

The Agenda

NRO's domestic-policy blog, by Reihan Salam.

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Stray Links 01.26.2011

By [Reihan Salam](#)

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* Megan McArdle has written the [most resonant take](#) on last night's SOTU.

* Ace CNET reporter Declan McCullagh takes congressional Republicans to task for backing a [vast expansion](#) of the government's surveillance authority:

Jim Harper, director of information policy studies at the free-market [Cato Institute](#), says the push for legislation is an example of [pro-regulatory Republicans](#). "Republicans were put in power to limit the size and scope of the federal government," Harper said. "And they're working to grow the federal government, increase its intrusiveness, and I fail to see where the Fourth Amendment permits the government to require dragnet surveillance of Internet users."

This seems to be at least as pressing a civil liberties issue as airport security junk-touching, but it hasn't drawn nearly as much attention.

* I greatly enjoyed [this post](#) by John McWhorter.

* Olivier Blanchard on the [two-speed global recovery](#). (I have to say, I think the two-speed recovery is likely to be the two-speed reality for at least a decade. There's lots of catch-up growth to be had in the developing world, but bloated public sectors in the advanced countries aren't going embrace productivity-enhancing structural without an ugly and potentially unwinnable political fight.)

* I'm a believer in Jane McGonigal's argument that [gamification](#) has enormous potential for solving seemingly intractable problems. I've been drawn to this idea for a long time, and I'm both delighted and slightly bitter about not having the good sense to devote more time to this theme as a young person.

* [E.J. McMahon](#) and Josh Barro [get results](#).

* Diana Lind wrote an [interesting op-ed](#) on revitalizing declining urban neighborhoods through effective job-training programs. I'm a bit skeptical, but it's worth a look.

* Is [breaking up good to do?](#) Parag Khanna makes the case for the establishment of new sovereign states out of the wreckage of dysfunctional multinational polities.

* Khanna also has a stimulating piece on the postmodern Medicis who are enhancing American influence in a post-Westphalian world (this deserves an entire post, but there's almost too much to say):

At Davos, American leadership isn't embodied in feeble cabinet members mouthing pre-fab remarks, but through its modern-day Medicis. The Medici family of medieval Florence led the West into the Renaissance by commissioning artists like Michaelangelo, inventors like Leonardo da Vinci, and backing secular rationalists like Machiavelli. Far from being ignorant, aloof, and depraved, America is home to most of the postmodern Medicis, from Bill Gates to Warren Buffett to George Soros. Mr. Gates tackles global scourges through science, Mr. Buffett backs public works through investment, and Mr. Soros attacks autocrats with technology. What the old and new Medicis have in common is a disregard for antiquated notions of public versus private power and a focus on a new hybrid model that unites the best of both spheres. America's global footprint is far greater than its declining share of global GDP and its increasingly unpopular president. Davos is where it needs to go in greater numbers to regain global respectability.

Interesting.

* Yet another reason to be skeptical about the prospects for a [Palestinian state](#).

* A Pascal Lamy [op-ed](#) in the *FT* found that of the 41,000 jobs the manufacture of Apple's iPod created in 2006, 14,000 were located in the U.S. and 6,000 of those were professional jobs. U.S.-based workers earned \$750M vs. \$320M for all workers outside of the U.S.

One wonders about the comparable numbers for the iPhone circa 2011. I wonder if Apple's suppliers have grown more productive, and if this has translated to higher compensation levels distributed across fewer workers. We'll find out soon enough.

* Karan Mahajan, one of my favorite writers, has written an [excellent, insightful profile](#) of William Dalrymple for *Bookforum*.

* Karan pointed me to this essay by Ramachandra Guha, author of *India After Gandhi* (a book that can't hold a candle to the work of Ayesha Jalal) and one of India's leading public intellectuals. I agree with very little in the essay — I take a more benign view of the BJP, I see the rise in visible Indian inequality as a byproduct of an overwhelmingly beneficial growth explosion, I find Guha's valorization of the midcentury Indian state risible, etc. But it's actually a pretty useful reflection of how India's center-left metropolitan intelligentsia sees the world, and he gets in some good shots at Naxalism and corruption.

* Josh Barro's take on Chris Christie's tenure as governor of New Jersey so far is one of the [best policy missives](#) I've read in a while: balanced, constructive, and interesting. I learned a lot. Barro offers Christie a roadmap to building on a strong but far from flawless record.

* Tim Fernholz seems to be making a smooth transition from opinion journalism to [beat reporting](#): he's written a solid, balanced take on reforming the corporate income tax.

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