

THE PRESS & DAKOTAN

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OPINION | OUR VIEW

The U.S. And Syria: On The Plus Side ...

It's been quite easy recently to bash the Obama administration for its handling of the Syrian crisis. We did it last week, and some news commentators have been falling all over themselves to take potshots. To be sure, the whole episode has had a clumsy, bumbling feel to it at times.

But to be fair, you also have to consider where this whole process has taken us in the last several days.

Two weeks ago, we were all sure that this nation was about to plunge itself into a bloody Syrian civil war with no clear end game and, as we've maintained, where there are no good options for us. Now, we have momentarily, at least, backed away from that stance as diplomatic efforts have worked toward a resolution. The threat of force appears to have pushed the process to this diplomatic point.

The situation has also forced Syria to admit that it does possess chemical weapons, a fact that until recently it has reportedly denied. By proposing to pursue the current diplomatic course, Syria's ally, Russia, has also admitted that Syria has such weapons. Thus, some light has finally been shed into a dark, murderous corner of the Mideast.

Then there is the matter of the use of those chemical weapons, which is at the crux of the current crisis. An Aug. 21 attack on a Damascus suburb killed hundreds of people — estimates have ranged from 600 to more than 1,400, with many of the victims being children. The U.S. accused the Syrian regime of the attack, while Russian President Vladimir Putin, who has been lauded by some people lately for pushing the current diplomatic initiative, has maintained that the rebels were responsible for the attack — either chemical or otherwise — and that the U.S. was trying to pursue an aggressive (Putin might call it “exceptionalist”) policy of influence.

On Monday, a United Nations report on the Aug. 21 incident confirmed that it was a chemical attack, with sarin used on a civilian population. The report did not specifically cite who initiated the attack — that was not the report's mission — but the details left little doubt about the responsibility. It noted that the armaments used originated from military sectors controlled by the forces of President Bashar al-Assad, and the size and shape of the armaments matched those used by the government. The report also noted the sophistication of the attacks, which suggested it was carried out by highly trained personnel, not untrained rebel forces. Also, the regime possesses chemical delivery systems that the rebels lack.

“This is a war crime,” U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon told the Security Council. “The international community has a responsibility to hold the perpetrators accountable and to ensure that chemical weapons never re-emerge as an instrument of warfare.”

Meanwhile, Russia has been stonewalling stronger United Nations attempts to deal with Syria. Moscow is adamant in opposing any resolution that calls for the use of force if Syria does not comply with the recently negotiated deal to catalogue and remove that country's chemical weapons. Thus, it's not clear what consequence there would be if Damascus does not comply.

Russia isn't the angel some people might make it out to be lately. It has aided and abetted Syria on numerous fronts, and is Assad's chief supplier of fuel and weaponry.

The notion that Putin “played” Obama may be amusing for some critics to declare, but Russia's own ties to Syria are now exposed and under scrutiny. Moscow is currently attempting to rationalize away the U.N. report by saying it offers no clear proof. But according to Reuters, independent analysts — not just the U.S., British, French and others who favor a firm stand with Damascus — say the evidence and the excuses don't add up.

So, while the Obama administration's approach to Syria has been stumbling, tentative and reckless at times, it has nevertheless achieved some significant results, and we still have not yet become militarily involved. While some of the achievements seem quite accidental, the thrust of it all was intended to this end. It seems to be a much better approach than our decisive and determined handling of the Iraq situation a decade ago, a dreadful mistake from which it may take decades for us to recover — and some among us never will.

War and peace are rarely clean and clear-cut endeavors. President Obama's threat to use force, unpopular though it was and is, has so far gotten some major concessions from a dangerous despot and his chief enabler. And that must count for something.

kmh

ON THIS DATE

By The Associated Press

Today is Wednesday, Sept. 18, the 261st day of 2013. There are 104 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History: On Sept. 18, 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed a commission naming Rabbi Jacob Frankel of Rodeph Shalom Congregation in Philadelphia the first Jewish chaplain of the U.S. Army.

On this date: In 1759, the French formally surrendered Quebec to the British.

In 1793, President George Washington laid the cornerstone of the U.S. Capitol.

In 1810, Chile made its initial declaration of independence from Spain with the formation of a national junta.

In 1850, Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act, which created a force of federal commissioners charged with returning escaped slaves to their owners.

In 1927, the Columbia Phonograph Broadcasting System (later CBS) made its on-air debut with a basic network of 16 radio stations.

In 1931, an explosion in the Chinese city of Mukden damaged a section of Japanese-owned railway track; Japan, blaming Chinese nationalists, invaded Manchuria the next day.

In 1947, the National Security Act, which created a National Military Establishment, went into effect.

In 1961, United Nations Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld was killed in a plane crash in northern Rhodesia.

In 1970, rock star Jimi Hendrix died in London at age 27.

In 1975, newspaper heiress Patricia Hearst was captured by the FBI in San Francisco, 19 months after being kidnapped by the Symbionese Liberation Army.

In 1981, a museum honoring former President Gerald R. Ford was dedicated in Grand Rapids, Mich.

In 1990, the city of Atlanta was named the site of the 1996 Summer Olympics. The organized crime drama “GoodFellas,” directed by Martin Scorsese, had its U.S. premiere in New York.

Ten years ago: Hurricane Isabel plowed into North Carolina's Outer Banks with 100 mph winds and pushed its way up the Eastern Seaboard; the storm was later blamed

for 30 deaths.

Five years ago: President George W. Bush told the country his administration was working feverishly to calm turmoil in the financial markets. The president met with Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson and Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke, who then asked Congress to give the government power to rescue banks by buying up their bad assets. Stocks on Wall Street shot up more than 400 points on word a plan was in the works.

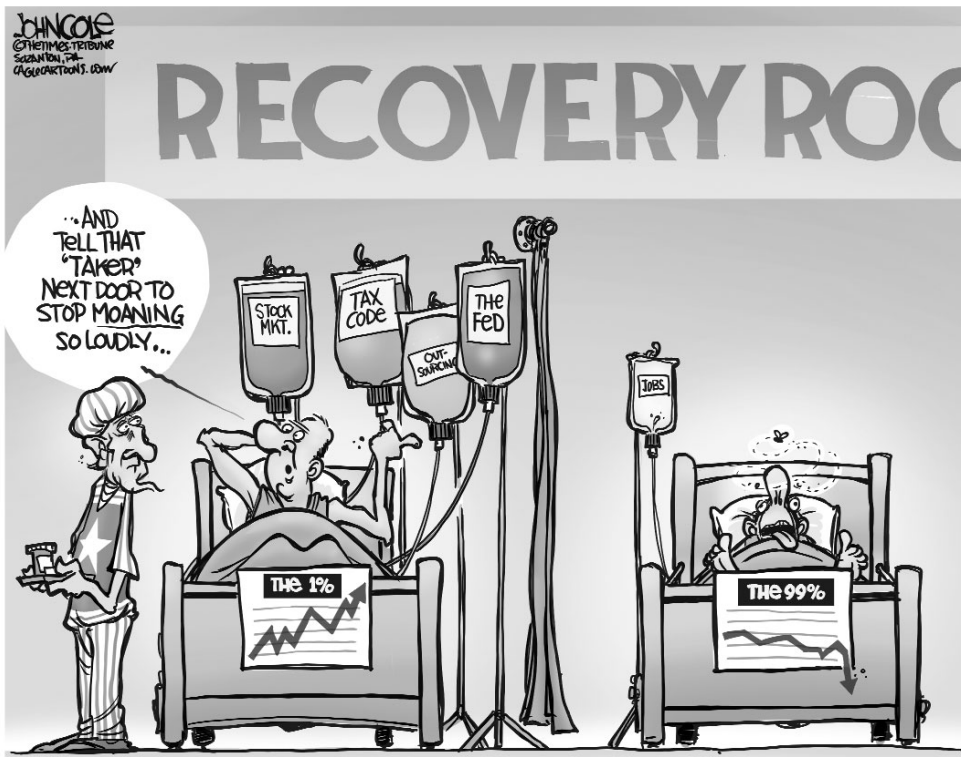
One year ago: Chicago teachers voted to suspend their strike and return to the classroom after more than a week on picket lines, ending a combative stalemate with Mayor Rahm Emanuel over evaluations and job security.

Today's Birthdays: Singer Jimmie Rodgers is 80. Actor Robert Blake is 80. Former Sen. Robert Bennett, R-Utah, is 80. Actor Fred Willard is 80. Actor Eddie Jones is 79. Gospel singer Bobby Jones is 75. Singer Frankie Avalon is 73. Actress Beth Grant (“The Mindy Project”) is 64. Rock musician Kerry Livgren is 64. Actress Anna Deavere Smith is 63. Basketball coach Rick Pitino is 61. College Football Hall of Famer and retired NFL player Billy Sims is 58. Movie director Mark Romanek is 54. Baseball Hall of Famer Ryne Sandberg is 54. Alt-country-rock musician Mark Olson is 52. Singer Joanne Catherall (Human League) is 51. Actress Holly Robinson Peete is 49. Rhythm-and-blues singer Ricky Bell (Bell Biv DeVoe and New Edition) is 46. Actress Aisha Tyler is 43. Racing cyclist Lance Armstrong is 42. Opera singer Anna Netrebko is 42. Actress Jada Pinkett Smith is 42. Actor James Marsden is 40. Actress Emily Rutherford is 39. Actor Travis Schuldt is 39. Rapper Xzibit is 39. Comedian-actor Jason Sudeikis (TV: “Saturday Night Live”) is 38. Actress Sophia Brown is 37. Actor Barrett Foa is 36. TV correspondent Sara Haines is 36. Actress Alison Lohman is 34. Actors Taylor and Brandon Porter are 20. Actor C.J. Sanders is 17.

Thought for Today: “We want the facts to fit the preconceptions. When they don't it is easier to ignore the facts than to change the preconceptions.” — Jessamyn West, American author (1902-1984).

FROM THE BIBLE

Heal me, O Lord, for my bones are troubled. Psalm 6:2. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis



Rez of the Story

Tattoos: Signs And Symbols

BY VINCE TWO EAGLES

Hau Mitakuepi (Greetings My Relatives),
To tat or not to tat – tat is the question. I don't know what the tattoo pundits (if there is even such a thing) are slinging around these days via the media but whatever their conversation happens to be, I wish to add my own two cents if I may.

You see, I come from a culture that doesn't have any experience with tattooing. Marking one's body with different colored paints and tattooing are two different things. At the end of the day, one need only take a quick plunge in a local lake or stream to wash off the body paint (today, we shower like everyone else). Removing an unwanted tattoo is another thing altogether, but the main question I hear elders asking is, why?

Why you ask? Here, according to Science Direct (www.sciencedirect.com) are some revealing thoughts that I thought I'd pass on as one of those FYI pieces. To find out why an individual decides to tattoo or pierce, you'd have to ask that person directly, I think. It is wiser to ask than to assume and stereotype folks, don't you think? Anyway:

“Body modification has been prevalent for centuries and are practiced for a great variety of reasons. Lately, tattoos and body piercings have been increasingly popular. A considerable amount of research on motivational aspects [why] already exists ...

“[Tattoos] have a long history and are well known from various cultures in Asia, Africa, America and Oceania. There is also evidence for the prevalence of tattoos in Europe, dating back over 5,000 years. Although the appearance of tattoos and piercings varied geographically, they always possessed a very specific meaning for the particular culture. Tattoos were utilized to signal religious affiliations, strength or social status. In Europe, the practices of tattooing was predominant among sailors and other working-class members from the beginning of the 20th century onwards. Later on, tattoos assigned affiliations of certain groups, such as bikers or inmates. In the 1980s, the punk and gay movements picked up invasive body modification, mainly as a protest against the conservative middle-class norms of society. Until the



Vince
TWO EAGLES

1900s, body modifications remained a provocative part of various subcultures.

“In the last decade, tattoos and piercings have increased tremendously in popularity, rising not only in numbers but also involving a broader range of social classes. The main cause of this extension can probably be found in cultural commercialism spread by the media, and it comes along with a considerable alteration in signaling function such that body modification does not necessarily assign the bearers to a certain subculture anymore. Many authors argued that tattoos and body piercings today ‘are nothing more than fashion accessories,’ whereas others assigned them a deeper psychological meaning.

“What people valued most about their own body modifications was ‘being different.’

“In summary, the major motivation for the acquisition of tattoos and body piercings are very similar and can be

expressed by 10 categories: beauty; art and fashion; individuality; personal narrative; physical endurance; spiritual and cultural tradition; addiction; sexual motivation and no specific reason. Most frequently mentioned in the literature are the expressions of individuality and the embellishment of the own body. Other motivations mirror personal attributes and values ...”

Richard Leaky in his book “Origins Reconsidered — In Search of What Makes Us Human” tells us: “Each society weaves its own culture, a complex fabric of many elements, each element giving special meaning to the others. It is often difficult for someone outside a particular culture to understand the fabric as an entity. Differences in language, in values, and in mythology create barriers to understanding. Pluck a single thread from a fabric, and the foreigner is even less likely to comprehend its significance. The painted, engraved, and carved images of prehistory are threads from past cultures, and are the foreigners trying to interpret their meaning. Perhaps more than anything else, art can be fully understood only in the context of the culture that produced it.”

Words to the wise. And now you know the rez of the story.
Doksha (later) ...

YOUR LETTERS

A Clear Mission

Jason Gant, Pierre

South Dakota Secretary of State

After careful thought and consideration, I have decided not to seek another term as your Secretary of State, and am looking forward to returning to the private sector when my term ends.

When I campaigned for this office, I detailed very specific goals to accomplish if elected. I promised to create an online corporate filing system, more open records online, increase transparency to campaign finance, and to increase access to the voting booth. I have met and exceeded my goals and am confident that the next Secretary of State will inherit a government agency that is at the forefront of technology.

My proudest accomplishment has been the creation and implementation of vote centers. This revolutionary change to our election system is breaking down barriers, while cutting costs. Creating the opportunity for people to vote anywhere allows for greater participation in our democratic process while increasing the security of our ballot.

I have been a vocal proponent of open government initiatives. As Secretary of State, I have made the campaign finance system searchable by donor and candidate as well as opening file cabinets and posting those records online for public inspection.

South Dakota businesses are benefiting from our new online filing system. Through the implementation of this user friendly filing system businesses have saved time and resources. This initiative was only possible by managing a government agency like a business.

I am far from perfect, but I have always tried to do my best and serve the people of South Dakota well. Tremendous improvements have been made in the Secretary of State's office with more to come. I may not be seeking another term; however my drive and determination are as strong as ever.

Over the next year and a half, I will roll out an elections app for your phone and tablet, launch the most innovative military voting system in the country, and continue to promote South Dakota as open for business.

My mission is clear and my focus is on target to continue to serve South Dakota.

OUR LETTER POLICY

The **PRESS & DAKOTAN** encourages its readers to write letters to the editor, and it asks that a few simple guidelines be followed.

■ Please limit letters to 300 words or less. Letters should deal with a single subject, be of general interest and state a specific point of view. Letters are edited with brevity, clarity and newspaper style in mind.

■ In the sense of fairness and professionalism, the **PRESS & DAKOTAN** will accept no letters attacking private individuals or businesses.

■ Specific individuals or entities addressed in letters may be given the opportunity to read the letter prior to publication and be allowed to answer the letter in the same issue.

■ Only signed letters with writer's full name, address and daytime phone number for verification will be accepted. Please mail to: Letters, 319 Walnut, Yankton, SD 57078, drop off at 319 Walnut in Yankton, fax to 665-1721 or email to views@yankton.net/.

A Great Day

Yankton Family Visitation Center

The Yankton Family Visitation Center would like to thank all of the parents and children who came to celebrate our “Family Fun Day” at Memorial Park on Sept. 14. We are grateful to our corporate sponsors who helped fund the event, and to our volunteers who graciously gave us their time and support. This event would not have been possible without all of you, and we can't thank you enough for making our first “Family Fun Day” a success!

The Family Visitation Center strives to promote healthy relationships between children and their loved ones. This event provided a free opportunity for families to gather and enjoy the day together with free lunch, a bouncy house, carnival games, and arts and crafts with plenty of candy and prizes. The vision our agency had for the event was made possible by our major sponsors in the Yankton community: Lewis & Clark Specialty Hospital, Avera Sacred Heart Hospital, Slumberland, Sapa, Head 2 Heals, Cimpl's, Hy-Vee, CorTrust Bank, Rexall Drug, Walmart, Walgreens, McDonald's, and Ace Hardware. Pop and water for the event was provided by Coke, Freedom, Paul's Kwik Stop, Pump 'N Stuff, Gramp's, Clark's and Shell.

Thanks again to everyone who participated in the event to support our agency and our mission to promote healthy family relationships! Thank you!

WRITE US

Letters, Yankton Press & Dakotan, 319 Walnut, Yankton, SD 57078