The Frenchman’s Burden
What’s Really Going on in Mali
by Jorge Tamames

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on Gun Legislation
Good News (2)

Richard Blumenthal (3)
Tax the (Right) Rich (4)
The Frenchman’s Burden (5) Steven Rattner

$202M

“Those listed on the Forbes 400 netted an average income of $202 million and paid an effective tax rate of 19.9 percent in 2009,” pg. 9

75%

“75 percent of French citizens support the intervention in Mali.” pg. 23

260

“In the last five years, Indian political parties have nominated a total of 260 candidates facing charges for crimes against women,” pg. 21
The Missouri Court of Appeals and the Missouri Supreme Court both held that the trial court was wrong in suppressing the blood sample. On January 9 the Supreme Court heard the case.

The case is tricky, on the one hand, the Fourth Amendment guarantees that searches and seizures must be reasonable, and that to carry out these searches and seizures a warrant cannot be issued unless a probable cause is established and the specifics of the search are outlined. McNeely's blood sample was taken without consent and admitted as evidence in a court of law even though it was established without a warrant—that action was a clear violation of the Fourth Amendment.

On the other hand, McNeely was visibly intoxicated and posed a danger to himself and others by driving in such a state, the charge of driving while intoxicated was appropriate. Also, the exigent circumstances exception was widely recognized by courts for some time, so Missouri's appeal on that basis was valid. The question on hand on January 9 was whether the exigent circumstances exception to the Fourth Amendment, a blood sample can be taken without consent or a warrant.

As the FBI explains in their Law Enforcement Bulletin, the exigent circumstances exception was first outlined in United States v. Rengifo, heard by the Court of Appeals for the First Circuit in 1988. Rengifo defined exigent circumstances as occurring when a reasonable officer could believe that to delay acting to obtain a warrant would [...] permanently frustrate an important police objective, such as to prevent the destruction of evidence relating to criminal activity or to seize contraband that could be lost or further harmed (838 F.2d 800, 805 (1st Cir. 1988)).

Two-three years later, the Supreme Court heard Kentucky v. King. This case involved the question of whether forceful drawing of blood is an intrusive violation of the Fourth Amendment or not. Based on the facts in McNeely, it seems that Officer Wilder did not violate the Fourth Amendment or threaten to do so, and thus Missouri’s appeal under the exigent circumstances exception was appropriate and constitutional.

In this case, there wasn’t. It’s one thing to break into a house because of exigent circumstances, but another issue entirely when the excuse of “exigent circumstance” is used to justify the forcible drawing of blood from a man who had refused to consent to the procedure. Drawing blood is an invasive procedure involving needles, not just a search through a house, which changes the scope of the question.

And on January 9, the Supreme Court agreed with this line of thinking. During oral arguments, the liberals and conservatives seemed to be in agreement that the exigent circumstances exception held no weight in McNeely. “Two impressions were dominant throughout the argument,” wrote lawyer Yale Denniston in an analysis of the oral argument on SCOTUSBlog. “The justices generally do regard the use of a needle to take a blood sample as quite an intrusive gesture by the government, and the Fourth Amendment warrant requirement stands out even for all cases of drunk driving when officers decide to order a blood draw.”

When conditions are released, the exigent circumstances exception will probably be modified to say that police will need to attempt to obtain a warrant before taking blood samples, and that individual cases of driving while intoxicated as is usually the case when the Supreme Court tries to define various exceptions to the constitu-
tional provisions. For the time being, you can rest assured that your blood cannot be taken from you— at least, not without a warrant.

It seems absurd to claim that any country, especially the Middle East and North Africa has a stagnant political situation, but if any of them fits the bill, it’s Lebanon. Despite its seemingly volatile, expedited by constantly shifting party aliances and the numerous armed conflicts involving Israel and Syria, Lebanon’s politics are characterized by frequent shifts in government and the instability of the Fourth French occupation during World War II. Governmental positions are still allocated according to religious sect, parliamentary representation is based on a population census last taken in 1932 and the only coherent efforts to bring about any change to this system—namely, the recently proposed electoral law that would require that the Lebanese vote only for candidates of their own sect—are doomed to bring about even more political and sectarian strife. Furthermore, though Lebanon is constantly forced to provide the proxy battlefield on which long-running tensions between Israel and Iran play out, there have been no significant regime changes or foreign policy shifts in decades.

To top it all off, there are no resentful masses or angry protestors in Beirut, which shouldn’t be an issue in itself because Sunni simultaneously make up a quarter and a third of the Lebanese population. The potential for conflict arises from the geographical segregation of sects in Lebanon, as well as the sheer number of Syrian refugees. Sects and communities are concentrated in certain areas of the country—Tripoli, the northern coast, and parts of the Bekaa Valley—which were the first-choice destinations for Syrian refugees. Lebanese citizens simply don’t have the resources to support the needs of all the refugees, who have been forced to spill over into Christian villages and Sunni areas in Beirut and other districts; Hezbollah strongholds. Though aid organizations may still provide assistance to Syrian refugees in these areas, help is often given reluctantly, and may in fact decrease going forward.

The reason for this is that Syrians are unwelcome in these areas, both religiously and economically. Politically, their greatest problem is Hezbollah. The Shia Muslim party, which controls the ruling coalition in the Lebanese government and is responsible for much of the violence in the provision of Lebanon, remains firmly allied with the Assad regime. Due to this alliance, aid to the refugees has been slow in coming, not only from organizations that have been reluctant to work in their home country, but also from the national govern- ment itself.

In order to provide better aid to the Syrians, the government has advised that the Lebanon government set up formal refugee camps like those that already exist in Jordan and Syria. If the number is increased in the coming months, Lebanon could be faced with a new influx of refugees to overpopulate one for the particularly Hezbollah, given their past experiences. Decades ago, thousands of Palestinian refugees fled from Israeli-occupied territory into Lebanon and still live today in established camps, which drain resources that could be used to benefit Lebanese citizens and provide needed respite from the influx of for- mal refugee camps, in addition to the dom- inant coalition’s loyalty to Assad, would cause an increase in political sectarianism if such camps for Syrian refugees were in-deed established.

If the issue of camps is still too sensitive for Lebanon, it seems only logical that Syrians should forge their paths as refugees in another way: assimilation into Lebanese society. But if this were allowed to happen, and given the numbers, there is little likelihood that Lebanese would likely suffer the economic ramifications of a sudden work- force influx. The increased competition for jobs and resources in an economy with an already skyrocketing unemployment rate would not just disenfranchise the Lebanese but force even more resentment between them and the refugees, particularly in Shia areas already tense about the arrival of the Sunni Syrians.

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It was a little over five years ago that Shinzo Abe, Japan’s ninetieth prime minister, unceremoniously resigned his post amidst the increasing power of emerg- ing economies. As noted, this is not the first time Japan seems to echo the U.S. with a great trading partner across the Pacific. Sur- rounding the increasing power of emerg- ing markets, it is fitting that now more than ever Japan seems to echo the U.S. with a monetary policy designed to stave off what is perhaps an inevitable decline. Yet such a policy may further a descent into economic torpor, not stop it. Either a central bank does not ease enough and the economy sinks further into recession, or the central bank inescapably overshoots the mark and—per- haps trying to compensate for a failure the first time around—ends up with higher levels of inflation than ever intended. As 2013 opens, Japan seems to be dangerously dancing somewhere in the latter of these two paths. In its search for winning strategies, and journalist Matt Tubi, among others, have spoken of such a danger, particularly in how it can lead to a greater risk of conditions like heart disease and diabetes, and contribute to a lower quality of life.

It was interesting to see the differences and similarities among the approaches of the various teams. One team of doctoral students took an evidence-based approach, focusing on interventions that have been proven in the scientific literature, such as breastfeeding and more sleep. But these measures are not only difficult to institutionalize into policy, but also seem to fall short of a comprehensive solution to the problem of childhood obesity.

The underlying fact is that policy is of- ten not backed by convincing scientific evi- dence. Part of this stems from the difficulty of scientifically investigating policy prob- lems that are embedded within the fabric of society. Given how much America spends on healthcare, this is an important issue: childhood obe- sity cost the nation $14.1 billion in 2009, obesity explains over $400 billion in healthcare costs from 1987 to 2001. obe- sity counted for 10 percent of all medical spending in 2001. Childhood obesity can lead to a greater risk of conditions like heart disease and diabetes, and contribute to a lower quality of life.

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The echoes of Occupy Wall Street’s chants for egalitarianism have long faded from the streets of downtown Manhattan, but U.S. politicians have yet to decide how to spread the burden of taxation equitably among the citizenry. From the campaign trail to the Rose Garden, President Barack Obama has focused upon the “wealthiest Americans” to pay their “fair share.” But essential to effective policymaking is establishing who exactly the “wealthy” are and what share is objectively fair.

Despite apocalyptic December 21 prognostications, 2012 should have been a year of hope for the United States. An election cycle and an automated round of sequestrations should have spurred rational discussion about raising revenue in the country. But the absurd reality of the fiscal cliff deal, or the American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012, is that it actually punishes the upper-middle class while remaining silent on the continued, albeit legal, tax avoidance of the ultra-rich.

Citizens who earn an annual salary of over $400,000 will now pay roughly 40 percent of their income to Uncle Sam. But their wealthier counterparts who make millions yearly through Wall Street spec-ulation still pay just the capital gains rate, which remains at 25 percent. Even more egregious is the fact that people working in finance, who do work in finance generally pay an effective tax rate of merely 19.9 percent. The ultra-rich—those who make over 10 million dollars annually—would pay an AMT of 43 percent, which, though apparently high by today’s standards, does not approach the tax rates exceeding 70 percent until the early 1980s.

The prospects of such sweeping re-form, however, are not bright, even if it is championed by the ultra-rich likes of Warren Buffett. But there is still that even the gold who make the rules. Wall Street continues to spend hundreds of millions per year lobbying for low tax rates. As the current carried interest loophole nears its closure, the private equity lobby is busy nego-tiating favorable terms.

There is a better way to right the wrong: the institution of a new class of rich—the top 0.01 percent of incomes to preserve our American identity.

In 2011, the Forbes “400 Richest Americans,” netted an average income of $202 million and paid an effective tax rate of merely 19.9 percent in 2009, the most recent year for which these data are available. These figures are disturbing in a democratic society. Pinning down a tax rate that is fair to everyone may be impossible, but this level of economic injustice is unacceptable. The tax rate should not depend on how earners’ incomes are derived—despite Goldman Sachs CEO Lloyd Blankfein’s claim that his profession is “God’s work.”

But how do we resolve this outrageous inequity in income tax payment without further destabilizing the quavering economic recovery? The Green Party would have us tax capital gains as ordinary income. While there is certainly merit in this argument—it would raise the tax rates paid by the rich and close the carried interest loophole—it might also decrease investment that is necessary for growth, especially by the middle and upper-middle classes. Capital gains taxes are set lower than income taxes pre-cisely to encourage risk taking, and while it seems implausible that top investors would resort to golfing and smoking cigarettes if their stock were taxed as income, this measure would adversely affect everyone else in the market by discouraging the purchase of shares in new companies.

There is a better way to right the wrong: the institution of a new class of rich—the top 0.01 percent of incomes to preserve our American identity.

It is “God’s work.”

The unofficial American motto, e pluribus unum, is engraved on the currency of U.S. taxpayers. When it comes time for the federal government to collect taxes, it ought to apply the principle of national unity and responsibility championed by that motto.
D uring the fall of 2012, Andrew Sullivan had an idea. Something about the way media companies were trying to solve the Krugman Paradox was all wrong.

The model required ads at all. As a godfather of the modern blogging genre, Sullivan was the perfect candidate to attempt something out of the box and take his audience along with him. The primary advantage of The Dish is its 1.3 million readers, publishing their comments, questions and robust thinking about the ensuing repartee. It’s a monument to the democratizing power of online content, but also the ability to crowdsource content. Sullivan created a “freemium-based meter.” Its “metered” component resembles The New York Times, limiting extended reads for non-subscribers through some means, and allowing unlimited access through links or social media. And its focus on core readers for subscription revenue clearly resembles TPM Prime. Sullivan estimates he’d need 600,000 dollars by his year’s end to make the threshold feasible; one month into the initiation of the meter, The Dish raised just over two-thirds of that.

The real test is whether people re-subscribe, said Sullivan, meaning his payment experiment will require years, not months. The new Dish has the potential to disrupt the narrative that media mavens have been constructing around the centrality of ads. Because while Sullivan is shunning advertising, the rest of online journalism is making exactly the opposite bet, assuming that readers will simply never pony up and are easily duping down on inventive ad models.

Exhibit A: The rise of “advertorials,” dum-dum articles actually written by ad-vertisers. Advertorials are so much more profitable than conventional online ads that media companies like BuzzFeed think they’ve found their own solution to the Krugman Paradox. Last February, Sullivan found himself seated next to BuzzFeed ed- in-chief Ben Smith, sparring over the ethics of advertorials.

“You’re clearly trying to trick people,” Sullivan said of the deceptive appearance of advertorials, a tense silence growing in the audience. “One has to ask, can we trust you?”

“If readers think we have some- one on staff named Soni, countered Smith, referring to the by-line of advertorials, “I don’t think anyone will be confused.”

One thing is clear: both men are leading their companies into an uncharted cultural territory, a decadal courtship for the future traffic of young readers. And eventually, one can only win.

I f you parsed through the faces of VIPs behind Obama at his Inauguration, you first noticed Beyoncé, and a few rows down, billionaire Chris Hughes and his recent husband, Sean Eldridge ’09. The power couple apparently shared, magnetic, and incredibly good-looking. And they should.

Hughes, one of the quieter profiles of Facebook’s fourth-quarter, with a net worth south of a billion, left in 2007 to lead the Obama campaign’s social media strategy. And in 2012, at age 28, he bought The New Republic, hiring himself as editor-in-chief. And in 2012, at age 28, he bought The New Republic, hiring himself as editor-in-chief.

At 28 years, he’s the youngest since Sullivan to become editor—note the only detail they share. Throughout the marathon year of his purchase, Hughes showed a tendency to reach for the star-crossed idioms of publicity and idealism and the promise of a tradition-based political world. Hughes places the romantic ideal of great journalism at the center of making even.

“Everyone believes in the power of great writing,” Hughes said, “Even if we see the world the way Sullivan does.”
Suddenly, the use of advertorials becomes especially tempting. "A failure to experiment is more dangerous than trying new things," Rusbridge wrote.

If Sullivan, Marshall, Hughes and the revolution they lead are still standing in one year, the choice for media executives will be, well, dramatic. After he breaks tradition and never looks back.
AUMF. However, the Court in Hamdi did not adddress whether the executive's plenary powers under Article II were sufficient to justify the application of such force. It is likely for this reason that your administration seeks to identify only the sufficiency, rather than the necessity, of the conditions it sets forth for a lethal operation. While both precedent and statutory language seem to plainly affirm the use of lethal force on an American citizen who is a belligerent in an armed conflict, the most consequential issue left unanswered by the white paper permits the executive to deter principles to the circumstances outlined in the AUMF— is dispositive to such use. Similarly, much of the outcry about targeted killings centers around their-proliferation in countries such as Yemen and Pakistan, not popularly understood to be active battlefields like Afghanistan. However, this view is premised on an anachronistic legal framework that defines conflict as occurring between sovereign states. In Hamdi v. Rumsfeld, the Court held that a conflict between a sovereign state and a non-state actor was “not of an international character” for the purposes of the Geneva Conventions because it was not “a clash between nations.” Because the Conventions define an armed conflict according to the “legal status of the entities opposing each other,” conducting targeted killings in different countries does not alter their legality because the legal status of non-state actors is unchanged.

None of the three branches, moreover, have identified strict geographic limits on the scope of AUMF. If “...the ultimate purpose of the drafters of the Geneva Conventions was to prevent law avoidance...” by developing de facto triggers,” write Geoffrey Corn and Eric Talbot Jensen, “the myopic focus on the geographic nature of an armed conflict in the context of transnational counterterrorist combat operations frustrates that purpose.” Indeed, constraining the War on Terror to some stringent geographic standard would neglect the fluidity of threats in a globalized world. Still, some limits on this geographic scope exist. To comply with international legal principles, such strikes require that the host nation consents or that they are unable or unwilling to do so. Applying these principles to the circumstances outlined in the white paper permits the executive to deter threats posed by members of those nations in which targeted killings have been conducted because the threat posed by non-state actors is legally identical, whether in Afghanistan or Yemen.

The rights laid out in the Fourth and Fifth Amendments pose two types of constitutional challenges to the legality of the targeted killing of an American citizen. Your administration does not pretend to ignore or nullify these rights overseas; rather, it argues that the government interest at hand overweighs the private interest of the individual. An individual’s interest in avoiding erroneous deprivation of his life is uniquely compelling to his unavoidable executability in that armed conflict and thus a legitimate target under laws of war— the method of force is unrelated to its legal-ity since when explicitly prohibited, which drones are not.

Furthermore, the Bush administration’s warrantless wiretapping and subsequent amendments to FISA demonstrate that the post-9/11 rule that in effect amounts to a FISC-like court inhibit compliance and accountability. Although the Patriot Act of 2001 broadened FISA to more comprehensively account for the threats of ter-rorism, the targeted killing of civilians remain a hot button issue. Mr. President Bush nevertheless utilized a presidential order to authorize warrantless wiretapping in defiance of FISA. In 2008, Congress responded to your administration’s actions by further amending FISA to retroactively legalize the majority of its warrantless wiretapping program. More-over, the Justice Department’s request to stop the warrantless wiretapping program is extended to the executive by both the legislative and judi-cial branches. In 2011, for example, FISC rejected none of the Justice Department’s applications for electronic or physical surveill ance, amending only 30 and approving 1,745. Institutional inertia toward execu-tive deference thus implicitly recognizes constitutional primary over such national security issues and defies the substantive purpose of check-and-balance oversight.

Mr. President, as long as you act within the current law, the drone program is not unconstitutional. But does it allow you to kill one of your own citizens? By specifying that determining whether a seizure was unreasonable is contingent on specific circumstances. In one of few tangential references to the bounds of the execu-utive’s authority, the Department of Justice hastened to point out that the balancing test is far more stringently applied domestically than when applied to an American citizen abroad. As with the Due Process Clause, the government’s argument is uniquely com-pelling when limited to the narrow scenario that the Justice Department addresses. Ir-reproducible situations require that the right and the nature and quality of the intrusion—occurring in the context of an armed conflict abroad—serve to diminish private interests and, at the same time, the government’s interest at hand. The use of unmanned aerial vehicles cannot be construed to constitute an unreasonable search because— as the subject is an active belligerent in that armed conflict and thus a legitimate target under laws of war— the method of force is unrelated to its legal-i-ty since when explicitly prohibited, which drones are not.

Chairwoman Diane Feinstein (D-CA), other members of the Senate Intelligence Committee and even your former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates have recently hinted at legislation that would apply judicial re-view to the targeted killing of civilians. Mr. Brennan agreed that the topic was “worthly of discussion,” a phrase likely employed by executive branch officials in response to legal protests about drone use. Under such legislation, which would be modeled on the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act of 1978 (FISA), which established the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court, rather than the need for a peremptory aggran-dizement of executive power, asserted itself to institute more robust oversight. While in theory a sound policy response, the constitutional questions surrounding such a court—as the history of FISA and FISC demonstrates—would become even more pronounced in times of crisis, compromising its objective of substantively controlling the exec-utive.

First, the structure of the court presents both practical and constitutional questions. In a situation where the window of opportu-nity to conduct such operations is severely limited—to say nothing of the smaller window between when actionable intelligence is obtained and when the op-portunity for action closes—the proposed drone court would be unable to satisfactorily judge such requests. Conse-quently, the only other manner in which to proceed would be for the court to impose a preemptive judgment about whether the government possessed enough evidence to justify a future targeted killing. The criteria for such a decision are “inherently predictive judgments” that in-clude the scope of the individual target, the threat and the nature of the capture. These seem to be inherently, ex- plicitly and exclusively executive functions, unable to be transferred to a court techni-cally and pragmatically ill-suited for such an endeavor. There exists no judicially discoverable or manageable standard for evaluating such claims, and so to impose them would risk substituting the reasoned decisions of elected officials for those of judges—make the process less accountable to the people.

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Rhode Islanders should say ‘not yet’ to ‘I do’

Rhode Island has already taken a series of measured steps toward LGBTQ equality. The legislature passed a bill that would allow same-sex couples to marry, and the Rhode Island Supreme Court ruled that the state constitution should be amended to allow gay marriage. The bill was signed into law in June 2013, and weddings began shortly thereafter.

The Rhode Island legislature is currently considering several tax reform measures. One of these proposals would allow businesses to deduct the cost of providing health insurance to their employees. This proposal has garnered significant support from businesses and labor unions alike.

The Rhode Island Senate is also considering several proposals related to education and health care. One of these proposals would provide universal access to health care for all Rhode Islanders, regardless of income. Another proposal would create a new state agency to oversee the state’s education system.

The Rhode Island House of Representatives is currently considering several proposals related to environmental policy. One of these proposals would extend the state’s cap-and-trade program, which limits the amount of carbon dioxide that can be emitted by large industrial facilities.

The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management is also considering several proposals related to energy policy. One of these proposals would increase the state’s goals for renewable energy production, which is currently 20 percent of the state’s electricity consumption.

The Rhode Island Department of Transportation is currently considering several proposals related to transportation policy. One of these proposals would expand the state’s public transportation system, which currently serves only a small portion of the state’s population.

The Rhode Island Department of Health is also considering several proposals related to health care policy. One of these proposals would create a new program to provide health care to uninsured individuals.
Today we attempt to put a modern, more palatable spin on the practice of indentured servitude. We label meager improvements in servants’ rights “reforms,” and we call the servants themselves “guest workers.” As the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) however, emphasizes in “Close to Slavery,” they expose on this issue, “Far from being treated like ‘guests,’ these workers are systematically exploited and empowered.”

For many, the journey of exploitation begins at home, where labor recruitment firms and traffickers exploit this migration of indentured servitude that is completely at odds with our modern values. As the issue of immigration reform once again takes center stage in the theater of the absurd—Congress—it is time we take action to defend the rights of these workers—and our principles in the process. Recent congressional proposals reprehensibly hint at the possible expansion of our antiquated migrant labor programs. Progressive proposals from civil society groups call for serious structural reforms, additional legislation and enhanced government oversight. However, what we need is not to ameliorate the conditions of bonded labor but to abolish it altogether, once and for all.

Through a moral loophole in our public policy, we continue to propagate a modern, erasized form of indentured servitude that is in quotation marks. In reality, most employers are completely dependent on them, and cannot stay competitive, but any business model that relies on exploited labor should be forced to adapt to modern times and modern values, lest they fail.

Guest worker programs promote an un-free labor market, so it would seem incongruous for business interests to promote such an extension. Yet a common complaint of guest workers—namely that the private sector is the oft-repeated refrain that there are some “dirty jobs” that Americans just refuse to do. We should not buy into such a dismissive propaganda, the rhetoric of cost-cutting capitalists who logically prefer cheap, unregulated foreign labor to more expensive, unionized American labor. U.S. companies that intend to recruit for jobs overseas must appear to adhere to the very vague and often unenforced DOL stipulations they “instructed” their workers to pay fraudulent upfront fees and promising false wages and accommodations in return. For example, according to the SPLC, “guestworkers from Guatemala generally pay at least $2,000 in travel, visa and hiring fees to obtain forestry jobs in the United States” through the H-2B program. This is in quotation marks. In reality, most employers get away with murder, and the entire system exists, exploitation will continue. There is a popular saying in the Spanish-speaking world, hacha la hacha, hacha la trampa: “Where there’s a law, there’s a loophole.” Even the best proposals—which extend the possibility of lawful permanent residency and eventual citizenship to guest workers—are hardly sufficient, because our promotion of human rights in the long term will not absolve our inhumanity in the short run.

Nevertheless, these perpetual promises of the right form of guest worker programs can be expanded the right of seasonal workers, increased federal oversight over employers and cut out exploitation. But until all of the rights of these workers are truly protected, the entire system exists, exploitation will continue. There is a popular saying in the Spanish-speaking world, hacha la hacha, hacha la trampa: “Where there’s a law, there’s a loophole.” Even the best proposals—which extend the possibility of lawful permanent residency and eventual citizenship to guest workers—are hardly sufficient, because our promotion of human rights in the long term will not absolve our inhumanity in the short run.

Big business advocates also like to argue that these laws, often低价, no-benefit jobs are vital to our economy, and thus we should not do anything that might jeopardize the status quo. Take a moment to consider that line of reasoning. It might seem, at first glance, like a reasonable claim: we as a nation rely on the products of these “guests” of ours some true hospitality. •

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used to travel two hours a day on the Delhi metro to go to university. In 2011, the anti-corruption movement case among its faculty was completely ignored and covered up while the administra-
tion actively intimidated students who attempted to protest. The current move-
ment cannot afford to narrow its am-itions. When women are afraid to travel on public transit, when they do not feel pro-
ected by the police, when they are afraid of being attacked by Cowardly muggers in-
stead of parliamentary corruption.

The workplace, too, must make changes. At St. Stephen’s college, an elite 
institution preparing the next generation of Indian leaders, a horrific sexual harass-
ment case among its faculty was completely ignored and covered up while the admin-
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The 2011 anti-corruption movement was exhaust-
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dion 377 in July 2009, a major victory for the movement. Yet in the wake of that suc-
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France is at war. At the time of writing, 4,000 French soldiers are deployed in Azzawad, the northern half of Mali, fighting a combination of Islamist and separatist insurgents who took over the region in mid-2012. Codenamed Operation Serval, the intervention is the latest launched by a Western power in a Muslim-majority country (although France’s official rhetoric stresses the importance of assisting Mali in the fight against radical Islam and protecting French interests in the region and advance its domestic concerns abroad, safeguard strategic interests in Africa and improve its image as a great power in a Muslim-majority country). The operation is linked to NATO’s War on Terror—the former French president used the opportunity to muse upon the ills of the “the Western World” while “living in a world of shadows,” a phrase which he repeated in his 2007 speech, also in Dakar, in which he warned “France’s well-wishes are often mistaken for genuine help. It also garnered support from the European Union, where nuclear giant company Areva gathered much of the uranium that fuels France’s power plants. This economic consideration is rarely invoked in the defense of France’s decision to intervene, but is essential to understanding it.

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The opportunity to intervene in Mali thus seemed too good to pass up. Operation Serval is backed by the French citizenry, and it allows the French government to pitch itself as a relevant global actor and draw attention away from the troubled domestic and European political economy. It has even generated an increase in Hollande’s approval ratings, as Monsieur Flanby revealed his solid resolve in deploying hard power in his foreign policy: On the whole, it appears as if moral and pragmatic considerations justified the intervention.

What’s really going on in Mali

The connection between French and African territorial possessions for strategic reasons, French interest in uranium. Campaign checks. Oil.

What’s really going on in Mali

Shariah law throughout Azzawad, are all too familiar. The opportunity to intervene in Mali thus seemed too good to pass up. Operation Serval is backed by the French citizenry, and it allows the French government to pitch itself as a relevant global actor and draw attention away from the troubled domestic and European political economy. It has even generated an increase in Hollande’s approval ratings, as Monsieur Flanby revealed his solid resolve in deploying hard power in his foreign policy: On the whole, it appears as if moral and pragmatic considerations justified the intervention.

France’s notorious history of military intervention in Africa has rarely captured the attention of international mainstream media, yet this background context is critical to understanding the logic behind Operation Serval. The French version of austerity—frames the French as a deserving and virtuous, a human face, based more on increasing fiscal pressure than on slashing welfare spending—has failed to revive France’s stagnant economy. To make matters worse, Hollande’s flagship economic proposal, a 75 percent income tax applied to earnings above €1,300,000, was soundly defeated in a December 2012 by the French Constitutional Court.

What is more, the ongoing euro crisis has, at least temporarily, detracted attention from the French president’s continued neglect of the former French colonies, his actions in the region were of little importance to him. In the end, it is not clear whether Operation Serval will prove elusive. French forces are unprepared for a counterinsurgency campaign, and potential threats to “our way of life” are telling of a world that no longer believes in the ability of states to act collectively to achieve much in the long term. In the short term, however, it wards off an insurgency that could spread to neighboring Niger, where nuclear giant company Areva gathers much of the uranium that fuels France’s power plants. This economic consideration is rarely invoked in the defense of France’s decision to intervene, but is essential to understanding it.

Moreover, recent events have demonstrated that the French public’s support for the government’s policies has plummeted for several years, despite the fact that the French government’s popularity has improved in recent months.

In conclusion, therefore, the opportunity to intervene in Mali thus seemed too good to pass up. Operation Serval is backed by the French citizenry, and it allows the French government to pitch itself as a relevant global actor and draw attention away from the troubled domestic and European political economy. It has even generated an increase in Hollande’s approval ratings, as Monsieur Flanby revealed his solid resolve in deploying hard power in his foreign policy: On the whole, it appears as if moral and pragmatic considerations justified the intervention.

Story by Jorge Tamames / Art by Ben Berke
**Françafrique** as a parody of the positive spin on France–Africa relations during post–World War II decolonization—has since turned out to be a great boon for the French political class, especially the Gaullist right, which to this day receives generous campaign contributions from elites in its African client states.

It was Jacques Foccart, chief of staff for African matters for both former French presidents Charles de Gaulle and Georges Pompidou, who established and perpetuated France’s neo-colonial grip on the continent. Under the stewardship of “Monsieur Afrique,” which lasted from 1960 to 1974, France’s reactions to the independence movements of its former colonies took a distinctly Lampedusan turn, changing everything from Africa is all to anything the same. During this period, Paris consistently propped up dictators and supported military coups, and it also encouraged the Biafran uprising. This was the result of a policy mix of benevolent neutrality for African matters for both former French presidents Charles de Gaulle and Georges Pompidou, and the French military involvement in African affairs and strategic assets, namely the unreliability of the old and venerable French client states.

A limit to France’s interventionism sooner or later may come with the endpoint of this regional hegemon is not isolated but also underfunded and possibly incapable of resisting the obsessions of the old and venerable French military, which does not amount to much. Furthermore, current rebel forces are not decisively defeated, Algeria is still not decisively defeated, the Islamist insurgency in the 1990s. Officially defined as the struggle against the south of the Sahara that lack a state of their own. This lack of a state of its own, spreading from Mali is too great. Tuaregs and Berbers are not the same, nor is their suffering. The appearance of suicide bombers in Gao is indicative of this regional hegemon is not isolated but also underfunded and possibly incapable of resisting the obsessions of the old and venerable French military, which does not amount to much.

To the extent that Tuareg populations are the ultimate consequence of the French intervention in Mali at the time of writing, the country’s urban areas are under the control of French and African forces. Still not decisively defeated, the Islamist revolutionaries have already offered their allegiance to a status-quo deal with their Malian counterparts and are already taking place now, as black Malians destroy the property of the MNLA in fact has already offered its sovereignty to collaborate with French forces. For this cooperation to last, however, southern Mali would have to share its sovereignty with and perhaps contemplate a partition of the country. Civil strife would otherwise be endemic to the region.

Unfortunately, destabilizing episodes of ethnic conflict have been common during previous uprisings and are already taking place now, as black Malians destroy the property of the MNLA in fact has already offered its sovereignty to collaborate with French forces. For this cooperation to last, however, southern Mali would have to share its sovereignty with and perhaps contemplate a partition of the country. Civil strife would otherwise be endemic to the region.

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Black humor amid horror in Syria

**WHY SO SYRIUS?**

**Black humor amid horror in Syria**

**STORY BY MICHAEL CHERNIN / ART BY SHEILA SITARAM**

Two years ago, chaos broke loose when Syrian protesters began demonstrating their deep discontent with President Bashar al-Assad’s rule. As the next domino to fall in the Arab Spring, Syrians followed Tunisians, Libyans and Egyptians in voicing their outrage over human rights violations, economic stagnation and restricted political freedoms. With such a backdrop framing our view of this country, the words “humor” and “Syria” might seem highly antithetical. For a country with a “Top 25” ranking in Foreign Policy magazine’s Failed State Index, it would seem nothing could be more serious than addressing Syria’s ongoing refugee crisis, economic decline or human rights violations. And from the perspective of the oppositional body, the Syrian National Council, there is nothing humorous about an international community reluctant to intervene, a 60,000-plus death toll and military checkpoints that frequently turn into deathtraps.

But there’s not the story of military measures taken by rebel leaders to undermine al-Assad’s dictatorship. This is the story of how the Syrian people accommodated such a task, by developing a distinctive form of pitch-black humor borne out of the daily atrocities suffered under an authoritarian regime. If the question was how to construct an atmosphere that fostered comedy and humor in spite of the omnipresent rain of bomb shells, police harassment and a failing economy, the answer is relatively simple: comedy develops because of, not despite, these horrors. As poet and playwright Christopher Fry once wrote, “If the characters were not qualified for tragedy, there would be no comedy.” In one oft-told story, a heavily armed Syrian soldier orders the driver of a rusted sedan to step out of his vehicle. The car and its driver, who is on his way from Aleppo to Damascus, have reached one of hundreds of military checkpoints controlling the flow of vehicles in and out of the Syrian capital. The driver readily presents his identification papers, making sure to mask any semblance of disapproval or defiance. “Now you!” the soldier orders, staring at the passenger. Breaking with the driver’s technique of offering the man anything and everything, the passenger shouts, “Oh, you’re screwed. Don’t you know who I am? I’m mukhabarat (military intelligence).” The soldier responds: “No, you’re the one who is screwed. This is a Free Syrian Army checkpoint!”

Some deconstruction provides valuable insight into why this story-based joke is so humorous and meaningful to the Syrian people. Firstly, mukhabarat, meaning “intelligence,” refers either to a clandestine intelligence officer or to the organization itself. The traveling mukhabarat assumes he has caught members of the Syrian Armed Forces harassing an officer of the state (himself)—an act which in a highly hierarchical and rigid authoritarian system can cost one dearly.

The retort and punch line that this checkpoint in fact belongs to the Free Syrian Army indicates that rebels, not the government’s military force, control the checkpoint. Since comedy is commentary, one implicit meaning of the joke is that the situation is so chaotic that even highly trained government spics can’t discern who the rebels are and who the Assad loyalists are. Whatever the interpretation, the great majority of Syrian citizens have been questioned or harassed by a government official at some point in their lifetimes.

This ultimately gets to the heart of why pitch-black comedy resonates so strongly with Syrian citizens. Rather than finding it exploitative or offensive, most Syrians can relate to it. Many in the United States are lucky enough to have daily problems that require simple solutions, most of which end up in stand-up comedy routines. Dating and endless lines at women’s restrooms have been adopted into our collective consciousness as experiences that nearly everyone recognizes. In Syria the sounds of exploding shells, random security checkpoints, and food rations are the daily occurrences that become fodder for national humor. Another joke highlights the widespread dearth of basic goods and services, like the availability of gas: “A man returns home with a live chicken for dinner...His wife tells him the family no longer has a knife to slaughter the bird, nor do they have gas to cook it with. Upon hearing the news, the chicken begins clucking: ‘Long live Bashar! Long live Bashar!’”

Comedy in Syria has served two valuable functions over the past two years. First, it has developed into a tool for political mobilization that has garnered support for opposition groups. Second, it has constructed a national coping mechanism that produces a modicum of joy in a landscape relatively devoid of it. A host of comedy groups have arisen in opposition to the ruling Baath Party’s leadership. One such group, Top Goon, has called for it and the God of Heaven welcomed it...The days of patronage are gone, thanks to our peaceful revolution...Hey, Syria, our revolution is peaceful!”

Christa Salamandra, anthropology professor at Lehman College, calls Top Goon’s work “the kind of humor that you don’t necessarily laugh at...the ultimate red line for Syrian culture producers.” Salamandra neatly contextualizes Top Goon’s production, recognizing that culture producers toe that line by criticizing the regime “in very vague terms”. In favor of the printing press, rejecting the very medium that is often credited with giving such power and anonymity to the Arab Spring in the first place. Funded through individual private donations, opposition newspapers like Hurriyat (Freedom) and Enab Baladi (Grapes of My Country) are printed and distributed under the cover of night directly to people’s homes, largely in and around the capital, Damascus. Thus far, satirists and comedians have struggled to maintain a presence via traditional print media: an above-ground satire newspaper, Al Domari (The Lamplighter) thrived for just two years in the early 2000s before being banned by the government. But if more comedy groups like “Top Goon” and “The Germs” followed the lead of the politically-minded Hurriyat, perhaps they too would be capable of reaching a large population without access to the Web. By distributing physical publications covertly to those who do not actively seek out satire, as one does on the Internet, they could likely expand their base. They would also provide an incredibly valuable service to those trapped in Syria’s major cities: a small degree of comfort-by-delivery.

We hear relatively little of the ways in which the Syrian people are fighting back through non-violence and creativity. Too often, the conflict is dichotomously depicted as the armed opposition shooting at tanks, and the regime shooting back. A third party has emerged, however, craving and deserving our attention. These writers, painters, sketch artists, broadcasters, filmmakers, print and musicians have harnessed the simple human desire to smile, and with it they have activated a previously untapped faction: the majority of Syrians who prefer the pen to the sword.

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On December 19, 2012, South Korea held its eighteenth presidential election. As a result, Park Geun-hye became the first female president in Korean history. She is the notable daughter of Park Chung-hee, the dictator who ruled South Korea between 1961 and 1979. Park Geun-hye has never formally declared political severance from her father. The victory of such a controversial candidate was a dramatic outcome that has critical implications for South Korean society. Park Geun-hye's father came to power through a military coup in 1961 and ruled the nation for 18 years until his assassination. Liberal critics harshly condemn Park Chung-hee's dictatorship, during which the imposition of martial law and use of torture became all too common. On the other hand, many conservatives believe that he was a legitimate and charismatic leader whose economic policies generated growth at an unprecedented rate. In today's South Korea, the most important distinction between conservatives and liberals, besides their stance on North Korea, is their view of Park Chung-hee's regime. In this context, President Park is her father's political heir as much as she is a symbol of both acclaimed and discredited aspects of his dictatorship. This particular legacy starkly contrasts with the past of her opponent, Moon Jae-in, a former human rights lawyer who had fought against Park Chung-hee's repressive regime and was imprisoned for his activity in 1975. Moon Jae-in represented those who opposed Park Chung-hee's dictatorship and fought for the democratization of South Korea throughout the 1970s and 1980s. The 2012 presidential election, then, was not only a contest to set the nation's course for the next five years, but a deep-rooted struggle to define the past and the ultimate values of South Korean society. In essence, Koreans were deciding between different interpretations of Park Chung-hee's rule. The result was a contest to set the nation's course for the future. President Park is her father's political heir and her victory was his daughter's victory.

In December 2012, TIME magazine defined this election as a confrontation between a strongman's daughter and a human rights lawyer. However, within the confines of this overly simplified framework, it seems difficult to explain how a dictator's daughter who never declared political leverage from her father could become a democratically elected president. In reality, Park Geun-hye's electoral chances could be condoned for the greater good. These opposing narratives clashed fiercely throughout the election season, as the most intense and jarring debate regarding modern Korean politics was formally introduced into the electoral and cultural arena.

Many political commentators predicted that being framed as a dictator's heir would give Park Geun-hye a substantial disadvantage, and it was unclear whether she could endure accusations grounded in moral issues and her father's disregard for human rights without losing legitimacy. The attack on her father's legacy, however, actually worked in her favor, because the contention served to consolidate her largest constituency: older generations.

According to Realmeter, one of the largest polling organizations in South Korea, the voter turnout of the over-50 age group was about 90 percent in the 2012 presidential election. Such a record suggests that Park Geun-hye successfully mobilized her constituency. Support came chiefly from the sense of stability and the link with the past that she embodied for older South Koreans, who remain nostalgic for the astonishing economic growth they witnessed firsthand during the senior Park's regime. Liberal critics, meanwhile, lambasted depictions of that period for being increasingly romanticized since the 1997 financial crisis.

The 2012 South Korean presidential election demonstrates that political decisions made today are profoundly influenced by collective memory. The decision to elect Park Geun-hye will itself become part of President Park Chung-hee's common past one day, and can immensely affect the country's future.

But the challenges for South Korea are all too present. President Park must now work to unite a society that became deeply fragmented during the presidential election, and precisely because she is a symbol of South Korea's controversial past, Park might be the only figure who can truly reconcile the divided people and heal their wounds—that is, if she works to embrace her father's legacy, realign with the past that she embodied for older South Koreans, who remain nostalgic for the astonishing economic growth they witnessed firsthand during the senior Park's regime. Liberal critics, meanwhile, lambasted depictions of that period for being increasingly romanticized since the 1997 financial crisis.

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One of the most striking phrases employed in President Obama’s reelection campaign was Joe Biden’s “Obama to dead, and General Motors is alive!” In retrospect, how do you evaluate the strategy you pursued to rescue the auto industry? Would you do anything differently?

I think in retrospect the president made the right decision to rescue the auto industry. The companies are healthy again. They’re profitable, they’re hiring more workers, they’re producing more cars. It’s hard for me to understand what the argument would be that the president shouldn’t have done anything. As for what we could have done differently, I’ve said that I think in retrospect we may not have fully appreciated how competitive this industry is and how important it is for this industry to have the lowest possible cost. But on balance, I really don’t think there’s anything material I would do differently.

In a recent article for The New York Times you wrote, “From Washington’s point of view, divesting its remaining shares [in GM] will end an uncomfortable and distinctly un-American rescue on the gridlock in Washington. It looks like sequestration is going to happen. Are there signs of compromise beginning to emerge from the partisan bickering in Washington?”

Any time the government changes its behavior, in this case by spending less, it has an economic effect. The macroeconomic effect of spending less is simply to slow the economy because there’s less money in the economy. It’s not a change in the economy from being in a recovery mode to being in a recession mode. It’ll have an immediate effect. At the margin, level, there will be a lot of individual effects. For example, unemployment payments will immediately go down by 11 percent. Everyone talks about air traffic control, agricultural inspections, employment payments will immediately go down by 11 percent. Everyone talks about air traffic control, agricultural inspections, things like that. There will be lots of small—and maybe not so small—dislocations in different pockets of the economy where spending cuts take hold. In the long run, what I’m most worried about is that we are cutting the spending of things like education, research and development, infrastructure, and the like.

One criticism of Medicare’s structure is that it leads to the overconsumption of health care. How do we deal with that overconsumption?

This is one of the toughest moral dilemmas, because in pretty much everything we do, we make decisions on how much to use based on price. How much gasoline to buy, what restaurant you go to…In health care, when you essentially say that everyone should have what they need, you’re basically saying that price should not be a factor in their decisions. That then raises the possibility of overconsumption because “why not, you’re not paying for it.” There’s definitely some of that going on right now…We have to get to a place where there is some economic impact on people based on their decisions. [We need it to be] that people do have some incentive to use the right amount of medical care to get the care they need, but not to use more than they need.

What do you think the Democratic Party will gravitate toward in its plans to reform Medicaid and Medicare?

The Democratic approach has two components. One is simply better enforcement of the health care law. If we were to use some of these new innovative ideas for how physicians are compensated…compensating them based on results, not just on amount of time spent. Innovative practices, I think the Democrats will put a lot of stock in. And the second thing I think you’ll see Democrats put some stock in is asking the wealthy to bear more of the burden, whether it’s higher premiums or having benefits phase out for people above a certain income level.

How would you characterize your own moral philosophy? Where do your ideas come from?

First, I focus on institutional design. So rather than focusing on questions of how individual and collective actors interact, I instead focus on the design of the ground rules—the basic procedures that structure and organize social systems. That’s something that follows John Rawls, who has also done that. He hasn’t done that on the global level though, which I have. The second important point is that I focus on negative duty violations. I characterize certain unjust institutional arrangements as constituting a violation of a negative duty, in order to better serve those who have less role in society. I call this process of institutionalization, as a method of taking advantage of them to exploit others in the process. [Editor’s note: Pogge has long argued that because the international order is in large part built in such a way as to perpetuate poverty in underdeveloped countries, we are actively harming these individuals and infringing on their negative liberties. A negative duty means we have a positive obligation to change the international institutions to rectify such inequalities. See Pogge’s 2006 article, “Severe Poverty as a Violation of Negative Duties.”]

What factors will eventually lead to a conception of social justice expanded to the global level?

The factors are twofold. The first is cultural convergence, meaning that we are constantly moving closer together culturally, and becoming more alike. The second is that we are cutting the spending of things like education, research and development, infrastructure, and the like.

What role do you think we play in perpetuating global poverty and what can we do about it?

I think most of the countries with the least resources, when they contribute to abject global poverty is through our governments. Our governments are generally defending our interests, and in particular the interests of the most powerful elites within our richer countries—namely the interests of banks, international corporations, hedge funds or anyone who can lobby. The U.S. political system is one that is largely privately financed, to the tune of many billions. The last election was equal only cost about two billion dollars, in terms of private money flowing in. Of course that money doesn’t flow in for nothing. This is money that is invested by smart people who put the money there because they want certain outcomes. And so the U.S. political system is one that at the national level, becomes an instrument for these elite players and is pushing for those supranational rules and arrangements that naturally increase the share of the global product that they naturally want for themselves. Now without unintended consequences, if you enlarge your own share, you will, as a side effect, reduce the share that is left for others. Poor people can’t lobby at international negotiations, they have no one to take care of their interests.
FACE-OFF ON GUN LEGISLATION

You’ve talked a lot about a culture of violence in America. Where does it come from? Is it innate? People who have a right in this country to defend themselves. As for the overall level of violence, there’s been a lot of attention to violent movies, TV shows, video games. I’m not suggesting that the solution by any stretch is to ban violent video games, but there is an overall level of violence, which kills 33 people every day. Since Newtown, more people have a right in this country to defend themselves. Responsible gun owners have a right in this country to defend themselves. There are 25,000 violent crimes committed every week in this country, so obviously we feel from the Second Amendment standpoint that law-abiding people should have the ability to defend themselves because police—despite their best efforts in responding to crimes—can’t be everywhere, and people have a right in this country to defend themselves. As for the overall level of violence, there’s been a lot of attention to violent movies, TV shows, video games. I’m not suggesting that the solution by any stretch is to ban violent video games, but certainly it’s an area that needs to be discussed.

A large bulk of NRA revenue comes from corporate sponsors, 74 percent of which comes from companies involved in the firearms industry. How do you balance your commitment to the interests of the NRA members with the interests of your corporate sponsors? One, a ban on illegal trafficking. Two, instituting federal penalties for firearms purchases by one person posing as another. Three, requiring criminal background checks on all firearms purchases. Right now there’s a so-called gun show loophole for private sales, which means that 40 percent of all firearms purchases involve no background checks. Four, there should be background checks on all firearms sales and ammunition purchases. It’s currently against the law for certain categories of people—convicted felons, drug addicts, seriously mentally ill, domestic abusers and fugitives—to buy both firearms and ammunition. We need to extend background checks to all firearms sales and ammunition purchases to make the database for background checks more accurate and complete. Many states right now fail to provide important information relating to [criminal] convictions or [civil] commitments based on mental health. I’ve also supported a ban on assault weapons and high-capacity magazines. The goal is to accomplish these measures in a way that is constitutional and feasible. Over what period of time I can’t say precisely. Certainly the effort has to be longer than a single session. As a gun control advocate, how do you operate amidst NRA rhetoric that labels many of the actions you take as infringe-ment upon Second Amendment rights? First, at least in Connecticut, I support the Second Amendment, which has been interpreted by the U.S. Supreme Court to include an individual right to possess firearms. Responsible gun owners are in favor of many of these measures that reduce gun violence.

What common sense regulations on gun ownership should we be advocating for immediately? What do you propose to mitigate gun violence in the long term? I don’t necessarily distinguish between short term and long term. The effort to reduce gun violence has to be seen as a marath-on, not a sprint. There’s no single solution, no one cure for gun violence, and no single state can do it alone because [gun trafficking has] no respect for state boundaries. Guns can be traf-ficked across state borders and cause harm in Connecticut, even though they are purchased elsewhere. So I think the strategy has to be a national solution, and it may be accomplished in steps. What are those steps? One, a ban on illegal trafficking. Two, instituting federal penalties for firearms purchases by one person posing as another. Three, requiring criminal background checks on all firearms purchases.

Senator Richard Blumenthal says that there is a disparity between NRA leadership and members, and that responsible gun owners support a lot of the pending legislation. How do you interpret that trend? Senator Blumenthal is basing his remarks off of a poll that was conducted and paid for by Mayor Bloomberg. We don’t give NRA membership lists to anyone. So he is using a bogus poll to pursue a bogus agenda, but that’s what we have to come to expect. We did a scientific poll and released it to the media, so no one could ask questions about the way we ask questions or the nature of the poll. The poll came back overwhelmingly positive, that over 92 percent of our members support the positions of the National Rifle Association.

You support mental health background checks, but there is a constellation of issues ranging from information from states to the federal government. Accomplishing this could be time-consuming and costly. What would be the monetary cost to the American taxpayer?

You know it’s a difficult issue. The NICS [National Instant Checks System] was started in 1993, and over a billion dollars has already been spent. It hasn’t worked for a variety of reasons. Some states have state privacy laws prohibiting these kinds of records from getting into the system, so we are currently working with a number of states to change these laws so that the states are actually legally capable of putting them in the system. Mark Kelly testified in Arizona that there were over 120,000 records that were not put into state records. Some governors have not, for political reasons, wanted to put the records in the system. They are more interested in protecting or not stigmatizing people who have been adjudicated as violent by not entering their name into the system. It is not the only mental health records, but also the felony records that were underreported, and the records on restraining orders were underreported. If you look at Newtown Aurora or Tucson, a background check would not have pre- vented any of those individuals because they weren’t in the sys- tem. They had not been adjudicated by a court, and that goes to the problem of civil commitments in this country.

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The NRA’s tactic is to wait for people to lose interest or outrage, I think that strategy is misguided. Newtown was an unspeakable and unimaginable, horrific act of gun violence, in which twenty innocent and beautiful children and six heroic and courageous educators were killed. Unfortunately, it is unlikely to be the last of these kinds of tragedies. People continue to be victims of gun violence. It’s an ongoing tragedy.

With that in mind, do you think that the measures taken by President Obama, both his legislative proposals and his ex-ecutive orders, are a good first step and a step in the right di-rection? The President’s proposals and initiatives are a very solid first step in the right direction. The Judiciary Committee will be voting in March on significant measures that require legislation.

Regarding some of those measures, do you see any of them in particular as attracting consensus from both sides of the aisle? All of these measures are viable, politically and practically. The specific steps right now that seem most likely to gain political bipartisanship are background checks and trafficking, and pos-sibly the ban on high-capacity magazines. But all are achievable.

I’m working hard, as a member of the Judiciary Committee and as a co-sponsor of [all] these measures, to advocate for them and help put together specific compromise-based versions that will attract bipartisan support. Mental health will be part of the legislation—better services and diagnoses, whether it’s in the schools or elsewhere. School safety also has to be addressed, so as to make our schools more protective of children against this kind of violence. Again, it’s not one single solution: it has to be a comprehensive strategy.

CHRISTOPHER COX
Christopher Cox is the chief national lobbyist for the National Rifle Association (NRA).

BY OMAR BEN HALLIM & CHRIS WILBUR

INTERVIEWS

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RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
Richard Blumenthal is the senior United States Senator from Connecticut, a Democrat who has advocated for gun control legislation.

BY HENRY KNIGHT
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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Why do you believe that President Obama's recent economic policy has been harmful?
Obama is growing the government even faster than [George W. Bush] did. Bush’s policies were deficit spending, Keynesian stimuli and artificially low interest rates. Those policies, together with the Federal Reserve, inflated the real estate bubble. President Obama was only too happy to run with that. Ben Bernanke continued with Alan Greenspan’s failed policies of keeping interest rates artificially low. People are surprised that we don’t have a stronger recovery, that we’re not creating more jobs. That’s exactly what I said was going to happen, that the stimulus would not work. In fact, as it wears off, we’ll discover that the economy is in even worse shape than before the stimulus was administered. I would try to undo the damage that has been done by my predecessors, and convince Congress that their legislation has harmed the economy. We have to start removing government tentacles, to stop all the borrowing and the spending—to have the Federal Reserve allow interest rates to rise, then allow the market to restructure based on higher interest rates. The economy needs fewer resources going into finance, education, health care and housing, and more resources back in the private sector.

In your book, The Real Crash, you argue that the 2008 financial crisis was an overture to a much bigger crash that’s not far off. Why do you believe that this catastrophic crash is coming?
I understand the dynamics that are at work. It was very predictable if you understood the dynamics that were driving the economy during the 2000s and the 1990s. It’s the consequence of what we did to artificially stimulate ourselves out of the last recession. I mention in my book that it’s not the disease that will be fatal to the U.S. economy, but the government’s cure. There’s an actual fiscal cliff coming—not the one that everyone talks about, but the one that I write about, which is, “What happens when interest rates rise? That can’t afford to make payments?” We know what happened in Greece, right? Collapse. We have the same dynamic going on here.

Is there any way to avoid such a crisis?
If, in order to avoid that outcome, we try to print money as a way out, then we have an even bigger crisis. The dollar collapses, prices go through the roof, and this wholephony economy unravels. We are headed for a real-world day of reckoning. We didn’t prevent that, we’ve merely postponed it. There’s no way to avoid it, but there is a way to minimize the damage and shorten the recovery period. We need to understand how screwed up this economy is, how much money we’ve squandered, how many of our resources we’ve wasted. We need to reset. Start over. And that means we need to let interest rates go up so that Americans will save again. We’ve got to get rid of rules and regulations that have been layered onto the economy so businesses can focus on generating profits. We’ve squandered our money. We need to acknowledge this.

Is there ever any legitimate government intervention to an economic crisis?
Most of the economic problems we have can be traced to a government program or government subsidy. Removing that program or subsidy is definitely something that government can do.

You’ve argued that the rising cost of college education has a lot to do with government loans for college education. Could you explain?
The real increase in the cost of college started after the GI Bill, when the government started giving people money to go to college. If you allow students to tap into huge reservoirs of money, you can all bid against each other to attract students. Colleges know this. They start competing on other things, like who’s got the best gymnasium, who’s got the fanciest dorms, who’s got the best restaurants. All of a sudden, prices are going up without any constraint because the buyers are 18-19-year-old kids who don’t really know any better, and their guidance counselors are telling them “You’ve got to go to college. Pay for it later. You’ll make a fortune.” Everybody goes to college now, even people who will have no real benefit from it.

What would higher education look like without government involvement?
If the government got out, colleges would have to figure out how to attract customers. They might say, “Do we really need this gymnasium? Are we overpaying our professors? Do we have too many professors, or too many teaching administrators? Where can we cut? What can we get rid of?” Colleges would do that if they had to, but they don’t have to now, so why should they? There’s no reason to lower tuition. In fact, colleges today often compete on who has the highest tuition, because that somehow confirms that it’s a better college. We’ve got to change that. The reason that politicians love this is that’s how they generate fees from students. They use their subsidies to get the cost of college to go sky-high—so that students know that they can’t possibly afford it—and then they promise government aid in exchange for their votes. Students will always want more government loans because they know how expensive college is. They need those loans to go. They don’t understand that the only reason it’s so expensive is because of those loans. Now you’ve got a voter who needs your help, and they’re going to vote for you even though they would have been self-sufficient without you. This is how politics works. College is already not worth the price that you pay for it, and the dynamics are going to get worse as the price of a college degree—and the number of unemployed college graduates—kept going up. At some point, the bubble bursts.

While I agree with Mr. Omar Ben Halim that a nuclear Iran could be capable of balancing Israeli power and lead to a more stable Middle East (“Nuclear Iran, Safer World?” Vol. 1, Issue 2), I take issue with many of the points he marshals in support of his thesis. A more nuanced analysis of Iran’s internal affairs might have led Mr. Halim to a different conclusion.

The author’s first mistake is to oversimplify President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s influence within the regime. The structure of government in Iran does not give the president control over the army. Additionally, in light of not only Iran’s rapidly approaching presidential election in June but also the less-than-covet power struggle between President Ahmadinejad and Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Hosseini Khamenei—a struggle in which Khamenei came out on top—Ahmadinejad’s power base is weaker than ever. The New York Times recognizes that neither he nor his cabinet control power. Ahmadinejad is a glorified figurehead; it is a mistake to conflate his “unsubstantiated bluster and inflammatory foreign policy” with the views and actions of the “highly intelligent and rational” ulama who truly control the country. Brown Political Review’s illustration, featuring a bust of Ahmadinejad behind a pile of nuclear weapons—thus linking the president to Iran’s nuclear program and implying that he has some measure of control over it—did not help debunk this misconception.

Nor am I capable of accepting Mr. Ben Halim’s conclusion that, upon obtaining a nuclear weapon, Iran would necessarily cut off funds to Hamas and Hezbollah. Why would an “intelligent and rational” group of individuals forgo such access to avenues of influence? Funding Hamas and Hezbollah is a potent bargaining chip for the Islamic Republic. It is conceivable that upon obtaining a nuclear weapon, Iran would agree to stop funding Hamas and Hezbollah in exchange for a reduction in sanctions, but suggesting that the first necessitates the second is a mistake.

Moreover, the author fails to distinguish between American political rhetoric and actual policy. Hawkish United States congressmen have been making noise about attacking Iran for decades, but the tacit consensus has been a policy of conservative diplomacy. It is inconceivable that America would attack Iran. As Ben Halim noted in his article, Iran is “a country of 75 million people”—who despite widespread dissatisfaction with the revolutionary regime would fight tooth and nail against an American occupation.

Downplaying this dissatisfaction, however, is the author’s largest error. He assumes that, because the Islamic Republic has been able to maintain power in Iran for “over 30 years,” it is stable enough to be trusted with nuclear weapons. This is not necessarily the case. The popular uprising of the Arab Spring repeatedly destabilized regimes that had been in power for 58 years (Egypt), 42 years (Libya) and 43 years (Syria). Clearly the length of time that a regime has remained in power is no guarantee of internal stability. Furthermore, the author ignores signs of dissatisfaction in Iran: the Green Movement, drug shortages, the plummeting value of the rial, and hints that Iran’s presidential election will be the least open in the history of the Islamic Republic.

The fact of the matter is that Iran will probably develop a nuclear weapon sometime in the future, and, rhetoric aside, there is no real support among policymakers in Washington for an attack on Iran, meaning it is unlikely that it would go off the books. What happens if—and when—a nuclear Islamic Republic crumbles? Its weapons, more likely than not, will end up in the hands of terrorists. In the words of Austin Long, professor of international and public affairs at Columbia University, “The world might be forced to choose between hoping the Iranian regime crushes the uprising or risking the Iranian nuclear arsenal becoming uncontrolled.”

All of this in and of itself is reason to oppose a nuclear Iran, despite the ease of containment and a potentially stabilizing effect on the region.

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34

35
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