

The San Diego Union-Tribune

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DANA MILBANK

The Washington Post

PRESIDENT OH-BUMMER

The two presidents stood in the East Room on Tuesday afternoon, united in their goal of defeating the Islamic State but separated by a stylistic gulf as vast as the Atlantic.

On the left, facing the cameras, was Francois Hollande, war president. He spoke of “cowardly murderers” who “dishonor humanity,” of a “relentless determination to fight terrorism everywhere and anywhere,” of “an implacable joint response,” of “hunting down their leaders” and “taking back the land.”

On the right stood Barack Obama, President Oh-bummer.

Defeating the Islamic State?

“That’s going to be a process that involves hard, methodical work. It’s not going to be something that happens just because suddenly we take a few more airstrikes.”

A political settlement in Syria?

“It’s going to be hard. And we should not be under any illusions.”

Could the Paris attacks have been prevented?

“It’s hard — that’s a hard thing to track ... That’s a tough job.”

Obama, in Turkey last week, responded to those who believe he isn’t tough enough on the Islamic State. “Some of them seem to think that if I were just more bellicose in expressing what we’re doing, that that would make a difference,” he said.

Well, yes.

Tough talk won’t defeat terrorists — but it will rally a nation. It’s no mere coincidence that the unpopular Hollande’s support has increased during his forceful response to the attacks, while Obama’s poll numbers are down.

The importance of language was very clear at the White House on Tuesday, even in translation.

There was little difference in their strategies for fighting the Islamic State, but Hollande was upbeat and can-do, while Obama was discouraging and lawyerly. It was as if the smoke-em-out spirit of George W. Bush had been transplanted into the body of a short, pudgy, bespectacled French socialist with wrinkled suit-pants.

From my fourth-row perspective, Obama was still and contained, while Hollande’s sweeping gestures kept setting off bursts of camera-shutter clicks. The Frenchman brought Mediterranean heat (“dismantle and destroy”), while the American was Lake Michigan-cool (“There is a potential convergence of interests between the various parties”).

It’s not as if Obama lacks emotion (he rubbed his face and appeared to blink back tears as Hollande spoke of the young American woman killed in the Paris attacks) or passion (he spoke movingly about the need to admit Syrian refugees). But when he spoke of war and

terrorism, it was to play down and reassure. “My fellow Americans, let’s remember we faced greater threats to our way of life before,” he said.

Obama had moments of loft in his lengthy opening statement. He spoke of the “murderous” Islamic State and the “madness” of terrorism as a “scourge that threatens all of us.” It “must be destroyed,” he said. But he turned defensive when he reminded everybody that a 65-nation coalition has been fighting the Islamic State “for more than a year,” and he recited its “progress.”

Later, Obama said the task was to “accelerate” the “success” already seen.

Hollande — whose capital, after all, is the one that

was just attacked — had a greater sense of urgency. “The Paris attacks generated a lot of emotion, but that’s not enough,” he said.

It’s not as if Obama lacked emotion or passion. But when he spoke of war and terrorism, it was to play down and reassure.

“We must act. And for a number of days now, I have been trying to convince, convincing all the countries that can act, to do so. ... Today I am here with Barack so that we can act with greater intensity and coherence as well.”

Asked about Turkey shooting down a Russian military plane, the two had the same response — but voiced it in very different ways. The cerebral Obama said “this underscores the importance of us making sure that we move this political track forward.” The visceral Hollande said, “The only purpose is to fight against terrorism” and the Islamic State.

When asked if there was a deadline for ousting Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, both men had the same policy: no timetable. But what they said after that highlighted their different styles.

Hollande spoke of a new era. “There is a new mindset now,” he said. “And those who believed that we could wait” now realize “the risk is everywhere. ... We, therefore, must act.”

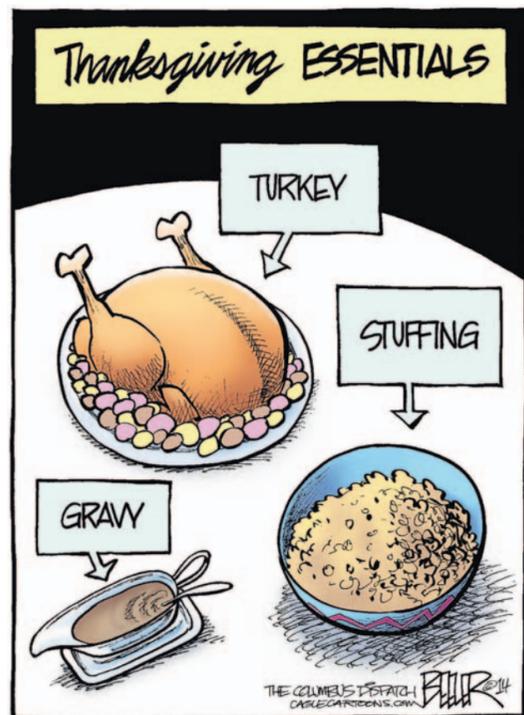
Then came President Oh-bummer.

“Syria has broken down,” he said. “And it is going to be a difficult, long, methodical process to bring back together various factions within Syria to maintain a Syrian state.”

Maybe you can motivate people when you sound so discouraging. But it’s hard.

Milbank is on Twitter, @Milbank.

NATE BEELER
The Columbus Dispatch



STEVE BREEN has the day off.



EDITORIAL

‘MISSION FORWARD’ OR ‘MISSION FORGOTTEN’

Alzheimer’s disease is the medical calamity of our time. It afflicts 5 million Americans today, a figure that with the aging population is projected to reach 15 million within a generation. There is no cure, nor even a way to slow its progression. Unlike cancer or heart disease, from which the number of deaths each year is thankfully declining, the number of Alzheimer’s deaths is increasing. The cost of Alzheimer’s is put at \$226 billion a year, much of it borne by taxpayers, and that cost is predicted to reach \$1.1 trillion by 2050. Yet, Alzheimer’s lags far behind other major killers in research dollars spent to combat it.

Against that backdrop comes “Mission Forward,” a plan by the national Alzheimer’s Association to restructure along the lines of what a number of other major health charities have already done. It would consolidate its 54 separately incorporated local chapters into a single charity run out of national headquarters in Chicago.

The intent, says Stewart Putnam, the national board chair, is to “enhance performance” in fighting Alzheimer’s by aligning the national organization and all the chapters behind a strategic plan with several goals, including raising public awareness, increasing revenue and increasing federal funding for research.

But “Mission Forward” has not gone down well with fully half of the 54 local chapters, including the Alzheimer’s Association of San Diego and Imperial Counties, which, along with 26 other locals voted earlier this fall to oppose it, mocking the plan as “Mission Forgotten.” Among them are some of the largest local chapters: New York City, Philadelphia, Los Angeles and Orange County. Some, including

San Diego, are considering breaking off the affiliation with the national organization to become fully independent.

Independence would be a radical step for the locals. But it is easy to understand and sympathize with their frustration.

Since 2009, the national association has required chapters to turn over 40 percent of all donations to headquarters in Chicago. Under the proposed consolidation, 100 percent of locally collected contributions would go to Chicago. In addition, directors of the local chapters would be relegated to advisory status, certain services would be run out of Chicago and local executive directors would report to Chicago, not the local board.

Local association leaders look at the national organization and see a bloated staff with bloated salaries and fancy offices, wasteful expenses such as extensive travel and, most importantly, research grants that declined by 46 percent from 2007 to 2013.

Putnam argues that those criticisms are based on a “flawed analysis” of the association’s public financial filings. But the numbers are what they are and they should not be any more acceptable to the national leadership than the local critics.

San Diego and the other chapters must decide by Jan. 15 whether to maintain the affiliation with the national association or go independent.

To be sure, breaking away from the mother ship would be a huge risk.

Between now and the end of the year, the national Alzheimer’s Association ought to commit to major internal reform. Without such a commitment, local chapters may have no choice but end their affiliation.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

More green, less concrete needed

After reading about the proposed Manchester Pacific Gateway project (“San Diego Rockefeller Center,” Nov. 24), I am convinced that we are hell-bent on turning San Diego into another Los Angeles or, in this case, New York.

Tourists don’t flock to San Diego to see more large buildings or condos. Why must we cover ever vacant downtown lot with a high-rise rectangle? How about giving us some breathing room and making much of this land a green-belt?

Mark Heinze
San Diego

Liberal media want to pick our leaders

Ron Bonn’s proposition (“Mainstream media asks questions for you the people,” Nov. 22) that the mainstream media is composed of a generally altruistic corps of truth seekers hoping to enlighten the simple masses is false.

Katie Faurc tried to “punch” Sarah Palin, not toss her a softball. At the same time, a compliant media was canonizing another hugely “unknown” right into the White House, with hardly a mention of Barack Obama’s connections to

Jeremiah Wright and Bill Ayers, let alone what papers he read.

Bonn and his liberal colleagues have practiced embedding left-leaning opinions as fact into straight news for so long, they can’t or won’t come to grips with the very “confirmation bias” of which he accuses ordinary citizens. Rich irony.

Mark Mendoza
San Diego

Spend those surpluses on real local needs

Regarding “SD’s future finances look rosy (Nov. 23): City officials predict San Diego’s budget surpluses: \$113.8 million in 2019, \$149.5 million in 2020 and \$184.9 million in 2021.” At least 50 percent of that is planned “on shoring up” the city’s crumbling infrastructure.

Oh, happy days are here again for San Diego. Thanks, Mayor Faulconer. Great idea. But then read on to page B4 and we see “mayor’s (new stadium) plan includes \$350 million in contributions from city and country taxpayers.” Really?

Do you really think that the people of San Diego are interested in funding that stadium right now or in the near future? Compare the stadium price tag with the

surplus dollars the city “predicts” we’re gonna have to fix real things that we so desperately need. Me thinks someone’s “spinning their wheels” and going nowhere.

Lee Clark
North Park

Syrians must stand up for their country

The assault against a Muslim student at SDSU (“Hundreds rally at SDSU following hate crime report,” Nov. 24) is reprehensible. Let’s build on that moment/sentiment and take the chant of “Stand up, fight back” to the world stage.

May I suggest that the motivated and vocal student citizens of this country line the mass migration route of Muslims from Syria and the Middle East to implore those able-bodied, combat-aged males clogging the camera lens to do just that, stand up and fight those in their homelands that are attacking Muslims, killing them, forcing them to flee their homes, not to mention making them feel unsafe on their college campuses.

J.C. Lunt
Coronado

Happy to see this decision come to a vote

Kudos to the Carlsbad City Council for doing the right — and sensible thing

— scheduling a special election (“Special election set for Caruso’s plan,” Nov. 18) on Feb. 23, so our community can come together, have its say, and move on. The 85/15 Plan has been in front of our community for three years now with community meetings, house parties and a tour of the project space itself.

That’s a long time and waiting another year to “study” this issue would unnecessarily delay a project that we, as a community, could be benefiting from now. With the projected more than \$2.5 million per year into our general fund, delaying another 12 months would divide our city further and be costly to boot. Our respected mayor and City Council members have sought the most sensible and responsible decision to unite our community, give people a say and begin realizing myriad benefits of this amazing plan.

Ralph & Noreen Wenstone
Carlsbad

Peters wrong to help put up roadblocks

Regarding “Rep. Peters votes for tighter controls on refugees” (Nov. 20): I was horrified to learn that Scott Peters voted for more restrictions on accepting Syrian refugees into the U.S. “Face the Nation” presented statistics on Sunday showing that more than

23,000 Syrian refugees had been recommended for asylum in the past few years, some 7,000 were interviewed, and about 2,400 accepted.

It seems the vetting process is already plenty rigorous. If politicians are so concerned about my safety, why don’t they allow better background checks on Americans with big guns? I am more worried about my armed countrymen than Syrian women and children who have gone through hell to find safety here.

Obama’s 10,000 is a paltry number. We have the moral obligation to accept many more.

Gail Nye
San Diego

Carson’s celebration story wasn’t fabricated

Republican presidential candidate Ben Carson was pressured to back off his claim (“Carson backs off 9/11 accusation,” Nov. 24) that he had seen Muslims in New Jersey celebrating the col-

lapse of the Twin Towers following the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

His reversal took place after fact-checkers and new anchors at the time said footage of those celebrations do not exist.

As someone who lived in New Jersey on 9/11, I for one can support Dr. Carson’s initial statement. I vividly recall watching local TV coverage of teens in a Muslim section of Patterson, N.J., celebrating after the attack was attributed to Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda. It may not have been as widespread as Dr. Carson implied, but celebrations were broadcast on the evening news.

Ray Sutton
Oceanside

Sickies stay home — the rest, get to work

Regarding “One in four sickies come to work” (Nov. 24): True. And one in four “healthies” call in sick.

Yale Kadesky
Escondido

The San Diego Union-Tribune letters policy

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