



## Opening Shot

“Friendship improves happiness and abates misery, by the doubling of our joy and the dividing of our grief.” — Marcus Tullius Cicero

## If You Thought It Couldn't Get Any Worse...

For the past few weeks, Syrian army forces have **pushed** further and further into Aleppo. We've now reached the end game. Rebel defenses collapsed on Monday, and government forces are expected to reclaim the city and declare victory sometime in the next day or so.

The crumbling of rebel positions has prompted civilians to leave en masse, a situation that the UN has described as a “complete meltdown of humanity.” There was a report yesterday of 82 civilians being massacred by the Syrian army as they tried to flee. And there were other reports of soldiers going house to house shooting civilians.

There seems to be little hope of any ceasefire to allow civilians to flee. The Russians in particular have rejected the idea. The French however, have called for an immediate UN Security Council meeting to discuss possible war atrocities and crimes against humanity.

## Tillerson to Take the Tiller

Well, after several days of trial-balloon teaser reports, yesterday President-elect Trump **named** ExxonMobil head Rex Tillerson as his choice for Secretary of State. The first challenge for this confirmation is to get past the Senate Foreign Relations committee.

That committee includes, among others, Marco Rubio who has **said** he has “serious concerns” about Tillerson. Republicans have a 10-9 majority on the committee, so it would only take one Republican Senator to make a mess of things. In the wider Senate, with the 52-48 majority, it would only take three Republican defections to stop the nomination.

However, it's extremely rare for that to happen. The last cabinet nominee to be voted down was John Town in 1989, and before that Lewis Strauss in 1959. And the last time a cabinet nomination was stopped by the President's own party was 1925, when Charles Warren was voted down. If a nominee gets in trouble, what usually happens is that they're withdrawn.

We got another cabinet pick **teased** yesterday: Rick Perry as Secretary of Energy. This is an interesting choice because Perry **memorably proposed eliminating** the DOE during his

2012 presidential campaign.

Perry was also highly critical of Trump last year, calling him “a toxic mix of demagoguery and mean-spiritedness and nonsense” and “a cancer on conservatism.” Though Perry went on to later endorse Trump, so maybe he **knows something** we don’t.

With a pick like Perry for DOE, you’d half expect that when it comes up, Trump will name Ron Paul to run the Federal Reserve, but we’re just as likely to get Gary Johnson named as a special envoy for **Aleppo**.

### **Eh, Maybe I’ll Tell You Next Year**

Back in November, President-elect Trump said that he would hold a press conference on December 15 to explain his plans for what he would be doing with his many businesses.

Well, that press conference has been **delayed**. It will now be held sometime next month, probably before he takes office. Word around the campfire is that his current plan is to hand things off to his two adult sons, while keeping a stake in the company.

It had not gone unnoticed when this delay was announced, that as of today, it has been 140 days since Trump’s **last press conference**, way back on July 27. Interestingly, Trump opened that presser by commenting on how long it’s been since Hillary Clinton held a press conference.

### **Dread Not the Iranian Dreadnought**

The Iranians were none too pleased last month when Congress voted to extend the sanctions act against them. At the time they promised to retaliate. We now know what form that would take.

The Iranians claim the sanctions act renewal violated the nuclear deal (American officials disagree), so in response, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani has **ordered** his scientists to start working on reactors for nuclear powered naval vessels.

Does this matter? Well, as per the agreement, there’s a cap on how much the Iranians can enrich uranium, and while it’s high enough to run a land-based power plant, it’s not enough for a naval reactor. Naval reactors are smaller, so you need a more pure fuel to maximize the energy produced and ensure a longer core life. (Kind of like a race car using higher octane fuel.) But Rouhani is only talking about working on the power supplies, not actually enriching uranium to run them, so this saber-rattling **technically** doesn’t violate the agreement.

The other thing is, yeah, it’s hard to build a **nuclear powered warship**. It’s not like you can just take a regular reactor, duct tape it to a ship, and have at it. It’s a freakin’ nuclear reactor, so it needs to be designed to withstand being jostled around in rough seas, it needs a different system of control rods because the ship won’t always be upright, all the parts have to stand up to saltwater corrosion, and it all needs to work perfectly, even under

combat conditions.

In short, this isn't something you just whip up. Even if they *did* build the thing somehow, and trained their engineers and crews to run it correctly, they still don't have any way to fuel the thing, and if they tried to enrich enough uranium to do it, we'd see it coming from a mile away. Not to mention the uselessness of a massively expensive, globe-circling, blue-water Navy when your goal is to protect your shoreline.

So, don't sweat this announcement. It's going to be a long time before there's an Iranian **Red October**.

### **The Golden Lasso of International Do-Gooder-ism**

Back on October 21, the United Nations, lacking anything **more urgent** to deal with, **appointed** a special ambassador to "stand up for the empowerment of women and girls everywhere." That ambassador was ... Wonder Woman.

Well, Wonder Woman did not get easy acceptance that you'd expect a fictional superhero to get. A petition against the appointment received 45,000 signatures. According to opponents, Wonder Woman's image was "not culturally encompassing or sensitive." And now her short tenure has **come to an end**. The UN announced yesterday that they'd be dropping her as an ambassador.

Nevertheless, DC Entertainment was still pleased with the spotlight Wonder Woman shined on the cause and were pleased with the media exposure. To which everyone said "No [expletive], Sherlock." (They have a **movie** coming out in June and this was free worldwide advertising.)

The UN, of course, didn't explain why they were dropping her, and previous campaigns with fictional characters have usually only lasted a few months. Though it seems weird to think that a female character created by a **guy who was way into bondage fetishism** would be seen as culturally appropriate to stand up for women's empowerment.

Oh, wait. We hear it now.

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### Meanwhile, at Ricochet...

There's been a lot of innuendo about equating Republicans with, well, Hitler. But as Ricochet contributor Marvin Folkertsma points out, it's our friends on the left who are contaminated with national socialism.

It's no secret that bureaucracies will act to protect their own turf and the CIA is no exception. Ricochet member EJHill looks at some of the games the CIA may or may not be playing over the election and Russian hacking.

Over the summer, the New York Times published a piece on charter schools that was riddled with errors. Well, they're at it again. Ricochet contributor (and awesome-beard-haver) Jason Bedrick viscerates this new piece and explains everything they get wrong.



### **New Ricochet Podcasts!**

This week on *The Conservatarians*, Ricochet Editor-in-Chief Jon Gabriel and Heatstreet contributor Stephen Miller welcome a very special guest, the host of “The Greg Gutfeld Show” ... Greg Gutfeld! It’s been one hell of a year, so of course they focus on important stuff: the best albums of 2016.

On a brand-new *Mad Dogs and Englishmen*, the boys want to talk about guns, guns, and more guns. But first they talk about their, like, their jobs and stuff, chit-chat about Obamacare, and yeah, finally they get to the guns.

Some people just don’t get that podcasts are an audio format and ... well, anyway, on the *Harvard Lunch Club* podcast, the boys discuss women in bikinis selling burgers. Boys, it’s a *podcast* and ... aw, hell. They’re pretty smart. They probably actually know what they’re doing.

Okay, so you’ve got your burger, you’re wearing your grandmother’s hand-knit bikini, sounds like you’re ready for a *Three Martini Lunch*. Jim Geraghty of National Review and Greg Corombos of Radio America cheer the choice of Rick Perry to run the DOE and grimace as Mitch McConnell hits the brakes on the Trump tax plan.

### **Today in History...**

On this day in 1972, Gene Cernan became the last man to leave a footprint on the Moon. His last words before climbing back into the Apollo 17 module were, “We leave as we came and, God willing, as we shall return, with peace and hope for all mankind.”

On this day in 1977, *Saturday Night Fever* premiered in New York City. We mention it because historical perspective matters: No matter how crazy America seems sometimes, it’s important to remember that there was a time when this movie was considered the height of cool.

On this day in 2008, during President Bush’s final trip to Iraq, Iraqi journalist Muntadhar al-Zaidi threw two shoes at him in the middle of a press conference. In case you’re curious, the correct term for throwing a shoe at somebody seems to be “shoeing.” So add

that one to your vocabulary right next to “autodefenestration” and “bastinado.”

### **We Heartily Recommend...**

When it comes to podcasts, we’re all about critical analysis. (The whole point of podcasts is to engage your mind. Otherwise you could just listen to the *Saturday Night Fever soundtrack* for the thousandth time.) To wit, we heartily recommend the podcast *Crime Writers On...*

This podcast originally started as *Crime Writers on Serial*, but they expanded beyond that one show and now talk about podcasts, pop culture, and true crime. The most recent episode talks about a few true crime stories as well as *Crime Town* and *West World*. This show turned us on to several of our favorite podcasts and TV shows.

They also have a lot of laughs while they’re doing it. They’re crime writers, not comedians, but then end up having a really good time. We put this podcast down for a little while, and when we picked it back up, we were reminded how much we enjoy it.