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U.S. PRESIDENT'S DAY 2014 IS NOTHING TO CELEBRATE: OBAMA'S FOREIGN POLICY RECORD TO DATE HAS BEEN ABYSMAL

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OBAMA'S HOLLOW PROMISES ABROAD

Daniel Pipes

Washington Times, Feb. 12, 2014

As U.S. credibility and stature diminish in world affairs, the American president and his secretaries of state and defence engage in eloquent denial. Unfortunately for them, realities trump words, even persuasive ones. At the recent World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, “where the water-cooler chatter was about America’s waning influence in the Middle East,” Secretary of State John F. Kerry proclaimed himself “perplexed by claims ... that somehow America is disengaging from the world.” Nothing could be further from the truth, he asserted: “We are entering an era of American diplomatic engagement that is as broad and as deep as any at any time in our history.” Likewise, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel has called for “a renewed and enhanced era of partnership with our friends and allies.”

In this spirit, President Obama has made multiple promises to reassure allies. To South Korea, which depends on the American “tripwire” to deter a demented dictator who could flatten Seoul within the first

few hours of an artillery barrage, Mr. Obama promised that “the commitment of the United States to the Republic of Korea will never waver.” To Japan, which depends on the U.S. 7th Fleet to deter increasingly aggressive Chinese encroachment on the Senkaku Islands, he reaffirmed that “the United States remains steadfast in its defense commitments to Japan,” which the State Department specifically indicated includes the Senkaku Islands. To Taiwan, whose security against mainland China depends on the American deterrent, he “reaffirmed our commitment to the Taiwan Relations Act,” which requires the United States to maintain the capacity “to resist any resort to force or other forms of coercion that would jeopardize the security” of Taiwan. To the Philippines, worried about its territories in the South China Sea claimed by China, particularly the Spratly Islands and Scarborough Reef, he reaffirmed a commitment to the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty that provides, in the event of an armed attack, that the United States “would act to meet the common dangers.” To Saudi Arabia, alarmed by Mr. Obama’s appeasement of Iran in the Joint Plan of Action, he reiterated “the firm commitment of the United States to our friends and allies in the Gulf.” Finally, to Israel, isolated in a sea of enemies, Mr. Obama declared “America’s unwavering commitment to Israel’s security,” because standing by Israel “is in our fundamental national security interest.”

The trouble is, first, that Americans doubt these fine and steadfast words. Record numbers of Americans think that U.S. global power and prestige are declining, according to the Pew Research Center. For the first time in surveys dating back to the 1970s, “a majority (53 percent) says the United States plays a less important and powerful role as a world leader than it did a decade ago,” while only 17 percent thought American power has been enhanced. An even larger majority, 70 percent, “say the United States is less respected than in the past.” Another 51 percent say Mr. Obama is “not tough enough” in foreign policy and national security issues. More than two-thirds have a negative opinion of the president’s handling of Iran, the Mellman Group found. A majority (54 percent to 37 percent) support targeted military strikes against Iran’s nuclear facilities, rather than allowing Iran to develop nuclear weapons. McLaughlin & Associates finds that 49 percent of respondents think America’s standing has been diminished during Mr. Obama’s five-plus years in office; 40 percent think America’s adversaries now look at Mr. Obama with contempt.

Second, the Pew Research Center reports that half the populations in Britain, France and Germany, as well as a third in the United States and Russia, see China eventually replacing the United States as the world’s leading superpower. Two-thirds of Israelis think Mr. Obama will not stop the Iranians from getting nuclear weapons. Third, world leaders in countries as varied as Japan, Poland and Israel hear Mr. Obama’s promises as unrelated to reality. Speaking for many, Josef Joffe of Germany’s *Die Zeit* weekly finds “consistency and coherence to Obama’s attempt to retract from the troubles of the world, to get the U.S. out of harm’s way. To be harsh about it, he wants to turn the U.S. into a very large medium power.” Successful “diplomatic engagement,” as Mr. Kerry calls it, must be backed by consistency, power and will, not by nice words, hollow promises and wishful thinking. Will the Obama administration realize this before doing permanent damage? Watch the Iranian nuclear deal for possible changes, or not.

[Daniel Pipes, president of the Middle East Forum, is a CIJR Academic Fellow]

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HANDING THE MIDDLE EAST TO RUSSIA

Amir Taheri

[New York Post](#), Feb. 16, 2014

Some 40 years ago, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat ended his regime’s alliance with, and reliance on, the Soviet Union, and, in one of the Cold war’s most dramatic turnabouts, joined the Middle Eastern bloc of nations close to the United States. The switch led to the Camp David peace accords, the defeat of a Soviet-

sponsored rebellion in the Arabian Peninsula, the taming of the Communist regime in South Yemen and the containment of the Ba'athist regimes of Syria and Iraq.

Since the modern Middle East emerged from the debris of the Ottoman Empire after World War I, the region has needed an outside power to ensure stability by curbing internal and external ambitions, and acting as an honest broker. Through the 1950s, Britain played that role. Then, until the late 1960s, the region was divided into Soviet and British spheres of influence, with the United States getting a cameo role every now and then. But by 1980, despite the fall of the pro-West regime in Iran, America was the principal guarantor of stability in the region.

Then came President Obama, anxious to move US foreign policy away from what he regards as imperialism. And indeed, after five years of seizing every opportunity to underline his lack of interest in projecting US leadership, Obama seems to have succeeded in persuading many across the region that America's absence is no longer just a theoretical possibility, but a reality. That fact — temporarily hidden by Hillary Clinton's energetic but ultimately unproductive activism — is highlighted by John Kerry's delusional dance on the margins.

The trouble is that, with the US absence, the Middle East faces a power vacuum that could tear it apart with unforeseeable consequences for regional peace and stability. The search for a new power capable of acting as a balancing force has intensified. Some in the region think Russia could and should assume that role. On Syria, Obama made it clear that he's given Russia a permanent veto over US policy. Arab sources tell me that Kerry has advised them not to press on with a new UN resolution seeking greater pressure on Syrian despot Bashar al-Assad so as not to antagonize "our Russian partners." Washington's new stance was reconfirmed with the "nuclear deal" with the mullahs in Tehran. Obama adopted a Russian "fudge formula" rejected by the Bush administration in 2006. Under it, Iran will continue its nuclear program while offering "robust" inspection of select sites. Suddenly, all roads seem to lead to Moscow.

Last month, even Saudi Arabia, Washington's close ally since the '40s, seemed interested in probing closer ties to Russia. Prince Bandar bin Sultan, the Saudi intelligence and security head, flew to Moscow on an unprecedented visit for extensive talks with Vladimir Putin. Arab sources say he evoked the prospect of giving Russia a share of the kingdom's huge arms imports and joint ventures in oil and gas projects. Iran instantly reacted by offering Russia "preferential conditions" in developing oilfields in the Caspian sea and the Persian Gulf. President Hassan Rouhani even spoke of a Tehran-Moscow "strategic partnership" to rid "our region from the influence of distant powers," i.e., the United States. Rouhani has invited Putin to Tehran for the first state visit to the Islamic Republic by a Russian president. Over the past six months, Moscow has played host to delegations from the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait and Iraq, all worried about Obama's decision to script the United States out of international leadership. Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif even led a delegation to Moscow to seek, believe it or not, a Russian role in "ensuring the future of Afghanistan." Turkey, although a NATO member, has opened negotiations to purchase Russian arms. The Syrian pro-democracy groups have also concluded that Russia may be the new "balancing power." This month, Ahmad Jarba of the Syrian National Coalition led a delegation to Moscow to discuss a deal where "the basic structures" of the Syrian state would remain intact while Russia plays an "oversight role" in a transition period. The upshot is that Russia would impose its policy of maintaining the Assad regime, with a few changes of personnel.

The latest pilgrim is Egypt's new military dictator, Abdul-Fattah el-Sissi, who last week flew to Moscow, the only foreign capital he has visited since his coup d'état last July, for a photo-op with Putin. Moscow authorized the publication of a news item according to which Putin wished Sissi "success in your presidential bid." In exchange, the Egyptians announced that Sissi had discussed buying \$2.2 billion in Russian arms — restoring the position Russia lost in the 1970s.

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SWITCHING SIDES

Richard Baehr

Israel Hayom, Feb. 17, 2014

Earlier this week, *The New Yorker* published a 17,000 word article by its editor, David Remnick, summarizing his time spent recently in travels with President Barack Obama. That Remnick should get such access to the president is not a surprise, since under his leadership, *The New Yorker* has shifted in a significant way from a magazine that was once known and widely respected for its fiction, essays and cartoons, to a magazine indistinguishable from many others for its role advancing the favored causes of the Left in the nation's political wars -- whether it be hysteria about climate change, bashing Israel and its American supporters, or mocking Tea Party supporters and their preferred candidates, as well as Republicans of any denomination. Previous editor Tina Brown had turned *The New Yorker* into a *Vanity Fair* twin with fewer pictures and longer articles. Remnick has made *The New Yorker* a close relation of *The Nation* with more fashion ads and better paper stock, and the one constant -- longer articles...

One part of Remnick's latest article has gotten a fair amount of attention. After the killing of Osama bin Laden, the administration hoped to coast to a 2012 re-election victory with the theme of "Bin Laden is dead (and so is al-Qaida), but General Motors is still alive." The attack on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi on September 11, 2012, provided an inconvenient truth, as if there were not other evidence around, that al-Qaida will still be alive and kicking. It is in light of the campaign's messaging, that the administration's desperate effort to mislead about who was responsible for what happened in Benghazi and why they did what they did, became so important. *The New York Times*, 16 months after the date of the attack and the killings of the U.S. ambassador and three other Americans, was still busy doing legwork to buttress the White House's original fabrication that the attack resulted from a spontaneous demonstration aroused by a Muslim-mocking video produced by a Coptic Christian in the United States, that of course, no one in Libya had seen. In any case, the *Times* author, David Kirkpatrick, maintained that no evidence existed that al-Qaida had its hands in the attack. The *Times* of course, had multiple objectives with the Kirkpatrick whitewash -- make sure Obama came out looking truthful (a big problem after the Obamacare lies), and make Benghazi go away for Hillary Clinton to better enable her to glide to victory in 2016.

With chaos seeming to envelop one country after another since the start of the so-called Arab Spring, and the clear involvement of al-Qaida and Sunni terror groups in violence occurring in many countries at the moment, the president has been at pains to justify his sweeping confidence that al-Qaida was a solved problem. Remnick describes the president's latest "all clear" on al-Qaida this way: "In the 2012 campaign, Obama spoke not only of killing Osama bin Laden; he also said that al-Qaida had been 'decimated.' I pointed out that the flag of al-Qaida is now flying in Falluja, in Iraq, and among various rebel factions in Syria; al-Qaida has asserted a presence in parts of Africa, too.

"The analogy we use around here sometimes, and I think is accurate, is if a jayvee team puts on Lakers uniforms that doesn't make them Kobe Bryant,' Obama said, resorting to an uncharacteristically flip analogy. 'I think there is a distinction between the capacity and reach of a bin Laden and a network that is actively planning major terrorist plots against the homeland versus jihadists who are engaged in various local power struggles and disputes, often sectarian.'"

Yesterday came news that Israelis had prevented an al-Qaida attack on the United States Embassy in Tel Aviv. The jayvee squad involved was arrested (Laker benchwarmers?). Wednesday's *Wall Street Journal* in its front page news box had five of the top seven stories relating to Sunni and al-Qaida linked terror attacks...One might think that the president's characterization of the current terror threat from Islamic radicals (of the Sunni persuasion) missed the mark. Does a terror attack on a U.S. embassy count as a major operation? It didn't for Obama and his national security team in Benghazi, so why should a Tel Aviv attack be viewed differently?

Would a major attack at the Sochi winter games show evidence that the jayvee team had sent a few of its top stars on to the next level? The president is very confident with sports metaphors, but even Remnick seems uncomfortable with this one. In any case, Kobe and the Lakers are well past their best days, and the shelf life of the "al-Qaida is decimated and on the run" meme seems also to have expired. The Remnick articles speak of Obama feeling the need to address the stale thinking that is so common in America on foreign policy, and work through the new realities that are out there. But the al-Qaida threat seems more like an old reality that is hanging in there, with new delusions about their demise being the real problem with the White House team's thinking.

One other prominent new reality for the administration seems to be that Iran is on the verge of becoming a partner of the United States, given how many common goals the two countries share. Again, *The New York Times* is first with the breakout of the new "special relationship." The new partners have their work cut out for them, since Obama has to deal with interference from Israel which the president and his team, none too subtly suggest is poisoning the waters in Congress (which Obama friend Tom Friedman has argued is controlled by Jews and the American Israel Public Affairs Committee). Rather than threatening new sanctions against Iran for failure to perform under the terms of its current agreement with the P5+1, as a strong bipartisan majority in each branch of Congress prefers, the president is letting slip out that his current plan is to gut the sanctions that are already in place, and that likely forced Iran to begin serious negotiations for the first time.

The White House seems to be creating the foreign policy version of "Fifty Ways to Please Your Lover." Abandoning existing allies? Check. Always reading the best into Iranian intentions? Check. Providing fodder for anti-Semites in the U.S., Iran and the region who think Israel controls the U.S. government? Check. Ignoring every public Iranian declaration that puts the lie to their having changed course with their nuclear program? Check. Love can be blind, but in this case, something else may be in play -- the administration has switched sides, so it has become part of the Iranian propaganda machine. Maybe the president actually sat through those Reverend Jeremiah Wright sermons.

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STOP JERKING CANADA AROUND

Charles Krauthammer

[Washington Post](#), Jan. 23, 2014

Fixated as we Americans are on Canada's three most attention-getting exports — polar vortexes, Alberta clippers and the antics of Toronto's addled mayor — we've somewhat overlooked a major feature of Canada's current relations with the United States: extreme annoyance. Last week, speaking to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Canada's foreign minister calmly but pointedly complained that the United States owes Canada a response on the Keystone XL pipeline. "We can't continue in this state of limbo," he sort of complained, in what for a placid, imperturbable Canadian passes for an explosion of volcanic rage.

Canadians may be preternaturally measured and polite, but they simply can't believe how they've been treated by President Obama — left hanging humiliatingly on an issue whose merits were settled years ago. Canada, the Saudi Arabia of oil sands, is committed to developing this priceless resource. Its natural export partner is the United States. But crossing the border requires State Department approval, which means the president decides yes or no. After three years of review, the State Department found no significant environmental risk to Keystone. Nonetheless, the original route was changed to assuage concerns regarding the Ogallala Aquifer. Obama withheld approval through the 2012 election. To this day he has issued no decision.

The Canadians are beside themselves. After five years of manufactured delay, they need a decision one way or the other because if denied a pipeline south, they could build a pipeline west to the Pacific. China would buy their oil in a New York minute. Yet Secretary of State John Kerry fumblingly says he is awaiting yet another environmental report. He offered no decision date.

If Obama wants to cave to his environmental left, fine. But why keep Canada in limbo? It's a show of supreme and undeserved disrespect for yet another ally. It seems not enough to have given the back of the hand to Britain, Israel, Poland and the Czech Republic, and to have so enraged the Saudis that they actually rejected a U.N. Security Council seat — disgusted as they were with this administration's remarkable combination of fecklessness and highhandedness. Must we crown this run of diplomatic malpractice with gratuitous injury to Canada, our most reliable, most congenial friend in the world? And for what? This is not a close call. The Keystone case is almost absurdly open and shut.

Even if you swallow everything the environmentalists tell you about oil sands, the idea that blocking Keystone would prevent their development by Canada is ridiculous. Canada sees its oil sands as a natural bounty and key strategic asset. Canada will not leave it in the ground. Where's the environmental gain in blocking Keystone? The oil will be produced and the oil will be burned. If it goes to China, the Pacific pipeline will carry the same environmental risks as a U.S. pipeline. And Alberta oil can still go to the United States, if not by pipeline then by rail, which requires no State Department approval. That would result in far more greenhouse gas emissions — exactly the opposite of what the environmentalists are seeking. Moreover, rail can be exceedingly dangerous. Last year a tanker train derailed and exploded en route through Quebec. The fireball destroyed half of downtown Lac-Mégantic, killing 47, many incinerated beyond recognition. This isn't theoretical environmentalism. This is not a decrease in the snail darter population. This is 47 dead human beings. More recently, we've had two rail-oil accidents within the United States, one near Philadelphia and one in North Dakota. Add to this the slam-dunk strategic case for Keystone: Canadian oil reduces our dependence on the volatile Middle East, shifting petroleum power from OPEC and the killing zones of the Middle East to North America. What more reliable source of oil could we possibly have than Canada?

Keystone has left Canada very upset, though characteristically relatively quiet. Canadians may have succeeded in sublimating every ounce of normal human hostility and unpleasantness by way of hockey fights, but that doesn't mean we should take advantage of their good manners. The only rationale for denying the pipeline is political — to appease Obama's more extreme environmentalists. For a president who claims not to be ideological, the irony is striking: Here is an easily available piece of infrastructure — privately built, costing government not a penny, creating thousands of jobs and, yes, shovel-ready — and yet the president, who's been incessantly pushing new "infrastructure" as a fundamental economic necessity, can't say yes. Well then, Mr. President, say something. You owe Canada at least that. Up or down. Five years is long enough.

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[Syria Will Haunt the President and his Advisers:](#) *Jennifer Rubin, Washington Post, Feb. 17, 2014*—It must be maddening spinning for the White House.

[Obamacare's War on Jobs:](#) *Charles Krauthammer, Washington Post, Feb. 13, 2014*— In the ongoing saga of the Affordable Care Act, oddly referred to by Democrats as the law of the land even as it is amended at will by presidential fiat, we are beginning to understand the extent of its war on jobs.

[Credulous and Tendentious on Benghazi:](#) *National Review, Dec. 31, 2013*— The *New York Times* has published a strange but unsurprising account of the attacks that killed four Americans in Benghazi, Libya, on September 11, 2012...

[Survey: U.S. Press Freedom Plunges Under Obama to 46th in World, After Romania:](#) *Meghan Drake, Washington Times, Feb. 11, 2014*—The Obama administration's handling of whistleblower Edward Snowden, the National Security Agency leaks and the investigation of a string of leaks produced a plunge in the country's rating on press freedoms and government openness, according to a global survey released Tuesday.

[The President Inhales:](#) *Wall Street Journal, Jan. 21, 2014* —To the delight of dorm rooms everywhere, President Obama has all but endorsed marijuana legalization.