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Article 1.

NYT

The Leaderless Doctrine

David Brooks

March 10, 2014 -- We're in the middle of a remarkable shift in how Americans see the world and their own country's role in the world. For the first time in half a century, a majority of Americans say that the U.S. should be less engaged in world affairs, according to the most recent Pew Research Center survey. For the first time in recorded history, a majority of Americans believe that their country has a declining influence on what's happening around the globe. A slight majority of Americans now say that their country is doing too much to help solve the world's problems.

At first blush, this looks like isolationism. After the exhaustion from Iraq and Afghanistan, and amid the lingering economic stagnation, Americans are turning inward.

But if you actually look at the data, you see that this is not the case. America is not turning inward economically. More than three-quarters of Americans believe the U.S. should get more economically integrated with the world, according to Pew.

America is not turning inward culturally. Large majorities embrace the globalization of culture and the internationalization of colleges and workplaces. Americans are not even turning inward when it comes to activism. They have enormous confidence in personalized peer-to-peer efforts to promote democracy, human rights and development.

What's happening can be more accurately described this way: Americans have lost faith in the high politics of global affairs. They have lost faith in the idea that American political and military institutions can do much to shape the world. American opinion is marked by an amazing sense of limitation — that there are severe restrictions on what political and military efforts can do.

This sense of limits is shared equally among Democrats and Republicans, polls show. There has been surprisingly little outcry against the proposed defense cuts, which would reduce the size of the U.S. Army to its lowest levels since 1940. That's because people are no longer sure military might gets you very much.

These shifts are not just a result of post-Iraq disillusionment, or anything the Obama administration has done. The shift in foreign policy values is a byproduct of a deeper and broader cultural shift.

The veterans of World War II returned to civilian life with a

basic faith in big units — big armies, corporations and unions. They tended to embrace a hierarchical leadership style.

The Cold War was a competition between clearly defined nation-states.

Commanding American leaders created a liberal international order. They preserved that order with fleets that roamed the seas, armies stationed around the world and diplomatic skill.

Over the ensuing decades, that faith in big units has eroded — in all spheres of life. Management hierarchies have been flattened. Today people are more likely to believe that history is driven by people gathering in the squares and not from the top down. The liberal order is not a single system organized and defended by American military strength; it's a spontaneous network of direct people-to-people contacts, flowing along the arteries of the Internet.

The real power in the world is not military or political. It is the power of individuals to withdraw their consent. In an age of global markets and global media, the power of the state and the tank, it is thought, can pale before the power of the swarms of individuals.

This is global affairs with the head chopped off. Political leaders are not at the forefront of history; real power is in the swarm. The ensuing doctrine is certainly not Reaganism — the belief that America should use its power to defeat tyranny and promote democracy. It's not Kantian, or a belief that the world should be governed by international law. It's not even realism — the belief that diplomats should play elaborate chess games to balance power and advance national interest. It's a radical belief that the

nature of power — where it comes from and how it can be used — has fundamentally shifted, and the people in the big offices just don't get it.

It's frankly naïve to believe that the world's problems can be conquered through conflict-free cooperation and that the menaces to civilization, whether in the form of Putin or Iran, can be simply not faced. It's the utopian belief that politics and conflict are optional.

One set of numbers in the data leaps out. For decades Americans have been asked if they believe most people can be trusted. Forty percent of baby boomers believe most people can be trusted. But only 19 percent of millennials believe that. This is a thoroughly globalized and linked generation with unprecedentedly low levels of social trust.

We live in a country in which many people act as if history is leaderless. Events emerge spontaneously from the ground up. Such a society is very hard to lead and summon. It can be governed only by someone who arouses intense moral loyalty, and even that may be fleeting.

[Article 2.](#)

National Interest

Post-Imperial Blues

Robert A. Manning, James Clad

March 11, 2014 -- As Syria burns, Iran negotiations drag on and Ukraine melts down, the absence of decisive US action just about anywhere is causing great heartburn to the strategic mindset that brought you Iraq, Libya and other nation-building successes. US and EU helplessness in the face of Russian intervention in the Ukraine has turned that into an ulcer.

Two recent laments come to mind. The first comes from the AEI's Michael Rubin who, in an Outlook piece in the Washington Post, warns about the dangers of negotiating with bad guys. The other comes from ubiquitous Harvard know-it-all Niall Ferguson, who ponders Obama's failure to lead in the Wall Street Journal.

Both men seize on Obama's inconsistency and inconstancy, implying—though neither comes out and says it—that muscularity by the Great White Father can solve the problem. Implicit also is the converse: restraint equals weakness. Both combine to offer an amazing case of historical amnesia, willful ignorance or nostalgia passing for strategy. A synopsis of this mindset is: when you have a hammer, every problem looks like a nail.

To be sure, Obama's foreign policy offers a target-rich environment. Befuddled by the Arab Awakening, the current administration has taken successive positions on Egypt—all to little effect. And when the president of the United States says Assad "must go," but has no idea how to achieve this (and later does nothing when Assad crosses the chemical-weapons red line)—well, it does not inspire confidence. And in regard to Ukraine, one might wonder what decisive steps did George W. Bush take when Moscow flexed its military muscle in similar

way Georgia.

Beware of Bad Guys

Rubin warns about “dancing with the devil”—the title of his new book—and uses the demonizing term “rogue regimes” to describe a clutch of nefarious actors. He makes useful points about how countries like North Korea or Iran can use negotiations as a delaying tactic or to extract concessions. And he is not entirely wrong to see negotiations as a jobs issue for US diplomats, who sometimes may want to talk for the sake of talking: Think of all the greenhouse gas emissions which have been generated during successive UN climate talks with sparse results.

But underneath this lies a strange idea—that we are so exceptionally wonderful that just talking to the United States is a high honor and privilege. The idea, so prevalent in the George W. Bush administration we served, is that diplomacy is not just a tool to achieve policy objectives but a reward that can legitimize bad guys. Almost never does this approach lead to problem solving.

There may be cases where an actor is so bad and incorrigible that the only useful step is to isolate them (think Mugabe in Zimbabwe or apartheid South Africa.). But it is almost never an either/or proposition: Iran and North Korea both show how sanctions and diplomacy can be employed simultaneously. With North Korea, Obama—to his credit—ended talks after Pyongyang’s provocative behavior (nuclear and missile tests, sinking a South Korean ship) made it clear that Pyongyang had no intention of yielding their nuclear weapons. And it would

obviously make little sense to negotiate with, nihilistic, suicidal terrorists—although even the most venal and evil can be induced to talk, even as we fight and isolate them.

If you are concerned about nuclear proliferation or territorial disputes, what alternative exists beside negotiation? Unless you are a mind reader, diplomacy can be a useful means of testing intentions. As former Israeli prime minister said, “you don’t make peace with your friends, you make peace with your enemies.”

Global Retreat or Prudent Retrenchment?

Ferguson’s theme boils down to this: Obama is presiding over US global retreat. He claims Obama’s foreign policy mirrors in geopolitical terms the Federal Reserve’s “tapering” of expansive monetary policy, “a fundamental shift...in the national security strategy of the US.”

Citing Obama’s frequently empty “red line” threats is easy and not unfair. Yet Ferguson seems oblivious to the after effect of the winding down of two, decade-long wars (costing over \$1 trillion and much blood, but with—at best—ambiguous outcomes). War-weariness is palpable, and the American public is now more alert than before to the folly of “nation-building.” But retrenchment is not necessarily isolationism.

It is in regard to the Middle East that Ferguson enters the realm of the absurd. “Syria,” he argues, “has been one of the great fiascoes of post-World War II American foreign policy.” Really? Do the words Vietnam or Iraq mean anything to him? In fact he argues that, “the result of this U.S. inaction [in Syria] is a disaster.”

Whatever else it is, the cause Syria's horrendous civil war is principally homegrown. Yes, it is exacerbated by Russian arms and Hezbollah and Iran's Qods Force fighters on one side, and global jihadists on the other (And with Hezbollah and Al-Qaeda fighting each other, what's not to like?). But it strains the imagination to blame it on the United States—as if US military intervention would be likely to do anything but make it worse. Again, it is as if the US experience in the Middle East over the past fifteen years has been deleted.

Of course, the administration hasn't covered itself with glory on Syria. But its caution and restraint has been warranted, particularly by a fragmented opposition difficult to help. Not all problems have solutions and, as we in this country learned in the nineteenth century, civil wars sometimes must play themselves—albeit at dreadful cost.

In our contemporary conundrum, the very last response should be the argument that the Middle East must be treated as a colonial province where the US acts as imperial overlord. Is it really so easy to airbrush Iraq from recent history? The subtext for those indifferent to contrition over Iraq is unvarying: the Single Superpower must also be the sole global enforcer. This was the message in Senator Marco Rubio's speech last week at the CPAC convention, echoed by a number of Republicans in Congress. We see the error in the logic that treats military intervention as a necessary response. Thus, the turmoil in the Middle East reflects not a playing out of history but a breakdown of US imperial order. This is the logic of the Great Retreat argument.

Reality is probably much more ambiguous. The world is still

transforming as global power becomes diffused, as information technologies create individual empowerment such as that evident in Cairo's Tahrir Square and, of late, in Kiev, Bangkok, and Caracas. At the same time, you may not be interested in geopolitics, but as Putin's old-school tactics reveal with a vengeance, geopolitics is interested in you. There is a structural problem: Ukraine is on Russia's border and is more of a vital interest (as opposed to important issue) for Moscow than for Washington.

The US remains the most dominant global actor, but more as *primus inter pares* than as sole superpower. It's better to see us as chairman of the board of major powers than as lords of all we survey. With regard to specific crises, power and influence tend to be situational: leadership is often about assembling the right coalition of forces that can be brought to bear to address specific problems. How much of Obama's foreign policy is a reflection of a more complex world of diffused power, one that is making addressing global problems increasingly more difficult, and how much of it is a result of administration shortcomings?

In this environment, the US needs clear strategic priorities rooted in knowledge about where our leverage lies, and where it doesn't. Selective engagement based on priorities must accompany the global diffusion of power. It is not hugely satisfying, but such an approach reflects current global dynamics. Obama has made his share of mistakes, and displayed at times a dearth of leadership. But much of his foreign policy reflects a complex world of diffused power.

The choice lies not in remaining the sole superpower or

indulging in retreat. On balance, and since our stupidly protracted land wars of the last decade, we have seen a modest, and rather prudent retrenchment however awkwardly executed. The frustrating ineffectiveness of Washington's response to Moscow's actions in the Ukraine is in one sense, a stark reminder of the limits of power. The maxim for the coming years should be this: You have to know when to hold'em and when to fold'em.

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[Article 3.](#)

The Weekly Standard

Strike Syria - It would send a message to Russia

Lee Smith

March 10, 2014 -- Who's surprised that the Obama administration, evolved, urbane and forward-looking, is having

a hard time dealing with Vladimir Putin's unreconstructed Cold War mentality in Ukraine? "We're hoping that Russia will not see this as sort of a continuation of the Cold War," John Kerry said last week. Even before the Russian invasion of Crimea, Obama was warning of the dangers of seeing the world in terms of Great Power conflict. "We're no longer in a Cold War," the president said at the U.N. General Assembly in September. "There's no Great Game to be won."

Well, to paraphrase Leon Trotsky, you might not be interested in the Cold War, but the Cold War is interested in you. In foreign policy you never get to dictate the rules entirely since the other players also have a say. That's true even for superpowers, and doubly so for superpowers that choose to lead from behind. If you don't want to be backed into the Cold War, then don't choose a former KGB officer as your dance partner.

The unpleasant fact is that Putin has not only bested the White House, but that Obama has enabled him from the very beginning of his first term. "Reset" with Russia, with the intended goals of getting Moscow to agree to Iran sanctions and to keep open the northern transport route to and from Afghanistan, made the administration subject to Putin's whims. The White House wouldn't dare cross the Russian strongman lest it risk policy aims the importance of which the "reset" had only underscored.

With the Syrian conflict, the White House turned Putin into the indispensable Russian. First, the administration begged him without success to abandon his Arab client. There was only a political solution to the crisis, said the White House, and Russia had the answers. Accordingly, traditional U.S. allies flocked to Sochi to petition Putin for relief. The Saudis promised to buy

\$15 billion worth of Russian arms if only the Russians would temper their support for Assad. Putin turned down the Saudi offer because what was more valuable than the cash was the public show that Obama couldn't keep his allies in line and happy. Not Russia—Putin would back Bashar al-Assad till the very end which, given American impotence, virtually guaranteed Assad's survival.

By the time Putin offered Obama a joint initiative to rid Assad of his chemical weapons, thereby saving Obama the embarrassment of not getting congressional authorization for strikes he never wanted to launch in the first place, the Russian was just telling Obama to turn over his king because the game was over. The situation in Ukraine is the culmination of “reset” and Syria.

The White House may be correct—this is not the Cold War. But history shows that, contrary to what Obama professes, the world is more often than not “a zero-sum endeavor.” There are clear winners and losers, and right now the White House is losing.

The administration's confused response to the crisis in Ukraine suggests that it may finally have come to understand the role of American power. U.S. foreign policy has a dual nature that, says my colleague Christopher Caldwell, is something like the medieval idea of the king's two bodies. The king is a real man, with a body subject to the pleasures and afflictions of all men. But the king is also a symbol of the divine order that ties man to God. Similarly, the United States is at once both a nation-state like any other that pursues its own interests, while it is also something much larger, the guarantor of global security—in short, order. There are growing numbers on both the American

right and left who announce they are tired of the United States having to serve as “the world’s policeman.” However, events in Ukraine are evidence that without a strong America things occur that seem distasteful and dangerous to all, like the violation of national sovereignty.

The United States has no narrow national interest in Ukraine, but as caretaker of the world’s security architecture it has a vital interest in pushing back against Putin. In order to send Putin a message in a language that will make sense to a man who has repeatedly posed bare-chested, political and diplomatic measures need to be integrated with hard power. Putin needs to be hit hard somewhere. Cold War thinking shows that there are a number of vulnerable pieces on the board and possible moves for the White House to make. The most obvious is to go back to the origin of Putin’s campaign—Syria.

Assad is not getting rid of his chemical weapons as Putin promised, so the administration should move to show that, in fact, it’s the Russian’s word that can’t be trusted, not America’s. The strikes on regime targets that Obama planned last September could serve as the White House’s notice that as far as the United States is concerned the deal’s off. Destroying the air force that Assad has used to drop barrel bombs on innocent civilians would not only restore some order to the international system, but also highlight the fact that, contrary to his boasts, the former KGB officer is incapable of protecting his allies. American allies on the other hand, from the Middle East to Asia and central Europe, will once again be reassured that their interests are safe in American hands. What a gift for Obama to bear the Saudi king when the president visits Riyadh later this month: “I told you—I got your back.”

For America and our allies, the most salutary effect of Putin's machinations is to remind the White House of what the Cold War looks like in reality. If the administration believes that it can contain and deter an Iranian nuclear weapon, it has to reckon truly the costs involved. As it stands, Obama administration officials have an academic conception of containment and deterrence, meaning that it's the opposite of anything like military action. As the half-century-long U.S.-Soviet standoff showed, real containment and deterrence of a nuclear power is bloody and expensive. Ensuring that the Iranians never acquire the bomb, whether that's through sanctions and a credible threat of force, or more perhaps eventually a bombing campaign to show that the regime in Tehran will never get there, means safeguarding the global order. Let Putin and Assad serve as an example to put Iran on notice.

Article 4.

Politico Magazine

Obama Needs a New National Security Strategy

Julianne Smith & Jacob Stokes

March 10, 2014 -- When you work on the president's national

security staff, you never feel like there are enough hours in the day. Whether you are managing Ukraine, Syria, South Sudan or the South China Sea, even a 15-hour day leaves you feeling like a slacker. But every few years, the White House staff piles one more task on its overflowing agenda: draft, debate and vet a National Security Strategy, a hefty document that explains the president's foreign policy vision to a demanding Congress, not to mention America's allies and adversaries around the world.

The task feels overwhelming for any administration. The drafters have to summarize all of the national security concerns of the United States, outline how the administration will address them and then secure buy-in from interagency colleagues — while simultaneously juggling real-time crises all over the globe.

This year's drafters, as they prepare for this month's release of the 2014 NSS, have a particularly steep hill to climb. Virtually all of the threats we face have evolved significantly since the administration's last version in 2010. Polling suggests Americans on the right and the left, tired from over a decade of war and recognizing the limits to U.S. power and resources, increasingly want to focus inward.

How then should the administration craft a strategy to secure and advance U.S. global interests in an increasingly complex world — a world perhaps no more dangerous than in the past but whose dangers manifest in newer, trickier ways? How can the United States reshape its commitments to allow for renewal of the domestic roots of American power without succumbing to the counterproductive and dangerous siren song of “Come home, America”?

The need for a new strategy stems in part from the success of the previous one: The United States has left Iraq, the war in Afghanistan is ending and Osama bin Laden is dead. President Barack Obama and Russian then-President Dmitry Medvedev signed a new nuclear treaty, and the U.S. economy is on the mend. But nobody's feeling like patting themselves on the back, as this year's NSS drafters face a long list of intractable problems for which there are no easy answers. Here are six issues that will be especially tough to tackle.

1. Rebalancing

The administration made rebalancing to Asia one of its signature foreign policy initiatives in the first term. That wise and overdue shift has concrete policy attached to it, including bolstering the U.S. military posture in the region, a major trade initiative in the Trans-Pacific Partnership and broader diplomatic ties through programs like the expanded strategic and economic dialogues with China. Those initial moves herald a shift that will take a generation to fully mature — the rebalance should be evaluated over years, not weeks or months.

Now officials must figure out how to devote increasing attention to Asia while simultaneously focusing on the administration's top three priorities in the Middle East: Iran, Syria and Middle East peace. Adding to the challenge, the recent crisis in Ukraine has forced the administration to review some of its core assumptions about stability in Europe, a region most believed was moving inexorably toward stability and prosperity. Will Russian aggression force the administration to spend more time and money reassuring skittish allies in Central and Eastern Europe going forward? Officials are already hinting, as did the

Quadrennial Defense Review, that the rebalancing concept actually applies to more than how the administration balances its resources and attention across various regions. It also applies to a rebalancing of the tools of national power and how the United States will approach problems globally.

2. Counterterrorism

Though the administration has wound down the wars and decimated core Al Qaeda, the terrorist threat has morphed to pose new challenges. Splinter groups have proliferated across the Middle East and North Africa. Syria has become a vast training ground for extremists much like Afghanistan in the 1980s, with more than 5,000 foreign fighters.

None of this is what the administration wanted or expected to be facing in its sixth year in office. The aim has always been to move America off of a permanent war footing and clarify the legal structures that will guide counterterror efforts going forward, from the use of drones to the status of detainees. Both of those goals have proved elusive. The challenge for the administration now will be noting its progress in combating core Al Qaeda but then quickly acknowledging the quantity, potency and geographic dispersion of new affiliates. The NSS will have to reassure the American public and the world that the United States possesses a strategy and the tools to combat today's threats as well as a renewed commitment to craft a more sustainable counterterror framework. Right now, that's not so clear.

Julianne Smith is senior fellow and director of the strategy and

statecraft program at the Center for a New American Security. Previously, she served as deputy national security advisor to the vice president. Jacob Stokes is a research associate at CNAS.

[Article 5](#)

Al Monitor

Egypt caught between Russia and Saudi Arabia

Mahmoud Salem

March 10, 2014 -- To say that relations between Russia and Saudi Arabia lately have been uneasy would be an understatement. Russia has been fuming for a while over what it perceives to be Saudi financing of Islamist terrorists in Russia, and Saudi Arabia in turn has been furious over Russia's continued support for Iran and Syria — two regimes that the Saudis would like, more than anything, to see broken or overthrown.

The frosty relations between the two respective regional powerhouses have been heating up recently, and not in a good way. On Feb. 24, Russia issued a statement accusing Saudi of planning to arm Syrian rebels with more advanced weaponry, and the next day Saudi Arabia responded with a statement

condemning Russia and stating, “[Vladimir] Putin has lost Arab hearts with his support for [Bashar al-]Assad.” The fight spilled over into the Saudi Twittersphere the moment Russia moved into Crimea, with Saudi hashtags accusing Russia of moving there to kill the Crimean Muslim population, and exulting the virtues of the Ukrainian soldiers who will teach the Russians a lesson. And right in between those two, there is Egypt.

Egypt, in terms of foreign policy, faces a unique conundrum: Its interim government needs Saudi and Gulf money to survive on a monthly basis, while its military is publically cozying up to Putin and announcing a \$2 billion arms deal, which it said will be financed by Saudi money. Needless to say, there has been no arms deal yet, and Saudi is not very likely to waste \$2 billion on second rate weaponry with unreliable after-sales service that Egypt doesn't need, especially if the seller is Russia. Saudi media were also quick to try to capitalize on the Crimean crisis, by reminding Egyptians that 2,500 Egyptian soldiers died defending Crimea from the Russians back in the mid-19th century, which had very little effect. Egypt's position is bewildering analysts: What exactly is Egypt up to?

The theory being advanced in some analysts' circles is that Egypt is playing a new role clandestinely, one that is a proxy between Gulf countries and Russia. They like to point to a number of specific facts and dates to support this. First, there is the fact that despite what the Egyptian media is reporting, Russia has not made any sales agreement to Egypt, yet there were two Russian military delegations that visited Egypt in less than two weeks in February, the last of which was on Feb. 24, right before the public condemnations between Russia and Saudi began. Then they point out that on March 7 Saudi Arabia made its big

announcement declaring the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization, alongside Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) and demanded the immediate return of any Saudi citizen fighting abroad in Syria. To those following Syria, something very strange was afoot here: Suddenly, the Saudi and Russian positions on Syrian rebels were aligned.

Was some kind of rapprochement really in effect? Has Egypt been secretly playing intermediary between Saudi and Russia? It is tough to say for sure, but the answer is most probably no, and that those who are advancing this theory are either grasping at straws, or would like to lend support to El Watan's laughable report on the new regional alliance Egyptian army chief Abdel Fattah al-Sisi is leading, which includes Egypt, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the UAE against a Western regional alliance led by the US that includes Turkey and Qatar. Either way, this theory, while satisfying to the conspiracy-addled mindset of many Egyptians, just doesn't hold water. Let's examine the facts, shall we?

1. The March 7 declaration regarding terrorist organizations had nothing to do with Russia or any foreign power, although it does have something to do with Qatar. Learning from its Afghanistan mistakes, Saudi has been less keen on continuing to support radical Islamist militia, especially ones that have their own nationals fighting in them, because they tend to come back home and cause security problems. Also, by declaring both Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS terrorist organizations and penalizing anyone who funds them, they have publically left Qatar as the only official sponsor of Islamist extremism in Syria. Having made the

announcement the day after Saudi Arabia, alongside the UAE and Bahrain, withdrew their ambassadors from Qatar, Saudi is not only aiming to isolate Qatar in the Gulf, but also internationally: Any new atrocity that gets committed by either Jabhat al-Nusra or ISIS is now on Qatar's hands, and Qatar's hands alone.

2. A rapprochement would mean that Russia would eventually back down from supporting Assad, while in reality it has good reasons to support him beyond simply having a foot in the region or wanting to antagonize Saudi as a way to antagonize the United States. Having suffered from civil conflict and terrorist attacks, Russia is anti-Islamist on principle, and has been eyeing the increasingly Islamist Turkey nervously, worrying that an Islamist alliance between Turkey and an Islamist-run Syria might take hold this close to its borders. As far as Russia is concerned, Assad remaining in control of Syria is a matter of national Russian security.
3. Russia has not sold Egypt any weapons, and most likely never will, because Egypt has a history of selling Russian weapons to the United States and anti-Russian allies. This whole thing with the highly publicized meetings is nothing short of posturing for both Putin and Sisi for the sake of local consumption: Sisi looks as if he is not beholden to US support or interest to the local population, which is something that the Egyptian public has held against both Mubarak and Morsi, while Putin appears to his population as if he is infiltrating a US stronghold in the region and restoring Russia's cold war glory. All of those meetings have been nothing more than a very expensive and elaborate PR

stunt aimed at snubbing the United States by both governments.

4. When it comes to Egypt cozying up to Russia, the Saudis get it. They understand that the new Egyptian government wanted to send a message to the Obama administration, even if it goes against all of the lobbying work that Saudi Arabia and the UAE have done to ensure continued US support to the post-June 30 government. Sure, in terms of foreign policy it might be a childish gesture from Egypt, but in the end it does aim to provoke a response from the most disaffected and nonresponsive administration foreign policy-wise in US history. The continued retreat of the United States from world affairs, its refusal to continue its role as the world's super power, especially in the Middle East, is having all sorts of side effects. The Russian invasion of Crimea is one of them, the Egyptian government's antagonism is another, and more are likely to come.

The actions of Russia and Saudi Arabia are springing from an awareness of a new reality: The United States is no longer the world's policeman, and is focusing on becoming a major oil and gas producer whose production is expected to surpass both Russia and Saudi Arabia. The United States is leaving the world to settle its affairs based on the work of the respective regional powers. Given what they perceive is a growing vacuum, Saudi Arabia — and the rest of the Gulf — are investing in the Egyptian army as their most reliable option to counter Iran. Russia, for its part, is determined to create buffer zones around

its borders and solidify its position as the regional power that Europe has to contend with.

Unfortunately for Egypt, no such plans or ambitions exist; it's just happy to be in the news.

Mahmoud Salem is a writer and an analyst.

Article 6.

NYT

Putin forces us to reconsider poor Neville Chamberlain

Richard Cohen

March 11 -- Pardon the cliche, but I think we have come upon a teachable moment. I am referring to the crisis in Ukraine and what it teaches us, not just about the future but also about the past. Vladimir Putin has turned us all into Neville Chamberlain. The umbrella, please.

Chamberlain is famous for the Munich Agreement and his statement that, by acquiescing to Hitler's demands, he had brought Britain and Europe "peace for our time." He and the French gave Hitler the Sudetenland, which was the name applied to the substantially German areas of what was then

Czechoslovakia. Hitler was a monster, but in this case his argument had a superficial appeal: Germans, he contended, ought to be in Germany.

What complicates matters is that we now know — indeed, we soon learned — that for Hitler the Sudetenland represented mere batting practice. He was soon to invade Poland and much of the rest of Europe, faltering only when he disregarded the bitter lesson Napoleon learned and plunged into Russia. It was a very cold winter.

Putin is demanding for Crimea more or less what Hitler wanted for the Sudetenland: Russians ought to be in Russia. No doubt the Crimean Russians agree and, come Sunday, will vote accordingly. That would place a patina of democracy — or at least self-determination — over what is essentially a power grab, but it will be hard to argue that the Crimean Russians aren't getting the government they want, if not the one they deserve.

So we can see — can't we? — that Chamberlain was not such a noodle after all. He certainly appeased Hitler. But the Western world — needing Russian gas for Germany, Russian rubles for London flats — over time probably will do the same with Putin. Just as we — especially our European brethren — can see the logic of Putin's demands, so could Chamberlain appreciate that the Sudeten Germans might be on the wrong side of the border. Hitler's homicidal anti-Semitism, among other character blemishes, bothered them not a bit. No one's perfect, after all.

The fly in my Sudeten ointment is that, as with Chamberlain in 1938, we are not sure with whom we are dealing. Hitler soon announced himself, making Chamberlain appear the fool then

and forevermore. But what of Putin? Will he stop at Crimea or, after a pause, plunge into the rest of eastern Ukraine, which has many Russian speakers? And then, what next? Will he endeavor to protect ethnic Russians in, say, Estonia? Almost 25 percent of that country is ethnic Russian. How about Latvia, which is about 27 percent Russian. These are healthy numbers; if these Russian minorities become endangered — or are merely said to be — a Russian ruler has an obligation to act, da?

Hitler made things easy. By 1938, he had already purged (murdered) the hierarchy of his vaunted brown shirts, instituted the anti-Semitic Nuremberg laws and, a bit more than a month after he signed the Munich Agreement, launched the vast pogrom known as Kristallnacht. By then, too, he had ruthlessly suppressed all dissent, created the first of many concentration camps and lit the German night with bonfires of unacceptable books.

Putin is no angel, but he has concentrated power without widespread violence or murder. While the gulag remains mostly a memory, he has sent his opponents to labor camps, such as YaG-14, where the oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky was eventually sentenced. Putin is autocratic and kleptomaniacal, but he is not Hitler or Stalin. He has a keen ear for the 24-hour news cycle and must have noticed that the Ukraine story has slipped off Page 1 and, on TV, is not as important as the weather.

It would be wrong to allow Putin's seizure of Crimea to fall into some sort of memory hole. Putin got away with the seizure of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 2008 (George W. Bush was president then) and now he seems poised to retain Crimea — at the very least. In the long term, he knows we are short-term

thinkers.

This teachable moment has many students. Around the world, there are nations that suffer the grievous loss of this or that strip of land, even worthless rocky islands in the middle of nowhere. What have they learned? I hope it's not that the rest of us have learned nothing.

Article 7.

NYT Books

The Jews, a History in So Many, Many Words

Dwight Garner

THE STORY OF THE JEWS

Finding the Words 1000 BC-1492 AD

By Simon Schama

Illustrated. 496 pages. Ecco. \$39.99.

March 10, 2014 -- Simon Schama, the prolific and protean British historian whose topics have included the French

Revolution and the history of art, arrives now with a history of the Jewish people, and it's a multimedia happening: two books and a five-part television documentary being broadcast on the BBC and PBS.

The first volume, "The Story of the Jews: Finding the Words 1000 BC-1492 AD," is before us. The second, out this fall, takes us up to the present day. It bears a rather more somber subtitle: "When Words Fail: 1492-Present."

It's no accident that the subtitles alight on language. Mr. Schama is a wordy, frequently witty writer about a wordy, witty culture. Considering the Dead Sea Scrolls, for example, he can't help summarizing a bit of the implied content in one of them this way: "We are going to write the enemy into capitulation! Surrender to our verbosity or else!"

Mr. Schama's own verbosity offers deep pleasures. If he occasionally writes the reader into capitulation — there are more zealots and harlots, uprootings and assaults, curses and hymns, doves and asses, and parched throats and sacrificed goats in this book than you can easily keep in your head at one time — he mostly wears his erudition lightly.

This story has, to be sure, been related many times before. "Anyone venturing into Jewish history has to be dauntingly aware," Mr. Schama observes, "of the immense mountain ranges of multivolume scholarship towering behind him." His is the kind of book that more academic historians sometimes disparage as paddling in a genre that's been described as, "read 10 books, write an 11th."

But Mr. Schama's "The Story of the Jews" is exemplary

popular history. It's engaged, literate, alert to recent scholarship and, at moments, winningly personal. Observing the ancient jugs and amphorae and other kitchenware unearthed during an archaeological dig, for example, he spies a beautiful baking tray and comments, "I am suddenly at home in this kitchen, preparing a meal, reaching for the oil."

Jewish history has survived, thanks to its people's intense literacy. "From the beginning of the culture's own self-consciousness, to be Jewish was to be Bookish," Mr. Schama writes. Jews carried the Torah everywhere, sometimes in miniaturized versions on their persons. Burning it was little use; these people had it memorized.

The Torah had everything a mentally omnivorous culture needed. Mr. Schama describes it as "compact, transferable history, law, wisdom, poetic chant, prophecy, consolation and self-strengthening counsel." Yet that the Jews have come so close to annihilation so many times also demonstrates the limits of words alone. As Mr. Schama writes elsewhere, "There are certain things poetry can't do: prolong the life of doomed states, for example."

Mr. Schama's history commences around the time Jews began to be thought of, by scholars, as a unified people; it ends with the Spanish Inquisition and the Jews' expulsion from Spain. In between, the author swivels among civilizations, depicting Jewish life in the ancient Near East, in the Roman and Hellenistic world, and mingled with early Christianity and Islam. His narrative stresses that Jews have not been, as is often imagined, a culture apart; their culture has busily intermingled with many others.

Mr. Schama mediates between historians. He lingers on the “procession of pink-faced Anglos — Bible scholars, missionaries, military engineers, mappers and surveyors, kitted out with their measuring tapes, their candles, notebooks, sketchbooks and pencils, accompanied by their NCOs and fellah-guides,” who have crisscrossed biblical lands, searching for relics.

The author himself combs through all manner of historical evidence, and is winsome about much of it. “So much classical history can be written in its plumbing,” he says. We realize that Josephus is the first real Jewish historian, Mr. Schama comments, “when, with a twinge of guilt, he introduces his mother into the action.”

At moments, this volume breaks into broad comedy. There is an extended riff on the surreptitious pickling that surely occurred on the Sabbath (“Woe betide you, O illicit pickler!”) that is nearly worth the price of admission alone.

But comedy “The Story of the Jews” is not. To study Jewish history is to study what it means to be hurt, to be despised, to be considered filthy and homicidal. Mr. Schama is thorough on the vindictive paranoia that has run rampant through history. He pauses to detail, in particular, the Judeophobic mobs in 12th- and 13th-century England who slaughtered and expelled Jews on the slightest of pretexts, a bit of history his country pretends, he suggests, did not occur.

Mr. Shama writes: “How can God permit such a thing to happen to His People? That’s what we always ask when cinders smart the eyes and we begin to spit soot.” Jewish faith and resilience are awesome to observe in this volume.

Mr. Schama is Jewish, but not especially religious. (I find it impossible to apply the term “nonobservant” to someone who observes so well.) Yet he is aware that there are essentially two Jewish stories running parallel to each other: “one from the archaeological record, one through the infinitely edited, redacted, anthologized, revised work that will end up as the Hebrew Bible.”

His loyalty is obviously to the hard evidence. At the same time, he declares that “the ‘minimalist’ view of the Bible as wholly fictitious, and unhooked from historical reality, may be as much of a mistake as the biblical literalism it sought to supersede.”

As much as Mr. Schama revels in the language of Jewish religious texts, it’s the secular commentary he more often thrills to. He pauses to praise the medieval philosopher Maimonides’s “lip-smacking, fist-punching relish for detail.” Finding a scrap of text on a pottery shard, Mr. Schama suggests, is like discovering “the equivalent of a Hebrew tweet.” Sometimes, he writes, “the tweets turn into true texts: stories of grievances, anxieties, prophecies, boasts.”

It’s a point this pungent book makes over and over: “In this story you don’t escape the words.”

Dwight Garner was senior editor at the New York Times Book Review, where he worked from 1999 to 2009.