

Trumpet Weekly

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U.S. President Barack Obama laughs with Pope Francis during a private audience on March 27, 2014, at the Vatican.



Why Did Pope Francis Push for a U.S.-Cuba Thaw?

Jeremiah Jacques | January 5

“HOW MANY DIVISIONS DOES THE POPE OF ROME HAVE?” THAT was Soviet leader Joseph Stalin’s reply after British Prime Minister Winston Churchill advised him, in the aftermath of World War II, to consider the Vatican’s perspective while laying out a plan for the future of Eastern Europe.

Stalin respected only brute force. The Vatican had none, so he dismissed it as irrelevant.

But today Stalin and the Soviet behemoth he led are long gone, while the papal system remains. And it was actually a pope—blending politics with religion—who sparked the revolution that eventually [toppled the Berlin Wall](#) and brought down that Soviet system.

In the decades since the Berlin Wall crumbled, the Vatican has wielded its political power in other international disputes: In the early 1990s, it helped bust Yugoslavia apart along lines that benefited Germany’s Europe project. In 2007, it defused a potentially explosive conflict by persuading Iran to release 15 captured

British sailors. The next year, it was instrumental in forcing the resignation of an Italian prime minister.

But last month, all these events were eclipsed by a bolder and starker display of papal political might: Restoring diplomatic ties between the U.S. and Cuba after a 53-year deep freeze.

“Pope Francis issued a personal appeal to me, and to Cuba’s President Raúl Castro,” President Barack Obama said Dec. 17, 2014. That appeal came in the form of letters the pope wrote to both leaders, which the Vatican followed up by hosting a secret meeting in Rome. But it was actually Francis’s predecessor, Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI, who in 2013 made the first high-level Vatican moves to normalize U.S.-Cuba relations. Francis carried on his work, and, after months of maneuvering behind the scenes, the historic deal was sealed.

Papal biographer Austen Ivereigh said, “Francis is a genius at breaking through and building bridges across boundaries.”

But what kind of deals is Francis brokering, and what kind of bridges is he building? Who do they benefit? Is there truth in the Vatican's claim that the deal is "in the interest of the citizens of both countries"?

When Russia and Venezuela, the main sponsors of the Castro regime, started reeling in 2014 due to plummeting oil prices, it looked as if the corrupt Castro government might finally collapse. Such a collapse could have paved the way for democracy to prevail on the island. What the Castro brothers needed to survive was an economic lifeline from the United States.

That is exactly what the pope delivered. As a bonus, it bestowed international legitimacy upon their government.

Anyone even vaguely familiar with the Castro regime's record knows that legitimizing and propping it up is not in the interest of the people of Cuba. The deal is predicated on hopes that the regime will reform, but it requires no change from it. And dictators voluntarily relinquish power about as often as they donate to charities.

Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, a Florida Republican, said the normalization of relations "will embolden the Castro regime to continue its illicit activities, trample on fundamental freedoms, and disregard democratic principles."

Under the Castro regime, Cuba has acted as one of the Western Hemisphere's major sponsors of terrorism and drug trafficking. Legitimizing the regime is a boon to those who long for

America's demise. Giving into it emboldens U.S. enemies.

It is also significant that, as part of the deal, Cuba released Alan Gross, an American citizen wrongfully imprisoned for five years, and the U.S. released three Cuban spies. To America's enemies, this deal sends a clear message: An excellent way to win policy concessions from Washington, and/or to rescue comrades captured by the U.S., is to take American citizens hostage and hold them as long as necessary.

Not only does this put America's weakness on display to the world, it also potentially endangers Americans by putting a price on their heads, making them valuable targets for would-be captors.

Much could be said about President Obama's decision to bypass Congress and use yet another executive action. Much could be said about the perils of America appeasing yet another U.S.-loathing regime, and about the deal's potential to prompt other enemies of the U.S. to take American hostages.

But more significant than any of these issues is the fact that the thaw was largely Pope Francis's handiwork.

Pope Francis directly commands no military divisions, but his power is formidable. Under him, the Vatican's might and influence are rapidly growing. In the year ahead, watch for him to wield that power more boldly and more often.

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MIDDLE EAST

Report: 'Geopolitics Is Back' for 2015 Jeremiah Jacques | January 8

THE YEAR 2015 WILL BE RIFE WITH CONFLICT AND TURMOIL TO A degree not seen in decades. That's the forecast from Eurasia Group, a consulting and research firm based in the United States that focuses on examining the affects of political events and trends on international markets.

"Geopolitics is back," says the firm's Top Risks 2015 report, published on January 5. "As 2015 begins, political conflict among the world's great powers is in play more than at any time since the end of the Cold War," the report noted. "Russia is lashing out, the Middle East is fragmenting, Islamic radicalism is expanding, and Europe faces challenges on all of these fronts."

Eurasia Group president Ian Bremmer said, "[F]or the first time since starting the firm in 1998, I'm starting to feel a serious undercurrent of geopolitical foreboding."

The report lists several of the developments contributing to the bleak assessment: "U.S. relations with Russia are fully broken. China is charting its own course. The ties that bind Europe are fraying on multiple fronts. Others—Gulf Arabs, Brazil, India—are hedging their plans and alliances in reaction to increasing geopolitical uncertainty. Ultimately these realignments will reshape the world order, but for now their impacts, while noteworthy, are more regional than global. ... Crises in the Middle East have produced a world with more refugees than at any time since the Second World War Russian revisionism is a direct threat to swathes of Europe"

The report says 2015 will also see a significant increase in tension between Saudi Arabia and Iran, and also between China and Taiwan. The "ideological reach" of the Islamic State will spread across the Middle East, boosting the risk for further destabilization, it noted.

Another trend the firm expects is a rupture in cooperation between America and Europe, especially regarding how the two sides deal with Tehran and Moscow: "To this point, the U.S. and Europe have worked closely together on sanctions and other punitive measures against both Iran and Russia. But we don't expect that unity to hold in 2015 as Europe begins to feel more economically vulnerable and U.S. politicians, those in power and those preparing for 2016 elections, take a tougher approach. All of which creates a backlash that will roil international politics. ... 2015 will see more geopolitical challenges than 2014."

The Eurasia Group points to a shift in America's foreign policy as the main reason for the increasing potential for conflict around the globe. Instead of playing its historic role as "global policemen," the report says, the U.S. "in recent years has more often acted just like any other country: sometimes proactive, sometimes belatedly reactive, and sometimes indifferent—but with much greater impact."

In his January 2014 article "What Happens After a Superpower Dies?," *Trumpet* columnist Joel Hilliker said that as the size of America's foreign policy footprint decreases, global stability

would diminish: “You can be certain that the number of crises is going to increase. The calls for action, for intervention, are bound to escalate. And because America is no longer the one to step up, the position of dominance is up for grabs, both within regions and globally. It will be ugly. We are leaving behind a comfortable era

of Western dominance—and entering a new and uncertain era of violent competition for supremacy among remorseless foes.”

The Top Risks 2015 report shows that this assessment was spot on, and that in the year ahead it could be proven all the more accurate.

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PM: Israel Stands With Europe—Europe Must Stand With Israel

Arutz Sheva | January 8

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU MET WITH NORWEGIAN Foreign Minister Børge Brende Thursday morning in Jerusalem, during the latter's visit to Israel. At the end of their meeting, Netanyahu addressed the brutal terrorist attack that occurred in Paris on Wednesday. ...

[He said:] “Israel joins all free nations in condemning yesterday's butchery in the capital of France. We express profound sympathies to the government of France, the people of France. ...”

Netanyahu also highlighted the onus on the world to unite against terrorism and called for Israel and Europe to stand together: “These extremists are part of a global movement

and this necessitates a global response. I believe that with the strength of our resolve and the unity of our action, we can defeat this threat to our common civilization. And what the battle against terror requires is courage, clarity and consistency.”

“Israel is being attacked by the very same forces that attack Europe. Israel stands with Europe. Europe must stand with Israel,” the prime minister concluded.

RELATED: “THE COUNTERFEIT PEACEMAKER” AND “THE WHIRLWIND PROPHECY”

Pro-Iran Militias Threaten to Conquer Yemen

Arutz Sheva | January 5

PRO-IRANIAN MILITIAS HAVE BECOME A REAL THREAT TO THE Yemeni government, Sultan al-Arada, governor of the Maerev district in central Yemen, stated Monday.

Arada warned of threats to the vital interests of the state in the province, including oil and gas fields and electrical transport system, in an interview with *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*.

According to Arada, the militias of the Shiite Houthi minority, supported by Iran, seek to take over the district [by] ambush that provides the bulk of the energy consumption of Yemen. [T]hey occupied Sanaa, its capital, a few months ago, as well as a few other districts in northern Yemen. ...

Last year Houthi militias were able to take control of several military bases and military equipment—including 120 tanks, 70 armored personnel carriers and 100 antiaircraft missiles.

In addition, the Houthis received weapons from Iran in late December and conducted an extensive military training session, which included sending naval ships to the Gulf of Aden, a visible message of its strategic interests in the region.

Seven thousand people were killed in Yemen in 2014, most of them in battles between Houthi militias [and] the army, internal power struggles, and terrorist attacks of extremist Islamist organizations, which have a significant presence in the south of the country.

The U.S. has carried out, during this period, 26 drone aircraft attacks against terrorist targets in Yemen.

RELATED: “IRAN: SULTAN OF THE RED SEA”

EUROPE

Europe's Islam Debate Erupts as Paris Killers at Large

Bloomberg | January 8

THE BODIES HAVEN'T BEEN BURIED AND THE KILLERS ARE ON THE loose, but that didn't prevent anti-Islam politicians across Europe from seizing on the January 7 massacre in Paris.

The rhetoric varied in intensity across the European Union's 28 countries

“I wish my daughter will be free tomorrow to go around without

a veil and without any fears,” Matteo Salvini, head of Italy’s anti-immigration Northern League, said on Twitter. Nigel Farage, leader of the UK Independence Party, spoke on LBC radio of a “Fifth Column” gnawing away at Britain and “a really rather gross policy of multiculturalism.” Geert Wilders, head of the Freedom Party in the Netherlands, said it is time to “de-Islamize our country.”

The murder of 12 people at a French satire magazine put Europe’s fragile politics on display, mobilizing the opponents of the EU’s much-heralded open borders and driving mainstream backers of often ill-defined “fundamental values” onto the defensive.

Europe is more vulnerable than the U.S. to radical, anti-immigration leanings. Abutting the newly aggressive Russia and across the Mediterranean Sea from the upheavals of the Arab world, the EU inhabits a dangerous neighborhood, with potential troubles that dwarf what the U.S. faces along its southwestern border. ...

Historically, Europe was a place people emigrated from. While countries that make up the pacified post-World War II EU have long since entered the multi-ethnic era, with France home to 5 million Muslims, the melting-pot mythology isn’t part of the typical European state’s DNA.

“In Europe right now there’s a tremendous amount of anti-immigration sentiment,” Daniel Benjamin, a former U.S. counter-terrorism official now with the Brookings Institution in Washington, said on Bloomberg Television. “The danger here is that we see ever greater confrontations, provocations and the like, and that will drive radicalization. That is a very difficult thing for the authorities to manage.” ...

“There’s no effect whatsoever of increasing border controls if you’re concerned about terrorist threats with a domestic source,” Lochocki said. “This applies to the French case and will likely

apply in future cases.” ...

Now controlled by Le Pen’s more media-savvy daughter Marine, the National Front is riding high in French opinion polls. It got more votes than any other French party in last May’s European Parliament elections, allowing it to take its anti-EU message to the EU’s heartland.

Le Pen called for France to bring back the death penalty and posted a video denouncing “radical Islam” while defending “Muslim compatriots attached to our country and its values.” ...

“I anticipate a radicalization of our debate on Islam, of our debate on immigration to some extent, and a conflation of the two by the National Front,” said Bruno Tertrais, senior research fellow at the Foundation for Strategic Research in Paris. “The intellectual climate was unfortunately nauseous already.”

The murders came as the front in Europe’s culture wars reached Germany, where anti-Islamic sentiment had long been unable to gain political traction. The battle lines were drawn late last year when the upstart PEGIDA movement—German for Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the West—took to the same streets in eastern Germany that were gathering points for protests against the Berlin Wall in 1989. ...

PEGIDA, whose first weekly demonstration in the eastern city of Dresden drew a few hundred people in October, has seen its protests grow. About 18,000 people joined a rally on January 5, and the group called on its Facebook site for a big turnout on January 12 for a silent march in Dresden “to commemorate the victims” of Paris.

For the 4 million Muslims in Germany, the outcome is combustible. Lamya Kaddor, head of a Cologne-based Islamic association, said the Paris murders could “add fuel to the fires of hot-heads on both sides,” according to Deutsche Presse-Agentur.

Anti-Muslim Backlash to Erupt After Paris Massacre? David Vejlil | January 7

ON WEDNESDAY, THREE MASKED GUNMEN STORMED THE OFFICE of a newspaper in Paris, killing 12 people and injuring 10 others. The gunmen escaped in a hijacked car and remain on the loose.

The office belongs to the satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo*, famous for its no-holds-barred satirical cartoons. These cartoons often satirize politicians and religious leaders. The newspaper has received numerous threats for its caricatures of the Islamic prophet Mohammed. Its offices were firebombed in 2011 after an issue depicted a caricature of Mohammed on its cover.

A police chief reported that the gunmen sought out staff members by name. The editor of the newspaper and several cartoonists, as well as two police officers, were killed in the attack.

Eyewitnesses said the gunmen shouted “Allahu Akbar” during the attack and said “the prophet has been avenged.” French President François Hollande said it was “a terrorist attack, without a doubt.” In recent weeks, French authorities have thwarted

several other attacks.

Christophe Deloire, head of the non-profit organization Reporters Without Borders, said it was a “black day” for press freedoms in France. “What is at stake, is the fight to try and intimidate journalists, to try and restrain the freedom of the press,” Deloire added.

Anti-Muslim movements have been growing across Europe. The popularity of far-right parties is also increasing. These political parties typically have anti-immigration policies.

Last year, France’s National Front made historic gains in local and Senate elections. It won the most seats in France’s election to the European Parliament. According to polls, party leader Marine Le Pen would top a presidential election if held today.

The *Trumpet* believes that such anti-immigration parties will garner more support as radical Islamists continue to push their agenda in Europe. Read [“Catholic Europe vs. Islamic Hordes: Round 2”](#) for more on this trend.

The Cuban Knot: The Vatican's Strategy in Havana

Victor Gaetan, Foreign Affairs | Dec. 30, 2014

THE RESTORATION OF U.S.-CUBAN DIPLOMATIC TIES IN MID-DECEMBER demonstrated the geopolitical relevance of religious institutions. The deal would not have happened without the Catholic Church and Jewish organizations. Jewish groups made Alan Gross, the prisoner at the heart of the reversal, impossible to ignore; and then the Catholic hierarchy provided the trust required to move the negotiations beyond stalemate. U.S. President Barack Obama and Cuban President Raúl Castro will surely benefit from the thaw in different ways

Obama had started his first term by promising a new day with Latin America—in April 2009 at the Summit of the Americas, he even declared, to great applause, that “[the United States seeks a new beginning with Cuba](#).” But, by the start of his second term, dialogue with Cuba was dead and most of the Southern Hemisphere blamed the United States. And so, to restore U.S. relations with the entire region, the Obama administration ranked improving ties with Cuba high. For his part, Castro had ended restrictions on travel abroad in October 2012 and continued to pursue limited economic reform. Yet Gross still stood in the way of a bilateral thaw. In June 2013, secret face-to-face talks between the United States and Cuba began, but six months later, the two countries were still fixated on prisoner exchange.

In January 2014, John Kerry, by then secretary of state, visited the Vatican for the first time—for any Catholic, as Kerry is, it was a major event. ... At the unusually long meeting, Kerry requested the [Vatican's help to free Gross](#) both because ongoing talks between small groups of aides to the two presidents were faltering and because numerous bishops around the world, including Havana's Cardinal Jaime Ortega, pointed to Francis as a potential interlocutor. ...

When Obama met with Francis at the Vatican two months after Kerry, he briefed the pope on Gross. A few days later, the pope wrote letters to Castro and Obama, urging them to “resolve humanitarian questions ... including the situation of certain prisoners.” He also offered to facilitate meetings between the two sides at the Vatican. According to one U.S. diplomat who has worked with the Vatican, its most valuable characteristic is secrecy: “They never leak anything,” which was particularly

valuable in this case. The prisoner exchange deal was finalized at the Vatican two months ago, which included the release of Rolando Sarraff Trujillo, who had been jailed in Cuba for 20 years for providing information on the “Cuban Five” to the United States.

Francis's personal style prepared him well to shepherd the interlocutors. ... He also stresses creating a “culture of encounter,” an idea Francis developed based on the writings of Romano Guardini, an Italian-German priest and philosopher. It means hosting meetings of leaders from different political and religious groups to encourage trust, friendship and the common good. This is why he often meets with Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. It's why the pope sponsored a prayer summit between former Israeli President Shimon Peres and Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas last June. And it is why he urged Cuba and the United States to come together.

Especially with Castro, Francis has pull. Raúl and Fidel Castro were raised by a rosary-reciting, Catholic mother. They attended high school at the Jesuit-run Belen College, although Raúl didn't finish. Despite initially declaring Cuba an atheist state, the Castros have [regularly](#), if hypocritically, paid respect to the Catholic Church. Fidel's visit to the Vatican in 1996 laid the ground for Pope John Paul II's [historic visit to Cuba in January 1998](#) when the pope called for the release of some political prisoners, which occurred a few months later.

In Cuba, in other words, the church is still strong. Havana's Cardinal Archbishop Jaime Lucas Ortega y Alamino has followed a strategy of reconciliation on the island, avoiding confrontation with the state while winning more independence to carry out the church's religious mission. Under Ortega's 35-year leadership, the Catholic Church, to which about 60 percent of all Cubans belong, has emerged as the only national institution that functions independent of the state. ...

A few days after Francis was elected, the Havana Archdiocese published a document containing 23 proposals produced by a group, *Laboratorio Casa Cuba*, comprised of “professors and researchers of diverse ideologies (Catholics, critical Marxists, republican-socialists and anarchists).” It's a Christian social-democratic program, with an anti-American cherry on top. ...

Euro Crisis Entering New, Highly Dangerous Phase

The Economist | January 4

EVER SINCE THE EURO CRISIS ERUPTED IN LATE 2009, GREECE HAS been at or near its heart. It was the first country to receive a bailout, in May 2010. It was the subject of repeated debate over a possible departure from the single currency (the so-called Grexit) in 2011 and again in 2012.

It is the only country in the eurozone whose official debt has been restructured. On Dec. 29, 2014, the Greek parliament failed to elect a president, forcing an early snap election to be called for

January 25. The euro crisis is entering a new, highly dangerous phase, and once again Greece finds itself at the center.

Investors promptly swooned, with the Athens stock market falling by almost 5 percent in a single day, bank shares down by even more, and Greek 10-year bond yields rising to a new 2014 high of 9.5 percent (over seven points above those for Italy). The reason for this collective outbreak of nerves is that the polls point to an election win for Syriza, a far-left populist

party led by Alexis Tsipras.

Although Mr. Tsipras says he wants to keep Greece in the euro, he also wants to dump most of the conditions attached to its bailouts: He would end austerity, reverse cuts in the minimum wage and in public spending, scrap asset sales, and seek to repudiate much of the country's debt. Such a program seems, to put it mildly, to sit uncomfortably with Greece's continuing membership of the single currency.

The early election is likely therefore to create a political crisis in Greece. What happens beyond that is less clear. Investors seem to be betting that the people of Italy, Spain and France will peek at the chaos in Athens, shudder—and stick to the austerity that Germany's Angela Merkel has prescribed for them.

But that seems too sanguine to this newspaper. It is hard to believe that a Greek crisis will not unleash fresh

ructions elsewhere in the eurozone—not least because some of Ms. Merkel's medicine is patently doing more harm than good. ...

The result is a game of chicken that neither Greece nor Europe can afford. Even if the Grexit is safer, it is still perilous and unpredictable. There was a worrying echo this week of the Lehman crisis of September 2008. ...

As 2015 approached, most of Europe's leaders assumed that the worst of the euro crisis was behind them. The early Greek election shows that hope was premature. Populist parties of left and right that are against the euro, explicitly or not, continue to gain ground in many countries—the leader of Podemos, Spain's highest-polling party, welcomed Mr. Tsipras's success in forcing an election this week. Ironically, when a country starts to recover is also when popular discontent often boils over. That message needs to be heeded this week in Berlin as much as in Athens.

UK's EU Referendum Could Be Held Earlier **EU Observer | January 5**

UK PRIME MINISTER DAVID CAMERON HAS SAID HE WILL NOT rule out an earlier-than-planned referendum on EU membership should he remain in office after the May general election.

The idea is to have the in-out referendum before the end of 2017, but Cameron on Sunday suggested it could be held at an earlier date after an EU treaty change.

"The referendum must take place before the end of 2017. If we could do that earlier, I'd be delighted, if we could deliver on this referendum then the sooner I can deliver on it the better," he told the BBC in an interview.

The conservative leader wants to renegotiate the terms of the UK's membership in the EU in order to take back some decision-making powers from Brussels.

Ideas include putting unemployment benefit restrictions on EU nationals in Britain looking for work. ...

He noted the proposals would require a "treaty change, and proper, full-on treaty change."

Cameron has previously said that reducing the number of EU migrants entering the UK as well as access to the welfare system would be pivotal to the membership talks.

A plan to cap the number of EU nationals able to come to the UK was also dropped after provoking a backlash on the principles of free movement from German Chancellor Angela Merkel. ...

The highly politicized issues are taking center stage in the UK debate ahead of the May election as the Conservatives seek to win back voters from Nigel Farage's populist UKIP Party. ...

The Scrapped Pipeline Project (II) **German Foreign Policy | January 7**

BERLIN AND BRUSSELS MUST COPE WITH A GROWING AMOUNT OF damage from Moscow's cancellation of the South Stream pipeline project. For subcontractors, who had expected profitable business deals from this project, the cancellation also means losses in the millions. The BASF subsidiary, Wintershall, has no hope of moving up "into the major leagues of global gas producers," predict media reports, since its conceptual project linked to South Stream fell through.

On Dec. 1, 2014, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced that the South Stream pipeline project was being scrapped due to the numerous obstructions imposed by Brussels. A pipeline crossing Turkish territory ("Turkish Stream") to the Greek border will now replace South Stream, which would have supplied gas from Russia, via the Black Sea, to Bulgaria and, from there, to several EU countries. ...

In the final days of December, Wintershall and the other EU shareholders withdrew from the project, selling their shares to Russia. This ultimate cancellation of the South Stream pipeline project is a heavy blow to Berlin and Brussels. Hardly anyone in the EU expected that Moscow could choose to scrap the pipeline

project, for several reasons: Gazprom strategy was aimed at minimizing risks and maximizing profits by having influence over the entire chain, from production to delivery. This corresponded to Germany's efforts to acquire access to the gas reservoir and trade all the way down to the end consumers.

Because Gazprom had already made significant progress, Berlin had not given any serious thought to the possibility that the corporation would abandon the project. Russia had already invested billions in the South Stream supply lines, running from Siberia to a compressor station at the Black Sea.

In addition, Moscow has already concluded comprehensive gas deals with China, but Moscow seeks to avoid becoming too dependent on Beijing, because the Peoples Republic is expected to become an overwhelming power.

Ultimately, German experts have repeatedly pointed to experiences of the Cold War: At the time, even the collapse of the socialist countries—including the Soviet Union—had not jeopardized the gas supply to the West. ...

Experts have begun confirming that scrapping the South Stream project will have serious repercussions on numerous EU

countries. Bulgaria is particularly hard hit, because it would have become the gas hub. This would not only have assured the country billions in investments, but also provided strategic advantages.

Italy is also hard hit. Its Eni corporation was a major shareholder in the South Stream project. The influence Rome had hoped to gain through the pipeline has now evaporated. But above all, southern Europe's gas supply will be dependent on Turkey, via whose territory the substitute pipes for South Stream ("Turkish Stream") will be laid.

This is more than inconvenient for the EU, because its

relations with Ankara, who must also be included in future gas supply negotiations, have seriously degraded over the past few years. In fact, Brussels had planned to pipe gas from the Caspian Basin—and eventually Iraq and Iran—via Turkey, bypassing Russia, as its alternative to Russian gas. If Turkey now becomes more dependent on Russia in energy policy, this could possibly "successfully torpedo the EU's main 'energy policy' objective of establishing a southern gas corridor independent of Russia," according to a "Russia Analysis" published by the University of Bremen. ...

ASIA

Russia Revises Military Doctrine and Upgrades Strategic Nuclear Forces

Strategic Culture Foundation | Dec. 31, 2014

THIS IS THE FIRST SUBSTANTIAL UPGRADE OF RUSSIA'S MILITARY doctrine published in February 2010. The document had to be revised by the end of 2014 in response to the growing pressure exerted on Russia by the West after Moscow refused to recognize the legitimacy of the coup in Ukraine. A military doctrine offers no spectrum of responses to isolated threats but rather provides guidance on countering the long-term trends undermining the country's security. The revised version of the doctrine describes the following factors that pose threats to Russia:

- the growing military potential of NATO and its expansion bringing the alliance's military infrastructure close to the borders of the Russian Federation;
- the deployment of foreign military contingents on the territories of the states adjacent to Russia;
- the construction and deployment of strategic missile defense by the Pentagon undermining global stability, the implementation of Prompt Strike Concept and the plans to place weapons systems in space.

The doctrine provides guidance on how to respond to emerged threats and challenges. The new provisions are introduced as a reaction to the events in Ukraine and around it, as well as in Africa, Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, which threaten the Russian Federation. ...

The Russian military leadership pays special attention to upgrading the nuclear shield. On the very same day the Russian President signed the document a RS-24 intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) blasted off from Plesetsk successfully hitting a

designated target at the Kura test range on the Kamchatka peninsula in the Far East. ... Over 20 mobile and ground-based Yars ICBMs will be added to the inventory of Russia's Strategic Rocket Forces next year.

The day before the Commander of the Strategic Rocket Forces of Russia Colonel-General (three stars) Karakayev officially announced the development of a heavy solid-fuel ballistic missile known as RS-26. Starting from 2016, the RS-26 is to reinforce the group of solid-fuel rockets, such as Topol-M and Yars of the Strategic Missile Forces. The characteristics are classified but it is known that the missile, already dubbed by media the "killer of missile defense," will be able to break through any type of missile defense. ...

"Under President Putin's reign, nuclear-armed Russia is transforming its military machine into a modern, technological, 21st-century force. ... Putin has not only brought Russia back into play as a world power, he has also secured his position at the nation's helm by getting a choke hold on Russian media and emasculating Russian parliament. The question that is becoming more relevant every day is this: Who is Vladimir Putin, and why is he having such a deep impact on global affairs?"
—Gerald Flurry, "Vladimir Putin Is the Prophesied Prince of Russia," Trumpet, September 2014



Japanese Youth Abandon Traditional Relationships for Virtual Girlfriends

Andrew Müller | January 7

THE VIRTUAL WORLD, DESPITE ITS POTENTIAL FOR GOOD, IS RUINING people's lives as never before in history. One of the tragic, recent victims of Internet addiction is the Japanese family.

One 2014 statistic claims that one third of Japanese under-30-year-olds have never been on a date ... ever! A survey by the Japan Family Planning Association reported that 49 percent of single

women and 61 percent of men ages 18 to 34 are not in any kind of romantic relationship.

Even more surprising, 45 percent of Japanese single women and 25 percent of Japanese single men ages 16 to 24 claim they aren't interested in sexual contact.

Guardian writer Abigail Haworth cites a "flight from human intimacy" as Japanese youth lose themselves in a virtual world of pornography, anime cartoons, Twitter, Instagram, texting, video games and Facebook romances. Indeed, there's even a Japanese word used to describe young Japanese men who have chosen to tune out, abandon traditional relationships, and immerse themselves in their own fantasy worlds. Known as *Otaku*, these young men are increasingly choosing virtual girlfriends over real relationships.

Two such *Otaku*, interviewed by BBC correspondent Anita Rani, are dating Nintendo computer game avatars named Rinko and Ne-ne. Both these men take the video consoles containing Rinko and Ne-ne on bike rides to the park. They take photos together with their virtual "girlfriends" and buy them birthday cakes.

"At high school you can have relationships without having to think about marriage," said one of these men. "With real girlfriends, you have to consider marriage. So I think twice about going out with a 3D woman."

In other words, technology has progressed to the point where individuals like this man can at least superficially fulfill their social and sexual desires without having to give anything back to a "3D woman."

This is a sad state of affairs that is destroying individuals, families and nations. Even setting aside moral and spiritual ramifications, Japan is being destroyed by a demographic crisis. So few children are being born, that by the year 2060, about 40 percent of the nation's population will be senior citizens. An economy cannot support that many elderly when there are so few working age individuals.

God created humans as social beings. He created the institutions of marriage and family to teach mankind how to live the give way of life. Of course, not everyone has to get married, but everyone does have an obligation to give of themselves to other human beings. One reason sins like pornography, fornication, adultery and Internet addiction are so grievous is that they focus people on their carnal lusts, pulling them away from truly serving others. Isolating yourself from normal human relationships to date a virtual "girlfriend" falls into this same category.

To learn more about the give way of life and God's family plan, read Herbert W. Armstrong's classic, *Why Marriage—Soon Obsolete?*

Japan's Defense Spending to Hit Record

Nikkei Asian Review | January 6

JAPAN'S ANNUAL DEFENSE-RELATED EXPENDITURES ARE EXPECTED to reach a record high of around 4.98 trillion yen (US\$40.9 billion) in the government's budget for fiscal 2015, which starts April 1.

The anticipated increase of about 2 percent from fiscal 2014 in defense spending comes as Japan plans to boost equipment procurement. The country aims to be better equipped to defend remote islands and expand security cooperation with the U.S. ...

Japan's defense-related expenditure declined almost uninterrupted due to its tight fiscal conditions after peaking at 4.95 trillion yen in fiscal 2002.

The trend was reversed under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who assumed the top government post for the second time in December 2012.

Defense spending will now almost certainly rise for a third

consecutive year in fiscal 2015, totaling around 4.98 trillion yen. It increased 0.8 percent in fiscal 2013 to 4.75 trillion yen and 2.8 percent in fiscal 2014 to 4.88 trillion yen.

The Defense Ministry has called for spending of 5.05 trillion yen (\$48.7 billion) in its fiscal 2015 budget request. It cites aggressive activities by China in the East China Sea and North Korea's increased nuclear and missile capabilities as reasons for the rise. ...

Costs related to the realignment of U.S. forces in Japan, including the relocation of the Futenma base, totaled 89 billion yen in fiscal 2014. They "will certainly top 100 billion yen in fiscal 2015," said a senior Defense Ministry official.

RELATED: WOULD MACARTHUR SUPPORT JAPAN'S MOVES TOWARD CONSTITUTIONAL REVISION?

Indian Exporters Want to Trade in Rupees With Russia

Russia & India Report | January 4

AJAY SAHAI, DIRECTOR GENERAL AND CEO OF THE FEDERATION of Indian Export Organizations (FIEO) talks to *Russia & India Report* about the possibility of trade with Russia in rupees and steps to increase trade volume between two countries.

RIR: You have suggested earlier to start trading with Russia in rupees. Tell us more about this idea.

Sahai: Most of India's export to Russia is happening in dollars, but we have a certain component which takes place in rubles. The sharp volatility in the ruble witnessed last month has impacted

any export to Russia, particularly in rubles, but in dollars also.

Ultimately, the importer in *Russia will have to pay a large amount of rubles to get dollars*. It also may affect exports to Russia and many of the communities where imports happen because the Russian domestic producer may not be competitive. They have assumed competency because of the increase in the import, landed import price because of the depreciation of the ruble.

Looking to all these possibilities and looking into the fact that India has an adverse trade balance with Russia, our present export

to Russia is around \$2.2 billion and import is close to \$4 billion.

We are suggesting that if Russia agrees to convert this payment of close to \$4 billion into Indian rupees, we can keep that

amount in India and when an exporter makes an export to Russia, he can invoice in Indian rupees and get those rupees from this account. ...

U.S. Anger at Raising of Taiwan Flag in Washington

Agence France-Presse | January 6

THE UNITED STATES ON TUESDAY DENOUNCED A FLAG-RAISING ceremony at Taiwan's de facto embassy in Washington, saying it violated a long-standing pact on U.S.-Taiwan ties.

"We're disappointed with the action," State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said when asked about the hoisting of the Taiwanese flag at the compound on New Year's Day.

The United States has long held a one-China policy, and as such does not have full diplomatic relations with Taiwan, the island Beijing claims as a renegade territory.

Instead, Washington has a representative office in Taipei, while Taiwan maintains a representation at a luxury estate in the U.S. capital known as Twin Oaks.

Taiwan's English-language daily, the *China Post*, said the

island's flag was raised over the building on Thursday for the first time in 36 years since the U.S. switched diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing in 1979.

Psaki stressed, however, that the U.S. administration had not been informed in advance of the move. ...

"We not only betray the Taiwanese, we betray our own ideals of freedom. America has been thinking this way so long that few people are concerned."

—Gerald Flurry, *Trumpet*, August 1998

AFRICA/ LATIN AMERICA

President of Sierra Leone Asks for Fasting and Prayers Against Ebola

Reuters, January 1

THE PRESIDENT OF SIERRA LEONE, ERNEST BAI KOROMA, ASKED the country to begin a week of fasting and prayers [January 1] to end the virus of Ebola that has already killed more than 2,700 of its compatriots.

The worst plague yet of the virus registered is still spreading in West Africa, especially in Sierra Leone, and the number of known cases in the world exceeds 20,000, the World Health Organization (WHO) said on Wednesday.

At the New Year's Day speech, Koroma said that the seven days of fasting and prayer would start immediately.

The number of deaths by the plague, confined to West Africa, rose to 7,905, according to WHO, in the sequence of 317 deaths registered since Dec. 24, 2014.

Sierra Leone is the most hit country in West Africa with over 9,000 cases of Ebola and the number of infected continues to rise. ...

ANGLO-AMERICA

Is Science Showing There Really Is a God?

Eric Metaxas, *The Australian* | Dec. 26, 2014

IN 1966, *TIME* MAGAZINE RAN A COVER STORY ASKING: IS GOD DEAD? ... Yet it turns out that the rumors of God's death were premature. More amazing is that the relatively recent case for His existence comes from a surprising place—science itself.

Here's the story: The same year *Time* featured the now-famous headline, the astronomer Carl Sagan announced that there were two important criteria for a planet to support life: The right kind of star, and a planet the right distance from that star. Given the roughly octillion—1 followed by 24 zeros—planets in the universe, there should have been about 1 septillion—1 followed by 21 zeros—planets capable of supporting life.

With such spectacular odds, the Search for Extraterrestrial

Intelligence (SETI), a large, expensive collection of private and publicly funded projects launched in the 1960s, was sure to turn up something soon. Scientists listened with a vast radio telescopic network for signals that resembled coded intelligence and were not merely random. But as years passed, the silence from the rest of the universe was deafening. Congress defunded SETI in 1993, but the search continues with private funds. As of 2014, researches have discovered precisely bupkis—0 followed by nothing.

What happened? As our knowledge of the universe increased, it became clear that there were far more factors necessary for life than Sagan supposed. His two parameters grew to 10 and then

20 and then 50, and so the number of potentially life-supporting planets decreased accordingly. The number dropped to a few thousand planets and kept on plummeting. ...

As factors continued to be discovered, the number of possible planets hit zero, and kept going. In other words, the odds turned against any planet in the universe supporting life, including this one. Probability said that even we shouldn't be here.

Today there are more than 200 known parameters necessary for a planet to support life—every single one of which must be perfectly met, or the whole thing falls apart. Without a massive planet like Jupiter nearby, whose gravity will draw away asteroids, a thousand times as many would hit Earth's surface. The odds against life in the universe are simply astonishing.

Yet here we are, not only existing, but talking about existing. What can account for it? Can every one of those many parameters have been perfect by accident? At what point is it fair to admit that science suggests that we cannot be the result of random forces? Doesn't assuming that an intelligence created these perfect conditions require far less faith than believing that a life-sustaining Earth just happened to beat the inconceivable odds to come into being?

There's more. The fine-tuning necessary for life to exist on a planet is nothing compared with the fine-tuning required for the universe to exist at all. For example, astrophysicists now know that the values of the four fundamental forces—gravity, the electromagnetic force, and the "strong" and "weak" nuclear forces—were determined less than one millionth of a second after the big bang. Alter any one value and the universe could not exist. For instance, if the ratio between the nuclear strong force and the electromagnetic force had been off by the tiniest fraction of the tiniest fraction—by even one part in 100,000,000,000,000,000—then no stars could have ever formed at all. Feel free to gulp.

Multiply that single parameter by all the other necessary conditions, and the odds against the universe existing are so heart-stoppingly astronomical that the notion that it all "just happened" defies common sense. It would be like tossing a coin and having it come up heads 10 quintillion times in a row. Really? ...

The greatest miracle of all time, without any close seconds, is the universe. It is the miracle of all miracles, one that ineluctably points with the combined brightness of every star to something—or Someone—beyond itself.

Obama Breaking Down Justice System

World Net Daily | Dec. 22, 2014

TALK-RADIO ICON RUSH LIMBAUGH SAYS PRESIDENT OBAMA IS actually breaking down the U.S. justice system by his comments on controversies such as the refusal of grand juries in New York and Missouri to indict police officers for the deaths of Eric Garner and Michael Brown.

"The president out there inciting anger over grand-jury decisions?" Limbaugh wondered aloud on his Monday broadcast. "That is the height of irresponsibility, go out and praise LeBron James for disagreeing with a grand-jury decision and urging more athletes to take steps and action or whatever against grand-jury decisions?"

"Presidents, attorneys general ought to be coming out and explaining to people the grand-jury system and telling them what all went on here and giving them as much of the evidence that was presented as possible to show them why what happened was the truth," he said.

Obama famously said the Cambridge, Massachusetts, police department acted "stupidly" for the arrest of a black man in 2009. Later he commented how if he had a son, he would look like Trayvon Martin, the black youth who apparently attacked a neighborhood watch volunteer and was shot.

Lately, Obama's been commenting on the Ferguson, Missouri, death of Brown, and the New York City death of Garner.

On Monday, Limbaugh noted Obama also has been asking for a "rejection of violence and words that harm."

"Well, there's a place he might want to start then, and that would be in his own house," Limbaugh said. "Let's review, shall we? According to President Obama, white cops are racists. We knew this from the first term when his buddy Skip Gates was arrested by that idiot cop or dumb cop wherever he was in, in Cambridge. ...

He noted now Obama is asking for a "dialogue" with those like the attacker [who] killed two New York police officers over the weekend.

"You know who he wants dialogue between? What is dialogue? ... Dialogue is a conversation between two legitimate sides that have opposing views. You sit down, and you talk about it. But the key to dialogue is that both sides are legitimate," he said.

"We're supposed to have dialogue with the cop killers? How are they legitimate? But that's what Obama's saying. Patient dialogue. With who? The cops are supposed to sit down with who? Folks, look. ...

"This is why Obama is really conducting a disservice on all of this by encouraging people, sports stars and anybody else to rag on the justice system such as grand-jury proceedings. This is irresponsible. He is the number one law-enforcement officer in the country, swears an oath, this is outrageous. He should be doing the exact opposite what he's doing and throwing cold water on all this fire, and he's not doing that."

FBI Says Search Warrants Not Needed to Use 'Stingrays' in Public Places

Arstechnica | January 5

THE FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION IS TAKING THE POSITION that court warrants are not required when deploying cell-site simulators in public places. Nicknamed "stingrays," the devices are decoy cell towers that capture locations and identities of mobile phone users and can intercept calls and texts.

The FBI made its position known during private briefings with staff members of Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) and Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa). In response, the two lawmakers wrote Attorney General Eric Holder and Homeland Security chief Jeh Johnson, maintaining they were "concerned about whether the FBI and other law enforcement agencies have adequately considered the privacy interests" of Americans.

According to the letter, which was released last week: "For example, we understand that the FBI's new policy requires FBI agents to obtain a search warrant whenever a cell-site simulator is used as part of a FBI investigation or operation, unless one of several exceptions apply, including (among others) ... cases in which the technology is used in public places or other locations at which the FBI deems there is no reasonable expectation of privacy."

The letter was prompted in part by a *Wall Street Journal* report in November that said the Justice Department was deploying small airplanes equipped with cell-site simulators that enabled "investigators to scoop data from tens of thousands of cell-phones in a single flight, collecting their identifying information and general location."

The bureau's position on Americans' privacy isn't surprising. The Obama administration has repeatedly maintained that the public has no privacy in public places. It began making that argument as early as 2010, when it told a federal appeals court that the authorities should be allowed to affix GPS devices on vehicles and track a suspect's every move without court authorization. The Supreme Court, however, eventually ruled that warrants are required. What's more, the administration has argued that placing a webcam with pan-and-zoom capabilities on a utility pole to spy on a suspect at his or her residence was no different from a police officer's observation from the public right-of-way. A federal judge last month disagreed with the government's position, tossing evidence gathered by the webcam that was operated from afar.

In their letter, Leahy and Grassley complained that little is known about how stingrays, also known as ISMI catchers, are used by law enforcement agencies. The Harris Corp., a maker of the devices from Florida, includes non-disclosure clauses with buyers. Baltimore authorities cited a non-disclosure agreement to a judge in November as their grounds for refusing to say how they tracked a suspect's mobile phone. They eventually dropped charges rather than disclose their techniques. ...

Hanni Fakhoury, an attorney for the Electronic Frontier Foundation, said some states and judges are pushing back against stingrays. ...

RELATED: [AMERICA UNDER ATTACK](#)

Bond Guru Gross: 'The Good Times Are Over'

USA Today | January 6

BILL GROSS, THE INFLUENTIAL BOND GURU WHO FLED PIMCO LAST fall to trade at Janus, issued a downbeat 2015 outlook. "The good times are over," Gross said.

The warning came in Gross's 2015 Investment Outlook titled "Ides," released Tuesday.

"Beware the Ides of March, or the Ides of any month in 2015 for that matter," Gross wrote. "When the year is done, there will be minus signs in front of returns for many asset classes. The good times are over."

While Gross said predicting the end of a bull market is "nearly always an impossible task," he added that there "comes a time when common sense must recognize that the king has no clothes ... when it comes to future expectations for asset returns. Now is that time," he wrote.

Gross's message is simple: Investors should "lower their expectations" in 2015.

"Manias can outlast any forecaster because they are driven not only by rational inputs, but by irrational human expressions of

fear and greed," Gross wrote. "Knowing when the 'crowd' has had enough is an often frustrating task, and it behooves an individual with a reputation at stake to stand clear. ..."

So what has Gross so worried?

In short, he argues that record-low interest rates won't restore economic growth to normal levels.

He says the "finance-driven" cycle or "debt super-cycle"—characterized by low interest rates and rapid credit growth fostered by central bankers hoping to stimulate the economy—is in the process of reversing and nearing an end. ...

The risks rise in a world of "secular stagnation," one where "a lack of aggregate demand" is the dominant theme, despite the easy-money policies of central banks, he warned.

The risk and return dynamic of the markets are turning dark. "Too little return for too much risk," is the way Gross put it. ...

"Debt super-cycles in the process of reversal are not favorable events for future investment returns," Gross concluded. ... The time for risk taking has passed." ...



GDP Grows at Record Pace: Here's What They Didn't Tell You

Robert Morley | January 9

THE UNITED STATES' GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT SOARED 5 PERCENT in the third quarter, the Commerce Department said on Dec. 23, 2014. It was the fastest pace of growth in over 11 years.

Investors seemed to cheer the news. The Dow Jones soared to a new record, crossing 18,000 for the first time. Standard & Poor's 500-stock index also hit a record high.

Judging by the headline numbers, the economy appears to have improved in 2014.

But all is not as it appears.

Consider GDP. In November, the Commerce Department reported third-quarter GDP growth was only 3.9 percent. So why did it revise it up to 5 percent?

Obamacare spending. People spent a lot more than the Commerce Department originally thought.

"The revision which helped create last quarter's incredible growth was the forced mandatory costs incurred by the American people from the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare)," writes Examiner.com finance writer Kenneth Schortgen Jr. It accounted for "two thirds of the entire boost in consumer spending."

How is that a good thing? Is forcing people to pay more money on health care and hospital visits really a good reason for investors to pile into stocks?

According to Schortgen, if you didn't count payments made by consumers toward mandatory government health care (Obamacare), GDP may have been in *negative growth* for last quarter!

The decline in factory orders, which shrunk for the fourth month in a row in November, confirms that the economy is in much worse shape than the headline GDP numbers suggest. Unsold inventories were up 24 of the last 25 months—the highest

level since the series was first published.

The GDP headlines reported by most media outlets were more than a little deceiving. Actually, GDP isn't really a score that can be relied on to determine if the economy is winning or losing.

America's gross domestic product, and what it measures, has changed a lot over the years. Production and industry are no longer the primary components of growth in America. Today, they make up a proportionately small share of the GDP measurement.

What GDP measures most is consumer spending, which accounts for 70 percent of America's GDP.

And what drives consumer spending most?

Debt.

In reality, America's GDP score has become a "how-much-more-did-America-borrow score."

While debt can bring the illusion of prosperity in the short term, eventually those debts need to be repaid, or they will be defaulted on.

Margin debt, money borrowed to buy stocks, ended 2014 at its highest level relative to the size of the economy since 1929, according to New York Stock Exchange debt figures.

Anybody know what else happened in 1929?

"If this doesn't count, then we might as well throw away everything we've ever learned about risk because there is none," said analyst Alan Newman, CNBC reported January 5. "*The manias of 2000 and 2007 now both look like small potatoes by comparison. This is total insanity*" (emphasis added).

America's economy is far shakier than most people realize. Use this opportunity to get out of debt and prepare for the next economic crash. Another one is coming.

 Follow [Robert Morley](#)

Who or What Is the Prophetic Beast?

Gerald Flurry,

The Key of David | January 9

WHAT DOES BIBLE PROPHECY REVEAL ABOUT world events now leading to Armageddon and the end of this age?

