

Merry
Christmas!

RAY TAKEYH
A Trump Iran Strategy

JOSH GELERNTER
John Glenn, American Hero

NATIONAL REVIEW

THE CASE FOR A NATIONAL
PRODUCTIVITY STRATEGY
ROBERT D. ATKINSON





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Prosecutor, Heal Thyself

An item in the Week in the December 5 issue begins: "If there's anything more New Jersey than having a corrupt political figure create artificial traffic troubles to torment a political rival for no obvious end than sadistic enjoyment, we do not know what it is." One thing that's more New Jersey was the near-universal response in the state when it was first reported that Chris Christie's "traffic survey" had slowed traffic at the George Washington Bridge's Fort Lee exit to a crawl: "How can they tell?" The surrounding area is notorious for having New Jersey's worst traffic, and that's a distinction that we Garden State residents do not take lightly (in fact, Fort Lee's traffic was recently rated worst in the U.S. by a trucking-industry group). Adding congestion to Fort Lee is like carrying coals to Newcastle, or toxic waste to Linden.

Or corruption to Trenton. Another thing we take seriously in New Jersey is our crooked politicians, and here, sad to say, Chris Christie barely even makes the list. Jailing New Jersey politicians has become a wearisome ritual, like grounding your 17-year-old for staying out past curfew, and many of them were put away by Christie himself, in his days as a U.S. Attorney. He presumably knows where the bodies are buried, and how to run a payoff scheme—which makes the Fort Lee affair even more puzzling, because Jon Corzine, Jim McGreevy, Bob Torricelli, and Bob Menendez all got something for their misdeeds, but Christie's scheme paid off in neither love nor money. That's the second thing everyone in New Jersey asked about Chris Christie and Bridgegate: "What was in it for him?" Or as Thomas More might have said: "It profits a man nothing to give his soul for the whole world . . . but for Fort Lee?"

Charles Grayson

Elizabeth, N.J.

Ping-Pong Politics

David French's "Trumpocalypse" (December 19) is about as measured an assessment of President-elect Trump as I have seen, and I hope that our friends on the left take note—for their own sake. A hysterical reaction to Barack Obama made many conservatives susceptible to an extreme candidate on their side, a hysterical reaction to Donald Trump threatens to do the same to the Left, and no good can come from a politics that oscillates between extremes.

Jerrold Payton

Greensboro, N.C.

The Well-Given Damn

Far be it from me to make such a claim, but I think William F. Buckley Jr. would have found a special pleasure in Daniel Foster's "A Course on Cursing" (December 19). Sometimes, a bad word is just necessary, as WFB seemed to understand. After all, he didn't write simply, "Cancel your own subscription."

Kimball Loyd

Dallas, Tex.

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The Week

■ We haven't seen liberals this interested in Russians and fake news since Walter Duranty.

■ Trump picked ExxonMobil CEO Rex Tillerson as his nominee for secretary of state. As the head of an enormous company with business around the world, Tillerson is an extremely capable person (he rose through the ranks at Exxon and is an Eagle Scout). He has basically been a corporate head of state, with extensive diplomatic experience of a certain kind. The problem is that Tillerson's views, apart from what has been to this point his commitment to promoting the interests of ExxonMobil shareholders, are unknown. The extensive dealings in Russia that earned him an Order of Friendship medal from Vladimir Putin have raised eyebrows and hackles on Capitol Hill, given worries about Trump's own Russophilia and against the backdrop of allegations of Russia's hacking operations. Tillerson should be thoroughly vetted, and his confirmation hearings will be more important than usual. We're prepared to believe that he is well suited to the job, but, as with all things related to Russia, our watchword is trust but verify.

■ In early December, Donald Trump took a phone call with Taiwanese president Tsai Ing-wen. Cross-strait relations being what they are (fragile), and Trump's foreign-policy vision being what it is (opaque), the prevailing reaction was one of horror, Senator Chris Murphy (D., Conn.) going so far as to suggest that Trump's "radical temporary deviation" from precedent—no American and Taiwanese heads of state have spoken together since 1979—was "how wars start." The Left's reaction is instructive as to its priorities. Visitors to Taiwan will find a fairly elected president, a vigorous legislature, an open press, religious freedom, the fifth-largest economy in Asia, and a unique culture that straddles East and West. A little over 100 miles to the west, visitors will find a one-party dictatorship, directly descended from the terrors of Chairman Mao, that "disappears" political dissidents and harvests the organs of Falun Gong adherents. While American involvement in cross-strait relations must be delicate, it is obvious that a free Taiwan and, ultimately, a free mainland China would serve both justice and American interests. If Trump's phone call is part of a coherent strategy, it could modestly advance that goal.

■ For eight years, Republicans who opposed the Obama administration's executive appointments received a standard rejoinder: "Win an election." On November 8, they did, and, upon the instant, the goalposts were moved out of sight. Now, it seems the rule is that Republicans are obliged both to win an election and to choose cabinet officials who conform to a progressive view of the department they will head up. For failing to conform to this second, partisan standard, Trump picks

See page 14.



such as Scott Pruitt (EPA), Betsy DeVos (Education), and Rick Perry (Energy) have been dismissed as "unsuitable" and "unqualified," and even as "wreckers." The executive branch is constitutionally bound to enforce the law as written, but nothing written into the charters of America's many agencies mandates progressive maximalism. There are a host of possible energy policies, a variety of approaches toward education, and a number of different means by which the environment can be protected. Choosing among them is part of why we have elections.

■ Immigration policy in the United States has largely refused to prioritize the interests of American workers over those of their foreign counterparts. From the start of his campaign, Donald Trump set himself against that consensus. That's why his nomination of Andy Puzder as labor secretary is eyebrow-raising. Puzder—head of CKE Restaurants, the parent company of fast-food chains such as Carl's Jr. and Hardee's—is among the most prominent advocates of Gang of Eight-style immigration reform in the American business community. He has argued for an increase in less-skilled immigrants, as well as amnesty for illegal immigrants currently residing in the country, and against tighter border security. All of that is a mistake, given strong evidence that high levels of low-skilled

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immigration force wages at the bottom of the labor market downward, that there are long-term social costs when low-skilled native-born citizens see their opportunities for advancement narrow, and that cultural fragmentation is fostered by an immigration policy that disproportionately emphasizes economics. GOP senators should use Puzder's confirmation process to secure from him a commitment to immigration-related labor policies that put the American worker first—for example, national implementation of E-Verify for all new hires (an idea to which Puzder is friendly), more-rigorous certification of guest workers, and aggressive action against companies that abuse immigration laws to undermine American workers.

■ Trump's cabinet-level picks so far include three generals: James Mattis (Defense), John F. Kelly (Homeland Security), and Michael T. Flynn (national-security adviser). Is that too much brass? They are ex-brass, having all retired; they will report to a president who is a lifelong civilian; and every time the military spends must be authorized by Congress. Civilian control of the military is quite secure. Even so, will their background skew the advice President Trump gets? Both civilians and military men had their fair share of successes and failures throughout the Cold War and beyond. The service academies are at least the peers of modern universities, and officers at the level of Mattis, Kelly, and Flynn have seen a lot of the world, and of life. They should be judged as individuals, not stereotypes.

■ Trump tweeted that Boeing's contract to build presidential aircraft should be revisited because the costs are running too high. There's nothing wrong with wanting to economize. But Trump's criticism of Boeing came days after he pressured and bribed the air-conditioner maker Carrier to keep some of its production in the U.S. It thus raised the possibility that the Trump administration would see sporadic and media-driven presidential micromanagement of either the government or business. If these are the alternatives, bring on the special presidentially hosted episodes of *Celebrity Apprentice*.

■ Edgar Welch, a 28-year-old North Carolina man, walked into Comet Ping Pong, a Washington, D.C., pizzeria, with a rifle and a handgun and fired shots, thus bringing a new level of attention to "Pizzagate." (Fortunately, no one was hurt, and Welch was arrested.) Welch was there to investigate a conspiracy theory, spread online in the wake of WikiLeaks' release of John Podesta's e-mails, that the pizza shop was the center of a child-prostitution ring run by Hillary Clinton and her top aides. The conspiracy theory is 100 percent made up and as lunatic as believing that water fluoridation is a Communist plot to undermine public health, that this magazine was established as a CIA front, or that Elvis helped Ted Cruz's father assassinate JFK. But the Left has seized the opportunity to conflate "news and opinion we happen to dislike" and "crazy online conspiracy theories" into one ball of "fake news." A conservative academic's contrarian take on the long-term stability of the Obamacare exchanges might or might not be correct, but it's not fake news, no matter what our progressive friends might claim. (And shall we mention the Left's own pet conspiracy theories? A 2006 survey found

that half of Democrats believed the Bush administration assisted or willfully took no action to prevent the 9/11 attacks.) Beware fake categories.

■ John Adams wrote of President Washington that "he possessed the gift of silence." President-elect Donald Trump possesses it not. His transition has been marked by foolish boasts (he won a "massive landslide" in the Electoral College—so massive that only twelve of the last 16 presidents exceeded it), media fisticuffs (NBC is "so biased, inaccurate, and bad . . . just can't get much worse"), and plain old bullying (when Chuck Jones, a local union boss, accused Trump of lying about the number of jobs he had saved at Carrier's plant in Indiana, Trump tweeted that Jones "has done a terrible job . . . No wonder companies flee country!"). The tone of the last claim was most disturbing, given the disparity of the combatants—Trump vs. Jones is like the pope zinging a monsignor. The entire flurry recalled the campaign, and forecast the future: Trump needs constant praise and retaliates against any criticism. History teaches there will be shortages of the first and no lack of the second. President Trump's Twitter account will get quite the workout.

■ A number of progressives, including E. J. Dionne and Robert Reich, are urging electors to be faithless: to vote for someone other than Donald Trump, that is, even if he won their state. The original understanding of the Constitution allowed electors to vote their consciences, and state laws that purport to deny them any discretion are at least constitutionally suspect. But Americans have over time come to expect the electors to follow their states' votes. For them to flout the universal expectation of the public because of political objections to Trump that voters understood perfectly well would be to steal the election, vastly increasing civil strife and undermining faith in our institutions. It would be an act of folly and discredit all who participated in it, as it already discredits those who urge it.



■ Senator Chris Coons, a Delaware Democrat, says he regrets voting to make filibusters of executive-branch nominees impossible. The Democrats made that change to help President Obama's nominees, making a simple majority enough to confirm them. Now, says Coons, many Democrats will regret the absence of "a terrific speed bump, potential emergency brake, to have in our system to slow down the confirmation of extreme nominees." It is a heartbreaking tale. Coons was elected to the Senate in 2010, and apparently nobody told him that someday a Republican might again be elected president.

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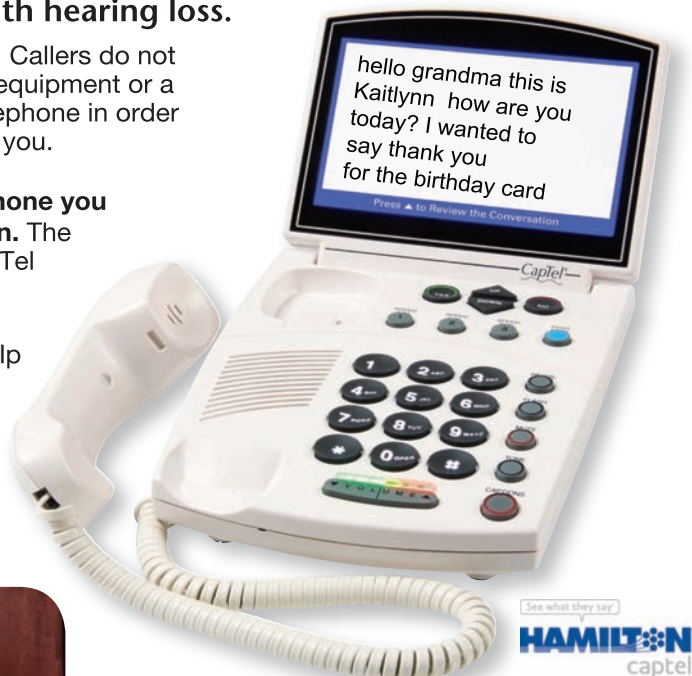
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■ At the end of November, Abdul Razak Ali Artan, a student at Ohio State, drove his car into a crowd of people on campus and then attacked them with a butcher knife, leaving 13 injured before a campus cop shot him dead. Artan was a Somali refugee who had made a seven-year layover in Pakistan before coming to the United States; his Facebook page referenced terrorist cleric Anwar al-Awlaki and sobbed about American mistreatment of the “Muslim Ummah.” Congratulations to Officer Alan Horujko, whose timely action prevented greater mayhem, and to Donald Trump, who visited with Horujko and with the stabbing victims. Meanwhile, according to the *Washington Post*, “participants in prayers at a mosque near Artan’s family home said they fear a backlash against Muslims as Trump prepares to take office.” We are now entering the 16th year of waiting for a backlash that has never quite materialized.

■ Harry Reid is a habitual liar and a cheap partisan of the lowest and most reptilian kind. He is also a tragic figure: His hardscrabble upbringing and the violence of his early life are the sorts of thing out of which a heroic story might have been made, if Harry Reid were a better sort of man.

signaled that he will allow the project to go forward once he takes office—as he should.

■ In an interview with Fox News, Representative Sean Duffy (R., Wis.) referred to the city of Madison as a “progressive/liberal/Communist community.” Oddly, Madison’s mayor took offense, calling Duffy a “liar,” “moron,” and “charlatan.” That mayor, Paul Soglin, gave the late Fidel Castro the key to the city. To quote a recent buzzphrase from *Saturday Night Live*: Any questions?

■ “I have looked into the eyes of the worst people on the planet,” writes James E. Mitchell. “I have sat with them and felt their passion as they described what they see as their holy duty to destroy our way of life.” Mitchell was responsible for the “enhanced interrogation” of jihadists, and he has now written a memoir. One of the jihadists with whom he spent a lot of time was Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the mastermind of 9/11. According to Mitchell, Mohammed told him that he expected the United States to turn tail, as in Lebanon 18 years before. Or to file suit in court, as after other jihadist attacks on America. But he and his group hit a snag. “How was I supposed to

Harry Reid did not exaggerate or distort; he **invented wild fictions** out of whole cloth.

But he isn’t. He did not exaggerate or distort: He invented wild fictions out of whole cloth, as with regard to Mitt Romney’s taxes, and then laughed at the American electorate for being stupid enough to fall for them. The absolute glee the man takes in a lie is something nauseating to behold. He grew wealthy in public service, through means including a land deal involving a mob figure and earmark money steered into projects that increased the value of his Nevada real-estate holdings. Good riddance to bad rubbish.

■ The Army Corps of Engineers has declined to grant an easement to the Dakota Access Pipeline, halting construction on the \$3.7 billion project. Actually, that’s not quite accurate: The Corps of Engineers recommended that the project go forward, but they were overruled by a civilian leader, who apparently bowed to political pressure from the White House, and to several thousand protesters who had gathered at the edge of Lake Oahe for a rural Occupy reboot, complete with illegal occupation of private (and federal) land and even the occasional IED detonation. Contrary to their claims, the Dakota Access Pipeline does not cross any land owned by the Standing Rock Sioux tribe, and it does not threaten the tribe’s water supply. More than 50 tribes (including the Standing Rock Sioux), as well as the North Dakota Public Service Commission and the State Historic Preservation Office, were notified to ensure that the pipeline would not sully historically significant land. But the Obama administration has intervened nevertheless, once again using bureaucratic machinations (possibly against the law) to impede development of America’s fossil-fuel industry. The protesters’ victory is likely to be a temporary one. Aides to Donald Trump have

known that cowboy George Bush would announce he wanted us ‘dead or alive’ and then invade Afghanistan to hunt us down?” Mohammed expected the jihad to prevail, because “we do not need to defeat you militarily; we only need to fight long enough for you to defeat yourself by quitting.” Let’s prove him wrong again.

■ Aleppo is about to be taken over completely by forces loyal to Bashar Assad, the president in name—but not everywhere in power—of his unfortunate country, Syria. Throughout the civil war, fighting between rebels of the so-called Syrian Free Army and Bashar’s loyalist forces has been ferocious. The rebels are finally obliged to give ground because the White House has failed to arm and support them effectively. Vladimir Putin took his chance for some old-fashioned imperialism. Russian bombers have pulverized Aleppo. Hardly a building is undamaged, and the street patterns are unrecognizable. Hospitals no longer function, and medicine and food are virtually unobtainable. Hundreds of thousands of the inhabitants have been killed or driven out, though 200,000 of them are still trapped in the ruined city. Some escape at the risk of their lives. The hour of atrocities has arrived. Whether arrested or giving themselves up voluntarily, young men are assumed to be rebels, and they are likely to disappear, never to be heard of again. In Geneva, Russian diplomats are ensuring that peace talks go nowhere. All the same, Bashar’s reputed victory is more symbolic than military. The fanatics of the Islamic State, Bashar’s implacable sectarian enemy, have just recaptured the historic city of Palmyra. The Syrian Kurds are laying the outlines of a state of their own, and the Turks are moving in to put a stop to anything of that kind. The deliberate brutality of all this fighting seems inexhaustible.

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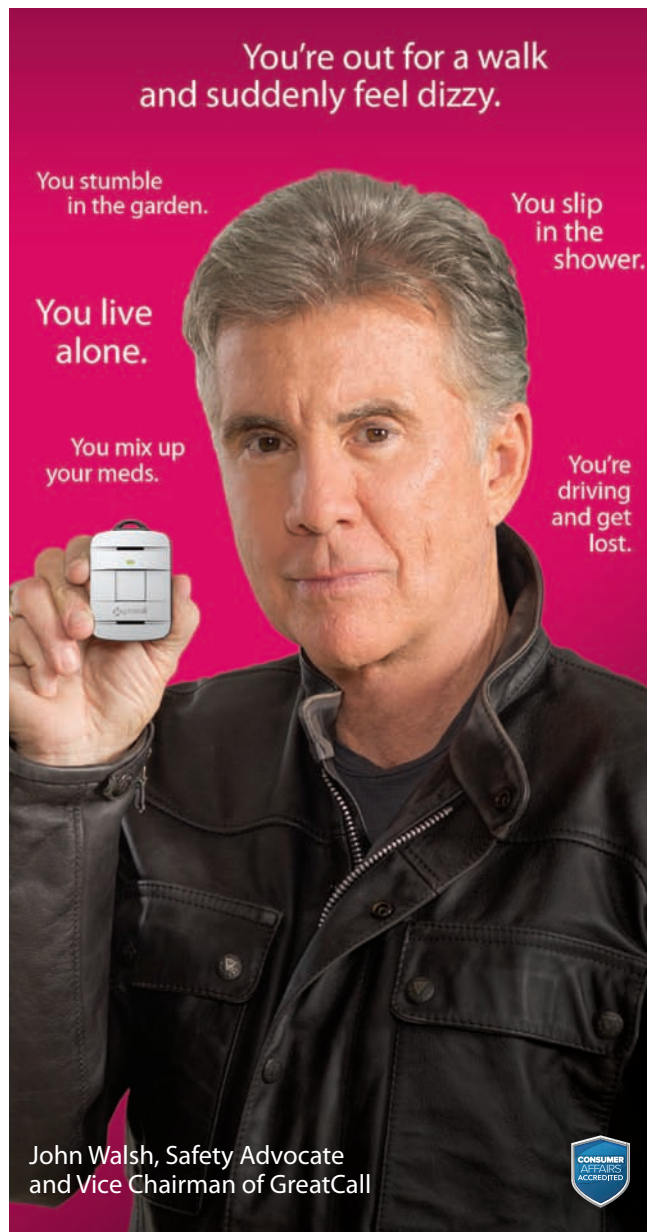
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■ Matteo Renzi—Italy’s youngest-ever prime minister, elected at age 39—resigned after Italians voted down constitutional changes that would have granted his office more power. (Paolo Gentiloni, the foreign minister, will form a caretaker center-left government.) The referendum’s failure, inaccurately trumpeted as “Italy’s Brexit,” could bring on yet another crisis in the European Union. Within minutes of the result’s announcement, the euro dropped sharply. Europe’s peoples continue to chafe at the burdensome status quo dictated from Brussels—a status quo popularly viewed as originating in Chancellor Angela Merkel’s office in Berlin—that has led to unemployment as high as 30 percent among Italian young adults. Renzi’s milquetoast government-by-technocrat may be replaced by something more radical as soon as the next election. Beppe Grillo, a former stand-up comedian and the leader of the right-wing-populist Five Star Movement, promises answers to the moribund economy and the seemingly unstoppable flow of migrants to the Italian coast from North Africa. He also raises the possibility of a second referendum: on whether Italy needs to be in the euro zone at all. That vote could, in fact, be “Italy’s Brexit.”



■ Geert Wilders isn’t much as free-speech martyrs go—the Dutch politician has proposed such illiberal measures as banning the Koran and prohibiting the building of mosques—but his recent conviction on two hate-speech charges is nonetheless lamentable, an unwelcome reminder of the decline of free speech and authentic civil liberty in Europe. Wilders’s crime was asking supporters at a rally whether they would prefer for the Netherlands to have more or fewer Muslim immigrants from Morocco. (Fewer, they said, with some energy.) The formal charges against Wilders were encouraging discrimination and giving “group offense,” and while he will endure no punishment, the fact that he has been convicted of a crime for engaging in ordinary politics is shameful. The Netherlands, like Europe at large, has a great deal to talk about on the related questions of Islam, immigration, culture, and security. The codification of liberal squeamishness in statutes outlawing free and open discussion of these questions suffocates debate among responsible parties and encourages irresponsible ones, from the Le Pen element in France to the frankly fascist movements in Austria and elsewhere. Before his conviction, Wilders was judged likely to be the Netherlands’ next prime minister; afterward, he was slightly more likely. He has something to say, and the Dutch should honor their ancient and proud free-speech tradition.

■ In Germany, Chancellor Merkel called for a partial ban on niqabs (face veils) and burkas (full-body sheaths) at a conference of the Christian Democratic Union. “Our law takes precedence over codes of honor, tribal or family rules, and over sharia law,”

Merkel said. Her proposal would require unmasked faces in court and during police checks: commonsense requirements of justice and security. But she would also extend the ban to schools, universities, and road traffic. So dirigisme tries to clean up multicultural messes; Merkel would not have to be so heavy-handed if she had not welcomed tens of thousands of refugees with little regard to the risks and consequences of doing so. Freedom smiles on eccentricity, but mass migration breeds conflict and repression.

■ By a vote of 234 to 56, with six abstentions, the South Korean congress impeached the country’s president, Park Geun-hye. We have no particular opinion about the charges against her, but we do have an opinion about democracy: It is a great and good thing. For decades, South Korea was ruled by dictatorships. Today, as every day since World War II, North Korea is a totalitarian hell. South Korea is an example of democracy—so that a proper presidential impeachment is, in a sense, good news.

■ Boubaker Hakim had a deadly career. Indeed, his nom de guerre was “Abu Muqatil,” “Father of Killing.” Credit him with truth in advertising. He was born in Paris. He mentored the brothers who killed a lot of people at *Charlie Hebdo* magazine. He had a hand in other attacks as well. The French had him in jail for a while: They released him after three years. Hakim went on to victory after victory, bloodbath after bloodbath. But it all ended for him in late November, when he was driving a car in Raqqa, Syria, and found himself on the business end of a drone. American forces killed him, as they have killed many jihadists, and as they will kill many more. This is vital work, and we congratulate and thank our forces.

■ New Zealand’s prime minister, John Key, abruptly announced his retirement, saying he had had enough of the job and wanted to spend more time with his family. For perhaps the first time in the history of politics, that explanation may actually be true. In his eight years in office (and ten as leader of the center-right National party), Key has brought unprecedented prosperity to New Zealand by following conservative principles. According to *The Economist*, New Zealand has been rated “the easiest place on Earth to do business,” “the world’s most prosperous spot,” and close to the top in “democracy and freedom,” partly because its government and civil servants are “the world’s fourth most honest.” Immigration policy focuses on those with desirable skills, and the government has “eagerly fostered free-trade agreements around the world.” Even before Key took office, New Zealand’s turnaround had begun with the reduction or elimination of tariffs and agricultural subsidies. While each country has its own strengths and its own issues, the fundamental principles apply everywhere: Honest, limited government plus economic freedom equals prosperity.

■ The French parliament recently passed a bill criminalizing the posting of pro-life information online. Violators face a maximum of two years in prison and over \$30,000 in fines. The measure makes it a crime for pro-life individuals or activists to obstruct a woman’s lawful decision to have an abortion, or to cause her guilt after the fact. Though the bill’s supporters claim that the measure criminalizes only “misinformation” about abortion, it defines obstruction expansively as the use of “moral and psychological pressure, threats, or intimidation” of any kind toward women who are considering abortion or who have obtained one in the

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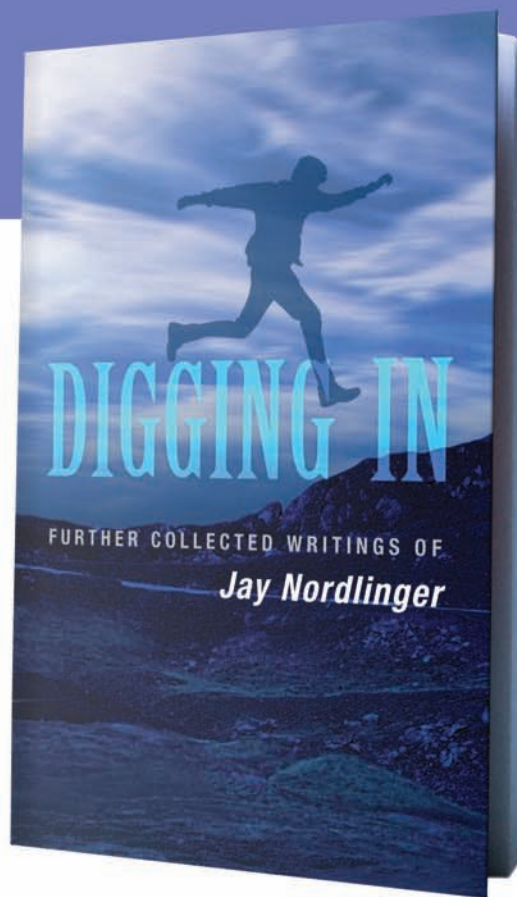
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past. This language could be used to lump in the presentation of alternatives to abortion with actual threats, and it might even be used to prevent Christians from stating that abortion is immoral. The French government is doing its part to make the country a place where truth will do the opposite of setting you free.



■ Kellie Leitch is running to be the leader of Canada's Conservative party. As part of her campaign, she has proposed changing the law to allow Canadians to use mace or pepper spray against humans in self-defense. It is currently a criminal offense. (It is legal to use pepper spray to defend against bears, about whom Canadians have fewer illusions.) Leitch said that such a change would particularly help women to ward off attackers. Canada's federal status-of-women minister,

Patty Hajdu, denounced the idea as “unrealistic and offensive to women” because it “places the onus on women to defend themselves.” Hajdu noted that the government was “developing a federal gender-based-violence strategy” to ensure that “women in Canada can live free from violence.” Perhaps many Canadian women will wish to rely solely on that strategy for their protection; others may wish to carry at least some means of self-defense. Why not give them the choice?

■ Catholic teaching has always held that marriage is indissoluble. It therefore also holds that people who have divorced and remarried without a Church declaration that their original marriage was invalid are engaged in ongoing sin and ineligible for Communion. Pope Francis has sought to show mercy to people in these situations, but his efforts have come at the cost of clarity about the teaching. Some traditionalists within the Church are beginning to hurl charges of heresy at him, while some progressives essentially agree but approve of the heterodoxy. Two eminent Catholic philosophers and theologians, John Finnis and Germain Grisez, have gently asked the pope for a clarification. They would like him to say that, since his statements are to be read in harmony with earlier authoritative pronouncements by the Church, he disavows any reading of them that casts those pronouncements aside. However inadvertently, Francis has created a great deal of needless strife; he should follow the path out of it that Finnis and Grisez have marked for him.

■ “We don’t get religion,” Dean Baquet, the executive editor of the *New York Times*, said in a post-election interview on NPR. “We don’t get the role of religion in people’s lives.” By “we,” he meant not only the Gray Lady but “the New York-based— and Washington-based, too, probably—media powerhouses” generally. Give him credit for recognizing a blind spot to which journalists as a tribe seem especially susceptible. They need to know the dogmas of the religiously observant but also to suspend their own dogmatism, be it secular or otherwise. Faith

touches politics and vice versa, and reporters without religious literacy will fail to discern the direction in which influence is running in any given circumstance. The *Times* has boasted some remarkably perceptive religion writers over the years—Peter Steinfels and Ari L. Goldman come to mind—but the assumption that the kind of sensitivity they brought to their work could be confined to a niche, or department, has impoverished the journalistic profession as a whole. Anyone can be fair and insightful if he tries. On matters where religion intersects with public life, most journalists should try harder.

■ “I’m not disputing this is great literature,” said the concerned mother of a pupil exposed to *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*. “But there is so much racial slurs in there and offensive wording that you can’t get past that, and right now we are a nation divided as it is.” At her request, the books have been temporarily removed from classrooms and school libraries in Accomack County, Va., while a committee deliberates whether to make the ban permanent. In those two novels, Mark Twain and Harper Lee depicted American society under slavery and Jim Crow, respectively, and expressed a sympathetic view of black Americans who suffered those injustices. The works also show how our morals, manners, and language have changed, and they are monuments to our country’s history, including its defects and the ordinary citizens who sought to correct them. Most children cannot be expected to understand the historical contexts of literature written long before they were born, but that’s why they have teachers, and parents.

■ According to *Billboard* magazine, “the biggest-selling CD act of 2016 doesn’t sing. He doesn’t play guitar and he doesn’t tour. In fact, no one alive has ever seen him.” He is Mozart. A new box set comprises 200 CDs, which play for 240 hours and contain the complete works of Mozart. The set costs \$339.82 on Amazon right now. And, yes, it is the best-selling CD release of 2016. Mozart’s still got it. And his popularity is very good cultural and civilizational news.

■ The *Brooklyn Paper* reported in December that “an anti-capitalist artist plans to open a cash-optional coffee shop in Williamsburg.” The coffee shop is meant to be an art project with a message: “I want to tell the story that goods or foods can exist outside of the market,” said Fran Ilich, the artist. How? Ilich plans to accept cash donations, goods, services, or an alternative currency minted in his shop as payment for his coffee (plus a grant from the New York State Council on the Arts). He told a local news station that he’s also open to people “bringing their own currencies as long as there’s trust and it can be converted into something else.” In other words, he plans to create a space in which goods and services are freely bartered, currency is used as a medium of exchange, and the rule of law establishes a fair playing field. If only someone had thought of that before.

■ Every revolution eats its children. When Kimberly Peirce, director of the 1999 film *Boys Don’t Cry*—based on the true story of a transsexual who was raped and murdered—accepted a speaking engagement at Reed College, she must have expected an enthusiastic reception. There is no cause more sacred on today’s college campus than transgenderism, and Peirce’s film was one of the first to portray a transgender per-

son positively. Yet instead of hosannas, she was met with protest signs and screeching abuse (“F*** this cis white b****!” “F*** your transphobia!” “F*** your respectability politics!”). Why? The protesters complained that, by making the film, Peirce (who is lesbian but non-trans) had profited from violence against the transgendered, and that the lead role was played by a cis woman (Hilary Swank) instead of a transsexual. The rowdy radicals drove Peirce from the stage, and when she attempted to return and resume her talk, they shouted her down again. Now she must know how Robespierre felt on the way to the guillotine.

■ Since its founding in 1839, the Virginia Military Institute has prided itself on strict discipline and spartan living conditions meant to build character and mold leaders. VMI students are trained to deal with situations ranging from military battles to corporate warfare, but even for them, some situations are just too stressful to bear—such as taking final exams, evidently. Students debilitated after brutal encounters with Plutarch or organic chemistry were invited during finals week to drop by a “Stress Busters” event whose relaxing activities included yoga, petting a “certified service dog,” and filling in coloring books. If only General Patton had thought of these! The institute’s superintendent later clarified that what VMI staff had called “coloring books” were actually “a one sheet handout with an intricate design that may be used to color, within [discrete], small lines.” We’ll trust the cadets to stay within the lines in true VMI style, and we hope that if they ever fight battles far from any college campus, they find other outlets for their stress.

■ “I really can’t stay” / “Baby, it’s cold outside . . .” Thus begins Frank Loesser’s classic 1944 song of attempted seduction meeting ambiguous reluctance. A pair of Minneapolis singer-songwriters, troubled by Loesser’s failure to respect modern “no means no” principles, have rewritten the lyrics and recorded a new version that emphasizes consent (“I really can’t stay” / “Baby, I’m fine with that”) while also removing politically incorrect references to cigarettes, maiden aunts, and so forth. The result is an odd reversal of the cat-and-mouse roles of Loesser’s original, as the man keeps brushing off the woman’s hints that she might be persuaded to linger. In short, Loesser’s suave wolf has become a too-perfect gentleman. The new version concludes with the couple agreeing to meet for lunch at Cheesecake Factory (no, really, it does).

■ When John Glenn became the third American in space, and the first to orbit Earth, he seemed to have stepped from a storybook written half by Hollywood, half by Mark Twain. The grin, the freckles, the glinting eyes looked too good to be true. Thank God they were true, for the Soviet Union had leaped ahead of America in space, but Glenn and his Mercury astronaut colleagues showed we could match and ultimately surpass them. Glenn had already been writing the story of his own life, as a decorated Marine fighter pilot in World War II and Korea and a test pilot thereafter. His political career was long but anticlimactic: He won an Ohio Senate seat on the third try and kept it for four terms, but his 1984 presidential run was a bust. His idea of a peroration was to recite the Pledge of Allegiance—it was hackneyed and corny, yet Glenn really meant it. Who needs the White House when you have flown the heavens and have such a strong, simple character? Dead at 95. R.I.P.



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Investigate Russia's Hacking

ACCORDING to the *Washington Post*, the CIA has concluded with “high confidence” that Russian interference in this year’s presidential election—primarily its facilitation of the theft and leaking of thousands of e-mails from the Democratic National Committee and others—was designed to boost Donald Trump’s electoral prospects, not merely to shake Americans’ faith in the integrity of their electoral system. If the conclusion is true—and it remains a significant if—Russia is even more brazen than formerly realized.

Interfering in an election by exposing sensitive information, as Russia seems to have done, and tampering with Diebold machines are two different things—a distinction that some Hillary Clinton partisans have forgotten in their calls for a revote. This is the latest excuse for Clinton’s loss other than Hillary Clinton. Kremlin machinations make for a helpful addition to the list that also includes Madisonian republicanism, James Comey, and fake news.

Amid the panic, it’s worth recalling who has been responsible for America’s foreign policy vis-à-vis Russia for the last eight years. The president-elect is not the one who oversaw the “reset,” or who allowed Russia to gobble up Crimea and invade Ukraine with impunity, or who enabled Putin to prop up the Assad regime in Syria, or who permitted American diplomats to be harassed in Moscow. Additionally, it’s not Trump and his nominee for secretary of state who exchanged classified communiqués over an unsecured e-mail server, and it was John Podesta, not Kellyanne Conway, whose password was “p@ssw0rd.”

What is needed isn’t a “do-over election.” It’s a full congressional investigation to determine exactly what happened and why, accompanied by a hardening of American defenses against future hacking.

Also advisable would be a more responsible approach from the president-elect. In typical form, Trump immediately called the CIA report “ridiculous” and in an official statement sought to dismiss wholesale the agency’s credibility. A bit of outrage at news that a foreign power tried to sway American voters is called for.

One hopes President-elect Trump’s illusions about Russia are soon dispelled. The Kremlin is, ultimately, not pro-Donald Trump, it is pro-Kremlin, and it will not hesitate to exploit weaknesses wherever it finds them. For eight years, the Obama administration has failed to properly distinguish America’s friends from its foes. Congress and the president-elect can defuse left-wing conspiracy-mongering without making the same mistake.

CARRIER BAILOUT

Chilling Effect

THE Carrier bailout, in which the air-conditioner company was given \$7 million in tax incentives in exchange for scaling back some offshoring plans, is bad politics, bad policy, and bad precedent. And, in spite of Donald Trump’s pride in his deal-making capabilities, it isn’t even very good deal-making.

Carrier had planned to close two facilities in Vice President-elect Mike Pence’s home state of Indiana, transferring that work to a Mexican facility and moving or eliminating about 1,800 jobs. Carrier still will close one of those Indiana facilities, and it still is



President-elect Donald Trump speaks at Carrier Corporation, in Indianapolis, December 1, 2016.

moving most of those jobs to Mexico. At least 300 of the jobs “saved” in this deal were never scheduled for transfer to Mexico to begin with.

Carrier, bolstered by that \$7 million corporate-welfare hand-out, will keep a few hundred positions in Indiana, at least for a time: It is planning a multi-million-dollar automation investment that eventually will eliminate many of them. The prevalence of automation as a cause of manufacturing’s declining share of the labor market (we manufacture much more in the United States than we did in the 1950s, but we need fewer people to do it) is terribly underappreciated, though we are pleased to have seen even such unlikely sources as the editor of *Mother Jones* lately acknowledge that technological development rather than a mythical race-to-the-bottom model of capitalism is and probably will continue to be the single greatest source of pressure on manufacturing jobs and wages. It is unlikely that any package of targeted tax breaks is going to be substantial enough to turn around the economics there.

And it is unlikely that the tax breaks were the effective instrument in this deal, either. Carrier is a division of United Technologies, an industrial-and-aerospace giant that derives about 25 percent of its revenue from government contracts, 10 percent from defense contracts alone. It had been offered a substantially similar deal by Indiana’s local economic-development agency before the election and rejected it. It is illegal to threaten a company with losing its government contracts in retaliation for its refusal to take into account a given politician’s political needs, but the CEO of United and knowledgeable sources in Indiana both frankly acknowledged that fear of such retaliation is what inspired United to give Trump a post-election victory in Indiana, however symbolic.

Seeing to the long-term economic policy of the United States is not an occasion for ad-hocracy, for flitting willy-nilly between crises, real or perceived, and intervening with the force of the presidency. It is, rather, a far-reaching project involving a consistent and enlightened understanding of everything from federal regulation (here, Trump has encouraging instincts) to tax policy, education, and much more. We are not going to ensure that there are good blue-collar jobs for Americans who work in places like Carrier factories 30 years hence by bribing and pressuring a few companies here and there to keep on a few hundred workers in exchange for some political goodwill. What Trump and Pence have done here is not economic policy at all, but pure politics of a not especially fruitful kind.

EDITOR’S NOTE: The next issue of NATIONAL REVIEW will appear in three weeks.

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Superman Politics

Trump's Carrier deal is government busyness, not the government's business

BY KEVIN D. WILLIAMSON

THE strange thing about bailouts, such as the one Donald Trump and Mike Pence just organized for the Carrier air-conditioner company, is that they are detested in theory but relatively popular in practice, at least when they are put together by your guy. When Barack Obama boasted of having saved GM, he wasn't scoffed at as a meddling know-nothing who used other people's money to save incompetent corporate managers and rapacious union goons from their own stupidity and excesses—he was considered a friend of the working man, or at least a well-intentioned would-be friend.

The automaker bailouts were never generally popular. A small majority of Americans disapproved of them, but that majority was lopsided: Sixty-three percent of Democrats approved of the bailouts, while 73 percent of Republicans opposed them. Political tribalism is strong here: The Trump-Pence Carrier handout is supported by 40 percent of Democrats, 54 percent of independents, and a remarkable 87 percent of Republicans, according to a *Politico* poll.

Carrier, it is worth noting, is not a bankrupt, struggling dinosaur manufacturer like GM: It turned a handsome profit of nearly \$3 billion in 2015.

United Technologies, a large manufacturing conglomerate that owns Carrier along with Otis elevators and Pratt & Whitney engines, operates a few facilities in Mike Pence's home state of Indiana. While the presidential campaign was under way, it announced that it was going to relocate one of those facilities, a furnace plant, to Mexico, along with the jobs associated with it. A second facility was to be relocated as well, affecting a total of about 2,000 jobs. That this was happening in his vice-presidential nominee's backyard was embarrassing for Trump.

Trump likes to talk tough about trade and outsourcing, but his actual strategy with Carrier was the usual political approach: showering the firm with other people's money. In exchange for at least \$7 million in tax incentives, Carrier will . . . do almost everything it was planning to do anyway: It will close Indiana facilities, and it will move manufacturing and manufacturing jobs to Mexico. The fig leaf is 800 jobs that will be "saved" in Indiana, a figure that includes at least 300 positions that never were scheduled for offshoring to begin with. Carrier will be using those tax incentives to improve the automation in its U.S. facilities, i.e., to replace Indiana workers with robots instead of Mexicans.

United Technologies, like General Electric and Lockheed Martin, is deeply

enmeshed in government. It derives at least 25 percent of its revenue from government contracts, 10 percent of it from the Department of Defense alone. It is not a company that can afford to have an enemy in the White House or the Pentagon. Which is to say that Trump, who prides himself on his negotiating skills, entered the negotiation with a very strong hand. Spending a few million dollars a year on more expensive labor in Indiana is chump change compared with the \$5.6 billion in aircraft engines and components United sold to the federal government last year.

Set aside, for the moment, the fact that using those federal contracts as leverage is kinda sorta technically illegal. It is difficult to imagine that a mere matter of law would prevent Trump from playing that card, and knowledgeable players such as former Indiana lieutenant governor John Mutz, who sits on the board of the Indiana Economic Development Corporation, are frank about the larger financial stakes for United, as indeed is the firm's CEO, who told Jim Cramer that the possibility of losing its government contracts weighed on his decision to give Trump a win in Indiana, however symbolic. In fact, Mutz's organization had put together a similar proposal and was rejected by the company. Trump's deal was substantially the same, but it was coming from the president-elect.

So, why didn't Trump get more?

The answer is probably straightforward: He didn't need more. Trump began his public life as a creature of the tabloid press in New York and is now a creature of social media. He was an incompetent casino operator and hotelier, but he understands publicity and has a genuine gift for it—without that, he'd just be another Fifth Avenue doofus who inherited a \$200 million real-estate portfolio from his dad. There will be a day or two of headlines with the words "Trump," "deal," "Indiana," and "jobs," and that suits Trump. The emptiness of the deal will be documented and lamented by the 0.4 percent of Americans who follow these things closely.

The Carrier bailout is awful, of course. It is a case of two politicians' using public funds to bribe a business into doing things that benefit them personally and politically while creating no real long-term economic value. Pence, who dropped his free-market principles like the world's

hottest potato once he got within sniffing distance of presidential power, can burnish his populist credentials at the taxpayers' expense, and Trump can get ready to flit on to the next publicity stunt.

But the emerging "Superman" politics here are truly poisonous. One of the genre conventions of superhero stories is the compression of all the world's drama into the immediate presence of the hero—only his actions and intentions are relevant. People may be dying all over the world, but Superman saves Lois Lane. (Comic-book movies have lately subverted that convention by focusing on the collateral damage done by superheroes to the cities in which they live.) What that means in the context of our contemporary presidential politics is that no one takes any note of the fact that Carrier is not the only HVAC company in the United States or the only industrial concern in Indiana. Carrier has competitors that employ Americans, pay taxes, and produce real economic value, and they have been put at a relative disadvantage by the political favoritism extended to Carrier. What about them? They're not on the stage, so they do not matter.

What is important to understand here is that this is not part of an economic-development agenda: It is theater. It is an adolescent fantasy of political power, and wherever Superman happens to land is where the action is. Nothing else is relevant. It does not matter that there is no broader logic at work: Small displays of efficacy can work to create an illusion of general efficacy. It is busyness as business.

This is, by his own account, Trump's conception of the purpose of the presidency: to go from situation to situation and "make deals." But a long-term economic program for the United States—one that accounts for, e.g., that big automation investment in Indiana and what it means for the future of the American work force—is not a deal to be made. Preventing a single symbolically important act of offshoring is a fundamentally different thing from understanding the underlying economic forces that make that offshoring attractive—as the Germans will tell you, it isn't just about low wages—and governing in a way that puts those forces to work in Americans' interests.

Trump's big idea so far is spending \$7 million of other people's money to delay an embarrassing headline. Some deal. Some deal-maker.

NR

Protection Racket

Critics of free trade traffic in myths

BY RAMESH PONNURU

ADVOCACY for free trade can sometimes be dogmatic and utopian. It can overstate the contribution that reducing trade barriers makes to the spread of peace and democracy. It can ignore the harm that liberalized trade does to particular workers, industries, and communities. It can assert, dubiously, an absolute right to trade, positing that governments should never interfere in voluntary economic transactions.

People who want to raise trade barriers—by, for example, imposing higher tariffs to discourage the purchase of imports—often deny that they are protectionists and say that they themselves support free trade. They say they are merely

should reconsider "this obsession with free trade." It's not an obsession our government exhibits.

Two: Trade deficits hurt the economy, and reducing the trade deficit would help the economy. Wilbur Ross, Trump's nominee for commerce secretary, says it's "Econ 101" that a trade deficit "weakens our economy." Gross domestic product is calculated by adding together consumption, investment, government spending, and exports, and then subtracting imports; Ross reasons that increased imports therefore reduce GDP. Along with Peter Navarro, another Trump adviser, Ross has written that we can eliminate our \$500 billion trade deficit and our economy will be \$500 billion larger.

That's a non sequitur. Imports add to economic welfare; that's why people buy them. Ross is assuming that imports are always substitutes for domestic production. On this assumption, levying tariffs on imported steel would not harm any American companies that use steel: They'd buy the same amount of steel at the same price from domestic producers, and

Imports add to economic welfare; that's why people buy them.

being pragmatic rather than doctrinaire about it. Thus President-elect Donald Trump and his trade advisers say they are for trade deals, just smarter ones than the U.S. has been making over the last several decades. But while the case for freeing trade can be exaggerated, the case for protectionism frequently traffics in outright misconceptions.

One: The U.S. practices "unfettered free trade." Both Bernie Sanders and Joe Scarborough have used this terminology. It's true that by historical standards, the U.S. government leaves trade relatively free. But there are some fetters. We levy 25 percent tariffs on imported light trucks, for example, and slap quotas on imports of cotton. The U.S. International Trade Commission reports that we impose more than 300 special protective duties, including nearly 200 on iron and steel products. A Credit Suisse report suggests that from 1990 through 2013, the U.S. imposed more trade barriers than any other country. (I'm indebted to a post by Scott Lincicome of the Cato Institute for these points.) Incoming White House chief of staff Reince Priebus recently said that we

be just as efficient as before. In the real world we should expect some combination of reduced purchases and increased prices, along with lower productivity.

Large trade deficits have often accompanied strong economic growth; so have rising trade deficits. The U.S. trade deficit grew through the 1990s, for example. Attempts to link trade deficits to the loss of manufacturing jobs are not persuasive, either. The European Union has a trade surplus, but it is losing those jobs too. (Higher productivity has been killing manufacturing jobs nearly everywhere.)

A more sophisticated argument against trade deficits holds that they weaken "aggregate demand," as Keynesians put it, since money sent abroad is no longer circulating here, and since central banks may not always be able to counteract this effect by running a more expansionary monetary policy. Whatever the merits of that theoretical argument, though, it cannot apply today. The Fed has been tightening monetary policy: It raised interest rates last year and says it expects to keep raising them. If it wants a looser policy, it can cut them instead.



The Infrastructure Bank We Need

It would help markets help us build things

BY SAMUEL R. STALEY

Three: New research has strengthened the case against free trade. A study released earlier this year suggested that trade with China had caused more job losses than previously believed—perhaps a quarter of all manufacturing-job losses between 1991 and 2007. But it also suggested that this job loss could partly be attributed to China’s growing more efficient by privatizing state-owned enterprises and cutting tariffs on inputs its producers imported, and it suggested that the impact of trade with China on jobs is already in the rear-view mirror. The details of the analysis do not point in the direction of raising American tariffs now.

Four: We can cut the trade deficit while making America more attractive to foreign investors. Trump took credit when a Japanese bank announced it would invest in the U.S. But if our trade deficit declines, then so must our net inflow of capital. That’s just math. Trump has tweeted that by putting tariffs on companies that move jobs overseas, he is signaling that America is open for business. But either it will be less open to foreign investors or American investors will have to find more opportunities abroad. (This effect is another reason that Ross’s use of the formula for GDP is misleading: These shifts in capital flows would affect consumption and investment.)

Five: Changing the tax code will eliminate the trade deficit. The Trump advisers’ promise to eliminate the trade deficit is largely based on the idea that many other countries’ tax codes discriminate against us. Those countries have value-added taxes that apply to their imports but exempt their exports—a “backdoor tariff,” the advisers say. They want the World Trade Organization to crack down on the practice. They’re wrong: A tariff discrimi-

nates between imports and domestically produced goods in an attempt to discourage the purchase of the former. Value-added taxes apply to both, covering domestically consumed goods regardless of their origin.

Other Republicans, including Speaker of the House Paul Ryan, want to move toward a business consumption tax that treats trade the way value-added taxes do: exempting exports and applying to imports. Economic theory suggests that if we took this step, the dollar would appreciate and the trade balance would be unchanged.

Six: Trump has a mandate to raise trade barriers. Polling on this subject is equivocal, with several polls suggesting that Americans look favorably on trade and are even mildly supportive of the much-maligned Trans-Pacific Partnership (which Trump has vowed to kill). The Chicago Council on Global Affairs found that while Trump’s core supporters are less likely than most Americans to say that globalization has been “mostly good for the United States,” even 49 percent of them agree.

The polling does not show a great deal of public interest in trade policy. Gallup regularly asks respondents to its survey to name the greatest problem facing the country. In October, 10 percent said “race relations” or “racism”; 7 percent said “immigration” or “illegal immigration”; 4 percent said “health care.” Add up “foreign trade” and the “trade deficit,” and you get an asterisk: Less than 1 percent of respondents brought up the topic.

Trump and some of his advisers have strong views on trade and are in a position to act on them. But those views are not well founded, and the country is not clamoring to see them put into practice. **NR**

ON the campaign trail this year, Donald Trump stumped for \$1 trillion worth of infrastructure investments, promising to shore up America’s flagging road networks, water systems, utilities, telecommunications systems, and public facilities. In the weeks since his election, Trump has made clear that this infrastructure package will be an immediate priority for his administration. And that means that a national infrastructure bank might end up back at the top of the policy agenda after almost a decade of gridlock in Congress, as House and Senate Republicans look for ways to forge a more cooperative relationship with the White House.

The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) estimates that the U.S. faces a funding gap of \$1.6 trillion over the next eight years, or \$201 billion annually, for a wide range of infrastructure. More than half of that deficit is concentrated in surface transportation (e.g., highways, commuter trains, ports). Highway- and road-infrastructure experts David Hartgen and Greg Fields estimate that commuters spend more than an entire work week each year stuck in traffic in Arizona, California, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Texas, and Virginia. More than one-fifth of the nation’s bridges are deficient and in need of repair.

This problem is not new; the ASCE has been harping on it since 1998. Everyone agrees that our infrastructure is in need of modernization. The question

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has been what role the federal government should play in modernizing it.

The Obama administration floated the concept of a federal infrastructure bank early in its first term, but the idea went nowhere even with a Democratic-controlled Congress. Democrats wanted to use the infrastructure bank as a means of deepening ties between the government and business, building a pot of public money that could lure private investors to public-private “partnerships” that would carry out the projects the government prioritized. Under some proposals, the bank would have made direct loans to public authorities, effectively becoming an unaccountable conduit for federal grants to politically preferred projects and government agencies. Republicans balked, stiffening their resistance after the 2010 midterm elections, which gave them control of the House.

But Trump’s White House might now create a window of opportunity to make the infrastructure bank a reality. A properly

investments to be evaluated by rate-of-return calculations and cost-benefit analyses. Such sources of capital also encourage local authorities to think beyond simply levying taxes and instead take advantage of market-based revenues and pricing. And revenue streams that are generated by users and tied to service delivery are ultimately more sustainable, making the future maintenance costs of new projects less daunting.

Conceived with these characteristics in mind, a properly designed bank would start private funds flowing to worthwhile public-private partnerships and perhaps even to privately developed and operated projects.

An existing program piloted under President Bill Clinton, expanded under President George W. Bush, and continued under the Obama administration provides the outlines of how a Trump-era bank might succeed. Reason Foundation transportation-infrastructure expert Robert W. Poole Jr. notes that the U.S.

legislative appropriations, before they could qualify for a loan. It would also apply performance measures to subsidized projects, clearly defining and measuring progress and tying continued financing to loan performance. This would ensure that loans are evaluated on their economic merit rather than by a political standard, improving the overall performance of the bank.

The gridlock that has prevented us from addressing the nation’s infrastructure problems is not the result of the private sector’s unwillingness to fund infrastructure projects. It is the fault of federal, state, and local governments that either cannot or simply don’t want to tap into capital markets and public-private partnership opportunities to upgrade their systems and improve productivity. As Poole writes in the industry newsletter *Public Works Financing*, what infrastructure-fund investors and the private companies that implement infrastructure projects “lament is the lack of a pipeline

A properly designed bank could implement **fiscally conservative, free-market solutions** to the nation’s infrastructure problems.

designed bank could implement fiscally conservative, free-market solutions to the nation’s infrastructure problems. By eschewing grants and centering its business model on a revolving loan fund—a portfolio that is replenished by the repayments of loans—such a bank would transparently finance large public projects. Loan performance would become a criterion for judging the bank’s effectiveness, giving it an incentive to invest in only the most viable projects. The key to the bank’s success would be leveraging private capital, rather than substituting taxpayer funds for private-investor funds.

Many large-scale infrastructure projects charge the public for their use, as anyone who’s ever paid a highway toll or a water bill will attest. The foreknowledge that a project will create a stream of revenue through such user fees can help to attract private investment that gets the project built. Many private investors are willing to take on the risk of bridge financing—funding early-stage construction—as long as they can tap into user-generated revenues once the projects open. As an indicator of willingness to pay, the promise of user fees allows

Department of Transportation’s TIFIA (Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act) program is an example of a “fiscally conservative, taxpayer friendly way” for the government to administer loans for infrastructure projects. TIFIA leverages private-sector capital while requiring investment-grade ratings for the projects it considers. Most experts believe the program has worked well, enabling the construction of new facilities that could not have been built without private participation. If all bank loans are tied to capital projects that are sustainable with market-driven revenue, ensuring that the projects with the greatest likelihood of success are prioritized, the nation can avoid substantial tax increases and minimize the risks taken with taxpayer dollars.

Of course, some capital projects, such as schools and rural water systems, don’t generate sufficient user revenues to be built without public subsidies. A smartly designed infrastructure bank would require that those projects be paid for with a mix of user fees and dedicated revenue streams such as earmarked sales taxes, rather than with

of U.S. projects,” not the lack of incentive to invest. The U.S. has a target-rich environment for private capital, but the targets don’t necessarily want to play, often preferring to wait for taxpayer-funded grants to shore up dilapidated or outmoded facilities.

Some of the public-sector inefficiencies are startling. Economist Lawrence McQuillan recently highlighted the extraordinary incompetence of certain state departments of transportation, bestowing the Independent Institute’s Golden Fleece Award on California’s transportation department for its wastefulness and inattention to service quality. The agency has a backlog of some 30,000 maintenance-service requests that have gone unresolved for 90 days or more, even as its \$10 billion budget funds about 3,300 staff positions that are unnecessary. Government agencies rife with this kind of complacency and ineffectiveness are unlikely to look to the private sector to improve service delivery or fill infrastructure gaps.

A national infrastructure bank, properly designed and constrained, could change this dynamic by providing incentives for

public agencies to play ball. Specifically, Trump's administration could mandate loan criteria that would encourage state and local governments to adopt pricing policies that accurately reflect full operational costs; to create sustained revenue tied to product delivery and quality; and to utilize private capital. This would help the public sector identify and set priorities for the services it delivers. If public services can be sustained through market pricing, and government facilitates the process of connecting private capital markets (and operators) to the public sector, significant headway toward closing the infrastructure-funding gap can be made relatively quickly.

The private sector's value in building infrastructure is not theoretical. Across the globe, other nations have learned to embrace private investment in their efforts to create new infrastructure, maintain existing systems, and upgrade systems falling into disrepair. The entire limited-access highway network in France is managed by private companies using tolls. Just in the past month, *Public Works Financing* reported financial closings with the private sector for \$9 billion worth of transportation megaprojects in the U.S., including investments in LaGuardia Airport, Maryland's mass-transit Purple Line, and Texas's SH 288 toll road. Canada has finalized agreements for transit and highway projects worth \$3.7 billion. Deals have been closed on transportation projects in Colombia, Chile, France, Mexico, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Slovakia, and Japan. China developed most of its highway and rail network using private capital in the mid 1980s and 1990s.

The U.S. has fallen behind in large part because our public authorities have too often been unwilling, or unable for political reasons, to tap into markets. This is where Trump's private-sector inclinations might provide an important boost to efforts to revitalize and modernize America's infrastructure if he is willing to spend his political capital on making his campaign-trail promises a reality. At long last, there is an opportunity to improve public-service delivery and put our nation's infrastructure on a sustainable financial path. It will be up to President Trump, his political appointees, and their allies in Congress to make it happen. **NR**

Calls To Arms

The pregnant question of Germany, Japan, and their militaries

BY JAY NORDLINGER

GERMANY and Japan have not been known for military forays since 1945. Much of the world has liked it that way. So have many Germans and Japanese. But a new era is upon us. Germany and Japan are venturing out, to a degree. They are rethinking their military postures. After 70 years, this was perhaps inevitable. In any case, it is so.

The Germans are sending a battalion to the Baltic states—specifically, to Lithuania. Japan is sending troops to South Sudan under new rules of engagement: They may use force, not only to defend themselves but to defend others. More broadly, Germany and Japan must think about new or increased threats. They also must think about a new America, which is ready to drop or lighten burdens of long standing.

Not everyone was happy about the reunification of Germany. Prominent among the unhappy was Margaret Thatcher, who said, "We beat the Germans twice, and now they're back." Her fellow Briton, General Ismay, had made a famous remark. He was the first secretary-general of NATO. And he described the alliance's purpose as "to keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down."

Eventually, many people decided that Germany had been down long enough. Radek Sikorski made a famous statement of his own, when he was foreign minister of Poland. The year was 2011 and he was speaking in Berlin: "I will probably be the first Polish foreign minister in history to say so, but here it is: I fear German power less than I am beginning to fear German inactivity. You have become Europe's indispensable nation."

President Obama has made clear his distaste for "free-riders," as he calls them: nations that ride freely on the back of the United States, without paying for their own defense. And this was

a theme of Donald Trump's presidential campaign. In August, speaking to a rally in Florida, he said, "I don't want to get rid of NATO—but you always have to be prepared to walk. It's possible. Okay?"

In recent years, Germany has not been exactly a wallflower on the international scene. They are part of the Afghan coalition, of course: That war is a NATO operation, among other things. The United States invoked Article 5 (which says that an attack on one is an attack on all). Germany was not part of the Iraq coalition, though they trained Iraqis in countries outside Iraq (including in Germany itself). They have been in Africa—in Mali, for example, and they are planning to build an outpost in Niger. This is all with an eye to counterterrorism. And they have been arming and training Kurds in the fight against ISIS.

But it is Russia that has really concentrated the German mind. In 2014, Vladimir Putin's state annexed the Crimea, and made war in the Donbass region of Ukraine. This was alarming in Berlin and throughout NATO, and it was particularly alarming in the Baltic states, the eastern flank of NATO. The alliance decided to send fresh battalions to those states: Britons to Estonia, Canadians to Latvia, and Germans to Lithuania.

The Lithuanian president, Dalia Grybauskaitė, made an exuberant statement. "I think we are at a historic turning-point," she said. "First, a lot of time has passed, and a breakthrough is occurring in the German mindset: Time for self-doubt, fear, reluctance to take responsibility, and dread of what Putin might think is over."

Lithuania aside, Germany is embarked on a large expansion of its military. In October, the chancellor, Angela Merkel, explained, "In the 21st century, we won't be getting as much help as we got in the 20th." She continued, "We have to spend more for our external security. The conflicts of this world are currently on Europe's doorstep, massively so."

In saying this, she was surely thinking of Middle Eastern and African migration, as well as Russia.

Constanze Stelzenmüller is an expert on Germany and Europe at the Brookings Institution. And she notes a dog not barking: a lack of protest within Germany

over the government's new direction. (There is a lack of protest in Europe at large, too.) Yes, there is some dissatisfaction from certain quarters, but mainly there is agreement. This is in amazing contrast, Stelzenmüller says, with the huge protests that took place over the installation of U.S. missiles in the early 1980s. At the time, she was in Bonn, the West German capital, studying law. She could barely get to class for the crowds.

Visiting Lithuania in September, the German defense minister, Ursula von der Leyen, made a declaration: "It's time to move forward to a Euro-

pean defense union." She said that such a union would complement and strengthen NATO. Plus, it is "what the Americans expect us to do." A few months earlier, President Grybauskaitė had made a telling statement: "With Britain withdrawing from the European Union, but remaining a NATO member, responsibility for stability in Europe will increasingly fall on the shoulders of Germany—not only for economic stability, but also for security."

In Germany, the idea of Europe is fundamental. "The Russians are meddling with the European project," says Stelzenmüller, "which is the foundation of German prosperity, stability, and peace. It is the be-all, end-all of German power."

I think of Willy Brandt, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1971. He was the West German chancellor, and he won the prize for his rapprochement with countries to his east. Here is a passage from his Nobel lecture, given in Oslo:

I say here what I say in Germany: A good German cannot be a nationalist. A good German knows that he cannot refuse a European calling. Through Europe, Germany returns to itself and to the constructive forces of its history. Our Europe, born of the experience of suffering and failure, is the imperative mission of reason.



Members of the Japan Self-Defense Forces arrive as peacekeepers in South Sudan, November 21, 2016.

Constanze Stelzenmüller says, "There is a general sense that there's a tsunami heading Europe's way." This question of military power—of doing the necessary, militarily—"is about values, interests, and the integrity of Europe. And it's about Germany and our future, damn it."

A Japanese politician won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1974. (To be most accurate, he shared it with an Irish politician, Seán MacBride.) That was Eisaku Sato, who had been prime minister from 1964 to 1972. In giving him the prize, the Norwegian committee was essentially honoring the peaceful nature of modern Japan.

Lecturing in Oslo, Sato pointed out that "the philosophy of the Kellogg-Briand Pact" is enshrined in the Japanese constitution. This treaty of 1928—still in effect, believe it or not—outlaws war as a means of settling disputes. Japan signed in 1928. It was the first to break the pact, in 1931. Needless to say, it would be far from the last.

Japan's constitution took effect in 1947, imposed on the country by the victorious Americans. The most famous part of the constitution is Article 9. Sato quoted from it in his lecture, and so will I: "Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever

renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or the use of force as means of settling international disputes." Forever is a long time.

Article 9 goes on to say that "land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained." *Never*:

For all this time, the United States has been the guarantor of Japan's defense. Japan does not lack money: It is the world's third-largest economy. (Germany is the fourth.) But the Kellogg-Briand philosophy has held sway—and so has the constitution. Japan has participated in American-led wars by donating money: many billions of dollars. Japan actually contributed troops to the Iraq War, but not in combat roles.

In the last 25 years, Japanese have been blue helmets. That is, they have taken part in the peacekeeping operations of the United Nations. The first was in 1992, in Cambodia. Since 2012, the Japanese have been in South Sudan, the world's newest nation—but not so new that it isn't rocked by civil war. Indeed, South Sudan is a hell on earth.

Among the victims have been U.N. peacekeepers and foreign-aid workers. They have been raped and murdered. In this context, recent Japanese legislation is interesting.

In 2014, the government approved a “reinterpretation” of the constitution, permitting Japanese forces to come to the aid of allies under attack. In 2015, this reinterpretation was made law, in a couple of wild sessions. The floor of the Japanese parliament, the National Diet, was the scene of *mêlées*. Legislators confronted one another physically over this departure from tradition. But the government’s view prevailed.

And Japan has now sent troops back to South Sudan under new rules: The troops may defend themselves, fellow peacekeepers, other international personnel, and civilians. What they may not do is engage an army—an official army. This is a problem in that South Sudanese troops have attacked international personnel (among others). What are the Japanese troops supposed to do in such an eventuality?

Troops in South Sudan are of considerable interest to the Japanese public, but South Sudan is small beer compared with threats from neighbors: North Korea and China in particular. Kim Jong-un is shaking his nuclear rattle. And how long can the Japanese depend on their American patron?

Campaigning in March, Donald Trump said, “Japan is better if it protects itself against this maniac of North Korea.” Campaigning in August, he said, “Do you know that if Japan is attacked, we have to get involved probably with World War III, right? If *we’re* attacked, Japan doesn’t have to do nothing. They can sit home and watch Sony television. Right? It’s true.”

After Trump was elected president, the Japanese prime minister, Shinzo Abe, was very eager to meet with him. In fact, Abe became the first foreign minister to meet with the president-elect. Afterward, he said that the two had had a “very candid discussion.”

Abe has long called for Japan to become a “normal,” or more normal, country—a country that can defend itself, for example. Germany is well on the way to normality. These two countries have been on the sidelines, for understandable reasons. But what did Grybauskaitė, the Lithuanian president, say? “A lot of time has passed.” A lot of time has passed between 1945 and today. Historically, it has been the blink of an eye. But to many people, here and now, it’s feeling long enough. **NR**

Glenn the Good

*He was more than brave
and intelligent*

BY JOSH GELERNTER

ON February 2, 1959, 35 American test pilots arrived at the Pentagon. Each of them had a college degree, and each was active-duty military; each had received vague orders telling him to dress like a civilian and come to Washington for a briefing.

In a Pentagon conference room, two NASA engineers told the pilots that NASA was going to send men to space and needed volunteers. It would be a hazardous undertaking. So hazardous, the pilots were told, that if they didn’t choose to volunteer, no record of the briefing would appear in their files; it wouldn’t be held against them in any way.

These 35 pilots were the first of three groups of pilots NASA had invited to D.C. There were so many volunteers from the first two groups that the third was sent home.

Six of the volunteers turned out to be too tall to fit into the Mercury capsules; dozens more failed during the unbelievably strenuous medical tests. Jim Lovell, who would fly on Apollo 8 and command Apollo 13, developed liver problems and had to drop out. Pete Conrad, who would be the third man to walk on the moon, quit when the tests got too invasive and required one enema too many. (They were both persuaded to reapply when NASA started recruiting its second class of astronauts.)

In the end, NASA chose seven men, each under six feet, with an outstanding service record and a “genius-level IQ.” They were all test pilots at a time when test-piloting was suffused with the magic of the sound barrier, Chuck Yeager, and rocket planes. Three of the seven flew for the Navy, three for the Air Force, and one for the Marines.

The Navy men were Scott Carpenter, Wally Schirra, and Alan Shepard; the

Air Force men were Gordo Cooper, Gus Grissom, and Deke Slayton—who, in his autobiography, described meeting the other Mercury astronauts for the first time:

Al Shepard seemed kind of cold and standoffish. . . . Wally Schirra was telling a joke. . . . I couldn’t help but like Gus Grissom, who was, like me, another Air Force test pilot. Scott Carpenter I had met at Lovelace [Medical Clinic]. Gordo I knew by sight from Edwards [Air Force Base].

They hauled us into the auditorium at NASA headquarters and introduced us to the press. “Ladies and gentleman . . . the astronaut volunteers.” . . .

I’ve never seen anything like it, before or since. It was just a frenzy of light bulbs and questions . . . it was some kind of roar. I know I stumbled through a couple answers. . . . We were sitting in alphabetical order, so I was at the far left end of the table next to Al Shepard. He was as surprised as I was.

What the real surprise was was watching John Glenn. He ate this stuff up. Somebody asked if our wives were behind us. Six of us said, “Sure,” as if that had ever been a real consideration. Glenn piped up with a damn speech about God and family and destiny. We all looked at him, then at each other.

Six of the Mercury Seven didn’t have a sentimental bone in their bodies, but once Glenn got going, that didn’t matter. “By the next morning,” writes Tom Wolfe in *The Right Stuff*, “the seven Mercury astronauts were national heroes”:

James Reston of the *New York Times* had been so profoundly moved by the press conference and the sight of the seven brave men that his heart, he confessed, now beat a little faster. “What made them so exciting,” he wrote, “was not that they said anything new but that they said all of the old things with such fierce convictions. . . . They spoke of ‘duty’ and ‘faith’ and ‘country’ like Walt Whitman’s pioneers. . . . This is a pretty cynical town, but nobody went away from these young men scoffing at their courage and idealism.”

In the years after Glenn got out of NASA and into politics, he was frequently accused of having tailored himself to suit the public. The Mercury

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Seven were stationed at Langley Air Force Base, and six of them lived with their families on the base or nearby. Glenn left his wife and kids 170 miles away, in Arlington; he made a point of living alone in Spartan bachelor quarters, with just a bed, a few books, and his Bible. He exercised relentlessly where he knew everyone on the base would see him. The other astronauts drove sports cars; Glenn drove an old rust-bucket Peugeot. He was ostentatiously abstemious.

Before he became an astronaut, he'd already been a minor celebrity for having set the coast-to-coast speed record, jetting from California to New York at an average speed just under the speed of sound. But Glenn hadn't been chosen to set the speed record; setting the speed record, as a military PR stunt, had been his idea, and he chose himself. Later on, as soon as he became the first American to orbit the earth, he wasted no time engineering his exit from NASA and his entrance to politics. More than a few NASA men were irritated to see him make his second space flight when he was 77, after decades in the Senate and a run for president.

In memoriam, Glenn is getting the respect he deserves as a war hero, an astronaut, and a senator; he also deserves a lot of credit for his evident earnestness. When the Mercury Seven were chosen, the country could easily have been presented with the astronaut as fighter-jockey—hard-drinking, hard-fighting, tough as nails, and frightened of nothing. That was the reputation that naturally accompanied seven test pilots. The country would gladly have accepted its astronauts just that way.

Instead, Glenn invented the NASA mystique—the astronaut as clean-cut, all-American, aw-shucks superman. He invented it at the press conference introducing the Mercury Seven, and it endures to this day. To his Mercury colleagues, he was coming out of left field, but in a few long answers about needing support from his wife, about teaching Sunday school and serving on church boards, he set the tone. A reporter asked about the astronauts' religious affiliation, and Glenn said he was "a Protestant Presbyterian" who took his "religion very seriously, as a matter of fact." He went on:



John Glenn beside the Mercury-Atlas 6 spacecraft Friendship 7

I was brought up believing that you are placed on Earth here more or less with sort of a 50–50 proposition, and this is what I still believe. We are placed here with certain talents and capabilities. It is up to each of us to use those talents and capabilities as best you can. If you do that, I think there is a power greater than any of us that will place the opportunities in our way, and if we use our talents properly, we will be living the kind of life we should live.

After his colleagues gave their own answers—perfunctory in comparison—Glenn added:

I think we would be most remiss in our duty if we didn't make the fullest use of our talents in volunteering for something that is as important as this is to our country and to the world in general

right now. This can mean an awful lot to this country, of course.

Glenn's unexpected earnestness was a hit with the press, a hit with the country, and a hit with NASA. Thanks to Glenn, instead of lovable but egotistical rocket pilots, the space race was run by champions of American values. It wasn't just the U.S. vs. the USSR, or the free market vs. Communism; it was goodness vs. the evil empire. And snide as some might be on the subject, encouraging the whole country to take pride in its unique, upright morality was one of NASA's great accomplishments—and one of Glenn's.

It deserves to be remembered right along with his orbits in *Friendship 7*, his war record, and his Senate record. John Glenn really was a remarkable man. God speed him.

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Toward a National Productivity Strategy

The case for a limited but important government role

BY ROBERT D. ATKINSON

‘TRUMPONOMICS”—to the extent that one can discern such a guiding philosophy at this early date—appears to be based on one key goal: growing middle-wage jobs by limiting low-skill immigration, building more infrastructure (construction jobs pay well), and, most important, reviving U.S. manufacturing, in part by radically limiting the transfer of jobs offshore. This helps explain why the president-elect has touted his deal to prevent Carrier from moving about 1,000 manufacturing jobs to Mexico.

The Carrier deal has dominated recent economic news, with responses running the gamut from “This is totally trivial” to “Picking winners only reduces economic welfare.” But the former characterization undervalues the types of jobs in question, and the latter is not always right. Encouraging Carrier to keep jobs can boost overall labor productivity because those jobs are more productive than the average U.S. job. Indeed, the U.S. Department of Labor has found that U.S. wages would have grown more than twice as fast from 2002 to 2007 had the economy not lost good-paying jobs in industries such as manufacturing (a trend most pronounced in swing states that Donald Trump won, including Florida, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin).

That said, efforts to create and retain high-value-added manufacturing jobs in the United States, while important for

keeping America economically competitive, won’t be enough to turn around the underlying productivity slump, because more than two-thirds of U.S. output is not traded internationally. What will really make America great is if the Trump administration establishes a comprehensive national productivity strategy.

Labor productivity, a tally of all the goods and services the country produces per hour of work, has been inching up at an anemic rate of just 1.2 percent per year since 2008. That’s half the rate of the prior 13 years. And in the last year, it has fallen. This is why wages and overall GDP growth have stagnated—not, as the Left claims, because the 1 percenters are taking all the gains.

Why worry about productivity and productivity policy? Without faster productivity growth, it will be impossible to raise living standards at the rate Americans expect. Indeed, the United States enjoys one of the world’s highest standards of living because the average U.S. worker today is so productive, producing in one hour what his counterpart a century ago produced in an entire day. If over the next 30 years U.S. productivity grows at the rate at which it grew from 1995 to 2004 rather than at the current rate, U.S. GDP (and per capita incomes) would increase by 150 percent instead of the currently projected 43 percent. Higher productivity also would afford the opportunity to enact fiscally responsible tax cuts, as every increase of one-tenth of a percentage point in productivity today adds \$50 billion to federal revenues ten years down the line. America’s

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ability to project power globally is directly related to its ability to increase productivity at a robust rate.

Why do we need to have a comprehensive productivity policy rather than just leaving it up to the market? Won't the traditional conservative formula of tax cuts, limited regulations, and free trade, maybe coupled with some public investment in basic research and education, do the job?

You would think that since most organizations benefit from increasing their productivity, market forces should provide plenty of motivation for them to do so. But in fact a host of market failures have held down productivity growth, making it necessary to adopt a national productivity strategy.

The first failure is that a firm does not capture all the benefits of its own investment; other firms, including its competitors, also benefit. As a result, firms make fewer productivity-enhancing investments than is optimal. This is the key rationale for the research-and-development tax credit, which is designed to stimulate additional private R&D spending by increasing the private rate of return from R&D (i.e., what the company earns), bringing it closer to the societal rate of return (what all companies earn from the investment). While economists have long shown that firms underinvest in R&D absent government incentives, new research suggests that companies

are often the same ones making decisions about whether to adopt it. In these cases, increased productivity often means that their own jobs are eliminated. Why, for example, would law firms not oppose competitors' provision of more-efficient legal services online, since it would result in fewer lawyers' practicing law?

Bear in mind that for-profit firms account for no more than two-thirds of U.S. output and that even some of these, such as those in the health-care industry, are heavily influenced by government policy, for better or worse. So any productivity strategy must include ways of improving productivity in government organizations, non-profit organizations, and for-profit industries that are deeply influenced by government. In particular, there is opportunity to boost productivity at all levels of government, which now uses information technology more to improve the quality of services than to cut the payroll—it often includes many unionized workers who resist IT-based automation.

Finally, many of the most important technologies driving productivity involve system interdependence. The effect is that organizations won't implement a technology unless others have already made associated technological changes. For example, appliance manufacturers might make a "smart" appliance that turns on only when the cost of electricity is below some threshold,

A host of market failures have held down productivity growth, making it necessary to adopt a national productivity strategy.

capture only about half of the total benefits that come from their investments in new capital equipment. The rest goes to other firms. So firms invest less than we need them to in new, productivity-enabling equipment.

Another market failure relates to uncertainty. Because increasing productivity often depends on adopting technologies that are emerging but not yet fully proven, many potential users will hold off until the payoff is clear. Economists refer to this challenge as "excess inertia" or, more commonly, the "penguin effect"—because, in a group of hungry penguins, most are loath to be the first to test the water, lest they become dinner for a predator. But if no penguin dives in, the whole group risks starvation.

A third market failure results from U.S. capital markets' having (d)evolved to reward short-term investing, leading firms to skimp on longer-term productivity-enhancing investments. Business R&D funding has shifted from basic and applied research to less risky and less productive product development, and publicly traded firms invest less in machinery and equipment than do privately owned ones.

A further challenge is that not all industries have the same incentive to raise their productivity. One reason is the "principal-agent" problem: Productivity increases can hurt those who would implement them. For example, while Ford and Toyota managers have strong incentives to adopt production automation, they might be slow to adopt managerial automation. In industries where workers "control the means of production," particularly professionalized ones—e.g., legal services, accounting, health care, real estate, optometry, and higher education—the workers negatively affected by automation

but why would they if the U.S. electric grid is not yet capable of time-of-day pricing? Why would people want personalized digital health records when little of the information doctors have is digitized? This chicken-or-egg dynamic exists for many other technologies, such as mobile payments, "intelligent" transportation systems, digital signatures and electronic IDs, and data-driven artificial intelligence. This is why, as described below, the Trump administration needs to put forward digital-transformation policies for these kinds of technologies. This is where smart government policies should come in.

To meet the productivity crisis, it's important first to understand its cause. Why has U.S. productivity growth stagnated? Most economists are little help here. Liberal economist Alan Blinder voices the thoughts of many in the field when he writes that "what's scary" about the slowdown "is that we don't know why" it's happening. Similarly, conservative economist Greg Mankiw writes that "policy makers don't have a lot of policy measures they can use to change pretax incomes"—in other words, to grow productivity.

What they are really saying, to paraphrase economist Moses Abramowitz, is that productivity is "the measure of their ignorance." Others, however, especially if their focus is at the meso-economic level of industries and firms, where most of the action related to productivity occurs, have at least an inkling of the slowdown's causes. "Most theories of growth are developed at the macroeconomic level—at 30,000 feet," Clay M. Christensen and Derek van Bever write in the *Harvard Business Review*.

“That perspective is good for spotting correlations between innovation and growth. To understand what causes growth, however, you have to crawl inside companies—and inside the minds of the people who invest in and manage them.”

In other words, you have to look in detail at firms, industries, and technologies. Take quality-adjusted investment in business equipment. It’s about 30 percent less as a share of GDP than it was three decades ago. Some of this decline may reflect a slowdown in the pace of tool improvement, because, outside the Internet and cellphones, the pace of technological innovation appears to have slowed, and much of current innovation is not focused on automating work, which is a key driver of productivity improvement. This trend has compounded the chicken-or-egg dynamic.

So what to do? If the Trump administration’s economic policy is focused predominantly on trade and restoring U.S. manufacturing, that could improve the country’s economic competitiveness, but it won’t be enough to get us out of our productivity crisis. It will happen only when we figure out how to produce more with less in most or all sectors of the economy, and it will happen faster if government policy is well organized to encourage it.

The first step is to get basic market conditions right: Maintain a strong rule of law, respect for property rights, reasonably competitive markets (too little competition limits productivity, but so too can too much), and limits on economic regulation. To that list, we should add a policy principle of firm-size agnosticism. Policymakers have long romanticized and distinctly favored small firms, which, in a system that could fairly be called “small-business cronyism,” enjoy preferential treatment in regulations, the tax code, spending (e.g., subsidized Small Business Administration loans), and procurement (the array of small-business set-asides whenever the federal government wants to buy something). Such policies lower U.S. productivity because, on average, small firms are far less productive than large firms.

The Trump administration could also revive a cultural attitude shared by most Americans until the last few decades: Embrace technological innovation and productivity. Seek to make the proverbial “better mousetrap.” Too many elites have begun to view innovation with suspicion, decrying it for, among other reasons, causing job loss.

On these points, most conservatives will probably agree. But more is needed, some of it heterodox from a conventional conservative perspective. Boosting productivity will require more and better “factor inputs”—things that a firm relies on to become more productive, including infrastructure, STEM education, and scientific and engineering research. With some of these inputs, such as education and infrastructure, the question of whether government provides what is needed directly (e.g., through public schools and government-owned roads) or provides incentives for its private production (e.g., through school vouchers and private toll roads) is tactical, not strategic. In other words, conservatives can have arguments about how government policy should be structured, but most conservatives should agree on the need for policy. For example, one can make a compelling argument that school vouchers and more private infrastructure would result in better outcomes, but it’s hard to make a good argument that better schools and infrastructure are not needed. In other cases—

most notably, basic and applied research—only increased government funding can fill the gap.

But spurring the expansion and improvement of factor inputs also won’t be enough in itself to maximize productivity growth. The administration and Congress also need to promote an array of policies focused explicitly on productivity. First among them should be policies designed to encourage firms to invest more in machinery, equipment, and software to replace labor.

Wait, policymakers will say. What about jobs? Won’t automation eventually leave most everyone unemployed? No, just the opposite. History, logic, and scores of economic studies all show that higher productivity is associated with faster job growth, not slower. Faster productivity growth frees up purchasing power, which in turn creates jobs. It stirs “animal spirits,” as Keynes called them, and encourages companies to invest and people to spend, creating a virtuous cycle of yet more economic activity and job creation. There is no reason to believe this will change in the future, despite what some techno-utopians claim about the transformative power of technologies such as artificial intelligence and robots. This dynamic of growth leading to purchasing power leading to jobs will exist as long as human needs remain unmet. And given that U.S. median income could increase by a factor of 10 (to \$510,000), with most people still having plenty of things to spend that money on (e.g., better vacations, a new boat, eating out more, a college education for their kids), we have a long way to go before we have to worry about running out of work (and even then productivity gains would be used to shorten the work week).

Anything that lowers the ratio of capital cost to labor cost will increase the substitution of technology for labor. So it would be a mistake if, in the forthcoming effort to reform the corporate tax code, existing but weak incentives to invest in capital equipment are jettisoned to offset the budgetary costs of a lower statutory rate. The Trump administration should instead seek to expand investment incentives by letting companies expense for tax purposes all the costs of capital equipment in the first year of use—or, if it is feeling particularly bold, by reinstating the investment tax credit that was eliminated in the 1986 tax reform.

Another way to lower the capital-to-labor cost ratio is to raise the cost of labor. One way to do that is to raise the minimum wage, albeit modestly. The former CEO of McDonald’s reported that, in response to the possibility that the minimum wage will be raised to \$15 an hour, McDonald’s began accelerating its deployment of self-serve kiosks and other automation technologies. Wonderful! Fewer low-wage jobs. Another way to lower the ratio is to limit low-skill immigration, as Trump has committed to do. Economists Orachos Napasintuwong and Robert D. Emerson estimate that limiting low-wage immigration would stimulate the adoption of labor-saving technology, with an increased substitution of capital for labor. If it’s harder to hire immigrant construction workers, a firm might be more likely to buy a robotic bricklayer. If California tomato farmers have a harder time hiring immigrant farm laborers, they might be more inclined to lease an automated tomato harvester.

Next, we need to accelerate the pace of innovation in automation technology. The possibilities are endless: robots that could replace janitors, waiters, and housekeepers; artificial-intelligence systems that could replace accountants and insurance agents; autonomous vehicles to replace car and truck drivers; new materials, such as longer-lasting house paint, to reduce the need for

maintenance and repair workers; and better drugs to cure diseases, reduce health-care costs, and reduce the demand for medical workers.

As a share of GDP, federal support for scientific research is lower than it was before Sputnik. Moreover, today's researchers shy away from R&D that could increase productivity, fearing political backlash. The National Robotics Initiative, run by the National Science Foundation, is focused only on robotic technology that complements workers, and not on technology that replaces them. After determining the areas of scientific research most likely to raise productivity, the administration should significantly increase its funding to them.

In addition to facilitating the development of better tools, a national productivity policy needs to promote their wider use, particularly in the case of those, such as drones and an electrical grid with time-of-day pricing, that have myriad applications across the economy. Government officials should be required to take productivity impacts into account when promulgating regulations (or reducing them). The federal government should be a lead adopter of the relevant technologies, using them to accomplish its own mission more efficiently. For example, many government agencies still have paper (or PDF) forms that citizens must fill out and fax or mail in. Simply catching up with the private sector and requiring that all forms be Web-enabled would boost efficiency.

Simply identifying good productivity policies is not the same thing as building the institutional competence and political will to develop and implement them.

A national productivity strategy must reflect how opportunities and constraints differ by industry. The government needs to understand better why productivity has fallen in, for example, the construction industry over the past two decades. The administration could help reverse the trend by giving construction companies stronger incentives to use building-information-modeling systems and other advanced technologies when erecting federal buildings and infrastructure. The administration also could support industry-led R&D consortia, such as the currently underfunded consortium Fiatch, which works on technology projects to boost construction-industry productivity. Finally, the administration should provide incentives for state and local governments to collaborate to streamline and align their varying building codes to promote industry productivity.

Construction is not the only industry with structural flaws that limit productivity improvement. Health care, transportation, higher education, financial services, and of course government itself could benefit from productivity strategies. Sometimes the federal government will need to spur disruption of recalcitrant industries. U.S. higher education is ripe for it in the form of massive open online courses, but such courses won't be widely instituted without government pressure, because no university wants to cannibalize its traditional courses and faculty. If the federal government began accepting, as qualifications for employment, alternatives to traditional college degrees, separating the instruction function of higher education from its credentialing function, a robust private-sector credentialing

market might develop, driving significant productivity improvement in higher education.

SIMPLY identifying good productivity policies is not the same thing as building the institutional competence and political will to develop and implement them. Concern with productivity is largely absent from the missions of all federal economic-policy institutions, which focus more on managing the business cycle. At present, boosting productivity should rank as more important, and the administration should make doing so the principal goal of its economic policy. It should establish a productivity commission, staffed not by economists but by engineers and business-administration experts, to analyze and advocate productivity policies and programs. It should also require every cabinet agency to develop a plan, within six months, for actions that will help drive productivity growth.

The recent economic slowdown has led pessimistic purveyors of the "dismal science" to tell us to get used to it. Larry Summers says we are in an age of structural stagnation. Robert Gordon laments the "fall of American growth." James Bullard, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, says that slow growth is the "new normal." But President-elect Trump didn't win by listening to conventional wisdom—and if he really wants to create good middle-class jobs, he shouldn't

start listening to it now. Instead, he should embrace a meso-level national productivity policy focused on firms and industries.

It will be much easier for the president-elect to do this if conservatives abandon their blind devotion to laissez-faire economics and put pragmatic productivity policies front and center. That would offer political opportunities as well, because the Democrats have largely given up on productivity growth, seeing it as something that helps only the 1 percent. By seizing this ground, Republicans can reinforce their standing as the party of growth. Conservatives should be forewarned, however, that they have to decide what's more important to them: untrammelled freedom or long-term prosperity, for some of these steps will require more government involvement in the economy, albeit to help business and spur growth. As the third great wave of industrialization and concentration was beginning to transform the U.S. economy in the 1930s and '40s, Friedrich Hayek wrote, with respect to the growth of corporations and government, "Personally, I should much prefer to have to put up with some such inefficiency than have organized monopoly control my ways of life." In other words, Hayek preferred small government and inefficiency to more-active government and more productivity growth. Trump voters seem to prefer the reverse: They want to make America great by restoring robust economic growth, even if it means that government plays a more active role in some sectors. Conservatives should respond by taking the best of free-market economics and combining it with a pro-productivity pragmatism.

NR

Taking On Iran

*To begin with,
scrap the nuclear deal*

BY RAY TAKEYH

As the Obama presidency fades from the scene, its most consequential and catastrophic legacy in foreign affairs is its Iran policy. Iran's clerical leaders today possess a nuclear infrastructure that is gradually expanding and is blessed by the international community. For the first time in its modern history, Tehran is in a commanding position from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean. Iran's leaders continue to castigate the United States from their platforms while their Revolutionary Guards taunt the American armada patrolling international waters. The incoming Trump administration should not just tinker with this legacy but cast it aside altogether.

President Barack Obama was the architect of his own Iran strategy, and brought to it his own peculiar concerns. For Obama, the success of the policy was measured not by the traditional benchmark of whether it arrested Iran's ambitions, but by the extent to which it propitiated a nation he thought had been abused for too long by the United States. His historical illiteracy was nowhere more on display than in Iran, as he reduced complex events to bumper-sticker slogans: America had overthrown a legitimately elected government of Iran in 1953 and then buttressed a cruel despot for nearly three decades. The clerical leaders are not hardened anti-Western ideologues but mere nationalists whose legitimate prerogatives have been trampled upon by arrogant Americans. And the Islamic Republic's imperial surge is a legitimate expression of a regional stakeholder. If a little history is a dangerous thing, in the hands of Obama it was absolutely toxic. The sum total of his achievements was the worst nuclear agreement in the history of U.S. arms-control diplomacy and an emboldened Iran rampaging across the Middle East.

The starting point of any sensible Iran policy will be to revisit key aspects of the Iran deal, which is formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The agreement's rapidly expiring sunset clauses ensure that Iran will soon embark on developing advanced centrifuges that operate efficiently at high velocity. Its research-and-development concessions are already allow-

ing Iran to modernize its nuclear infrastructure. And its economic concessions have damaged the once-formidable sanctions architecture that effectively hemmed in the mullahs' ambitions. All these core aspects of the accord must be reconsidered.

Although the proponents of the agreement insist that its international support makes it inviolable, it is important to note that the JCPOA was rejected by the House of Representatives and that 58 senators went on the record opposing it. An agreement rejected by a majority of legislators has no credibility. The sovereignty of the U.S. Congress outweighs any international body's embrace of an agreement damaging to American national interests. Should the Trump team wish to revisit or even abrogate the JCPOA, they have sufficient domestic political authority to justify their moves.

The question then becomes: To what type of civilian nuclear program is Iran entitled? At the moment, Iran is on the path of not just enriching uranium domestically but industrializing that capacity once the JCPOA's restrictions expire. The United States should set aside the agreement's sunset clauses and insist that Iran is entitled only to a modest and largely symbolic program. Whatever uranium Iran enriches must be permanently shipped abroad for processing into fuel rods that are difficult to convert for military purposes. And Iran may never have advanced centrifuges but must limit itself to small cascades of primitive machines. An oil-rich Iran does not require an elaborate nuclear network operating thousands of advanced centrifuges while accumulating tons of enriched uranium.

In attempting to persuade the Europeans to join the United States in strengthening the JCPOA, the new administration has some important cards to play. President Donald Trump will have a period of honeymoon in the alliance: The European leaders will initially be eager to get along with him. All these states have higher priorities than a flawed arms-control agreement with an unsavory theocracy. If setting a new Iran policy is one of the most important issues to the new president, they will be inclined to help. Given Trump's nascent relationship with Vladimir Putin, Russia might be more forthcoming on this issue than it has been. And should the Russians and the Europeans prove receptive, China will not wish to remain the sole and lonely obstacle to sensible revisions. Still, the manner in which the case is presented will be crucial.

In challenging some of the most problematic aspects of the agreement, the U.S. will merely be asking its partners in the so-called 5+1 (the U.S. plus Britain, France, Germany, Russia, and China) to return to the principles that they accepted up to 2013. It was the official 5+1 position until then that Iran would be entitled only to a small cascade of primitive centrifuge machines and that it could expand its program only after it satisfied the international community that the program was strictly for peaceful purposes. The reelected Obama administration, eager for an agreement and a legacy, cajoled other members of the coalition to abandon these positions for the sake of a deal; the new Trump administration would be asking the alliance to return to positions that it very recently considered prudent.

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BUT revising the JCPOA should not be the sole objective of a revamped Iran policy. During both the Obama and George W. Bush administrations, the United States did not have an actual Iran policy, but rather only a series of arms-control formulations. The most sensible contribution the Trump administration can make to regional stability is to conceive a strategy that stands up to Iran in the region and puts its domestic regime under stress. The “supreme leader,” Ali Khamenei, is presiding over a state with immense vulnerabilities, and the task of U.S. policy is to exploit all of them.

As it begins its transition to power, the Trump team should be wary of the accumulated wisdom it is bound to receive from the diplomatic corps and the intelligence community. In their briefings, the professional bureaucracy will insist that the mullahs are firmly in control of their state and that the regime’s hold on power is absolute and immutable. The professionals will likely warn that any attempts to forcefully confront Iran will only empower the so-called hard-liners. Such anachronistic postulations must be set aside if America is to have a successful Iran policy.

In the summer of 2009, the presidential election that returned Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to power by rigging the

As it did with Solidarity in Poland, the United States should find a way of establishing ties with forces of opposition within Iran. Given the Islamic Republic’s cruelty and corruption, the opposition spans the entire social spectrum. The Iranians have given up not just on the Islamic Republic, but even on religious observance, as mosques go empty during most Shiite commemorations. Three decades of theocratic rule has transformed Iran into one of the most secular nations in the world. The middle class and the working poor are equally hard pressed by the regime’s incompetence and corruption. Even the senior ayatollahs are beginning to realize the toll that has been taken on Shia Islam by its entanglement with politics. America has ready allies in Iran and must make an effort to empower those who share its values.

Economic sanctions are a critical aspect of any policy of pressuring the Islamic Republic. The experience of the past few years has shown that the United States has a real capacity to shrink Iran’s economy and bring it to the brink of collapse. It was this leverage that the Obama administration forfeited for the sake of a deficient arms-control accord. And it is this leverage that must be reestablished and redeployed. Instead of imploring Europeans to invest in Iran, as John Kerry is doing, we must return to the days of warning off

As it begins its transition to power, the Trump team should be wary of the accumulated wisdom it is bound to receive from the diplomatic corps and the intelligence community.

vote presented the theocratic state with the most consequential crisis of its lifetime. The Green Movement that exploded on the scene was a coalition of disenchanted clerics, restive youth, disenfranchised women, and impoverished elements of the middle class. The regime managed to regain control of the streets through brute violence against its own citizens, show trials in which regime loyalists confessed to fantastic crimes, and continued repression. However, the essential link between the state and society was severed during that summer’s riots. The Islamic Republic was never a typical totalitarian state, as its electoral procedures and elected institutions provided the public with at least impressions of democratic representation. That republican element of the regime provided it with a veneer of legitimacy—and in 2009, that legitimacy vanished. The clerical regime lingers on, but a state that relies on a terror apparatus cannot forever stifle the forces of change.

Trump’s task is similar to the one Ronald Reagan faced with the Soviet Union: not just renegotiating a better arms-control agreement but devising a comprehensive policy that undermines the already wobbly foundation of the regime. In this regard, there is nothing as powerful as the presidential bully pulpit. Reagan’s denunciations of Communist rule did much to galvanize the opposition and undermine the Soviet empire. Dissidents in jail and others laboring under the Soviet system took heart from an American president who championed their cause. Trump should study Reagan’s old speeches and emulate his powerful rhetoric.

commerce and segregating Iran from global financial institutions. Designating the Revolutionary Guards as a terrorist organization and reimposing financial sanctions could go a long way toward crippling Iran’s economy. Once deprived of money, the mullahs will find it difficult to fund the patronage networks that are essential to their rule and their imperial ventures. One of the best ways of threatening the theocracy is through the power of the purse.

PUSHING back on Iran in the Middle East is the order of the day in Washington, and shrinking the Islamic Republic’s imperial frontiers should be an important priority of the incoming Trump administration. An essential insight of any such policy is to dispense with the false notion that Iran and America have a common enemy in the Islamic State. Such pretenses ignore the fact that Sunni radicalism is the necessary by-product of Iran’s Shiite chauvinism. Destroying the Islamic State requires diminishing the tides of Sunni militancy, which in turn necessitates tempering Iran’s regional ambitions.

The best arena in which to achieve this objective is Iran’s periphery in the Persian Gulf region. The Gulf sheikdoms, led by Saudi Arabia, are already locked into a region-wide rivalry with Iran. The Sunni states have taken it upon themselves to contest Iran’s gains in the Gulf and the Levant. Washington should not only buttress these efforts but press all Arab states to embark on a serious attempt to lessen their commercial and diplomatic ties to Tehran. The price of American guardianship

is for Sunni Arab states to do their part in resisting the rising Shiite power of Iran.

Even in a disorderly Middle East, there are opportunities to forge new constructive alliances. The enmity that Saudi Arabia and Israel share toward Iran should be the basis for bringing these two countries closer together. Instead of lecturing the Saudis to share the Middle East with Iran and hectoring Israelis about settlements, as the Obama White House has done, the Trump administration should focus on imaginative ways of institutionalizing the nascent cooperation that is already taking place between Riyadh and Jerusalem. The U.S. should press both countries to move beyond intelligence sharing and perhaps forge complementary trade ties, with Saudi oil being exchanged for Israel's technological products. History rarely offers opportunities to realign the politics of the Middle East; a truculent Iran has presented this chance.

Although today Iraq may seem like a protectorate of Iran, this is a predicament that most Iraqi leaders want to escape. Iraq was once the seat of Arab civilization and the center of the region's politics. The Shiite leaders in Iraq take Iranian advice and money for the simple reason that they are locked out of Sunni Arab councils and abandoned by the American superpower. Iraqis understand that Iran has exercised a pernicious influence in their country, further accentuating its sectarian divides as a means of ensuring Iranian influence. Iraq cannot be whole and free so long as Iran interferes in its affairs. A commitment by the United States to once more rehabilitate the Iraqi army and bureaucracy can go a long way toward diminishing their ties to Tehran. No Iraqi Arab wants to be subordinate to imperious Shiite Persians. Once Iraq frees itself of Iranian dominance, it may yet find a path back to the Arab world and once more serve as a barrier to Iranian power.

The tragedy of Syria is that, as the Obama administration stood aloof and preoccupied itself with useless international summits, Iran and Russia possibly succeeded in saving the Assad dynasty. The Syrian army, buttressed by Iran's Revolutionary Guards, Hezbollah terrorists, and Russian airpower, is poised to control most of the population centers. This hardly ends the civil war, but the attempt to unseat Iran's client in Damascus will take considerable effort and commitment by the United States and its Sunni allies. For both humanitarian and strategic reasons, the Trump administration should embrace this task. Pushing back on Iran means harassing its Syrian proxy. At the very least, as the opposition strengthens, Iran will have to face the dilemma of sinking more resources and men into a quagmire or cutting its losses, as the Soviet Union was forced to do in Afghanistan.

Since the inception of the Islamic Republic, Westerners enchanted by the clerics and their mysterious ways have insisted that their regime is essentially a pragmatic one. If only America set aside its animosity, it could forge a new relationship with the much misunderstood theocracy. But in reality it is a revolutionary regime that sees a resumed relationship with America as an existential threat. The clerical oligarchs need an American enemy to justify their repression and their costly and corrupt rule. They know that between our two nations there can never be permanent peace. And this is the most important lesson for the incoming president to learn. **NR**

A Christmas Carol

*A Heath family Christmas-carol program
always seems like a good idea . . .*

BY ALOÏSE BUCKLEY HEATH

NONE of the Heath children was born on Sunday, but many of them almost were, which may account for the fact that, although bright *and* bonny *and* good *and* gay they are not, bonny and gay they indubitably are.

They may get A2 in handwriting and D4 in word analysis; they may get “wholeheartedly enthusiastic” in sports and “constantly inattentive” in social studies, but they are the bonniest crew—not in the whole country; that’s ridiculous, I always tell people—in New England. Though, I admit it, I don’t know the rest of the country very well.

It is regrettably true that they forge their father’s name to undone-homework slips (remember those A’s in penmanship) at eight; that they fall in love with and torture members of the opposite sex at eleven; and that by the age of twelve they have discovered that you can smoke into the exhaust fan of the first-floor lavatory with absolute safety, whereas smoking out of the third-floor bathroom window means Mother calls the Fire Department. (They learn about cigarettes young because when we catch them smoking, we beat them.)

And gay my children unquestionably are. They rollick into the house from school, burst into paroxysms of laughter at the extraordinary coincidence of their reunion from various carpools, plan their far-flung wickednesses in gales of muffled giggles, are scolded with eyes twinkling above insufficiently suppressed grins, and fall asleep in the midst of a choked chuckle at 8, 9, or 10 P.M., according to whether their bedtime was at 7, 8, or nine.

And they sing. Lord, how they sing! They sing alone or in unison, in harmony, cacophony, or competition, and if two of the stubborn ones simultaneously embark on “The Surrey with the Fringe on Top” and “Silent Night,” an immediate popularity contest ensues, as other children drift into the room and join in one song or the other. If the singers are equally popular, you just have to break it up. (Not by saying, “Break it up,” you understand. Who’s listening? What I usually do is play “The Stars and Stripes Forever” very loudly on the piano.)

With all the gaiety and caroling that goes on in our house all year round, it is only natural that we plan, early every December, a Christmas-carol program to put on tape after it is absolutely perfect, and send to the children’s grandmother as an absolutely unique, unprocureable-in-stores Christmas gift.

One reason this always seems feasible in early December is that around then the children are infinitesimally better behaved

A piece by Aloïse Buckley Heath (1918–1967) is a NATIONAL REVIEW Christmas tradition. This article was first published in 1966.



than usual. I myself attribute this to the fact that their father and I are, not infinitesimally at all, worse. I have even discussed with Ben the potentialities of our being worse all the time, for the children's own good, but he insists he is the same at Christmastime as he is the year round, which, as I occasionally—well, maybe a *little* more often than occasionally—point out, is a clear admission that he is impossible all the time.

In any case, there's no question that, around Christmastime, the children are more cooperative. All of them will stand and concentrate, instead of two reading comic books and three wrestling under the piano. They all willingly sing, "*fa-la-la-la-la, la-la! la! la!*" even though most of the boys, and all of the girls under twelve, say it makes them feel silly. All in all, it seems an ideal time to plan a Christmas-carol program, and I do so in spite of a) an unbroken record of failure, and b) the boys.

Boys, as anyone with fewer resources than the director of the Vienna Boys' Choir knows, are an insuperable obstacle to group singing. I am convinced that Baroness von Trapp had hers wired for sound.

In our family, 21-year-old Jim is the only dependable boy. He has a soft, melodious tenor voice, he sings *fa-la-la* without shame, and he whacks the little ones when they fidget. Seventeen-year-old John, who also has a nice voice, is, unfortunately, musically gifted, and refuses to waste his talent on mere singing. He plays the descant to the carols on his recorder, and if there is not a satisfactory descant he composes one, which is lovely, but it leaves Jim alone and lonely down there below middle C. Buckley, at 13, sings a high and piercingly sweet soprano, but he is under the impression that a listening world will believe his voice has changed if he emits all sounds an octave lower than is normal to him. And he sings that way until his ribs are so sore from his brothers' and sisters' pounding that he can barely sing at all, which, as I keep pointing out, may be good for discipline, but not for Christmas-carol programs. Timothy, who is a crotchety eight, refuses flatly to make any concessions on the part of the language as it is spoken, to the

language as it is sung. "*Glo-o-o-o-o, o-o-o-o-o, o-o-o-o-o-o, ria*" is not for Tim. He sings "*Glo-*," compares the marble in his right pocket with the marble collection in his left pocket, and rejoins the chorale unerringly on "*ria*," but neither pleading nor pummeling will induce him to vocalize all those finky "aws."

All this is a little hard on Pam, who is 19 and who, as the conscientious and efficient head of her school Madrigal Club last year, has much higher standards than the rest of us. Our carol program this year was to be not just mother at the piano, John at the recorder, and nine children singing in unison. It was to include part-singing; solos, duets, trios, and quartets; Buckley on the drums; ten-year-old Jennifer on the triangle; and a piano duet by Betsey and Alison, who are eleven and twelve and hate each other.*

Our first difficulties I could see coming. Buckley played the drum, not with a gently medieval boom, nor even with a gay 17th-century rat-a-tat, but as if he were solo-ing during a pause in a program by the Rolling Stones, which was impressive, to be sure, but reduced the singers to utter inaudibility. Jennifer ting'd on the triangle whenever it seemed to her that she had not tung for quite long enough, and Betsey and Alison, who have never entirely grasped the purpose of a duet, exchanged sidelong black-eyed glares and raced each other through "Jingle Bells," Alison winning handily by a good two and a half measures.

Timothy and little Janet, 5, who were to solo as friendly beasts in the carol known only to the parents of small children, "The Friendly Beasts," were less than cooperative. Janet refused to sing, "*I, said the cow all white and red,*" because she

*Above all, every word was to be as clear as a bell. Pam even taught us a little song: "*Whether you whisper soft, or whether you loudly call, distinctly, distinctly speak. Or do not speak at all.*" Whose melody we assimilated rather more quickly than its meaning.

said cows were ugly and she was not; besides, everyone kept smiling at her. And Tim persisted in singing, “*I, said the donkey, all shag-gy and brown,*” as “*I. Said the donkey. All shaggy. And brown. I carried. His Mother. Uphill. And down.*”

After the special-effects numbers the group launched into the standard Christmas carol while Pam conducted and I concentrated on the piano. I have to concentrate harder than most people on the piano because of an abnormal tendency to play everything in D major. Our repertoire was nearly finished when Pam addressed the group in a less-than-friendly tone. “If anybody’s being funny around here, they just can just stop it right now.”

There was a blank silence. Long blue eyes met wide black eyes without the glimmer of a twinkle. Pam waited a minute, then she said: “Mother, let’s start over, and I’ll take the piano while you come out here and listen. There’s something peculiar going on. Now listen *carefully*.”

I listened carefully, and it was then I decided that either my children are not quite bright enough to live, or else they are too gay to bear.

Do you know what “afforiant” is? Neither did I till I heard Priscilla, who is 15 and should know better, sweetly warble that the three kings afforiant were, and I asked her. “Afforiant,” if you are interested, is the state of being disoriented, or wandering, as one does over field and fountain, moor and mountain.

And has anybody ever wondered where the Ranger is on Christmas Eve? Has anyone, for that matter, ever given a single thought to the Ranger on Christmas Eve? Well, Betsey Heath has. “*Away is the Ranger,*” she will inform you, if you listen carefully. And obviously, he is away because there is no crib for his bed. After all, why should the Ranger stick around *here*, when he hasn’t even got a crib, much less a bed, for Pete’s sake!

Janet, canny little Janet, all of whose sins are premeditated and blatant, sang exactly what she intended to sing. “*No L, No L, the angels did say.*” It was a matter of the angels’ alphabet, she explained to me a little tiredly. “A B C D E F G H I J K M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z. No L, get it, Mother, No L!” I eyed her suspiciously, because more humor in the family we do not need, but I let it pass.

Jennifer settled my next problem, which had to do with the angels. Do you know how the angel of the Lord shone around? He shone around in a glowy manner, that’s how. While shepherds watch’d their flock by night, she explained, the angel of the Lord came and glowy showed around. How else?

Have you ever wondered, in the long watches of the night, what Child is this Who laid to rest on Mary’s lap is sleeping? Well, it is the Child Whom angels greet with Anne the Sweet, while shepherds’ watches keeping. Well, St. Anne was Mary’s mother, certainly sweet and probably dead, argued Alison. Why *wouldn’t* she be with the angels? As for the shepherds, what with their setting off for Bethlehem, well known for its good and bad thieves, keeping their watches was a very friendly gesture on the part of the angels. Anne the Sweet probably thought of it.

Some of them were taking an individual called Good Heed to the angels’ ward, many of them with the jellied toast proclaiming; though all of them sang the “Coventry Carol,” 20 of whose 28 words are “Lully, lully,” absolutely correctly.

If anyone is interested in the geography of Bethlehem, I can tell you categorically that it lies on the seashore, just below

the town of Dul. We know it is *below* Dul because the carol states very clearly that Bethlehem is what in Dul see you *below* (sometimes written in *dulci júbilo*), and we know it is on the sea because among the deep in dreamless sleep the silent stars go by, so that had to be the stars’ *reflection*, see, Mother? Because they couldn’t very well *shine* among the deep, could they, Mother?

This is the kind of thing that happens when your children get B2 in Reasoning Ability and C4 in Independent Reading.

The older children, to give credit where credit is due, made their misinterpretations on a far loftier level. Leaving history and geography to their younger siblings, Pam and Jim simply revised the Christian religion.

Pam, even Pam, kept announcing in her clear, sweet contralto that God and sin are reconciled; but she realized immediately, when it was pointed out to her, that God was far more likely to reconcile Himself to sinners than to sin, even if the book hadn’t said so, which it had.

Jim had to argue a little. He was the one who kept urging the shepherds to leave their “you’s” and leave their “am’s” and rise up, shepherds, and follow.

“What in Heaven’s name is this about you’s and am’s?” I asked him.

“Oh-h-h, rejection of personality, denial of self,” said Jim grandly. “Practically the central thesis of Christian theology.”

“Of course, *I* don’t go to a Catholic college, but *I* think that’s Communist theory, not Christian theology,” I told him. “In any case, could you come down from those philosophic heights and join us shepherds down here with our ewes (female sheep) and rams (male sheep)?”

“If you insist,” said Jim, with the impudent grin of the 21-year-old whose dear mother is incontrovertibly in the right, and besides, it’s right down there in black and white.

But I was too weary to go on. “Children,” I said. “Let’s just do one song absolutely *perfectly*. Let’s concentrate on ‘Silent Night,’ because that’s the one we know best anyway. Pam and Priscilla can do the alto, John can do the descant, the rest of you just sing nice and softly, and Buckley, I don’t want to hear one single *note* below middle C.”

They lined up, looking very clean and handsome and holy, Jim and John at the back, Timothy and Janet on either side of Pam at the piano, and the middle echelon sensibly and unquarrelsome distributed in the middle according to heights. *Just like the von Trapp Family*, I thought to myself happily. Pam turned and gave them all a long and, I hoped, extremely stern look, before she turned back to play the opening measures.

“*Silent night, holy night,*” nine young voices chanted softly, and I noticed Jennifer and Betsey beginning to break up in twin-kles and dimples. “*All is calm, all is bright,*” they went on, John’s recorder piping low and clear. Buckley and Alison clapped their hands briefly over their mouths. “*Round John Virgin, Mother and Child,*” the chorus swelled sweetly, and I rapped hard on the piano. “Just *who*,” I asked, in my most restrained voice, “is Round John Virgin?” “One of the 12 opossums,” the ten young voices answered promptly, and they collapsed over the piano, from the piano bench onto the floor, convulsed by their delicate wit.

And that’s why we didn’t have *this* year’s Christmas-carol program.

NR

Rudolph the Red

It's the time of year when people start pouring politics over holiday classics. The real hero of *It's a Wonderful Life* was Mr. Potter! Scrooge was right!

Eh. If you really want a Christmas story that can be ruthlessly ruined with political meaning, look no farther than *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*, a stop-motion children's holiday special that has delighted generations with its gender-fluid elf who runs away with a bullied ruminant.

Every problem society had in the later Sixties can be traced back to the corroding influence of the show's treatment of those who ought to be respected. You want to know why we got hippies who shunned 'Nam? Rudolph's why.

Start with Santa. In *Rudolph*, Santa is a cruel, narcissistic, lazy boor. The evidence:

1. When his elves assemble to sing a song of fealty—"We Are Santa's Elves," which has the forced gaiety of a song expressing love for Kim Jong-un—Santa rolls his eyes and looks cross, leaving halfway through the performance with the comment that it "needs work." Half the elves probably think they're going to be sent to the labor camp. Oh, wait, the whole place is a labor camp.

2. When Santa goes to visit the newborn Rudolph, we see that the reindeer's parents live in a cave. Rudolph's father is a crucial employee in the toy-distribution system, so he has to be high up in the organization—but there's not a stick of furniture in the place, and as far as we can tell Rudolph was rudely birthed on a cold stone floor.

Does Santa suddenly realize that his workers live in squalor and fall on his knees to apologize? Nope: He sings a song. About himself. How he is old Kris Kringle. He's the king of ding-a-ling. Rudolph's parents stare at him in mute horror; it's like the CEO of the company showing up at your child's christening, calling himself a completely different name, and announcing he is the monarch of bell sounds.

Then Rudolph's schnozzle-merkin falls off and his nose glows red. Santa is horrified to see this defect and makes himself scarce; it's a wonder he doesn't tell Donner to smother the foal on the spot and make something that doesn't sicken everyone with a revolting deformity.

3. Let's talk a bit about Santa's quality-control procedures. Now and then an elf screws up when making a toy—a train has square wheels, or a Jack-in-the-box has the wrong name. Obviously the elves are protesting work conditions with these passive acts of sabotage, but that's another issue. What does Santa do with these toys?

A. Fix them, since he has a sophisticated toy-construction facility at his fingertips.

B. Ship the sentient Misfit Toys to a gulag run by a winged lion who keeps them from leaving.

The second, of course, and here we meet another compromised authority figure: this lion guy who has a castle. He's called Moonracer because of course that's a real lion name. More likely that Santa called up a pal and said, "Look, I need you to look after these defective toys so I don't get sued by the end users. Normally I'd have them scrapped but they're all conscious and self-aware, and I don't want it to get out that I'm feeding Bob-in-the-box to the woodchipper, if you get my drift."

Sure! Sure! Can I be king of the island?

"Yeah, whatever. Just make sure they don't—"

Can I be King Moonracer?

"Seriously, Ed? Look, this is just a temporary gig until I find out who's screwing up on the line."

I want to be King Moonracer!

"Fine. Be Duke Starzoomer for all I care, just—"

I will make a royal crest and a throne and I will be King of the Sad Toys for you, Santa. I will not let you down.

"Ed, it's strictly contract work—1099, you get what I'm saying?"

At the end of *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*, all the misfit toys

are dumped without any repairs on kids all over the world, which is something Moonracer might have done. But he was more concerned with lording over his icy island, posing on his throne like the *prettiest* king you ever saw.

As a kid, you don't pick up on these things. When the big storm hits the North Pole and Santa says, "Well, looks like Christmas will be canceled this year," you believe he's sad. You never think: A guy who lives in the Arctic has no contingency plans for bad weather? The problem would seem to be adverse atmospheric factors such as wind and low visibility; a red nose on the end of a reindeer would be like a flashlight taped to the stern of an airplane. It's not that bright. It's not as if Rudolph's nose goes on and people stagger back screaming, "My eyes, my eyes, I can't see!"

No, Santa realizes he has run out of excuses and has to go through with Christmas after all. *Rudolph* destroyed kids' faith in Santa and placed it in counterculture figures such as Yukon Cornelius, a drifter who has "outsider" status because he is literally outside all the time.

And let's not forget the narrator—Sam the Snowman, voiced by Burl Ives, a folk singer who was probably a Commie. Do you remember the song he sang? "Silver and gold, silver and gold / Kulaks are hoarding them, so I've been told."

It's all there. No wonder Woodstock happened.

NR



Mr. Lileks blogs at www.lileks.com.



The Long View

BY ROB LONG

PRESIDENTIAL DAILY BRIEFING

Prepared by the combined
Intelligence Agencies of the
Union of Americanyits States
and *no one else!*

TOP SECRET FOR THE PRESIDENSK ONLY

*Guaranteed 100% True Ameri-
canyits Content with only tiny pieces
of Russian Influence, so mind of
yours to be set easy at.*

Beginning with the Syria Situationsk:

Situation in Syria is not problem. Relax yourself and think on top of other things that may be more bigger problems, like what for is Kanye West doing on his tour and what is happening on top of the Twitter timelinesk. Better for to just ignore what is being seen on the televisionsk and the journalists who are stirring up the trouble and the controverski and who have no true understanding of the what is happening on the ground in Syria, which is not much and also, Presidensk Assad is true friend of the Union of American States. Along with dynamic world-wide Supermansk Putin he is having the loose ends in the Syria wrapped up and needs not to be disturbed or molested during this process. Later when is done and no smoke is around time would be for a visit from you Mr. Trump to the region to see the benefits of Russia friendship, which to include perhaps a fun time with Mssrs Putin and Assad for a banquet party of great cost and opulence.

In general, the middle east as a region of area and influence is not a

problem, most it stays quiet and better to be left alone to the countries already part of operations there which are the Russikiy and others. Best to put this all out of your busy mind, Mr. Trump, because it is currently so busy with her other problems, America is. To focus on these is best, the problems and etcetera.

RECOMMENDASKI: It is formal recommendaski of the Union of American States intelligence directorate to be easy of mind and relaxation-ful when the Syria and her middle east is coming into conversationski.

Is now time for the Econominyits:

Why come for there is the sanctions? Mr. Trump is time to rethink the sanctions and her effects on peoples of Russikiy. Why come now not for reset? Big button to hit again. Think on top of this, Donald Fredovitch.

Is important also to ponder for the energy policy which is also needs top-to-bottomski look at. Is much trouble with the fracking and the hot global situation, with the change-ments to the weather becoming a serious. For why is there the fracking and the oily searching, when plentiful of oily and gassy comes from the friends in the Russikiy and her other peoples with the gas?

RECOMMENDASKI: Sanctionskis lifted to be and then there is happiness. Why not does the new presidentsk desire such happiness for himself and others? Simply do so. And think not again about the compromat that may or may not be existing of yourself with the naked and the party times. Is silly to think of that. Best to lift sanctionskis and be joy.

Is next, Ukraine and Like That:

This is most foolishness to bother about with the Ukraine and her politicians. Many of them will be dead by the time of this printing because of unsafeness of automobile brake lines and also sometimes mistakes when cleaning rifles, so is best for new presidensk to direct

brain to other matters, such as again the Twitter timelineskis and the E! channel.

RECOMMENDASKI: Again, to see what is the recommendaski for the Syria happenings, which is to let the events occur as they must, guided by the firm hand of Supermansk Putin and among others. Is possible situation will become more wet and dirty than it now seems to be occurring and in which case, it is in the interests of the UAS to visit Mr. Putin at his dacha and be a guest according to rich and long tradition of being a host, with the banquet and the great fire and the toasts and the exchange of gifts which according to local custom can and should include wife and daughter of Americanski Presidensk, Melanya and Ivanka Donaldovna, should he wish to be greeted as brother from his host the Mr. Putin. Possible to suggest Eric Donaldovitch and Donald Donaldovitch be accompany to banquet and to remain with the Mr. Putin for to make the security swap and safety assurances should times become sad between the Russia and her Union of American States.

Not to be forgetting Friends and Allies Abroad:

It is sad to say that Mme Angela Merkel is a crazy lady with personal life of much activity—pics attached—and also that is not for to Europe or the Chine that Mr. Trump should turn his face to. Prime Minister of the Kingdom Unite is also a woman like Merkel so what deal is with that? Is best to have one friend, and to ride atop the horse with this friend with bare chests and wobbly skin in the sunshine.

RECOMMENDASKI: As babuska taught us, better to find the bear a sleeping place in the winter if you want him to be friend to you in summer. Also: Bees may sting the face of the peasant, but only a Prince will cry out in pain.

END BRIEFINGSKI

Books, Arts & Manners

Dangerous Gamble

ARTHUR HERMAN



The Iran Wars: Spy Games, Bank Battles, and the Secret Deals that Reshaped the Middle East, by Jay Solomon (Random House, 352 pp., \$28)

IN July 2015, representatives of members of the U.N. Security Council and representatives from Germany and the European Union met in Vienna, to reach an agreement with Iran regarding that country's nuclear program. The Obama administration and the media were quick to dub the deal they struck "historic," a term now used to describe anything that has never happened before but otherwise has little to recommend it. The deal called on Iran to halt large portions of its nuclear program for a decade, to reduce the number of centrifuges it has been using to enrich bomb-grade uranium, and to cut down its stockpiles of fissile material. In exchange, the U.S. and the other members of the "P5+1," as the Vienna group were dubbed, agreed to lift economic sanctions against the Islamic Republic. As *Wall Street Journal* chief foreign-affairs correspondent Jay Solomon puts it in his new book, the Vienna agreement now stands as "President Obama's signature foreign-policy achievement"—much as Obamacare stands as his signature domestic-policy achievement.

Mr. Herman is a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute and the author, most recently, of Douglas MacArthur: American Warrior.

Obamacare has been a disaster. As Solomon concludes in his fast-paced, well-researched account, the Iran nuclear deal bids fair to be a similar disaster—but one with far more dangerous consequences for the world. Indeed, it may make it impossible for the United States or any other nation to prevent a runaway nuclear-arms race in the Middle East.

Solomon gives us a series of inside glimpses into how this deal came about and why, using interviews with key participants, including the deal's chief American negotiator, Secretary of State John Kerry. Nonetheless, what emerges is a picture that Obama admirers won't like. While some have dared to compare the Vienna deal to Nixon's 1971 opening to China, a better comparison is 1938 Munich. This is because Solomon's narrative, for all its effort at balance and avoiding alarmist conclusions, is ultimately a tale of how Obama and Kerry threw away the West's best leverage over a brutal dictatorship, for the sake of a promise from a regime whose word is worthless.

What makes this such a bad deal? If Ronald Reagan's dictum on arms treaties was to trust but verify, Obama's is to trust and not even try to verify. As the deal is currently structured, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which is supposed to oversee the agreement, has no way of checking on whether Iran is complying unless Tehran gives its consent and is warned months in advance. The deal also comes with an expiration date: After ten years, all restrictions on the Iran nuclear program end. Tehran will be free to start up hundreds of thousands of centrifuges enriching uranium around the clock, if it wishes—a process that could give Iran the bomb it wants within a year, or even sooner. That will certainly set other powers in the region scrambling for nuclear weapons of their own, which, thanks to Pakistan and North Korea, could be only a billion petrodollars away.

A more subtle problem is that the deal sweeps Iran's past efforts at getting the bomb under the rug. Even "U.S. officials, in private, acknowledged that Tehran would probably never own up to

[working on] developing a bomb" in the past, writes Solomon, "nor would it fully cooperate with the [IAEA]'s investigation" in the future. This point is crucial, since "it would be very hard to verify Iran's compliance with a new nuclear deal if the IAEA . . . didn't fully understand the scope of Iran's capabilities." It's rather like hiring an ex-con as babysitter without asking whether he did time as a child molester. But "the Obama administration said it could live with this"—and a dozen other giveaways. The reasons lie deep in the pathology of the Obama administration, and in Obama's mind-set regarding the Middle East.

After all, it's not as if Obama and Kerry weren't warned about the potentially disastrous consequences of the agreement they were so single-mindedly pursuing. Foreign-policy experts roundly condemned it—from Henry Kissinger to Olli Heinonen, the former IAEA weapons inspector who told Solomon it sets "an incredibly bad precedent." Allies in the region from Israel to Saudi Arabia seethed, both publicly and behind the scenes—even as the Saudis and other Sunni powers in the region began to lay plans to acquire nuclear weapons of their own.

Almost from the moment he took office, Obama began pursuing an opening to the mullahs in Tehran—a pursuit that for a long while went unrequited. He sent no fewer than four secret letters to Iran's "supreme leader," Ayatollah Khamenei, offering to restart Washington–Tehran relations (which had been largely frozen since the seizure of the U.S. embassy in 1979) and promising to abandon any policy of regime change in Iran. That last promise led to Obama's complete inaction when young Iranians took to the streets in 2011 in the aftermath of the Arab Spring and his saying nothing when they were being mowed down by Khamenei's thugs.

Why? By Solomon's account, Obama "viewed détente with Shiite-dominant Iran as crucial to stopping the spread of nuclear weapons, calming the region, and underpinning efforts to counter radical Sunni groups such as the Islamic State and al-Qaeda." Whereas previous administrations

had treated the terrorist-sponsoring, nuclear-weapon-seeking Iran as the No. 1 pariah of the Middle East, Obama didn't mind when his decision to enter into direct talks with Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the other Persian Gulf states."

This turned America's relations with the Middle East inside out. Our former allies were to be ignored or marginalized; our former enemies were to be courted and cosseted.

The desire to appease Iran led to some of the administration's most fateful decisions, such as pulling the last American troops out of Iraq (thus inadvertently leading to the rise of ISIS) and refusing to enforce the "red line" in Syria for fear it would upset Assad's ally, Iran, which opened the door to the current refugee crisis sweeping Europe. Finally, it led to the brokering of the current nuclear deal, which gives Iran practically anything it wants in exchange for its promise not to

of Kansas. It was Pompeo who discovered that, as part of the unfreezing of Iranian assets, the White House was paying \$1.7 billion to Tehran as settlement of a \$400 million claim for U.S. arms sales going back to the shah—or, more precisely, \$400 million plus \$1.3 billion "interest" for a 35-year-old contract with a ruler the current regime despises and overthrew. The administration was doing this, Pompeo realized, just about the time that Tehran was announcing the release of Americans who had been held hostage in Iran for years. In a letter to Secretary Kerry, Pompeo demanded to know whether the payment was in effect a ransom. A Kerry underling brushed the suggestion aside, but the news that the payment was eventually made in secret bundles of foreign cash seems to prove that Pompeo was right and that the State Department was lying.

Come January, Pompeo will be taking over the CIA, and Senator Cotton too will

The desire to appease Iran led to some of the administration's most fateful decisions.

do again what it still insists it never did in the first place, i.e., try to build an atomic bomb.

There are many dupes and villains in Solomon's sobering story, but also some heroes. One is lawyer Steven Perles, who, together with the Treasury Department's Stuart Levey and Robert Morgenthau, crafted the economic sanctions against Iran into a genuinely effective weapon that ultimately forced Tehran to the bargaining table.

Another is Senator Tom Cotton of Arkansas, the Iraq War veteran who sent a letter also signed by 46 other GOP senators directly to the Ayatollah Khamenei, warning him that under the U.S. Constitution the White House did not have the authority to deliver a lasting nuclear deal unless the Senate approved it. According to Solomon's account, the letter sent shock waves through the administration, with Kerry telling his Iranian negotiating partner that Cotton was "dangerous" and saying the Iranians shouldn't be distracted by what Cotton or the rest of the Senate might think—Constitution or no Constitution.

Still another hero, not mentioned by Solomon, is Representative Mike Pompeo

play an important role in guiding the new Trump administration toward a more muscular approach to dealing with the Iranian threat to the region. Jay Solomon may be correct in concluding that if Tehran decides to abide by the terms of the agreement, this could mark a positive turn for U.S.–Iranian relations and the prospects of peace in the Middle East. But that's a very large "if." We've seen that the deal has encouraged Tehran to be even more provocative, as its seizure of nine U.S. sailors in the Straits of Hormuz and its encouraging its Houthi allies to fire missiles at U.S. warships off the coast of Yemen demonstrate. Combine this with the war in Syria, Emile Hokayem of London's International Institute for Strategic Studies tells our author, and "this is the most dangerous time in the Middle East in decades. A fuse has been lit."

Secretary Kerry told Solomon, about the Vienna deal, that "I have no doubt we avoided a war. None." No war on his watch, perhaps. But he, and President Obama's misguided policy, may have set the detonator for a truly terrible one in the future—one that ends in a mushroom cloud.

Making a Nation-State

DOMINIC GREEN



Israel: A Concise History of a Nation Reborn, by Daniel Gordis (Ecco, 560 pp., \$29.99)

THE Jews are like other people, only more so; Israel is like no other nation-state. This is the success of Zionism, and its failure. Zionism was meant to raise the Jewish people from exceptional degradation to ordinary dignity. Yet Israel is anything but ordinary.

The retreat of the European empires after 1945 led to the creation of more than a hundred new states. Only Israel has assimilated so many immigrants and fought so many wars while sustaining a liberal democracy, a free press, and an independent judiciary. Only Israel has completed the transition from an economy of raw materials—oranges and avocados—to the economy of digital knowledge. Israel now has more companies on the NASDAQ than all of Europe combined. Its GDP per capita is, with the exception of such oil oligarchies as Qatar, the highest of any postcolonial state—ahead of Japan and Italy.

Still, there is no pleasing some people. Only Israel attracts so much cold malice and mad propaganda. This year, an Israeli-German team discovered the process by which melanoma cells metastasize from the skin to the vital organs. Meanwhile, academic associations across the West vote to boycott Israeli researchers. As Daniel Gordis admits in this *Concise History*, Israel is less likely to

Mr. Green, a fellow of the Royal Historical Society, teaches politics at Boston College.

be praised as the “start-up nation” than condemned as a “pariah state.”

The inquisition is likely to intensify in 2017, a year of anniversaries and unfinished business. It will mark 50 years since the Six-Day War of June 1967, from which Israel emerged in control of the entire territory of the Palestine Mandate; 70 years since the U.N. voted, in 1947, to partition the Mandate into two states, one with a Jewish and the other with an Arab majority; 100 years since the Balfour Declaration of 1917, in which the British government endorsed the establishment of a “national home” for the Jews in their historic homeland; and 120 years since Theodor Herzl, elated by the First Zionist Conference of 1897, wrote in his diary, “At Basle, I founded the Jewish state.”

There have been several excellent one-volume histories of Israel, notably by Howard Sachar (1976), the late Martin Gilbert (1998), and Anita Shapira (2012). All are heavy on detail, and heavy in the hand. The student and the non-specialist are barraged with names and dates and caught in a minefield of acronyms, parties and acrimonious negotiations. There has been too much history in too small a space, and too short a time.

Daniel Gordis’s *Israel* is as clear and thorough as a concise guide for the per-

plexed can be. Rather than cataloguing what happened, Gordis seeks to tell the story of why it happened. The wars, the Palestinians, and the diplomatic maneuvers are all here, but they are not the focus of the narrative. Gordis is more interested in domestic dynamics than in foreign diplomacy, and more concerned with how people thought than with how they fought. His narrative pursues “the *idea* of a Jewish state—where that notion originated, how it was preserved, and how the dream was transformed into reality.” This approach has the virtues of exposing Israel’s shifting relationship to Judaism and of explaining its relationship to the paradoxes of Jewish history.

Israel, Gordis writes, perplexes because it is “a deeply traditional society in some ways, and hypermodern in others.” This doubleness was, as the rabbis say, “present at Sinai”—at the founding scene in the hotel ballroom at Basel. Herzl sought to channel the reservoir of a religious faith that he no longer possessed into a liberal nationalism for the modern age. The revived Jewish state should be Austria-Hungary by the sea, the Trieste of the Levant. German would be the language of the Jews. There would be “genuine Viennese cafés,” “German theater, international theater, opera, musical comedy, circus, café-concert,” and a cavalry composed of Hungarian Jewish hussars

with cream-and-yellow uniforms. The vision of Jewish revival had come to Herzl while he was watching Wagner’s *Tannhäuser*. Herzl saw Judaism and its “historic God” in Wagnerian terms, as a “mighty legend” that could rouse a people to rebel against history.

Yet the foot soldiers of Herzl’s vision were not as liberal as their would-be commander. Nor were the intended conscripts, the Jewish masses of Eastern Europe, as secular. And while Herzl, a journalist, sought to create facts on paper by securing the support of the imperial powers, groups of Jewish socialists from Eastern Europe were already creating facts on the ground. The Lovers of Zion had founded their first agricultural settlement, Rishon LeZion (First in Zion), in 1882. The revival of Hebrew began in 1890, with the establishment of the Hebrew Language Committee under Eliezer Ben-Yehuda.

Jewish statehood would never have been achieved without the “political Zionism” of Herzl and Chaim Weizmann, the chemist whose personal intercession with David Lloyd George was crucial in obtaining the Balfour Declaration from Britain. But it was the kibbutzniks of Labor Zionism who created the infrastructure, the ruling ethos, the army, and the geography of the early Israeli state.

“In Israel,” David Ben-Gurion said, “in order to be a realist, you must believe



Jerusalem

in miracles.” Gordis rightly praises Ben-Gurion as a master strategist but also recognizes that he was a flawed autocrat. During the worst years in Jewish history, Ben-Gurion steered the outnumbered Yishuv (Jewish community) between the violent resentment of the Mandate’s Arabs and the passive resentment of the Mandate’s British governors and built up a well-organized, well-armed state in waiting. He timed Israel’s declaration of independence perfectly, securing the support of both Russia and the U.S. and the endorsement of the U.N.

Instead of returning to the plough like a Hebrew Cincinnatus, Ben-Gurion stayed in office. His objective was to create a state and a national culture; decades before the age of decolonization, he realized that the two were not identical. He called his guiding principle *mamlachtiyut*—a term with Biblical implications of kingship, but, as Gordis says, it came to mean political “statism” or “state consciousness.” Some of Ben-Gurion’s early judgments strengthened the state but divided its consciousness in serious ways.

Between 1948 and the electoral “Revolution” of 1977, Israel was a consensual one-party state, ruled by the Labor-led “Alignment.” Its civil and military leaders, and the soldiers in the army’s elite units, came from the kibbutz movement, which at its 1940s peak had constituted only 7 percent of Israeli society. They were, writes Gordis, a “secular aristocracy” that believed in the “negation of the Diaspora”—purging such exilic taints as Judaism, Yiddish, Judeo-Arabic, and bourgeois manners to create the “new Jew.”

Israel’s Arabs lived under martial law until 1966. Jewish immigrants from North Africa and the Middle East were dumped on the periphery; Ben-Gurion called them “human dust lacking language, education, roots, tradition, or national dreams.” When Israel’s system of proportional representation obliged coalition government, Ben-Gurion preferred to ally with Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) Jews over the less numerous but more patriotic Religious Zionists. Confident that religion was a thing of the past, he exempted the Haredim, at that time a small population consisting largely of Holocaust survivors, from the military draft.

The 1967 war announced the return of Israel to the territory of its Biblical origins, and the related return of Judaism to Israeli politics. The Alignment planned the settlement of the West Bank and Gaza, but it was Religious Zionists who broke the ground. In 1973, the Yom Kippur War broke the public’s trust in the kibbutz oligarchy: Israel’s generals and politicians had grown too comfortable in their belief that the Arabs would never launch a war they would lose. In the 1977 election, the excluded avenged themselves by electing Menachem Begin and a right-wing alignment, the Likud.

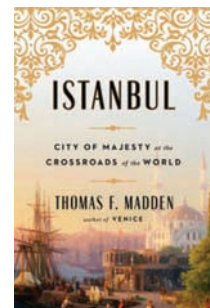
Since 1977, Israeli society has tipped away from secularism. Religious Zionists now account for about 10 percent of Israel’s population but as many as 30 percent of soldiers in combat units. Demographic shifts, the collapse of the Oslo process, and the freeing of the electorate from the notion that security could be outsourced to the PLO have reduced Labor to third-party status, behind the Arab bloc. The Likud and its allies have ruled for 32 of the last 38 years. If Benjamin Netanyahu lasts until 2019, he will replace Ben-Gurion as Israel’s longest-serving leader.

Gordis prefers not to predict what might happen next, but the writing is on the wall. The major Palestinian factions have pledged themselves to the fraternity of suicide bombers and other terrorists. The Israelis are not so foolish as to repeat the Oslo experiment in the hope of a different outcome. So long as Israel remains a democracy, there can be no “two-state solution” west of the Jordan.

Gordis has written a valuable and enlightening story. He succeeds in doing for the Israelis what Luigi Barzini did for the Italians, and Peter Ackroyd for the English: to get inside the ideas that made a nation and that continue to shape its development. Israel was born in an attempt to “normalize” Jewish nationhood in a secularist revolt against traditional religion, but it has matured as the normalization of Judaism within a nation-state. Any American wishing to understand how Israelis think, why this differs from how American Jews think, and why so many American policymakers have failed to understand Israeli thinking should read this book. **NR**

A Megacity Old and New

CLAIRE BERLINSKI



Istanbul: City of Majesty at the Crossroads of the World, by Thomas F. Madden (Viking, 400 pp., \$32)

HISTORIAN Thomas F. Madden begins his story in 667 B.C. or thereabouts, when, legend has it, Megaran colonists under the command of King Byzas sailed from the Bosphorus into the world’s largest natural harbor, an estuary they were to call the Golden Horn. They were ravished by their discovery: There was a verdant peninsula from which Asia and Europe could be seen, with natural defenses of hills and water. The promontory allowed them to survey and dominate the strait that linked two continents and the Black and Mediterranean Seas. The climate was temperate, the water so abundant with fish they could catch them with their hands. Just beyond was the fertile soil of Thrace. It was the ideal site for a trading city.

Byzantium has been known by at least ten other names. (“Istanbul” is a Turkish corruption of the Greek for “to or of the city,” in the local dialect—with the *p* in “polis” pronounced as a *b*.) The Megarans could not have imagined their city’s future. In 1203, a dumb-founded Crusader, Robert de Clari, tried to describe the size and splendor of Constantinople and its treasures to Western audiences but at last gave up: “If anyone should recount to you the hun-

Claire Berlinski is the author of Menace in Europe: Why the Continent’s Crisis Is America’s, Too. She is now crowdfunding a new book about Europe titled “Brave Old World.”

dreadth part of the richness and the beauty and the nobility that was found . . . in the city, it would seem like a lie and you would not believe it.”

Istanbul remains a city beyond superlatives and beyond Westerners’ imaginations: ancient and modern, magnificent and mad in equal measure. The ghosts of marauding Crusaders, marching janissaries, and conspiratorial Young Turks still haunt its soot-streaked alleyways. Everywhere, writes Madden, there is evidence of the city’s prior incarnations as “a den of debauchery, a city of saints, a smoldering ruin, and a glistening capital of two empires.” But unlike Venice, the subject of one of Madden’s previous books, Istanbul is not an urban museum. It is rather a cacophonous megacity. The Bosphorus is still the world’s most critical maritime artery; and construction noise, car horns, and the shouts of street hawkers play a constant counterpoint to the call of the muezzin.

The city’s history long antedates Byzantium, in fact. I was there throughout most of the drama of the construction of its \$4 billion subway beneath the Bosphorus. In 2005 (to the abject horror of the city’s budget planners), engineers discovered, beneath the proposed main transit station, the lost, A.D. fourth century Byzantine port of Theodosius. The project screeched to a halt while platoons of excited archaeologists descended upon it. They then unearthed 8,000-year-old clothes, urns, ashes, and utensils, forcing historians to completely revise their understanding of the city’s age and origins. The subway was not completed until 2014. Discoveries such as these pose terrible dilemmas to archaeologists: Excavating the top layer can damage the one below it, and vice versa. So which of the many cities below the surface should be conserved? (And how can any of them be made safe from President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the army of commercial developers who, with basically the same motives as the Megarian colonists, long to replace it all with high-rises, neo-Ottoman kitsch, and multistory parking lots?)

Madden is a medieval and Renaissance historian. The history of Istanbul is his vehicle for telling many other stories: those of antiquity, of the doomed

Byzantine Empire, of Christianity and Islam, of trade throughout the ages, of warfare, and of the many empires of the Mediterranean and the Middle East. His use of a single city as the narrative device by which he recounts these overlapping histories works remarkably well, and surely no city could be more fit for the use of this conceit. If Istanbul’s unique blessing is its geography, which makes it a natural crossroads for trade, this is also its curse: It is an irresistible target for conquest, and conquered it was, by most every empire in history—from the Macedonians to the Romans, Persians, Avars, Arabs, Russians, and even Hungarians, and then finally the Ottomans.

Condensing Istanbul’s history in a single volume is a daunting challenge; the book is a great success, and one with no lack of drama. Madden evokes vividly, for example, the horror of the winter of A.D. 196, when, under siege by Roman forces, Byzantines succumbed to disease and starvation, eating corpses and fleeing in desperation by sea on overloaded boats that quickly sank, capsized in the storm or rammed by Roman galleys. As Madden explains, historians are unsure why the Byzantines resisted so fiercely: No one else did. When at last they surrendered, the surviving soldiers and officials were executed and the rest of the people lost their property; many of them were sold into slavery. (How brutal was the ancient world—and how strangely like our own, with Aleppo

under siege, desperate refugees drowning in the Mediterranean, and the vanquished executed and sold into slavery.)

The city was renamed Antoniniana, after the emperor’s son. Madden’s brief history of Rome—told in support of the central narrative—is surprisingly clear. I would not have thought it could be so compressed without becoming gibberish.

Madden tells the stories of all of Istanbul’s incarnations skillfully, but he runs out of energy in 1453. After the Muslim conquest, he races toward the end (and who could blame him; Istanbul’s *is* a long history). He might argue that in the big scheme of things, the Ottoman and Turkish Republican periods are short chapters of Istanbul’s history—and he would be right—but only in these last chapters does the book feel rushed. He describes the Ottomans as vividly as he does the city’s earlier inhabitants (his treatment of the Sultanate of Women is particularly interesting), but given their significance, he might have dwelled longer on them with profit.

The book could also have done with footnotes. There is little by way of scholarly apparatus, presumably because an editor insisted that it would doom the book’s commercial prospects, but this is regrettable. One trusts Madden’s scholarship—he is highly regarded among medievalists—but curious readers naturally want to know how, exactly, we know what he tells us. Even a few judicious notes, or an annotated bibliography of the kind he furnished in his

AUTUMN SONG

after Chassignet

Little flower, you live in constant danger:
Likely to be crushed under foot or torn by wind,
Sun-scorched or gobbled by a goat.

These October days streaked with regrets and tears
Are like you, brindled flower, as they bloom
And fade, harried by heat as much as by the cold.

Our ship sets out to sea, not with ivory or gold
In the hold, but with fragrant apples for cargo. Just so
My days are not heavy but delicate, fleeting and vain,

Leaving behind the sweet, faint scent of renown
That quickly will vanish like the taste of fruit
Passing from the tongues and hearts of everyone.

—DANIEL MARK EPSTEIN

Concise History of the Crusades, would have gone a long way. Better proofreading would also have done him no harm; the inconsistent Turkish transliterations are annoying.

But these are quibbles. Madden is especially good when he tells us what the city looked like in its different incarnations. I had had no sense, for example, of what I might have seen had I walked down one of the main streets of Constantinople, having seen only the ruins, which smell of moss, decay, and damp. It had never occurred to me to imagine the streets “flanked with long rows of monumental columns, stretching two stories in the air and topped by ornate wooden roofs to keep out the sun and rain.” These were lavishly decorated with statues, fountains, and bright tapestries, we learn; they were not avenues, but forums that stretched on for miles, designed to be the centers of civic life.

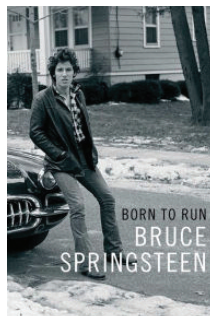
The book is, inescapably, elegiac. Like all the port cities of the eastern Mediterranean, Istanbul’s is now a story of vanished cosmopolitanism. The end of the Ottoman Empire, and its replacement by the nationalist successor states, has mostly been a tragedy; and Istanbul itself is now heavy with an omnipresent sense of ancient eclipsed glory.

If Istanbul’s vanished cosmopolitanism is a tragedy, so too is ours. From the publicist’s blurb that accompanies the book: “Given the recent terror attacks in highly touristed parts of Turkey’s capital,” it says, it is “critically important to understand the complex history of one of the world’s most important cities.” Could any commendation be more solipsistic? Would it otherwise be unimportant to understand this history? It is dismaying to imagine readers so dull-witted that terrorists must be invoked to compel their curiosity about the city that was Byzantium, Constantinople, New Rome, and the seat of the Ottoman Empire.

Madden is not to be blamed for his publicist, of course. To the contrary, the careful reader will, indeed, learn much in this book about the fate of incurious and self-absorbed empires. Even the careless reader will be much enlightened by the book, as good an introduction to Istanbul and its splendors as one could hope to have. **NR**

Working Man’s Bard

ROBERT DEAN LURIE



Born to Run, by Bruce Springsteen
(Simon & Schuster, 528 pp., \$32.50)

SPRINGSTEEN. The Boss. *Bruuuuuuuce*. A lot of hyperbolic ink has been spilled over this man through the years, so I’m going to walk it back a little and say that, at base level, Bruce Springsteen is a songwriter whose grasp of musical and lyrical economy is unusual in the often excessive world of rock ‘n’ roll. His catalogue boasts a number of tight, enduring records: *Born to Run*, *The River*, *Nebraska*, *Born in the U.S.A.*, and *The Rising*, among others.

There is, of course, another side to Springsteen—what we might call the “Prove It All Night” side: the Springsteen of four-hour concerts and wall-of-sound bluster courtesy of his longtime backing group, the E Street Band. Springsteen’s new memoir, in its exhaustive—and exhausting—500-plus pages, has more in common with this live, “all-in” approach than with the carefully polished vignettes he puts down in the studio. Fans will no doubt find it exhilarating from start to finish, but casual readers lured by the promise of rock-’n’-roll lore may find themselves wailing and gnashing their teeth by the time they reach the section devoted to the inner workings of Bruce’s horse farm. The writing is amateurish in places: Springsteen has a fondness for exclamation points and EMPHASIZING THINGS IN ALL CAPS! (Not to mention the gratuitous use of parenthetical asides.)

Mr. Lurie is the author of We Can Be Heroes: The Radical Individualism of David Bowie.

But in other respects he demonstrates a natural ease with prose. It is certainly gratifying to read a celebrity memoir that bears no trace of a ghostwriter.

Springsteen’s chief distinguishing feature as a songwriter is his ability to wrest poetry out of everyday experience, and this might be the reason he has become an icon for so many listeners. His songs recast the struggles, joys, and sorrows of working people in heroic terms. He brings this same sensibility to bear in his memoir, portraying, for instance, his humble neighborhood Catholic church as a place of high-stakes spiritual drama:

The priests and nuns themselves are creatures of great authority and unknowable sexual mystery. As both my flesh-and-blood neighbors and our local bridge to the next life, they exert a hard influence over our daily existence. Both everyday and otherworldly, they are the neighborhood gatekeepers of a dark and beatific world I fear and desire entrance to. . . . It’s a world where all you have is at risk . . . a world where men turn into gods and gods into devils.

When he slips into this mode, whether describing religion, his construction-working brother-in-law, or a particularly good rock guitarist, the book soars.

A number of music critics have noted that Springsteen’s catalogue seems to disregard the creative innovations of the 1960s and instead builds directly from the foundational elements of early rock ‘n’ roll: a strong backbeat, solid but unshowy guitar riffs, lyrics about girls, cars, good times and bad—all of this delivered with enough conviction and intelligence that you begin to wonder why anyone thought anything else was necessary. We learn in the book that Springsteen himself was very much a fan of the psychedelic music of the 1960s and mastered that style of playing early on, but he came to understand that his audience—initially, the mostly Italian- and Irish-descended working-class people of New Jersey—demanded a different approach.

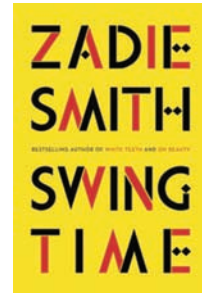
“Except for their Top 40 hits, the bohemian poses of the Stones or their other Sixties brethren held little relevance to these kids’ experience,” Springsteen writes. “Who could afford that? You had to fight, struggle, work, protect what was yours.” He saw more than a little of himself in his listeners. “I was a faux hippie,” he states. “The counterculture stood by



Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band perform during their 'Born in the U.S.A.' tour, Philadelphia, 1984.

Unreal Fictions

SARAH RUDEN



Swing Time, by Zadie Smith
(Penguin, 416 pp., \$27)

definition in opposition to the conservative blue-collar experience I'd had."

So Springsteen's way forward was to write what he knew—what he saw in the lives of all of his family and friends—and in so doing, he gave voice to a large swath of the population that had not hitherto seen itself represented in the music of the era: the many who had *not* turned on, tuned in, dropped out, and/or gone to California but had instead stayed at their jobs or gotten drafted. Springsteen, himself a draft dodger, misfit, and political liberal, became an Everyman hero to these people because of his ability to convey their experience in song. Like Dylan and Steinbeck before him, he has been largely successful at subordinating his ideological concerns to the needs of character and narrative, which have grounded even some of his most radical statements, such as the 2012 album *Wrecking Ball*, in stories of recognizable people and situations.

This brings us to the subject of drugs. Springsteen never touched them and didn't have his first drink until the age of 22. His tight rein on reality almost certainly contributed to the groundedness of his lyrics, but one could be forgiven for wondering whether such restraint might have posed a challenge in the composition of his book. After all, the lack of an epic battle with substance abuse would seem to rob *Born to Run* of one of the key ingredients of the rock-memoir genre. Can you have a romantic comedy without a love interest, or a murder mystery without a dead body? But never fear! Just as the remaining four

senses will compensate if one is lacking, so too has Bruce managed to train-wreck other areas of his life in the absence of a stint in rehab. Thus, we are treated in the book to an abundance of family conflict, relationship drama, musical rivalries, and Springsteen's battle with mental illness—a particularly surprising revelation given his upbeat tough-guy persona.

There is more than enough dramatic tension at hand to keep the pace moving briskly, at least until Springsteen's father dies at the three-fourths mark, which closes the door on the largely oppositional relationship that constitutes the book's major arc. Springsteen writes movingly of his hard-won reconciliation with his remote, troubled dad, but after that he's left a bit adrift—both in his actual life and in the telling of it. The various conflicts and agitations accompanying the second coming of the E Street Band in the early 2000s do not carry nearly as much interest for this reader as they obviously did for Springsteen.

For all of its excesses and occasional dead ends, *Born to Run* succeeds in its stated objective of showing the reader its author's mind. More crucially, it provides a detailed explanation of how and why Springsteen became the songwriter he is. Very few of his peers can articulate the workings of their craft to the degree that Springsteen does here, so the book's greatest value may be as a sort of how-to manual for the next generation of aspiring pop composers. At the close of the book, as at the end of one of those four-hour concerts, most of the audience will likely have found its rewards worth the time invested.

NR

LIVING overseas for many years, I learned to ask open-ended questions about culture. Thus I came to know, for example, a little of what the late-20th-century German army—beefed up by a draft and a rich country's high taxes, but unable to do much of anything militarily—was like inside. An acquaintance of mine had served on the champion river-crossing-with-full-battle-gear team. (He did not seem worried that, in the event of a Russian invasion, he and his veteran comrades would not know how to resist except by finding a river and crossing and recrossing it; I didn't have the heart to suggest this to him.)

I hope it's the same for information-age fiction; in fact, my questions *have* to be open-ended, as I'm deeply bewildered. I can't even call these books postmodern, as they seem rather to be post-everything: post-family, post-individual, post-religion, post-industrial-capitalism, post-national, post-feminist, post-ethnic. They don't venture a clear reordering or critique, as modernism does; nor do they offer earnest or even ironic substitutions for our consideration, as postmodern visual art did when Jeff Koons depicted Michael Jackson in porcelain with the stated intention of "creating" him "in a very god-like icon manner."

Sarah Ruden is the author of the forthcoming book The Face of Water: A Translator on Beauty and Meaning in the Bible and the translator of a forthcoming edition of Augustine's Confessions.

The book industry, after all, doesn't allow its suppliers the same latitude in borrowing or in rebellion. The business—seeded in drawing rooms and gentlemen's studies, fertilized by lending libraries, and now flowering through women's book clubs and Kindles—tends to be bourgeois in its demands. No matter how post- you are as an author, you probably still have to tell a cogent story. The fiction avant-garde (as much as it's permitted to be one) tells this story mainly through imagery, with the (already) time-honored postmodern imitation of popular electronic media. This strategy has plain disadvantages for print fiction: Readers, used to being viewers, can revert to the screen for actual images, and to older literature for the ideas they seem to crave most.

With respect to images, the difference between the old and the new fiction is astonishing. In Jane Austen's work, there's practically nothing both detailed and explicit about the material culture (the "glossy spots" on Fanny Price's ball gown appear only through another character's comment, and the authorial interest remains in that character's manners and morals), let alone the attractions of a costume drama, and no modern crazed Austen fans care.

As for me, I find many of the new fiction's scenes ingenious, and funny, and even moving in competition with those in traditional fiction, but I wouldn't read these new books again, or praise them synthetically, no matter what Oprah might command; any more than I would eat all the junk food I'm told to. I don't think the comparison is unfair. The titillation of literary imagery is like "mouth-feel," in being designed to make me consume too much but without giving solid nurturance. These are long, dense, busy books, but I don't see how to get out of them what I need.

I feel that I have to include in this judgment even a really memorable book like Zadie Smith's fifth novel, *Swing Time*, about an unnamed dual-ethnic British girl under the overwhelming influence of two dancers. One is her friend (also dual-ethnic) from childhood, who (because her more-real world is the screen on which she's sure she belongs) is pulled between sociopathy and pathos, between a brutal drive toward media apotheosis and a compulsive destruction of the self that exists in

time and space. The other dancer is the protagonist's boss, an aging white megastar who eventually parlays her midriff-in-motion into a plantation from which she can order up an unwilling young African boyfriend from his village and an African baby from two viable parents.

Traditional plot elements are thus set up, but without any edification I can sense amid the vast array of physical description. The protagonist's help in the boyfriend's escape and her exposure of the child purchase are conducted in the impulsive, stumbling terms of a Facebook "friendship" gone bad. In the aftermath, she is humiliated and desolate; her employer has barely been disturbed. No wonder, as the young woman's consuming relationship with the star has been, for years, carried out mostly by smartphone contact with the star's other satellites. She has no sustaining attachments to which she can retreat, in essence no name, even to herself. But she doesn't fall like a tragic heroine; she drifts off, and not even to where lessons seem liable to exist.

In reading Smith's essays collected under the title "Changing My Mind" (2009), I could at least ask how I'm meant to take all this. I was particularly struck by her admiration of David Foster Wallace: Through fiction of greatly heightened frankness and precision, he sought to address ethically the electronic mediation of reality to the modern mind. It's a superficially appealing purpose, especially to those of us who grew up around any contempt for the "squawk box."

But not far below the surface is a Rousseau-like plea for a time when reality was unmediated. That of course wasn't true even in the hunter-gatherer stage, when we mediated reality through tools, visual art, and storytelling. And I'm looking down right now at my corgi, Bessie, whose mediation between herself and reality includes the fiction that, without her vigilance, predators will devour my husband and me. For mortal creatures, isn't everything mediated? But don't rational creatures have a lot of choice in *how* it's mediated?

Wallace and Smith and similar fiction writers attempt in a single basic way, through masses of pure documentation, actually to un-mediate reality (creepy as any such God-challenging

move may appear). Images are key: *This* is the exact tactile sensation, the color, the shape; this is the basic, *real* experience left when institutions and ideologies are muddled or gone. But Smith's leading example of Wallace's achievement along these lines, an early piece about a boy's first high dive, shows the trap. The diver himself, by fixating on his physical experience, avoids social and intellectual connection and deepens his panic and despair. The middle-aged woman in line to dive in front of him isn't a spunky human being, having fun without reference to her looks: She's only her big, tight bathing suit and cheese-like, veiny thighs. The voices—concerned, impatient—other swimmers direct at him are not signs of other consciousnesses but merely an interruption of his own. The slightly rough surface of the board isn't an ordinary, barely noticeable safety feature but a tormenting, disgusting skin grater. His world—physical only—is the free-fall of solipsism. He has de-storied and thus stranded himself like a child concentrating on the scary sounds in the darkness instead of saying, "I'm scared. May I have a nightlight? My friend has one."

It's not unlike the world of Smith's protagonist in *Swing Time*. The depiction of her mother, an old-fashioned radical (who, of course, ends up as part of the establishment), filled me with ironic nostalgia. She marches forth to garden on her housing estate, uncovering only clay—so, ceramics classes for the local kids, her daughter included? Nothing doing. They can't get beyond the penis shape rising from the pottery wheel during the initial demonstration. Am I the only aghast fud here, or are "children" who can resist clay not some appalling deconstruction of children? The narrator doesn't notice that a life-long sensation of hip emptiness is the really odd one.

Fiction is malleable for a reason. You need to get your hands dirty in it, form it into something new and useful to be shared. There is plenty of journalism to tell us what the world is like, alas. There are plenty of blogs to tell us exactly what it's like to individuals in isolation. Fiction should strive to understand how the world works underneath, in its elements, and communicate something about that.

NR

Film

Dark Journey

ROSS DOUTHAT

MANCHESTER BY THE SEA is the kind of movie that critics are pretty much required to like. It offers an actors' clinic, with a brace of talented performers inhabiting the heavily accented pafts of a north-of-Boston Irish Catholic clan. It has a mournful soundtrack, a colloquial, closely observed script, and a story whose central tragedy is designed to strip you raw. The writer-director, Kenneth Lonergan, and the star, Casey Affleck, are both major talents who haven't had their biggest breakthroughs yet; if they want it, *Manchester by the Sea* has the feel of a career turning point for both.

I also rather hated it.

The movie starts in flashback, with Affleck's character, Lee Chandler, out on the water, horsing around with his kid-nephew Patrick while his brother Joe (Kyle Chandler) carries them both on his fishing boat. Then we move to the present, to a wintry Boston, where Lee is the eminently capable, highly truculent handyman for a cluster of apartment buildings. He lives alone, he avoids female contact, he drinks and picks fights in bars—and then, the phone call from his hometown: Joe has had a heart attack and died.

So back to Manchester goes Lee, to organize the funeral and supervise the now-teenage Patrick (Lucas Hedges) and reconnect, in some form, with friends and family and neighbors from whom he's become estranged. The why of the estrangement is the movie's secret, for a while. People murmur as he passes ("Is that *the* Lee Chandler?"), and as the work of the funeral goes ahead, we get snatches of flashback—scenes of Lee horsing around with a wife (Michelle Williams) and three little kids, scenes of Joe getting his bad heart diagnosed, scenes of Joe's wife and Patrick's mother melting down on drugs and alcohol, scenes of Lee hosting a gang of friends at his house in midwinter



Casey Affleck and Lucas Hedges in *Manchester by the Sea*

while his wife complains (playing a nag, not being one) that they're keeping the kids awake . . . and then, the catastrophe.

I won't reveal the details; suffice it to say it's terrible enough that you can understand completely why present-day Lee would have no wish to stay a moment longer in Manchester than he must to wrap up his brother's affairs. But from beyond the grave, his brother has other ideas: He's named Lee to be Patrick's guardian, and Patrick has a life in Manchester—friends, a hockey team, and not one but two girlfriends (oh, kids these days) with whom he's hooking up on the regular. He doesn't want to leave, Lee doesn't want to stay, and out of that conflict comes the dramatic tension of the movie's second half.

What you might expect, given Hollywood narrative clichés, is that Patrick and Lee will forge a connection in shared grief, and that Lee will learn somehow to love and live again—becoming a surrogate father to his nephew, maybe dating the mom of one of Lee's two belles, maybe taking over his late brother's fishing boat and becoming a fisherman rather than a janitor. The story would write itself, but Lonergan has written a different, darker one, in which it isn't clear at all that Lee can learn to be fully human once again—because some tragedies cut too deeply, some contaminations can't be cured.

I respect the unsentimentality of this approach, and its realism cannot be denied. There are men and women who don't come back from the worst experience they suffer, who remain trapped in the darkness, or at best take a few halting steps back out.

But from a storytelling perspective, those "learn to live again" clichés exist for a reason—because they give a story shape, urgency, and drama, and give the audience a reason to invest. And they have parallels in darker, unredemptive stories as well. There are many great tragedies, from *Othello* to *The Godfather Part II*, that take as dire a view of the human situation as *Manchester* does. But great tragedians from Shakespeare to Coppola also take care to offer the kind of movement, action, agency, and change-over-time that makes their pity-and-terror conjurings feel like more than just a browbeating, more than just a punishment delivered to the characters and audience alike.

Which is what *Manchester by the Sea* felt like to me—an overdetermined, loaded-dice series of unfortunate events that prides itself on the very things that make it boring and bludgeoning: the constant anticlimax and repetition, the brutalized recessiveness of Lee and the teenage unpleasantness of Patrick, the determination to transform any potential turning point or epiphany into something that trails off back into the same old misery instead.

Which, again, is a grimly realistic way to portray a certain kind of life experience. But not every life experience makes for a strong story, a gripping movie, a searing work of art. There are scenes in *Manchester* that sear—that cannot help but do so—but the movie as a whole does not. The experience, for all its verisimilitude, is like motoring through a dark tunnel and finding nothing there that's worth taking with you back into the light.

NR

Hillary Gone Wild

On the first weekend of December, *Saturday Night Live*—finally showing a little pep after its over-the-top, embarrassingly lachrymose mourning period for Hillary Clinton—debuted a new sketch, “The Hunt for Hil.” Mimicking the style of *Finding Bigfoot*, Animal Planet’s kitschy television sensation, “The Hunt for Hil” took various cockeyed fake “experts” into brave new territory: Clinton country, deep in the shadowy yet upscale hiking trails of Chappaqua, N.Y.

“Bigfoot. Chupacabra. The Loch Ness monster,” intones a tough-guy narrator. The video flashes over shaky images of various mythical creatures, including, oddly, a stray ordinary coyote, which I presume was shown in a half-hearted attempt to represent the legendary, fearsome, oft-misunderstood chupacabra. As a newish specialist on mythical creatures—in recent years, thanks to three kids with wild imaginations, I’ve watched more episodes of *Finding Bigfoot* than I should admit—I find this unfortunate, as well as an insult to chupacabras everywhere. But I digress.

“All rarely seen. All shrouded in mystery,” the “Hunt for Hil” narrator continues. “And tonight, we’re headed to the woods of Westchester County to search for the most elusive legend of all: Hillary Rodham Clinton.”

Ah, yes: Hillary in the wild. It’s a post-election meme that has gained significant steam. Perhaps you’ve seen these viral chummy selfies, all starring the American politician most famous for being not very chummy or perhaps, as Barack Obama once declared her, “likeable enough.” Scan through these memes with me in your mind: There’s Hillary on a forest trail, bedecked in fleece, bereft of makeup, posing with a beaming fan. There’s Hillary in a grocery store, looking benign and grandmotherly (and also kind of like she just rolled out of bed, because hey, at this point, why not), cheerily posing in front of vats of guacamole and mysterious-looking potato salad.

There she is with Bill in a local restaurant, grinning with the whole staff, everyone apparently having a whale of a time. There she is in a quaint little bookstore. Next, a deli. Another nature trail! Post-election Hillary sightings have even earned their own Twitter account, HRC in the Wild, which has shot up to having almost 30,000 followers.

Because America is a kooky and creative place, we’ve even had a few faux Hillary sightings, including one image doctored to make it look like Clinton, not Bigfoot, is striding across the infamous 1967 Patterson-Gimlin film. (Sasquatch enthusiasts will inform you that the Patterson-Gimlin creature appears to be a lady bigfoot, so there’s that.)

But Hillary Clinton, “wandering folk hero,” as *Vanity Fair* predictably hailed her, could not last for long. This is because Hillary Clinton is not a Willie Nelson or a Bob

Dylan or even a Kinky Friedman. She is Hillary Clinton, which was the main reason she lost the presidential contest in the first place.

And so on December 8, in her first major public post-election appearance—wearing a purple pantsuit, no less—the real Hillary returned to the American stage. “This is not exactly the speech at the Capitol I hoped to be giving after the election,” she said, “but after a few weeks of taking selfies in the woods, I thought it would be a good idea to come out.”

Sadly, Clinton did not then drop the microphone, exit the stage, and wander back into the woods for more good times and jolly photos. Instead, she went on to honor the questionable D.C. fixture Harry Reid, blast a national scourge of “fake news,” and later, via her campaign confidant John Podesta, suggest that the Electoral College seriously rethink the act of finalizing a Trump presidency. Helpful, right? (Fact check: not helpful at all.)

Please, Hillary Clinton, go back to the forest. Buy some furry winter boots, quietly reflect during walks, and enjoy all of that money you amassed in ways we might not want to discuss. You don’t have to go full Bigfoot—emerging very rarely, in short, compelling appearances. Going at least 50 percent Bigfoot would work. If you can pull it off, America will like you more!

Not everyone would find Hillary-gone-Bigfoot a “folk hero.” Many Americans are relieved that the Clintons are out of their political hair. Others, while less than thrilled with Donald Trump, are downright elated that Hillary won’t be filling their ears and the airwaves with sanctimony and nonsense and tales of underlings stuffing secret documents down their socks and various strains of left-wing goofiness for the next four years.

But still, it would be glorious, wouldn’t it? Imagine a quiet Clinton, seemingly content, back in touch with normal people and normal life, occasionally rearing her head at a gas station or a Westchester Starbucks. She would re-learn a life without influence-peddling! She could volunteer for local charities! She would emerge and speak only when she had something to say, and sometimes not even then!

Alas, Hillary Clinton’s desired attainments do not seem to include “increasingly well liked former public servant as people’s memories fade.” The odds of her truly going Bigfoot are low—and, hopes and dreams aside, no one should be surprised.

After all, Hillary Clinton is a politician, a species that thrives on exposure, publicity, sound, and fury. Very few manage to do the job quietly. To do it quietly, in fact, seems to be drifting out of style. Witness our recently elected celebrity-in-chief. Like Bigfoot, he occupies the minds and imaginations of many Americans, but that’s where the comparison ends. Poor Bigfoot. The way he minds his own business, he’d never make it in Washington.

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