begun to suspect that Haig was "seeing things that aren't there," on March 30, 1981, to be exact, this neurotic narcissist seized the microphone and made a clumsy attempt to seize power. With Reagan lying critically injured in the hospital, Haig announced in the Situation Room that "the helm is right here, and that means right in this chair for now, *constitutionally*, until the vice president gets here." As his rival Richard Allen [commented](#), having caught the megalomaniacal drivel on tape, this was "out" by several degrees and intermediate officers [mentioned in the U.S. Constitution](#). "But Haig's demeanor signaled that he might be ready for a quarrel, and there was no point in provoking one."

I saw that "demeanor" up close more than once and was coldly appalled by the pig-nostriled and also piggy-eyed form that it took. But nothing could equal that day's performance, which evinced all the sweaty, pasty-faced, trembling symptoms of a weak king or of a slobbering dauphin who could not wait to try on the crown. For a few hours at least, the United States of America appeared to be—and actually was—a pathetic banana republic.

Indeed, the bulk of Haig's awful political career was an example of banana-republic principles and the related phenomenon of an overambitious man in uniform who mastered the essential art of licking the *derrières* of those above him while simultaneously (see above) bullying and menacing those below. This was the method he perfected between 1969 and '74, serving Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon and helping to superimpose an impression of "order" on a White House that was full of dysfunction, crookery, and coverup. Without any further battlefield experience, except for propaganda trips to Vietnam to support a war that his bosses had artificially prolonged, he moved up the ladder from colonel to four-star general—not bad even for a man who had gotten started by marrying his commanding general's daughter.

Haig had few illusions about the sort of people for whom he was working, and liked to gratify both sides of a riven White House. According to Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein in [The Final Days](#), to Kissinger and others he liked to joke after hours that "Nixon and Bebe Rebozo had a homosexual relationship, imitating what he called the President's limp-wrist manner." When it came time to fold the whole dirty game, he was the first to go to Vice President Gerald Ford and suggest the low stratagem of a pardon that would put the lawbreaker in chief (and by extension some of his underlings) above the law itself.

Haig also developed a natural sympathy for some of the more vicious banana-republic dictatorships with which he had worked overseas. He helped Kissinger to wreck Chile during his first tour in the White House, and under Reagan was one of those who took a sympathetic view of the Argentine military fascists in the Falklands War. I shall also never forget [the day in February 1981](#) (mentioned by none of Haig's obituarists) when extremist mutineers in the Spanish army took over the parliament in Madrid and our secretary of state, asked for a comment, described this assault on Europe's newest democracy as purely an internal matter for Spain.

Having made a complete clown of himself with attempts to run for the presidency in 1980 (when his efforts stopped at considering a run) and 1988, Haig went into quasi-retirement and advised on arms sales to the sorts of regimes who like to have a former general and politician as an "adviser." He then decided that politics was not for him after all, since "the life of a politician is sleaze." We all think this from time to time, but Haig really came by the idea dishonestly. His manically authoritarian personality frightened even many on the right, from John Poindexter to Richard Allen, and his career was one of contempt for democracy at home and abroad. From his squalid life one can learn to detect the diseased symptoms of Caesarism and the urgency of combating it.

## Tablet Magazine

### [McStrategy](#)

***George Friedman built a private, subscription-based CIA. But is his intel any good?***

by David P. Goldman



How would you like to tap into an exclusive private intelligence service staffed by ex-CIA analysts who glean exclusive information from shadowy sources, cross-grid raw intel to detect relevant patterns, and alert you by email when the product requires your attention? Membership in this elite club will cost you just \$349 a year, and you'll also get a free book that predicts the next 100 years of human history.

Welcome to [Stratfor](#), the brainchild of George Friedman, a Texas academic and sometime U.S. government consultant, who became an intelligence entrepreneur and runs what the press routinely calls "a private CIA" out of a compound in Texas. In a crowded market where *The New York Times* can't successfully charge for premium content, Friedman's thriving business targets a key market niche: corporate types with geopolitical exposure who are too busy or too ill-informed to use Google.

"Controlling costs but without skimping on quality" is the secret to the McDonald's-like commercial success of Stratfor, Friedman explains during a break from his New York book tour. "The secret is the division of labor: we have people who collect intelligence, people who analyze intelligence, and people who write," he says. "It's designed to give the subscriber a consistent product." Friedman is promoting an exercise in futurology titled *The Next 100 Years*—it's the book you get free with your \$349—that teems with counter-intuitive assertions, for example, that Poland will become Europe's great power by the middle of this century. Poland? I spent some time in the country a few years ago, pitching the Polish finance ministry on sovereign debt issues for Credit Suisse. You could have fooled me.

Friedman and I meet in the bar of a New York hotel, where I sip a cappuccino while Friedman drinks white wine. He checks the label of the bottle of house white burgundy with the eager eye of a man who has recently traded up to the good stuff from academic plonk. With his diminutive frame, wide mouth, and pedantic smile, he reminds me of Yoda, but without the Eastern European grammar. The child of Holocaust survivors who fled the Communist regime in Hungary, Friedman attended public schools in New York and put in 20 years teaching at middling colleges with side gigs consulting for the defense community. His children are yeshiva-educated, and two of them are serving as officers in the U.S. military.

Does being Jewish affect the way you view the world, I begin. "Being Jewish keeps things in perspective," he says, smiling. "We lost two temples."

Friedman is not selling sophistication. Subscribers to his premium service get more items in their inbox than the most avid geopolitics junkie could digest. Friedman's private CIA, for that matter, isn't much different from the official version. My old boss from Ronald Reagan's National Security Council, Norman Bailey, always read the press himself to make sure he caught key items that the CIA analysts missed. Most of the cubicle-dwellers in the CIA's Directorate of Intelligence are academics who didn't get tenure and chose the government's health and pension benefits over the uncertainties of adjunct teaching.

For all his commercial focus, Friedman does not pander to his readers' prejudice. *The Next 100 Years* dismisses the stuff of scare scenarios—Islam taking over Europe, China confronting the United States, a failed Mexican state dumping its surplus millions over the American border—and offers an idiosyncratic vision that will leave most readers confused. Forget Russia and China, Friedman insists: they will collapse of their own weight during the next generation. The great powers of the future are Japan, Turkey, Mexico, and Poland. The great crisis of the mid-21st century, he believes, will be a war between the United States and a fearsome Turkish-Japanese alliance.

It's old-fashioned geopolitics doped with some eyebrow-raising professorial assumptions. China, India, and Russia will fail as states, while the Muslim states will remain stable enough to crush radical Islam. And Poland will arise as Europe's major power. "Poland hasn't been a great power since the sixteenth century," he wrote. "But once it was—and, I think, will be again."

Poland? I ask Friedman if he's kidding. He isn't. In his book, Friedman cites two factors. "First will be the decline of Germany," he writes. "Its economy is large and still growing, but it has lost the dynamism it has had for two centuries. In addition, its population is going to fall dramatically in the next fifty years, further undermining its economic power."

I protest: But isn't Poland's fertility rate even lower than Germany's? According to U.N. projections, Poland's working-age population will fall by half between 2010 and 2050—from 25 million to 13 million. Germany's is projected to fall from 50 million to 30 million.

Friedman brushes this aside. "The most important reason for Poland's ascendancy," he says, is that Germany didn't have the benefit of a Nazi and Communist occupation. "Poland is a blank slate and is free to develop any way it wants, while Germany is crippled by its historical obligations."

I wonder: If you're looking for a European power without the baggage of Nazism, why not pick on France? France has the highest fertility rate in Europe, close to replacement, while Poland is at an apocalyptic 1.3. "The high fertility in France is due to Muslim immigrants," Friedman replies. That stretches credibility; the fertility rate for French-born women is around 1.8, according to available data. We argue for a minute or two and move on.

Next, I question Friedman's claim that Japan will not only become a great power but will then ally with Turkey and go to war against the United States. "The fragmentation of China in the 2010s and the breakup of Russia in the 2020s will create a vast vacuum from the Pacific to the Carpathians, Friedman wrote. "Because of cyclical instability in China, Japan will have to protect its assets."

In the low variant of U.N. projections—which Friedman in his book says he considers most accurate—Japan will have an elderly dependency ratio of 85 percent by the year 2050. Are the Japanese going to war with the United States in submersible armored wheelchairs?

To be fair, Friedman's scenario for a mid-century war between the United States and a Japan-Turkey alliance starts not with wheelchairs but with the deployment of Battle Star satellites. The United States will use its Battle Stars to force Japan and Turkey to limit their acquisition of territory, he writes, and Japan and Turkey will react—but no spoilers. If you want to find out who wins the Great Battle Star Battle of 2050 you have to buy Friedman's book.

So we have American satellites hovering above Turkey and Japan, and Japanese battle robots roaming through a splintered and chaotic China, operated by joysticks by orange-haired septuagenarians who cut their teeth on computer games during the 2010s. Warfare no longer depends on demographics, Friedman explains with exquisite patience. With precision-guided munitions and battlefield robotics, Japan can project military power without a large army. Israel, after all, is the biggest military power in the Middle East, and its demographic presence is trivial. "One computer scientist is worth a great many soldiers," Friedman says.

That ends the discussion of Japan. "But you also predict that Mexico will rise up and confront the United States by 2080," I add, remembering one of the most exciting passages of Friedman's book: "If the United States and (its ally) Poland were both defeated" by Turkey and Japan, "then Germany would have an opportunity to move in quickly for the kill... The only other possible member of the coalition might be Mexico, however unlikely. Recall that Mexico was invited into an alliance by Germany in World War I, so this idea is hardly unprecedented."

I ask how many doctorates in computer science Mexico graduates each year. Friedman doesn't know. The correct answer is nine. Japan is going to be a world power despite its vanishing population because it's got the computer scientists, and Mexico is going to threaten the United States despite its lack of computer scientists because of its large unskilled population.

Doesn't all of this seem inconsistent? "Not at all," Friedman answers. "I look at the discrepancy between economic status and economic potential and draw conclusions from there." And that, in essence, is what his method entails. He looks for countries with a high growth rate, like Turkey or Mexico, and projects this forward 50 years in a straight line. He is not trying to be sensational; he is simply being academic. Why a country like India, which now produces more graduate students in math and sciences than the United States, does not figure into Friedman's vision of the future is perplexing. "You can't speak of India as a

unified country,” he says. “They have marvelous technology in Mumbai, and a hundred miles away they have Maoist guerillas. India was invited by the British. It has vast political diversity.”

The fact that India and China are graduating millions of bright young people trained at the cutting edge of technology and conversant with Western culture—China is training more than 50 million classical musicians—doesn’t matter, for Friedman takes for granted that the world’s two largest nations will turn into failed states, while Mexico will become America’s geopolitical rival.

Don’t demographic trends, though, tell us something about the spiritual character of a country? When people choose leisure and hedonistic pursuits above children, haven’t they given up on the future?

Friedman waves this aside with the first lapse from professorial patience in the hourlong discussion. “People always were hedonistic,” he responds. “In the past children were cheap labor and social security. Having children coincided with economic needs. Having children was self-interested then, and not having children is self-interested now.”

So moral, cultural, and spiritual factors play no role whatever in his geopolitics? “My training was in political philosophy,” Friedman says. My advisor was Werner Dannhauser,” a student of the political philosopher Leo Strauss, “so I am keenly aware of Athens and Jerusalem. But I see the world in terms of three stages: barbarism at the beginning, decadence and decline at the end, and with luck, a brief civilized moment in the middle.”

The comparisons of Stratfor with the CIA are not entirely off-base. By main force and superior salesmanship, George Friedman has managed to replicate the key features of the intelligence establishment on a private footing. He didn’t invent what I call McStrategy—the splintering of tasks that puts one analyst at the deep fryer, another at sandwich assembly, and a third at the cash register. But the eccentricity of the final product is easily recognizable.

The truth is that even a moderately interested consumer could gain more accurate and detailed information in two minutes of searching on Google. As a random (and of course unscientific) test I picked the most recent Stratfor comment on Iran on the day of the interview, a January 28 bulletin noting that President Barack Obama had said nothing about the prospective nuclear power the previous week, while Germany’s Chancellor Angela Merkel had warned of stricter sanctions. That could hurt German business, Stratfor notes: “Tehran has relied on Germany as one of its most consistent supporters in the West. German businesses, particularly in the heavy industrial sector, exported nearly \$6 billion worth of goods in 2008, a marked increase from barely \$1 billion in 2000, especially considering the worsening relations between Tehran and the rest of the West’s powers.”

Typing the relevant search terms into Google News, the top item to pop up was in fact a lot more informative than the bulletin I received from Stratfor. On January 27, Richard Kiessler of the German-language news site derwesten.de had reported that German exports to Iran were melting down, falling to only \$4 billion in 2009. This isn’t news; a senior German official had told me in November that German exports to Iran would collapse. “Massive Israeli pressure,” the site reported, had canceled a German contract to construct the Bandar-Abbas port in Iran, and big industrial contracts from Siemens and Thyssen “are in the pillory.” The Stratfor item lacks the updated export data and the telling detail from the Google News article – that Germany’s biggest construction contract with the Islamic Republic had already been canceled. In my random but entirely unscientific sample, it was Google News 1, Stratfor 0.

Stratfor’s entrepreneurial success sheds valuable light on the failures of U.S. foreign policy. Americans really are incurious about the rest of the world; they do not learn foreign languages, absorb other cultures, or think much about world history. It was Barack Obama, our shining model of the intellectual as public servant, who recently told a Viennese audience that he did not know how to communicate in “Austrian.” American officials can absorb only so much information about the rest of the world, and we forgive our own dire ignorance with startling alacrity. The nuggets of McStrategy beamed to Stratfor subscribers really do resemble the briefings that senior officials get. And that explains a lot.

David P. Goldman, a senior editor at First Things, formerly headed global fixed income research at Bank of America. He also writes the [“Spengler”](#) column at [Asia Times Online](#).

## The Corner

### [Friday Night Hack Attack](#) [Bill Burck and Dana Perino]

On February 19, Attorney General Eric Holder took part in the time-honored Washington tradition of dumping undesired news on Friday afternoons or evenings. After weeks of leaks, the Justice Department officially exonerated Bush-era lawyers John Yoo and Jay Bybee, the authors of the original legal opinions on the lawfulness of the CIA interrogation program, which are known pejoratively as the “torture memos” to critics.

This is bad news for Holder and certain other Obama appointees at Justice — it undermines the story they’ve been telling for years that the lawyers who found the CIA program lawful were sadistic criminals committed to torturing poor souls such as Khalid Sheik Muhammad — but it is a vindication of an important principle that, prior to the Holder reign, had been adhered to across administrations: honestly held legal and policy opinions are not cause for prosecution or professional discipline.

For years now this principle has been under sustained attack by hard-core left-wing congressional partisans such as Rep. John Conyers and Sen. Patrick Leahy. It’s not much of a stretch to imagine some of the more wild-eyed among them searching for ways to revoke the law licenses of conservative Supreme Court justices. Fortunately, this country is not Venezuela — at least not yet; we should not rest easy.

This was a very narrow escape that came down to the brave decision of a long-time career official at Justice named David Margolis. Margolis is a widely respected 40-year veteran who has been tasked over the years with handling many of the more sensitive internal inquiries at the Justice Department. One of his responsibilities — which he has performed honorably for a number of different attorneys general in Democratic and Republican administrations — has been to oversee inquiries conducted by lawyers in the little-known Office of Professional Responsibility, or OPR. OPR is the office that recommended Yoo and Bybee be subject to disciplinary proceedings. Margolis rejected OPR’s recommendation and most of its analysis.

OPR is the equivalent of internal affairs at a police department, conducting inquiries of alleged misconduct by Justice Department lawyers and other staff and making disciplinary recommendations. OPR has an important role to play to ensure that misconduct is discovered and punished. But OPR’s investigation of the legal advice provided by Yoo and Bybee was, by its own admission, extremely unusual.

OPR annointed itself to review the constitutional and legal analysis of Bybee and Yoo while they were leading the Office of Legal Counsel, or OLC. Along with the Solicitor General’s Office — which, among other things, represents the federal government in cases before the Supreme Court — OLC employs the Justice Department’s best lawyers on the most difficult constitutional and legal issues. OLC is tasked with providing legal advice to the entire federal government, including the White House.

We don’t mean to be insulting, but the plain fact is that OPR is not, and has never been, equipped to second-guess OLC. The office’s role is a limited one focused on ethical violations; it is not staffed with experts on constitutional law or national security. It would be preposterous to rely on OPR’s judgment about hard questions of constitutional and statutory law over that of OLC or the Solicitor General’s Office. As Andy McCarthy has said, “having OPR grade the scholarship of OLC is like having the Double-A batting coach critique Derek Jeter’s swing.”

What makes this whole affair even more pointless is that OLC itself withdrew or superseded the relevant opinions of Yoo and Bybee during the Bush years. The purpose of OPR’s investigation was never clear to anyone — except OPR and people who hoped to use the results for political advantage, such as Conyers and Leahy,.

OPR spent more than five years and untold taxpayer dollars to give us its opinion that Yoo and Bybee committed professional misconduct. The basis for this conclusion? Embarrassingly shoddy “analysis” spread over 250-plus pages of turgid and incoherent prose. In college, OPR couldn’t pull a “gentleman’s B” for this report, even in the era of grade inflation. Since nobody fails any more, let’s call it D-minus work.

President Bush’s final attorney general, Michael Mukasey, and deputy attorney general, Mark Filip — former federal judges widely respected across the political spectrum for their intellect and command of the law — eviscerated a draft of the report. They had to do so quickly — OPR, knowing they were tough graders, dumped it in their laps near the end of their tenure — but they put their criticism in writing and provided it to the incoming Justice leadership. Holder did not see fit to release Mukasey and Filip’s letter last Friday night with the rest of the “bad news,” so Andy McCarthy did the honors.

Also defending Yoo is well-known Washington attorney Miguel Estrada, who emigrated from Honduras at 17, graduated from Columbia and Harvard Law School magna cum laude (much like President Obama), was an editor on the *Harvard Law Review* (also like the president), clerked for a Supreme Court justice, served as a federal prosecutor in New York, argued cases before the Supreme Court while in the Solicitor General’s Office at the Justice Department, and has become one of the nation’s leading appellate lawyers at a major international law firm. (Bush nominated him to an appeals court, but the Left blocked the nomination.) “Having seen OPR’s work and tactics up close,” Estrada told us, “I would have a hard time choosing one dominant trait in their approach. It is probably a three-way tie between stupidity, rank incompetence, and partisan malignancy.”

And what did Maureen Mahoney, who represented Bybee, think of OPR’s work? In the conclusion of her objections to OPR’s report, she sums it up with typical panache: “We have, in OPR’s report, the poor execution of a bad idea.” Ms. Mahoney is not just any lawyer. She was a senior official in the Solicitor General’s Office in the 1980s and went on to become a legendary litigator and appellate lawyer at a leading international law firm. Like Estrada, Ms. Mahoney is someone whose credentials and experience as a top-flight lawyer cannot be seriously doubted.

And what about Jack Goldsmith, who became head of OLC after Bybee and withdrew the most controversial opinions written by Yoo? Goldsmith is a well-known Harvard Law School professor and author of a book, *The Terror Presidency*, that describes the extraordinary challenges of his time at OLC. Some on the left praised that book, seeing it as a denunciation of Yoo and Bybee; but actually, Goldsmith’s arguments are complex and can’t be converted into soundbites. For example, although Goldsmith did not think highly of Yoo’s analysis in some of the memos, he agreed that none of the interrogation techniques, including waterboarding, violated U.S. law. He also believed that Yoo had come to his views honestly and did not merely use them as a cover to justify torture. Goldsmith warned OPR against second-guessing Yoo and Bybee, particularly without considering the context in which they were operating at the time, with 9/11 still fresh and the ever-present fear of a follow-on attack. OPR ignored Goldsmith’s warning.

Finally, we return to David Margolis, who was tasked with determining whether the OPR had adequately justified its conclusions about Yoo and Bybee. Margolis decisively rejects OPR’s report. Because of his position at Justice, Margolis is far more polite than Estrada or Mahoney, but no less devastating to OPR. He identifies numerous errors in OPR’s work, many of the embarrassing sort that are attributable only to carelessness and a lack of intellectual rigor, and consistently sides with Mukasey, Filip, Estrada, Mahoney, and Goldsmith.

Margolis explains that OPR’s theories continued to “evolve” from draft to draft, and that he could discern no coherent standard employed by OPR. Margolis does conclude that Yoo and Bybee exercised “poor judgment” in the analysis and conclusions they presented in one of the memoranda under review (but, notably, not the other two). But that is really no different than what the Justice Department concluded under Bush, which is why all three memoranda were either withdrawn or superseded years ago.

So, in one corner we have a legal all-star team of Mukasey, Filip, Estrada, Mahoney, Goldsmith, and

Margolis. In the other corner, we have OPR operating far outside its comfort zone and area of expertise. This shouldn't have been close — and it wasn't, on the merits. The fact that OPR almost succeeded — and was stopped only because Margolis did the right thing and brought the curtain down on this farce — should remind everyone that partisan politics are alive and well at the Justice Department.

**Times, UK**

### **Obama's 'Chicago mafia' blamed for paralysis at the top**

by Christina Lamb in Washington

WHEN President Barack Obama's secret service codename was revealed as Renegade and his wife Michelle's as Renaissance, the names seemed perfect for a first couple who had come to Washington to shake things up.

More than a year into the Obama administration, with healthcare yet to be reformed, Wall Street banks continuing to pay huge bonuses and Guantanamo Bay prison still open, that mood of hope has turned to disillusion. Obama's policy of engagement has yielded no progress in the Middle East or Iran; the war in Afghanistan continues to exact a big toll in lives and dollars; while the heaviest snow in Washington for 90 years seems to have stymied any hope of climate change legislation.

The president and his team now find themselves under fire for mishandling Congress from everyone from senior Democrats to social columnists. Critics say that by failing to move on from the "us versus them" feeling of the Obama election campaign, they have united an opposition that was in disarray. The result is legislative paralysis despite the biggest Democratic majority in 30 years.

Last week a prominent Democratic senator resigned after criticising both government and Congress. Evan Bayh from Indiana, who had never lost a race and was expected to be re-elected in November, complained that the party's recent loss of the Senate seat of the late Ted Kennedy should have been seen as a wake-up call.

"Moderates and independents even in a state as Democratic as Massachusetts just aren't buying our message," he said.

"They don't believe the answers we are currently proposing are solving their problems."

Even society writers are disenchanted. "The Obama White House has closed ranks. They were completely overwhelmed by the new office," said Karen Sommer Shalett, editor-in-chief of DC magazine. "I haven't heard of them going to any house parties or Georgetown row houses to be entertained.

"That's important because if you're social with someone over canapés and you know their wife and you know their children, you talk business in a friendlier way."

When the Obamas do go to someone's house for dinner, almost invariably it is to the home of Valerie Jarrett, their old friend from Chicago who serves as a political adviser.

The Wednesday evening White House cocktail parties which were launched with great fanfare as a way to reach out to Republicans, fizzled out last spring. The two parties seem more hostile than ever.

"This administration has managed to divide its friends and unite its enemies," said Steve Clemons, director of the American Strategy Programme at the New America Foundation.

He and others lay the blame on the Chicago team, advisers from Obama's adopted city. "Obama's West Wing is filled with people who are in their jobs because of their Chicago connections or because they signed



on early during his presidential campaign,” complained Doug Wilder, who in 1990s Virginia was America’s first elected black governor and was an early backer of Obama. “One problem is they do not have sufficient experience at governing at the executive branch level. The deeper problem is that they are not listening to the people.”

Obama relies on five people, four of whom are Chicagoans. They are Rahm Emanuel, his chief of staff, David Axelrod and Jarrett, his political advisers, and Michelle, while the fifth kitchen cabinet member is Robert Gibbs, his chief spokesman, who comes from Alabama.

The president consults them on everything. Military commanders were astounded when they participated in Afghanistan war councils and referred to them as the “Chicago mafia”. It was this group that inserted into Obama’s Afghan surge speech the deadline of July 2011 as a date to start withdrawing.

With Democrats fearing big losses in the mid-term elections in November, the knives are out for Emanuel, whose abrasive manner and use of profanities have won him few friends. Although his job is to deflect criticism from his boss, Rahmbo, as he is known, seems to have gone over the top.

The Wall Street Journal reported him losing his temper at a strategy session in August and referring to liberals as “f\*\*\*ing retarded”. He is said to have sent dead fish to a pollster whose numbers he did not like.

Leslie Gelb, president emeritus of the Council on Foreign Relations, called on Obama to remove Emanuel, arguing that he needs someone who knows how to navigate Washington or will end up being no more than a speechmaker.

“No one I’ve talked to believes he [Emanuel] has the management skills and discipline to run the White House,” he wrote in The Daily Beast.

Among those touted as possible replacements are David Gergen, a political consultant brought in by President Bill Clinton, or John Podesta, a former Clinton chief of staff who now heads the Center for American Progress, a left-wing pressure group.

Emanuel would be unlikely to go without a fight. “Obama needs Emanuel at the top,” argued Dana Milbank in yesterday’s Washington Post, writing that the chief of staff was being unfairly blamed for the healthcare debacle.

“Where the president is airy and idealistic, Rahm is earthy and calculating. One thinks big; the other, a former House Democratic caucus chair, understands the congressional mind, in which small stuff counts for more than broad strokes.”

In Milbank’s view, Obama’s real problem is his other confidants, Jarrett, Gibbs and Axelrod, whom he describes as “part of the cult of Obama”, believing he is “a transformational figure who needn’t dirty his hands in politics”.

While Obama may have campaigned on a slogan of change, he has shown himself reluctant to sack people.

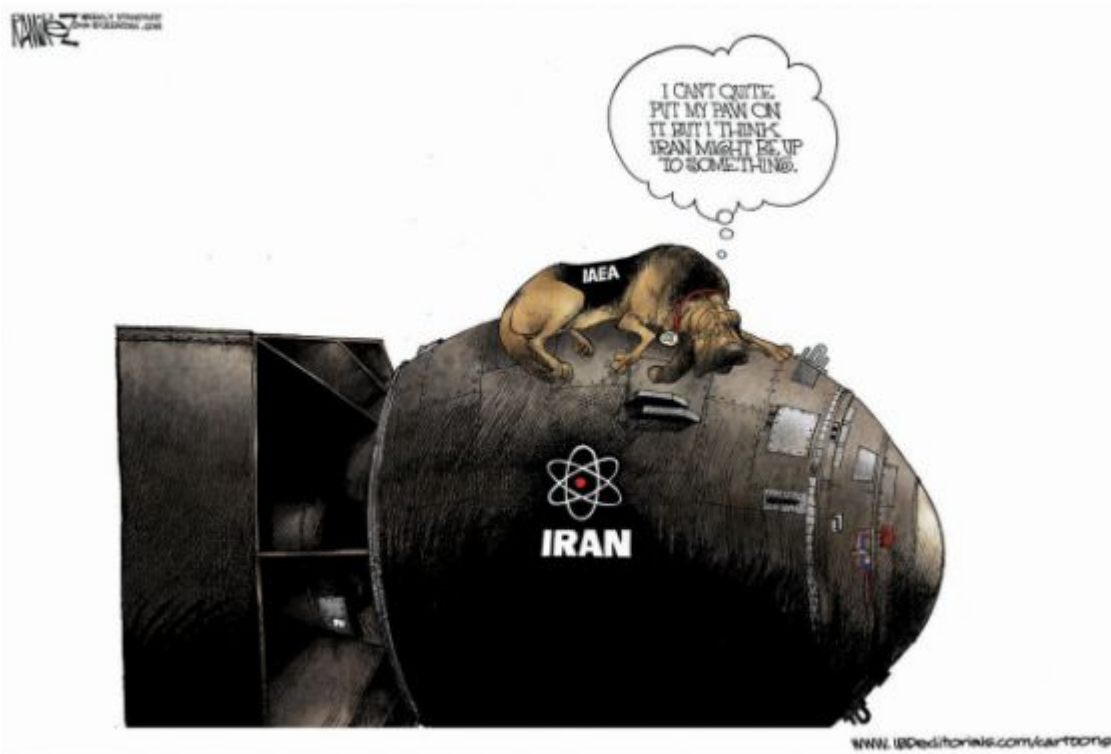
The problem may go deeper. Douglas Schoen, former pollster for Bill Clinton, believes the Obama team misinterpreted victory as an endorsement of his liberal agenda when it was really a reaction against George W Bush and the credit crisis. “They need to recognise there is only one fundamental issue in America: jobs,” he said.

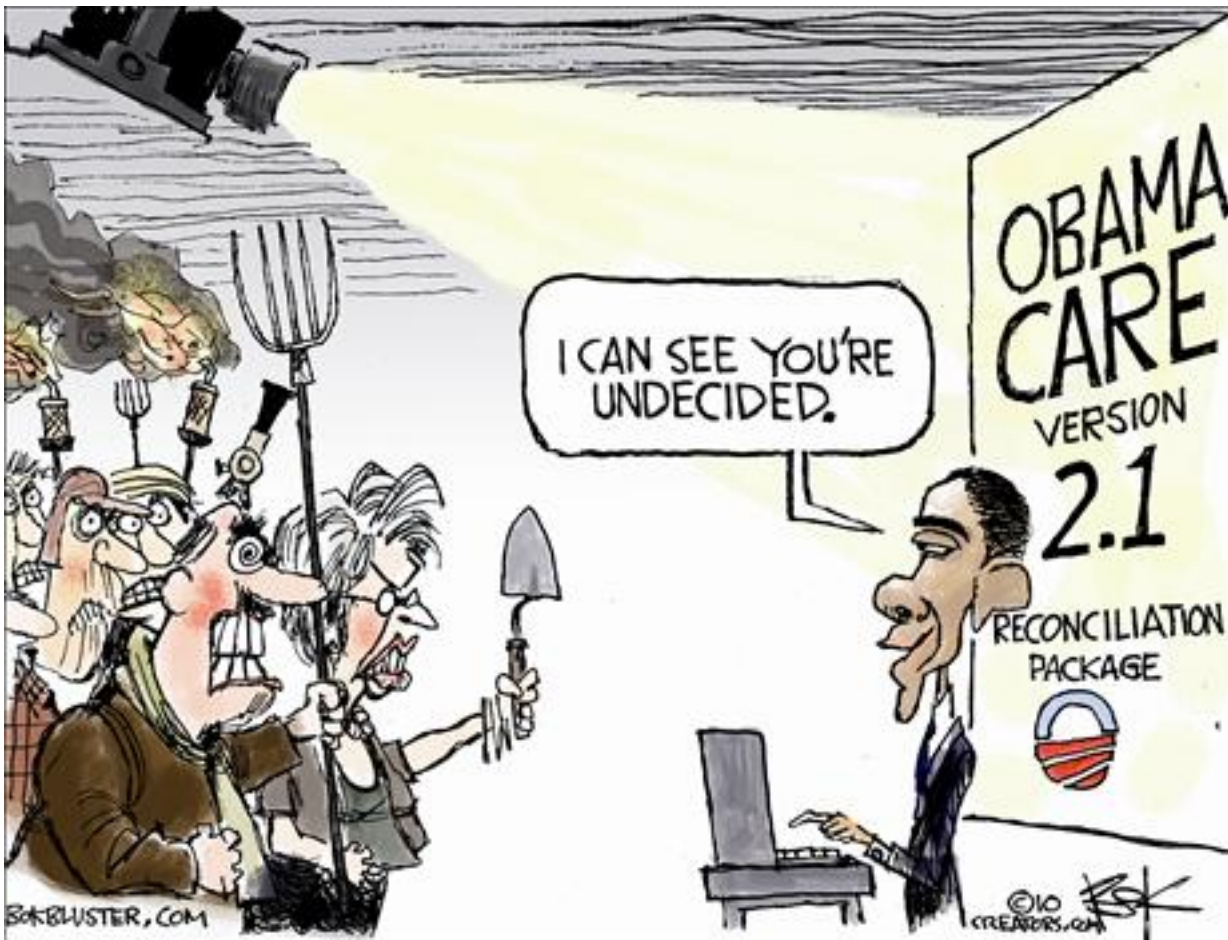
What no one disputes is that Obama is extremely clever. Were it not for losing the Kennedy seat and with it the Democrats’ 60-seat super-majority in the Senate, Obama would probably have signed healthcare into law by now.

The president has not given up on the reform. He is expected to publish a revised bill today or Monday, just before a televised White House summit on Thursday with congressional Republicans. But they are calling on Democrats to start all over again with a far less sweeping proposal.

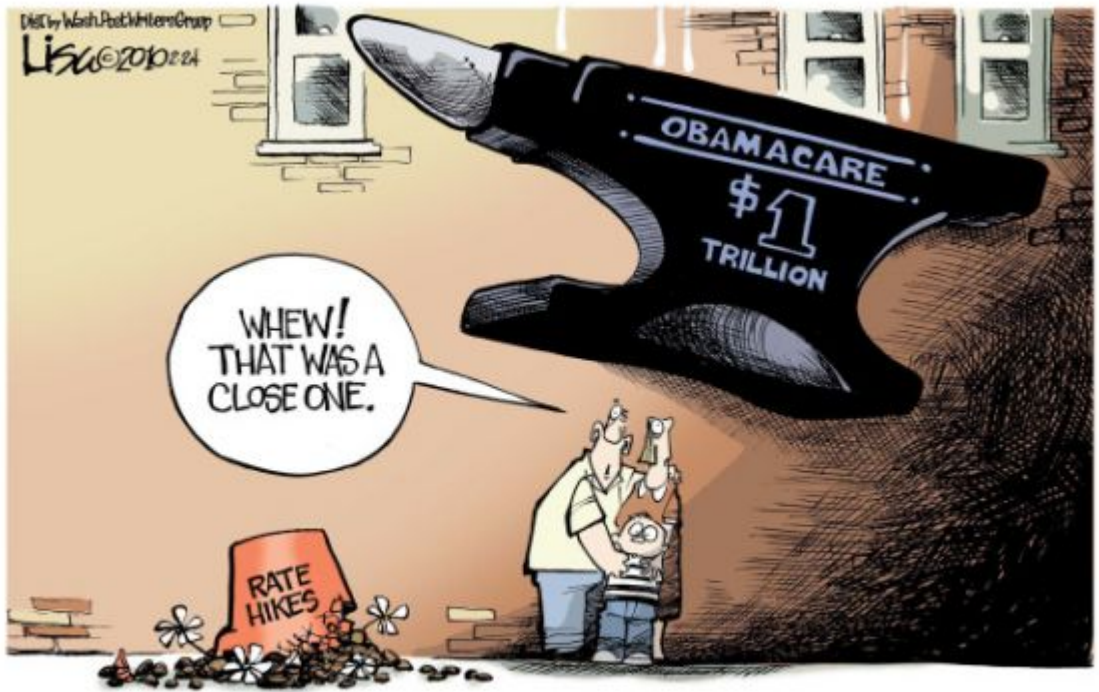
The biggest hurdle may be Obama's own ambition combined with lack of experience. A leading Democratic supporter described his administration as "unfocused", adding that he had counted 137 items on Obama's agenda.

"He needs to realise that he's running a huge operation and has to sequence priorities," said Clemons. "He's not thinking like the chief executive of a complex organisation."





FATAL ATTRACTION.



MAN-MADE CAUSE OF THE 800AD-1300 MEDIEVAL WARM PERIOD.