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## 5 Best Tuesday Columns

By *DEB WEINSTEIN, CAITLIN DICKSON, AND ELI ROSENBERG* | February 01, 2011 8:58am



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- **John Kerry on Egypt's Moment** Writing in The New York Times, the senator from Massachusetts [outlines](#) what should come next for Egypt domestically as well as internationally. According to Kerry, Mubarak's choice is clear: "The most important step that he can take is to address his nation and declare that neither he nor the son he has been positioning as his successor will run in the presidential election this year." Kerry adds that from an international perspective, Egypt presents an opportunity to right past wrongs. America has a history of backing governments that have aided the United States without helping their own citizens. Rather than repeat a moment like that in which the U.S. clung too long to Iran's shah, Kerry urges the United States has the chance and the duty to support a government that serves the people. The senator writes that this requires replicating the Pakistan template in which the United States funds civilian jobs and social conditions, instead of simply providing the military with more muscle. He concludes that "for three decades, the United States pursued a Mubarak policy. Now we must look beyond the Mubarak era and devise an Egyptian policy."
- **The Wall Street Journal on Judge Vinson, Stand-Up Guy** The Wall Street Journal editors [celebrate](#) Judge Roger Vinson's [ruling](#) that Obamacare is unconstitutional. They write that the decision focuses less on the question of health care and more on the "core of the architecture of the American system," and is "by far the best legal vindication to date of Constitutional principles that form the outer boundaries of federal power." The editors commend Vinson for extensively investigating the constitution's Commerce Clause so as to prove it does not justify requiring all American citizens to purchase health insurance. Crucially, Vinson's ruling also tackles the Administration's alternative argument: that mandating health care is justified by the Necessary and Proper Clause of the Constitution. The editors note that they "take a measure of vindication in the decision," as the lawyers in the Florida case first argued that the individual mandate was unconstitutional in the Journal's opinion pages.
- **Michael Lind on an Alternative to Our Current Middle East Strategy** At Salon, Lind, a policy director at the New America Foundation, [suggests](#) that whatever happens in Egypt, now is a great time to reevaluate the U.S.'s strategy in the Middle East. He points out that the majority of America's foreign policy and military tools since the Cold War have been focused on the Middle East and wonders if this hasn't just been "an expensive distraction" from a more worthwhile focus: China. He argues that the "Middle East First" approach to nation-building has been unsuccessful and offers an

alternative strategy: Focus on Asia First instead. "Instead of encircling China on its coasts and its Central Asian land borders, the U.S. should adopt a less provocative 'offshore balancer' strategy as an over-the-horizon naval and air power, adding its strength to that of Japan, India and other regional powers, if that is necessary to deter future attempts by China to intimidate its neighbors," Lind offers. Such a strategy would "allow the U.S. to preserve its security while reducing the Pentagon budget in the interest of long-term solvency." Lind hopes the U.S.'s Middle East First policy will not reflect Britain's post-World War I mistake of expanding its empire and exhausting its military resources in the Middle East and Africa while Germany's ambitions boiled and Britain's manufacturing industry declined.

- **Doug Bandow on Cutting Military Spending** In lieu of the \$14 trillion debt and \$1.5 trillion deficit the United States currently faces, Forbes's Doug Bandow [argues](#) that the military must not be exempt from the chopping block. "The U.S. can't afford to be an endless soup line for every interest group which hires a lobbyist," he writes. "And Washington no longer can afford to play at empire, subsidizing rich allies and remaking failed states. Military spending must be cut." He notes that outlays have nearly doubled in the last decade, adding up to a total of what is around 50 percent of military spending in the rest the world, combined. "The bulk of the Defense Department's \$721 billion budget this year, \$159 billion of which is expected to go for the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, has nothing to do with defense," he writes, noting that our Cold War-style military--a large, global presence with an emphasis on "nation-building" and "subsidizing wealthy industrialized states"--has proven itself both outdated and inadequate when dealing with the conflicts that have emerged in recent times.
- **The Los Angeles Times on the Koch Brothers** The editors at the Los Angeles Times [say](#) the activists who descended on Rancho Mirage to [protest](#) a political retreat sponsored by the billionaire Koch brothers were wrong to do so. They argue that simply because the retreat cost money does not make it corrupt, and point out that protesting the event for conservative political figures amounts to a pot-kettle situation; these very same activists who were riled about the Kochs' \$1 million campaign to end greenhouse gas limits were the same people who "didn't seem bothered about the millions spent on the other side by California venture capitalists with investments in clean-energy startups." The way the editors see it, honesty requires activists to interrogate their own causes as heartily as those of their opponents. In protesting the Koch brothers' weekend gathering, the editors say, the activists weren't protesting cash donations or the influence of corporate money on free speech. Instead, what they ended up protesting was free speech. "We're no fans of the Kochs and their promotion of poisonous, self-dealing politics," the editors write, "but we'll defend their right to promote it."

## Sources

- [Allying With Egypt](#) *Sen. John Kerry*, The New York Times
- [America's Middle East First Policy](#) *Michael Lind*, Salon
- [Constitutional Moment](#) The Wall Street Journal
- [Rich Guys Have Rights](#) Los Angeles Times
- [Solving The Debt](#) *Doug Bandow*, Forbes

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