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[Article 1.](#)

The Washington Post

Why (this time) Obama must lead

[Fareed Zakaria](#)

March 14 -- The crisis in Ukraine was produced by two sets of blunders, neither emanating from Washington. The European Union's vacillations and — most significantly, of course — Russia's aggression created the

problem. But it will be up to President Obama to show the strength and skill to resolve it.

For years, the European Union has been ambivalent toward Ukraine, causing instability in that country and opposition from Russia. The union's greatest source of power is the prospect of it offering membership. This magnet has transformed societies in southern and eastern Europe, creating stability, economic modernization and democracy. For that reason, it is a weapon that should be wielded strategically and seriously. In the case of Ukraine, it was not.

Ukraine is the most important post-Soviet country that Russia seeks to dominate politically. If Europe wanted to help Ukraine move west, it should have planned a bold, generous and swift strategy of attraction. Instead, [the European Union conducted lengthy, meandering negotiations with Kiev](#), eventually offering it an association agreement mostly filled with demands that the country make massive economic and political reforms before getting much in the way of access, trade or aid with Europe. But let's not persist in believing that Moscow's moves have been strategically brilliant. Vladimir Putin must have watched with extreme frustration in February as [a pro-Russian government was toppled](#) and Ukraine was slipping from his grasp. After the Olympics ended, he acted swiftly, [sending his forces into Crimea](#). It was a blunder. In taking over Crimea, Putin has lost Ukraine.

Since 1991, Russia has influenced Ukraine through pro-Russian politicians who were bribed by Moscow to listen to its diktats. That path is now blocked. [Princeton professor Stephen Kotkin points out](#) that in the last elections, in 2010, Viktor Yanukovich, representing to some extent the pro-Russian forces, won Crimea by nearly a million votes, which is why he won the election overall. In other words, once you take Crimea out of Ukraine — which Putin has done — it becomes virtually impossible for a pro-Russian Ukrainian ever to win the presidency. Remember, Ukraine is divided but not in half. Without Crimea, only 15 percent of the population will be ethnic Russian.

In fact, the only hope that Russia will reverse course in Crimea comes precisely because Putin might realize that his only chance of maintaining influence in Ukraine is by having Crimea — with its large Russian majority — as part of that country.

Putin has also triggered a deep anti-Russian nationalism around his borders. There are 25 million ethnic Russians living outside Russia. Countries such as Kazakhstan, with significant Russian minorities, must wonder whether Putin could foment secessionist movements in their countries as well — and then use the Russian army to “protect” them. In any case, Russia has had to bribe countries with offers of cheap gas to join its “[Eurasian Union](#).” I suspect the cost to Moscow just went up. Beyond the near abroad, Russia’s relations with countries such as Poland and Hungary, once warming, are now tense and adversarial. NATO, which has been searching for a role in the post-Cold War era, has been given a new lease on life. Moscow will face some sanctions from Washington and, almost certainly, the European Union as well. In a rare break with Russia on the U.N. Security Council, China refused to condone Russia’s moves in Crimea. [Moscow’s annexation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia from Georgia](#) was recognized by [Nicaragua, Venezuela and two island nations in the South Pacific](#). That might be as many as will recognize the annexation of Crimea.

I have generally been wary of the calls for U.S. intervention in any and every conflict around the world. But this is different. The crisis in Ukraine is the most significant geopolitical problem since the Cold War. Unlike many of the tragic ethnic and civil wars that have bubbled up over the past three decades, this one involves a great global power, Russia, and thus can and will have far-reaching consequences. And it involves a great global principle: whether national boundaries can be changed by brute force. If it becomes acceptable to do so, what will happen in Asia, where there are dozens of contested boundaries — and several great powers that want to remake them?

Obama must rally the world, push the Europeans and negotiate with the Russians. In this crisis, the United States truly is the indispensable nation.

[Article 2](#)

The Washington Post

In Syria, rebel with a cause

[David Ignatius](#)

March 14 -- With the Ukraine crisis, any fleeting hope that the U.S. and Russia could soon broker a political settlement in Syria has vanished. The United States needs an alternate strategy for strengthening Syrian moderates who can resist both the brutal Bashar al-Assad regime and al-Qaeda extremists.

A new Syrian opposition leader who may help get the balance right is [Jamal Maarouf](#). He heads a group called the [Syria Revolutionaries Front](#) and is the leading moderate rebel commander in northern Syria. I spoke Thursday by phone with Maarouf, who was near the Syria-Turkey border. He outlined a two-pronged strategy that sounded more pragmatic than anything I've heard from the opposition in recent months.

Maarouf says his forces must simultaneously fight Assad's army and the fighters from [Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria](#), two jihadist groups with al-Qaeda roots. That's easier said than done, but Maarouf has actually accomplished it in his home region of Idlib. His fighters drove Assad's army from Maarat al-Numan, a town in central Idlib, back in August 2011, and [two months ago they expelled ISIS jihadists from the area](#).

The Syrian rebel commander has widened the anti-jihadist fight. His forces expelled ISIS from northern Aleppo Province and are seeking to clear eastern Aleppo. They have just driven the extremists from their staging area of Darkush, along the Turkish border. If he can get enough money and weapons, he wants to take the fight against the extremists east, to the northern suburbs of Aleppo and eventually the [eastern cities of Raqqah and Deir al-Zour](#).

Maarouf, 39, is an example of the younger generation of commanders in the bottom-up Syrian revolution. The previous Free Syrian Army leader in the north, [Gen Salim Idriss](#), was a thoughtful, German-educated former professor at a Syrian war college. By contrast, Maarouf is high-school graduate who served in a tank unit during his two-year mandatory service in the Syrian army and then worked in construction in Lebanon.

Maarouf appears to have two qualities that have been missing among the moderate opposition. First, he has been a successful field commander. Second, and perhaps more important, he talks like a genuinely moderate man who hasn't succumbed to the sectarian poison that has infected much of the opposition. He says many members of the regime army are "sons of

Syria,” too, and that after the war ends, there must be national reconciliation.

I asked Maarouf, a Sunni Muslim, what he would say to his Alawite neighbors. “All of the Syrian people have the right to live and be free in Syria,” with no discrimination between Sunni and Alawite, he answered. After Assad is replaced as president, he continued, some Syrians should be prosecuted for war crimes — including Sunni extremists who have slaughtered Alawite civilians, as well as regime fighters who killed Sunnis. That’s a message that Syrians need to hear.

Corrupt warlords have plundered the northern areas “liberated” by the rebels from Assad, and public anger at this thievery helped al-Qaeda forces gain recruits. Here, again, Maarouf offered sound strategies: In the areas of Idlib his fighters control, he says he has established courts and prisons to suppress crime, and he tried to restore public services where possible. He can’t reopen schools, he cautions, because of fears that the regime would bomb the children gathered for classes.

The [Obama administration is weighing whether to expand its aid for the moderate opposition](#). The CIA is [training about 250 fighters a month in Jordan](#); these fighters operate mostly in southern Syria under the FSA’s overall commander, Abdul-Ilah al-Bashir, who is from [Quneitra near the Israel border](#). Opposition supporters want to double this training program by establishing a camp at an air base in a friendly Gulf state where U.S. Special Forces soldiers could train and equip FSA fighters for counterterrorism operations. This expansion of training makes sense; President Obama should approve it.

Syrian moderate fighters will need better weapons to protect civilians from Assad’s forces and extremists, alike. The opposition has made a reasonable request for heavy-caliber machine guns that could attack Syrian helicopters. Meanwhile, [Saudi Arabia is ready to supply shoulder-fired missiles](#) that could shoot down Syrian fighter jets. The missiles are in Jordan, awaiting U.S. approval for distribution.

The United States is right to worry that such powerful weapons could fall into the wrong hands. But Maarouf appears to be the kind of commander the United States and its allies will need to trust — and provide with enough firepower to protect Syrian civilians and fight extremists — in the long wait for a political solution to this horrifying conflict.

The Washington Post

Israel gets no credit from Obama for a year of moderate settlement construction

Elliott Abrams and Uri Sadot

March 14 -- Last week's [meeting between Benjamin Netanyahu and Barack Obama](#) must have been tense. Two days before the meeting, the president publicly accused Israel of more "[aggressive settlement construction](#) . . . than we've seen in a very long time." Only hours before the meeting, Israel's [Central Bureau of Statistics \(CBS\) published a report](#) that cited a massive increase in settlement construction during 2013. But the president had his facts wrong, and a careful reading of the CBS data proves it. The pace is not "aggressive," and almost all of the construction took place within the major settlement "blocs" — areas that past negotiations have recognized would remain part of Israel (to be compensated for with land swaps).

The [figures are online](#) for anyone to see (the Web site is in Hebrew). Israel built 2,534 housing units last year in the West Bank. Of these, about a quarter (694) were in two major blocs near Jerusalem, Giv'at Ze'ev and Betar Illit, and 537 were in two other major blocs, Modiin Illit and Ma'ale Adumim, also near Jerusalem. These four, which will remain part of Israel, account for half of last year's construction. They are not isolated outposts but instead are towns with populations in the tens of thousands, near the Green Line, as the 1949 armistice line and 1967 border are known.

The critical figure to monitor is the number of Israeli houses built outside such blocs in areas intended for the future state of Palestine. What the CBS data tell us on that question is that only 908 units were built last year in Israeli townships of 10,000 residents or fewer. And most of those units were built in settlement towns that are part of the major blocs. Units built in areas that would become part of Palestine number in the hundreds — and likely in the low hundreds. Given that about 90,000 Israelis live in the West Bank outside the blocs, that is approximately the rate of natural growth. So much for the president's claim of "aggressive construction."

In fact, what the much-cited CBS data reveal is that Netanyahu's track record on this issue is more restrained than that of Ehud Barak, the last Labor Party prime minister, whose government approved three times more new houses in small settlements in 2000 than Netanyahu did last year. In 2002, Ariel Sharon's government approved the construction of 960 new units — more than Netanyahu's 908 in 2013 — not long before Sharon decided to evacuate Gaza.

Measuring construction is complicated. A recent study the two of us conducted, using voter registration data, suggested more significant increases in settlements outside the blocs. The CBS report measures official approvals for construction, which may be the best indicator of Israeli government policy. It appears from the construction patterns that, under Netanyahu, Israel is slowly moving toward preparation for the two-state solution: Build energetically in the parts Israel will keep but restrain construction outside them in areas that will become Palestine.

Why doesn't the U.S. president understand this, and why doesn't Netanyahu explain it more clearly? The irony is that Netanyahu can't publicly admit this policy because it would alienate his right-leaning political base. The settler lobby, which has a strong footing in the Likud Party, constantly criticizes Netanyahu for not permitting "sufficient" construction. To placate them, it appears that Netanyahu's government has boosted construction in the major settlement blocs as well as in Jerusalem, which in turns buys him flak from the Israeli left, the Palestinians — and the U.S. president.

International coverage of the recent report entirely overlooked these nuances. A [New York Times editorial](#) flatly stated that "2,534 housing units were begun in 2013 compared with 1,133 the previous year." The BBC echoed the report, citing "[a large increase in the pace of new settlement construction in the West Bank in 2013 over the year before.](#)" But a more careful reading of the tea leaves suggests that it is the settlers who should be worried by these recent trends in de facto government policy, rather than supporters of partition into two states.

Too often the debate over settlement construction is a proxy for other positions — toward Israel, the two-state solution or the Netanyahu government. But the numbers tell their own story, and that is the one that deserves the most attention.

Elliott Abrams is a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and was a deputy national security advisor in the George W. Bush administration. Uri Sadot is a research associate at the Council on Foreign Relations.

[Article 4.](#)

The New Republic

Obama - Speak Loudly and Carry a Small Stick

[John B. Judis](#)

March 12, 2014 -- Theodore Roosevelt won fame, and was later lionized, as the leader of the Rough Riders in Cuba and as the bellicose advocate of American expansionism in the Pacific. “I should welcome any war, for I think the country needs one,” Roosevelt [wrote](#) a friend in 1897. But Roosevelt’s most important contribution to American foreign policy came later—when he became president in 1901 and when he replaced his colonel’s spurs with a subtle understanding of what diplomacy entailed. During his two terms, Roosevelt wound down the war in the Philippines that he had helped start in 1898, thwarted European designs upon Latin America, and mediated the Algeciras Crisis and the Russo-Japanese War, for which he won the Nobel Peace Prize.

Barack Obama promised to bring a fresh perspective to American foreign policy. He had been raised overseas, and could see the U.S. from the outside; he had captured the Democratic nomination for president partly on the basis of his opposition to the Iraq War. He has had some success— notably in killing Osama Bin Laden and in initiating negotiations with Iran that could, if they succeed, transform the politics of the Middle East. But Obama has also stumbled—initially, out of inexperience (his awkward mix of escalation and withdrawal in Afghanistan), but more recently in Syria and the Ukraine out of disregard for the principles of successful diplomacy that Roosevelt enshrined. Roosevelt summed up presidential diplomacy in what he claimed to be a West African adage, “speak softly and carry a big

stick.” By contrast, Obama’s recent diplomacy in Syria and Russia could be described as “speak loudly and carry a little stick, or no stick at all.” What did Roosevelt’s “speak softly and carry a big stick” mean? It’s not as obvious as it might seem. “Speak softly” draws an implicit distinction between the public space of, say, a domestic political campaign or a courtroom drama and the public space of international relations. In a political campaign, candidates often say nasty things to each other. They want to rouse supporters and discredit their opponents. After the campaign is over, these accusations are often forgotten. But in international relations, the very success of a negotiation can depend upon adjusting one’s rhetoric so that, if an opponent does concede, he still saves face and maintains his nation’s honor. If the goal of the negotiation is to change another country’s behavior, putting the country’s ruler down publicly may make success less likely and also imperil cooperation in areas that don’t directly pertain to what is immediately at issue.

The meaning of “carry a big stick” is more obvious. If you want to change another country’s behavior in ways it might not initially desire, you need to have a credible threat to back up your demand for change. Roosevelt primarily thought in military and specifically naval terms—the U.S. economy was not yet large enough for economic sanctions to be a credible threat. During Roosevelt’s presidency, the U.S. added eleven new [battleships](#) and almost doubled the size of the navy. Roosevelt was intent, Frederick Marks wrote in his study of Roosevelt’s foreign policy [Velvet on Iron](#), on “tailoring policy to power.” He rejected the idea that conflicts of national interest could be settled through good will—or in contemporary terms, by sitting adversaries down in a room and insisting that they come to an agreement. Roosevelt described that kind of diplomacy as “slop,” and designated “Thou shalt not slop over” as the Eleventh Commandment. Roosevelt applied these principles in the [Venezuela crisis](#) of November-December 1902. Britain and Germany threatened to blockade Venezuela if it did not repay its loans to them. Roosevelt was not concerned about Britain’s intentions, but he did worry that Germany would demand territory for failure to repay the loan, as it had done in China. When the Germans and British started firing at Venezuelan ships, and Venezuela’s president called for arbitration, Roosevelt gave the Germans ten days to agree. If they did not, he threatened to send the U.S. Navy, whose ships in the

Caribbean outnumbered the Germans. But Roosevelt did not announce this publicly.

Roosevelt issued his ultimatum entirely in private—the visit by the German ambassador was not even listed on the White House calendar. Roosevelt distrusted German Kaiser Wilhelm, but he also knew that he was vain and subject to delusions of grandeur. “It would be foolhardy to humiliate a person like that in the Caribbean,” Roosevelt [explained](#). On December 17, convinced that Roosevelt was serious, the Germans backed down and agreed to arbitration, but the details of what had happened weren’t known until Roosevelt was out of office.

Roosevelt succeeded with the Germans in Venezuela because he actually had a big stick that he was wielding. But the corollary of Roosevelt’s adage was that when a president doesn’t have a big stick, it’s best not to make hollow threats. Roosevelt was wary of trying to enforce the American Open Door policy (for free access to markets) in the Far East because the U.S. couldn’t compete there with the British, German, French, and even Russian and Japanese forces. Roosevelt acquiesced to Japanese control of Korea and sought a compromise when the Chinese boycotted American imports in 1905. He was also attuned to domestic opposition. Faced with a war-weary Congress in 1907, he opted not to intervene militarily in Venezuela when it reneged on loans from the United States.

Consider by contrast Obama’s policy toward Syria. On August 18, 2011, Obama [issued](#) a statement calling for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to leave office. “The future of Syria must be determined by its people, but President Bashar al-Assad is standing in their way,” Obama said. “For the sake of the Syrian people, the time has come for President Assad to step aside.” This was speaking loudly, but Obama was not prepared to follow it up when Assad failed to step aside. He rejected arming Assad’s opposition. In January 2012, he [told](#) *The New Republic*, “In a situation like Syria, I have to ask, can we make a difference in that situation?” There was no stick.

On August 20, on the eve of the party conventions, Obama warned that if the Assad government either used or transferred its chemical weapons, it would constitute a “red line” that would invite military action. The next spring, Assad was widely believed to have used chemical weapons against the opposition. After a month of dithering, the White House announced that

the intelligence community had judged with “varying degrees of confidence” that Assad had used gas on a “small scale.” But it did not propose any military response. Six weeks later, it finally promised to provide some military equipment to the rebels, but the aid failed to arrive. Last August, the administration affirmed that the Assad regime had launched a large-scale chemical attack in the rebel-held Damascus suburbs, and this time Obama threatened military reprisals. But he had done nothing to build support for a military response. The British balked, and then majorities in Congress indicated they would not support military action. Obama was bailed out by the Russians, who obtained a promise from Assad to destroy his chemical weapons arsenal. But the failure to take action when the Assad government crossed the “red line” undermined America’s credibility in the Middle East. The Syrian red line fiasco showed that the Obama administration was reluctant to make good on its threat to use military force to back up its diplomacy. In Rooseveltian terms, the administration should either have not threatened military action in the first place or carefully laid the basis for its use.

America’s relations with Putin’s Russia are now being seen through the prism of the Cold War past, but that vantage obscures the degree of cooperation that occurred between the nations during Obama’s presidency. The two nations signed a new START treaty in 2011; Russia continued to assist the United States in Afghanistan; it backed UN resolutions against Iran for its nuclear program and signed the interim agreement last November. However, Obama also angered Russia by deceiving it in United Nations negotiations over intervention in Libya. (The U.S. claimed its purpose was limited to humanitarian intervention.) And Russia, for its part, backed Assad in Syria; and defied the Obama administration by granting asylum to Edward Snowden. (By refusing to hand over Snowden, the Russians actually did Obama a favor by sparing him the uproar and loss of popularity that prosecuting the whistle-blower would have deservedly cost him.)

The United States had a similar mixed record with China, but it acted far differently toward its rulers. With them, Obama engaged in respectful competition; with Putin, he conveyed a lack of respect toward someone who, like the Kaiser in Roosevelt’s time, craves respect for himself and for his country. Obama skipped meetings; he sent an underling—former

Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano—to represent the United States at the Winter Olympics in Sochi and a delegation headed by gay athletes to protest a recent Russian law [banning](#) gay “propaganda.”

Obama’s sending Napolitano was a gratuitous snub and made it more likely that Putin would refuse to cooperate when the U.S. needed Russia’s support. Sending a delegation that not merely included, but was headed by gay athletes, was an important moral statement, and perhaps was appropriate, but it also turned the game’s ceremonies into an overt attempt to embarrass their host and threatened America's ability to influence Russian behavior in other areas.

The events that occurred in the Ukraine during the last week of February remain murky. Did the United States and European Union put sufficient weight behind a transitional solution to the crisis that was worked out with Russian representatives present? Or did they encourage a new anti-Russian government in Kiev that ended up eliminating Russian as a second language and replacing pro-Russian governors in the Eastern Ukraine and Crimea? Could Obama, if less intent on dissing Putin, have engineered a compromise during that fateful weekend that would have prevented Russia’s invasion of Crimea? If Obama had followed TR’s principles, he would not have gone out of his way to insult Putin at the Olympics. There was some domestic political advantage to doing so (Putin is not popular and gay rights are), but there was a diplomatic price to be paid. And he would have recognized that he had limited ability to affect events in Ukraine and would have attempted at the beginning, as trouble was brewing, to mediate between the Russians and the E.U. But that’s not what he did.

On February 28, Obama warned Putin that “there will be costs” if Russia sent troops to the Ukraine. That had all the earmarks of an ultimatum, but it was delivered publicly and not backed up by credible threats. By the next day, Russian forces were spotted taking control of government buildings. The White House then raised the possibility of Iran-style sanctions against Russian banks. Secretary of State John Kerry [indicated](#) that “all options” were on the table. But as happened with Syria in August, the White House had issued threats before assembling the appropriate coalition to back them up. On March 4, Germany, the United Kingdom, and France, which had far deeper economic ties to Russia than did the United States, all indicated

they would not go along with punitive sanctions against Russian banks, only with restrictions on visas for Russian officials linked to the invasion. In his attempt to pressure Putin and Russia to withdraw, Obama had come up empty again. He had not put any power behind his policies. And he may have forfeited any Russian cooperation in the Middle East.

Why at critical times has Obama conducted diplomacy in this way? Final answers will have to await the release of his papers decades hence, but a few factors come to mind. First, in these cases, Obama publicly articulated ends but ignored or slighted the development of the means to achieve them. That's been characteristic of his governing style. Think of the failed rollout of the Affordable Care Act last fall. In domestic policy, a failure to match means to ends can lead to falling approval numbers. In foreign policy, it can lead to the perception of fecklessness, which can severely limit a country's effectiveness.

Secondly, in these cases, domestic political considerations may have impinged on Obama's foreign policy decisions. He issued his "red line" warning to Syria in the wake of Republican attacks that he was displaying weakness toward Assad. His Republican challenger Mitt Romney had accused him of a "lack of leadership" and a "policy of paralysis." During the last month, Obama may have been responding to John McCain, Lindsay Graham and other Republicans who attacked him for showing weakness toward Putin and in the Ukraine. These critics advocated even louder speech, but they usually did not offer substantive alternatives to what Obama was doing.

Third, Obama, particularly in the case of Putin, may have fallen into the trap of personalizing his international adversaries. There is no question that some of Putin's policies—including his support for Assad and his apparent to desire to restore the old Soviet Union—run counter to what the United States and any proponent of democracy and human rights would like to see happen. But Obama—again prodded, perhaps, by Republican critics—has inserted Putin into that pantheon of demonic foes that includes Fidel Castro, Mao Zedong, Saddam Hussein, and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. That has obscured past areas of cooperation, and made future cooperation much less likely. Kaiser Wilhelm was no bargain either, and Theodore Roosevelt knew it. But he also knew that he had to be handled carefully, and if handled carefully, could even occasionally prove useful to the United

States. Obama, and much of the rest of official Washington, forgot that lesson in dealing with Putin.

Obama and American diplomacy may still emerge unscathed from the crisis in the Ukraine. Putin, fearful of the E.U.'s and America's disfavor, may opt for an autonomous rather than annexed Crimea. Or he may annex Crimea and leave the East Ukraine alone. That will be a setback, but not necessarily the beginning of a new twilight struggle with the Russians. Putin could, however, attempt to stir up trouble in the Eastern Ukraine and to encourage a partition of the country. Here, finally, is the question for the future: Is the Obama administration preparing for that possibility by drawing up with the relevant European countries a sanctions strategy that could quietly deter Putin from moving ahead? Or will it settle again for angry declamations and denunciations?

John B. Judis is a senior editor at The New Republic. In 2002, he published The Emerging Democratic Majority (co-written with political scientist Ruy Teixeira), that was named one of the year's best by The Economist.

[Article 5.](#)

NYT

Egypt's Ancient Snark

Alaa Al Aswany

March 13, 2014 -- Cairo — In 1798, after Napoleon Bonaparte occupied Egypt, some local grandees wanted to get close to him, so they gave him six slave girls. At that time, Egyptians were under the influence of the Turkish taste that considered a fulsome figure a prerequisite of feminine beauty. Napoleon was more fired up by Parisian elegance and refused to sleep with any of the women because they were, in his opinion, fat and reeking of fenugreek.

Misinterpreting his aloofness, the Egyptians mocked Napoleon for a lack of virility, contrasting him and his troops unflatteringly with the Egyptian “manhood” of Ali Kaka dolls — figurines with enormous penises. Despite such vulgarity in a conservative society, Egyptians took Kaka into their

hearts and the dolls became wildly popular, even taking the form of pastries for children.

As related by a 1992 book on political humor by the journalist Adel Hammouda, editor of the independent news weekly *El Fagr*, it was a way for Egyptians to get back at the French general who had occupied their country. Egyptians had discovered that their strongest weapon was satire. The scores of quips caused Napoleon to issue an edict threatening to punish anyone who told or laughed at jokes at his expense. Their subversive effect may have played a role in restoring Egyptians' morale: Twice within the space of three years, there were revolts. One resulted in the assassination of Napoleon's deputy, Gen. Jean Baptiste Kléber.

As far back as 1836, the English Orientalist Edward William Lane noted in his "Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians" that "the Egyptians are particularly prone to satire." He observed how "the lower orders sometimes lampoon their rulers in songs, and ridicule those enactments of the government by which they themselves most suffer."

In 1877, the journalist Yaqub Sanu (also known as James Sanua) founded the first satirical newspaper in Egypt, *Abou Naddara*. He wrote such trenchant criticism of Ismail Pasha, the Ottoman khedive (or viceroy), that the newspaper was soon suppressed. Sanua was forced into exile in France, where he resumed publication. When the khedive wrote to Sanua offering money and titles if he would desist, Sanua refused. Instead, he published the letter, causing a scandal that incensed the khedive still more.

The tradition of Egyptian political humor continued through modern times. In the aftermath of defeat in the 1967 war against Israel, Egypt's soldiers became the object of ridicule. The jokes got so out of hand that Gamal Abdel Nasser finally called on Egyptians to stop poking fun at the army. But Egyptians' political jokes do not come without a price: Through the years, hundreds of artists and writers have paid heavily, with fines, imprisonment and worse, for their courageous irreverence and wit. In the 1960s, the chief of Egypt's General Intelligence Directorate, Salah Nasr, was convinced that the American Embassy in Cairo was behind the jokes going around about Nasser, by then the president. The directorate assigned dozens of offices throughout Egypt to collect the jokes and study their meaning. These were written up and sent as regular reports to the president's office.

Nasser was an exceptional figure, who retained a legendary popularity despite being pilloried. When he died, millions of Egyptians poured onto the streets out of sorrow and respect.

Whether jokes can actually change things is much debated. Some argue that Egyptians take refuge in satire as a kind of consolation because other means of expression have been blocked. If there were genuine democracy, they say, the political joke would disappear. Others say that Egyptians simply can't get through life without jokes — and that they will poke fun equally at leaders they like or dislike. Satire is simply a national pastime, they believe, and does not imply any particular political stance.

But humor is not always impotent or apolitical. The revolution of 2011, which toppled President Hosni Mubarak, brought satire out into the open. Mr. Mubarak was mercilessly mocked for his limited horizon, his lack of intelligence and his corruption. In particular, the networks of social media have come to be seen as a zone of satirical expression beyond the reach of the censors and bureaucratic joke collectors.

The weekly satirical television show presented by Bassem Youssef — who has been called Egypt's Jon Stewart — is evidence of this change. For a year, Mr. Youssef ridiculed President Mohamed Morsi. After the ouster of Mr. Morsi, Mr. Youssef turned his attention to Egypt's new ruler, Gen. Abdul-Fattah el-Sisi (now a field marshal). In so doing, he incurred the ire of those who accused him of offending the dignity of the army. Yet millions of admirers and detractors alike watch his program every Friday at 10 ████. For the first time, Egyptians are seeing their leader ridiculed on prime time while still in power.

Not everyone is laughing. After every broadcast, people write long, vituperative comments on Facebook and a battle rages on Twitter — all of which reveals the chasm between the culture of Egypt's young revolutionaries and the mentality of those who support the military dictatorship. The former consider the president of the republic no more than a civil servant who can be criticized, held to account and mocked for his behavior. Those who cling to the old way of thinking consider the president a symbol of the state, the father of the nation, who is not to be laughed at.

Three years have passed since the revolution. It has not won power or achieved its aims. But I am optimistic about the future, because most

Egyptians, in spite of their travails and problems, can still appreciate a good joke.

Alaa Al Aswany is the author of the novel “The Yacoubian Building” and other books. This article was translated by Russell Harris from the Arabic.

[Article 6.](#)

Al Monitor

The Saudi pivot to Asia

Bruce Riedel

March 13, 2014 -- Saudi Crown Prince [Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud](#)'s visit this week to China — his second major state trip this year to Asia — underscores the kingdom's pivot to the east. Long before the American pivot, Saudi Arabia has reoriented its economic and political priorities to South and East Asia.

Salman arrived in Beijing on March 13 for his first visit to China. Last month, the crown prince visited Pakistan, Japan, India and the Maldives. The two state visits symbolize the kingdom's growing role in the economies of all five states. Saudi Arabia, the [world's largest oil exporter](#), now sells more than two-thirds of its oil to markets in south and east Asia. Saudi trade and investment are increasingly directed toward Asian markets rather than Europe or America.

Saudi Arabia's turn to the east began almost a decade ago. King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz's first foreign trip after becoming king was to India and China in January 2006. It was also the first ever visit by a Saudi monarch to China. At the time, Saudi officials cited the trip as a symbol of the kingdom's growing interest in Asia's two largest emerging economies. Saudi Arabia is today China's largest trading partner in the Middle East. The kingdom's closest ties remain with Pakistan. The Pakistani press has reported that Riyadh provided a \$1.5 billion loan to Islamabad to help Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's effort to get Pakistan's economy out of its slump. The Saudis have a close relationship with Sharif, who lived in the kingdom in exile during the Pervez Musharraf dictatorship. Military and intelligence connections between the two are also very close. Saudi Arabia

has provided more assistance to Pakistan over the last three decades than to any other country.

But Riyadh is eager to also have strong ties with India. Indian energy consumption is growing rapidly, and the Saudis have a keen interest in being a major exporter to New Delhi. The kingdom extradited a major terrorist from the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e Tayyiba group, Sayed Zabiuddin Ansar, to India in 2012, who had been involved in the November 2008 attack on Mumbai. Ansar was arrested while planning another attack on India from a Lashkar-e Tayyiba cell in the kingdom, and his arrest and extradition earned the Saudis significant favor in India. Both India and Pakistan have large diaspora communities working in the kingdom and the [other Gulf states](#). There are over 1.5 million Pakistanis and a million Indians in the kingdom alone. Remittances home are crucial, especially to the Pakistani economy.

Last month in Tokyo, the crown prince celebrated the hundredth anniversary of the first Japanese Muslim to make the hajj to Mecca, and more importantly, signed a number of bilateral agreements on investment, trade and security cooperation. Japan imports more than a million barrels of Saudi oil every day.

Since the crown prince also serves as minister of defense, there has been extensive speculation about possible arms deals arranged behind the scenes on his two trips. Rumors that the kingdom solicited Pakistani shoulder-fired surface-to-air missiles for the Syrian opposition have been particularly frequent. There is also much speculation that the kingdom would like to replace its aging Chinese-provided intermediate-range ballistic missiles first delivered in the 1980s to Saudi Arabia with newer and more capable missiles. It is unlikely that either possible deal, if consummated, will be confirmed in public.

The crown prince's travel undoubtedly is also intended to counter persistent reports of his ill health. Since the king's health is also poor, it is important — with regard to the stability of the succession process in the kingdom — for Salman to be seen as conducting foreign and military business with the outside world. News of his visits in Islamabad, Tokyo, New Delhi, Male and Beijing, with photos of him meeting his counterparts, have been featured prominently in the Saudi press and television for the last month.

President Barack Obama travels to the kingdom at the end of this month for his second visit since 2009. The crown prince's travels provide a subtle means of reminding Washington that it is no longer the only game in town for [Saudi national security policy](#). The US-Saudi relationship remains a critical element in the kingdom's foreign policy despite differences over Syria, Egypt, Bahrain, the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and Iran in the last year. Abdullah and Salman do not want to see further bumps in the American-Saudi partnership, but they also want to make certain they have other options besides reliance on America. Looking east is critical to that policy diversification.

Bruce Riedel is the director of the Intelligence Project at the Brookings Institution. His latest book is [Avoiding Armageddon: America, India and Pakistan to the Brink and Back](#).

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NYT

The Deepest Self

David Brooks

March 13, 2014 -- There is, by now, a large literature on the chemistry and biology of love and sex. If you dive into that literature, you learn pretty quickly that our love lives are biased by all sorts of deep unconscious processes. When men become fathers, their testosterone levels drop, thus reducing their sex drive. There's some evidence that it's the smell of their own infants (but not other people's infants) that sets this off.

Women, meanwhile, have different tastes at different times in their cycles. During ovulation, according to some research, they prefer ruggedly handsome and risky men, while at other times they are more drawn to pleasant-looking, nice men.

When men look at pictures of naked women, their startle response to loud noises diminishes. It seems that the dopamine surge mutes the prefrontal cortex, and they become less alert to danger and risk.

This literature sometimes reduces the profound and transformational power of love into a series of mating strategies. But it also, like so much of the

literature across psychology and the cognitive sciences these days, reinforces a specific view of human nature. We have two systems inside, one on top of the other.

Deep in the core of our being there are the unconscious natural processes built in by evolution. These deep unconscious processes propel us to procreate or strut or think in certain ways, often impulsively. Then, at the top, we have our conscious, rational processes. This top layer does its best to exercise some restraint and executive function.

This evolutionary description has become the primary way we understand ourselves. Deep down we are mammals with unconscious instincts and drives. Up top there's a relatively recent layer of rationality. Yet in conversation when we say someone is deep, that they have a deep mind or a deep heart, we don't mean that they are animalistic or impulsive. We mean the opposite. When we say that someone is a deep person, we mean they have achieved a quiet, dependable mind by being rooted in something spiritual and permanent.

A person of deep character has certain qualities: in the realm of intellect, she has permanent convictions about fundamental things; in the realm of emotions, she has a web of unconditional loves; in the realm of action, she has permanent commitments to transcendent projects that cannot be completed in a single lifetime.

There's great wisdom embedded in this conversational understanding of depth, and it should cause us to amend the System 1/System 2 image of human nature that we are getting from evolutionary biology. Specifically, it should cause us to make a sharp distinction between origins and depth. We originate with certain biological predispositions. These can include erotic predispositions (we're aroused by people who send off fertility or status cues), or they can be cognitive (like loss aversion).

But depth, the core of our being, is something we cultivate over time. We form relationships that either turn the core piece of ourselves into something more stable and disciplined or something more fragmented and disorderly. We begin with our natural biases but carve out depths according to the quality of the commitments we make. Our origins are natural; our depths are man-made — engraved by thought and action.

This amendment seems worth making because the strictly evolutionary view of human nature sells humanity short. It leaves the impression that we

are just slightly higher animals — thousands of years of evolutionary processes capped by a thin layer of rationality. It lops off entire regions of human possibility.

In fact, while we are animals, we have much higher opportunities. While we start with and are influenced by evolutionary forces, people also have the chance to make themselves deep in a way not explicable in strictly evolutionary terms.

So much of what we call depth is built through freely chosen suffering. People make commitments — to a nation, faith, calling or loved ones — and endure the sacrifices those commitments demand. Often this depth is built by fighting against natural evolutionary predispositions.

So much of our own understanding of our depth occurs later in life, also amid suffering. The theologian Paul Tillich has a great essay in “Shaking the Foundations” in which he observes that during moments of suffering, people discover they are not what they appeared to be. The suffering scours away a floor inside themselves, exposing a deeper level, and then that floor gets scoured away and another deeper level is revealed. Finally, people get down to the core wounds and the core loves.

Babies are not deep. Old people can be, depending upon how they have chosen to lead their lives. Babies start out very natural. The people we admire are rooted in nature but have surpassed nature. Often they grew up in cultures that encouraged them to take a loftier view of their possibilities than we do today.