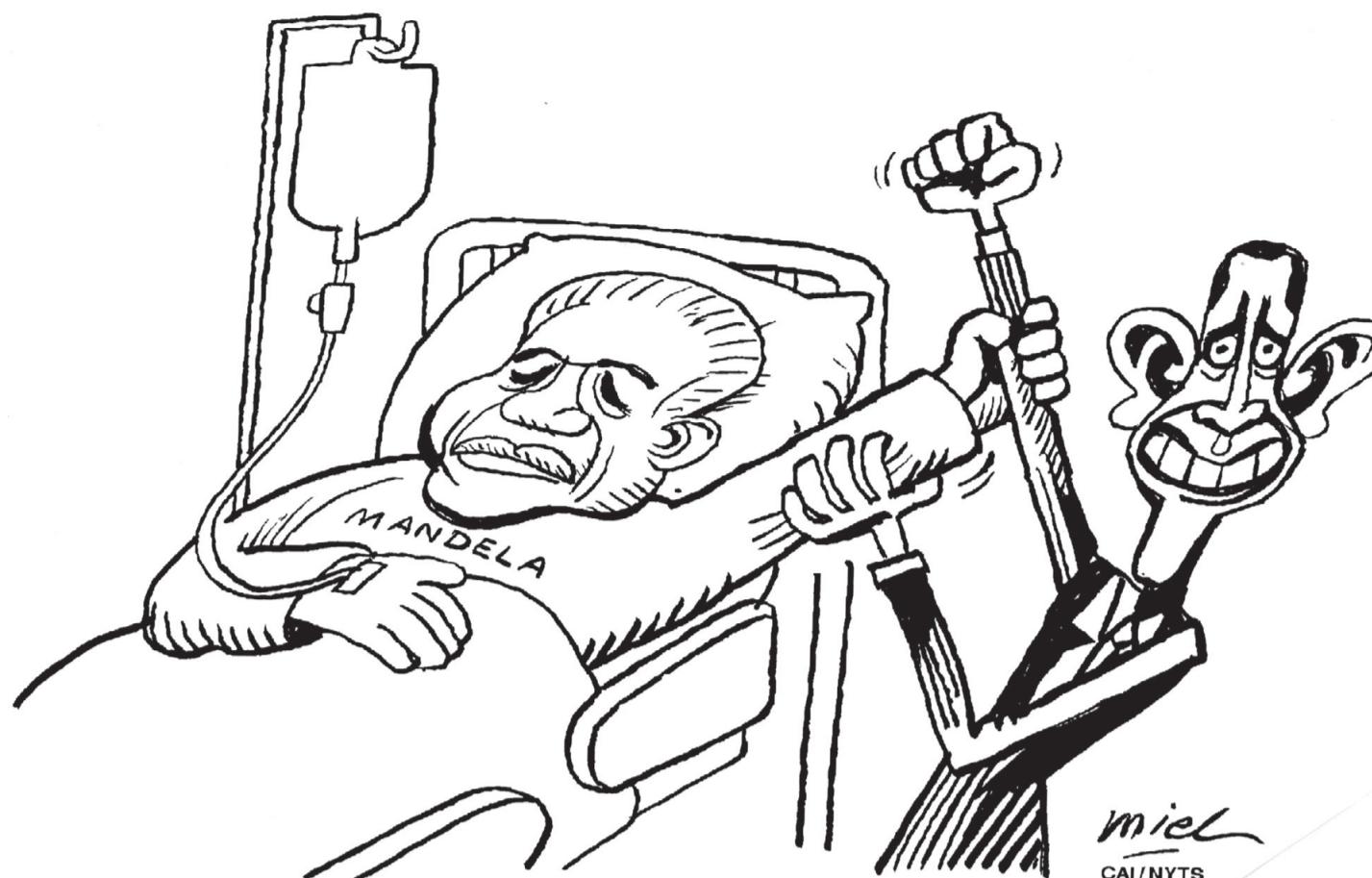


opinion



Moral high ground as a tool

Paul Taylor
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THE WASHINGTON POST

When, after 27 years, Nelson Mandela was finally released from prison, the world marveled at his generous spirit, even temperament, gentle manners, disarming wit, ready smile and lack of bitterness.

Admirable as they were, those saintly virtues don't begin to explain his political genius. Mandela was also cunning, iron-willed, bulldogged, contemptuous — and more embittered than he let on. He needed all of his traits — soft and hard — to engineer a political miracle: persuading a sitting government to negotiate its own abdication by yielding power to the very people it had ruthlessly oppressed.

Historic transfers of that magnitude typically occur only at gunpoint. To pull it off peacefully, Mandela, who died Thursday, knew that he had to tame the racial fears and hatreds that have haunted beautiful South Africa since the first whites settled there four centuries ago. He needed to teach militant blacks that they couldn't take revenge and frightened whites that they shouldn't fear retribution.

Mandela didn't do all that by himself. On both sides of the racial divide, he had the help of legions of sophisticated negotiators determined to find a peaceful path to democracy. His main partner, President Frederik W. de Klerk, was a shrewd Afrikaner who had the foresight to understand that the grotesque apartheid system he once championed was destroying his country, and he had the fortitude to stick with his surrender-without-a-fight strategy through four arduous years of start-and-stop negotiations, even as the deal grew less attractive for the white minority.

Instead, their presumed allies turned on them, and the day quickly devolved into a

that had put him in power.

The two men never got on well. And Mandela had no compunctions about using de Klerk as a scapegoat whenever it served his purposes.

At a news conference the day before they were honored as co-recipients of the 1993 Nobel Peace Prize, Mandela repeated his (dubious) accusation that de Klerk was the mastermind behind deadly faction fighting among rival black groups. The charge infuriated de Klerk but played well among militants in the black townships.

Mandela sometimes used his martyr's halo like a club against his own supporters. At a campaign rally in 1994, when some rowdy black youths ripped down the banner of a small political party they considered corrupt, Mandela called them "hooligans" and "animals," saying they were a disgrace to the liberation movement. He ordered the chastened teenagers to rehang the banner, which they promptly did.

But as the rally was breaking up, he gave them back their dignity. He told them that he loved them and that they would be comrades forever. Scold, flatter, demand, cajole — when you occupy the moral high ground, your tactical options are practically limitless. Mandela's genius was knowing how and when to deploy them all.

In those days, South Africa had plenty of white militants, too. The most dangerous moment of Mandela's presidential campaign came when several thousand heavily armed whites left their farms and drove to Bophuthatswana, one of the black homelands set up under apartheid, where they planned to join the forces of the pro-apartheid black puppet government and derail the election.

Instead, their presumed allies turned on them, and the day quickly devolved into a

bloody, boozy fiasco. A photo that captured the symbolism of the last gasp of the white militants — published on front pages around the world — depicted a wounded, khaki-clad white farmer pleading for mercy as a young black homeland soldier hovered over him with a rifle. The young man executed the farmer on the spot.

Two months later, Mandela was elected president. It took a few days to count the ballots, and to pass time he invited small groups of foreign correspondents into a hotel suite, where he conducted interviews. During my session, I asked about that young soldier. The day of the incident, candidate Mandela had condemned the shooting and said that the rule of law must prevail. Now that he was about to become president, I asked, would he bring that soldier to justice?

Mandela gave me a cold stare. "Why is it that the Western press would focus so much on that one case when so many thousands of blacks have been the victims of so much political violence for so many years?" I had a response, but my tongue went numb. None of the other reporters in the room dared to venture a followup. Case closed. The great man knew how to play the race card.

When our interview session came to a close, I broke one of the cardinal rules of journalism: I handed Nelson Mandela a campaign poster that I had collected as a keepsake and asked him to sign it. He gave me a firm handshake and warm smile and wrote a lovely note. It hangs in my office, where I look at it every day.

Paul Taylor was *The Washington Post's* bureau chief in South Africa from 1992 to 1995.

Mandela's walk from prison to reconciliation

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The day in 1990 that Nelson Mandela walked to freedom, I waited hours in the hot sun outside city hall in downtown Cape Town, in a crowd of thousands of blacks and mixed-race coloreds dying to glimpse their hoped-for savior.

Mandela, who died last week at 95, had been locked away in prison for more than 27 years. As it happened, the excitement of witnessing history that day was tarnished by mishaps.

The mood grew ugly because of a five-hour delay in his scheduled arrival, partly due to his wife, Winnie, who had failed to show up on time at the Victor Verster Prison, 45 minutes outside Cape Town, where Mandela was last held.

Some hotheaded youths had taken to skirmishing with police around the fringes. Gunshots and tear gas were in the air, while colored thieves were hard at work pickpocketing whites and blacks alike, even foreign journalists like myself. (I lost a tape recorder ripped from my hands.)

Many coloreds gave up and drifted away long before his arrival, reflecting what I assumed was their deep ambivalence over the prospect of black rule given their own minority status and frequent alignment with the country's white minority.

Everyone in the crowd did, however, have one thing in common. No South African outside his white jailers and his fellow inmates had any idea what the 71-year-old Mandela looked like, or what he thought. Since his imprisonment in 1962, the government had banned the media from publishing his photo or words.

The man so long awaited to lead his people out of the nightmare of apartheid to the promised land of democracy was a total mystery. Would he lead a black uprising and call for the overthrow of the white minority government?

Or would he continue negotiations with his former white captors for a peaceful

transfer of power, talks that he had begun in 1985 from prison in secret with the iron-fisted Afrikaner president, P.W. Botha?

His first day of freedom offered one intriguing hint that he intended to make a determined effort to befriend the jittery white population.

On his way to Cape Town, Mandela smiled and waved to the few whites who turned out along the road to see him. He even stopped to say hello to one very surprised white family that he beckoned to come over to talk to him.

Still, I remember his debut before the nation and world as a bit of a letdown. He had never made a speech before a mass of television cameras, and the one he gave that day didn't excite the thinning crowd so much as did just his appearance.

South African blacks were mesmerized to behold finally the man who embodied all their hopes, while whites stared at him with trepidation and called his words for signs of their fate under black rule.

There was, however, one near tragedy on this historic occasion. The American black civil-rights leader Jesse Jackson was

apparently determined to be photographed standing next to Mandela while he uttered his first words in freedom. His car plowed through the crowd up to where Mandela was to speak, almost running over several angry blacks who tried to stop it. And Jackson ended up as part of South African history that day.

I got to know Mandela progressively over the next few days. He held his first international news conference in the well-manicured garden belonging to the official residence of Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the outspoken critic of apartheid and 1984 Nobel Peace Prize winner.

Mandela seemed somewhat frail; we had been told he was feeling ill. Many wondered if he was up to the grueling negotiations that lay ahead. But Mandela quickly warmed to the limelight, mixing nationalist rhetoric with assurances to the whites.

His regal bearing and manners made him seem every bit the African tribal chief

he was born to be, yet with the airs of a European aristocrat, a soothing soft voice and conquering smile. Most amazingly, after wasting half a lifetime in captivity that had begun by cutting stones, he evinced no bitterness toward whites.

Over the next weeks, I followed him around the country as he introduced himself to the country's black, colored, Indian and white populations. You could feel his power and authority mounting day by day. He needed it.

Mandela had to deal with a long-suppressed black constituency that felt the day of reckoning with its white rulers was finally at hand. The favorite chant of his militant young followers was "Shoot the Boers," the name for Afrikaners whose own hardliners took to plotting coups.

Yet Mandela never got distracted from his central goal, laboring on through four years of tough bargaining to assure black rule. At the same time, he waged a public campaign to reassure whites that they were wanted and needed in a new South Africa.

Mandela's great legacy to South Africa, indeed the entire world, was to preach and practice reconciliation between former sworn enemies.

He singlehandedly averted a civil war. And he made South Africa a shining example of how to resolve deep-seated racial and ethnic conflicts peacefully.

That legacy may not have been apparent from his less-than-memorable speech on that hot summer day almost a quarter-century ago, when he first returned to freedom and sunlight. But it explains why his voice will be sorely missed, by all, in decades to come.

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Oil shortage led to Pearl Harbor attack

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Few people today realize that it was oil — the shortage of oil — that precipitated the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941. Tensions between the United States and Japan were rising throughout that fateful year. Having initiated a war with China (America's ally) and occupied Indochina, Japan's totalitarian government was intent on imposing its will on all of the people of East Asia.

In the summer of 1941, before leaving for Placentia Bay, U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt had ordered a freeze on Japanese assets. That measure required the Japanese to seek and obtain licenses to export and pay for each shipment of goods from the U.S., including oil.

This move was most distressing to the Japanese because they were dependent on the U.S. for most of their crude oil and refined petroleum products. However, Roosevelt did not want to trigger a war with Japan. His intention was to keep the oil flowing by continuing to grant licenses.

Roosevelt had a noose around Japan's neck, but he chose not to tighten it. He was not ready to cut off its oil lifeline for fear that such a move would be regarded as tantamount to an act of war.

That summer, while Roosevelt, his trusted adviser Harry Hopkins and U.S. Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles were attending the shipboard conference off Newfoundland and Secretary of State Cordell Hull was on vacation at the Greenbrier in West Virginia, the authority to grant licenses to export and pay for oil and other goods was in the hands of a three-person interagency committee.

It was dominated by Assistant Secretary of State Dean Acheson, whom one historian described as the "quintessential opportunist of U.S. foreign policy in 1941." Acheson favored a "bullet-proof freeze" on oil shipments to Japan, claiming it would not provoke war because "no rational Japanese could believe that an attack on us could result in anything but disaster for Japan."

With breathtaking confidence in his own judgment, and ignoring the objections of others in the State Department, Acheson refused to grant licenses to Japan to pay for goods in dollars. That effectively ended Japan's ability to ship oil and all other goods from the U.S.

Acheson's actions cut off all American trade with Japan. When Roosevelt returned,

he decided not to overturn the "state of affairs" initiated by Acheson, apparently because he feared he would otherwise be regarded as an appeaser. Once Roosevelt perpetuated Acheson's trade embargo, the planners in Japan's imperial military headquarters knew that oil to fuel their fleet, as well as rubber, rice and other vital reserves, would soon run out.

By year-end at the latest, Japan would need to capture new supply sources in the oil-rich Dutch East Indies, which the U.S. would surely oppose. And to protect its long exposed flank as it moved south, the Japanese Navy would have to deliver a knockout blow to U.S. naval and air power in the Pacific. Without oil, Japan could not survive a long war. The blow would be delivered at Pearl Harbor.

Throughout the summer and autumn, the First Carrier Division of the Japanese Navy secretly practiced low-level torpedo bombing in Kagoshima Bay, which bore a resemblance to Pearl Harbor. The plans for the Pearl Harbor attack were being developed by Admiral Yamamoto Isoroku, an innovative thinker with what the historian Gordon Prange has called "a gambler's heart."

In September 1941, Japan's prime minister, Prince Konoe Fumimaro, who had been urging a personal meeting with the president to reach a peace agreement, was almost assassinated by pro-war fanatics wielding ceremonial knives. Weakened by the attempt to overthrow him and losing power and influence to militarist elements, Prince Konoe's government fell on Oct. 16, less than two months before the attack.

That day, meeting with Harry Hopkins and his top military advisers, FDR expressed concern that the new Japanese government would be "much more anti-American" than the old. Sure enough, two days later, Gen. Tojo Hideki, leader of the militarists and the minister of war, became Japan's prime minister.

Anticipating a move southward by the Japanese, the U.S. began reinforcing its air forces in the Philippines and constructing a chain of airfields from Hawaii toward Australia and the Philippines. These moves provided hard evidence to support Tojo's arguments for war as soon as possible.

In Washington, Ambassador Kichisaburo Nomura begged to be relieved after Tojo took over the government. He was ordered to stay on and keep offering elaborate proposals for settling the looming crisis, proposals that Tojo knew would be rejected by the U.S.

The Japanese offered to reverse their aggressive designs on Indochina and to begin to withdraw troops under two conditions: first, if peace with China was achieved without interference by the U.S. (in other words, on Japan's terms) — and second, if the U.S. restored trade in oil and other resources.

The U.S. could not possibly agree to this because it would amount to an abandonment of China and its Nationalist government. For its part, the Roosevelt administration, as the price for lifting trade sanctions, continued to insist that Japan withdraw its troops from China and Indochina and reconsider its commitment to the Tripartite Pact (by which Japan would declare war if the U.S. joined in the European war against Germany).

In the final days before the attack on Pearl Harbor, U.S. Secretary of State Hull also proposed that in any settlement with China, the U.S. and Japan would not agree to recognize any Chinese government other than that of the Nationalists led by Chiang Kai-shek. There was not the slightest chance that Tojo would accept these proposals.

Nomura pleaded with Tojo for more time to negotiate, but he refused, saying a settlement agreement with the U.S. must be signed by Nov. 29. "After that, things are automatically going to happen." At a Cabinet meeting Nov. 7, Hull warned that Japan might attack at any time. Roosevelt ordered him to keep the negotiations going and to "do nothing to precipitate a crisis."

On Nov. 22, Admiral Yamamoto ordered the First Carrier Division at Hitokappu Bay in the Kurils, north of Japan's main islands, to "move out ... on 26 November and proceed without being detected to the evening rendezvous point ... set for 3 December. X-day will be December 8 [Japanese time]." At a large rally in Tokyo on Nov. 30, Tojo incited the crowd, claiming that the U.S. and Britain, in order to "satisfy their greed," were preventing development of the East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. "We must purge this ... practice from East Asia with a vengeance," Tojo said.

It was this speech that caused Roosevelt to cut short a belated Thanksgiving in Warm Springs, Georgia, and return to Washington the next day.

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The revival of a Great Depression-era retreat

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Former U.S. Treasury Secretary Larry Summers is talking about it. So is Paul Krugman. So are other economists. And everyone else is talking about the folks who are talking about it.

The "it" is secular stagnation, which seems to be the New New Thing or the new new normal: a way to describe the persistent state of subpar economic growth plaguing developed nations. Think of it as Japan's lost decade.

The diagnosis? Too much saving and a lack of investment opportunities, according to Harvard University's Summers. And with the funds rate close to zero, the Federal Reserve can't deliver the negative real interest rates he says the economy needs unless it creates higher inflation.

So what do Summers and Krugman advocate for the secular malaise? Why, a cyclical solution: government spending on infrastructure. They want the kinds of things Keynesians typically promote to stabilize the economy during a recession to become a permanent part of the fiscal architecture.

A bit of history is in order. Summers didn't coin the phrase "secular stagnation," which has been gaining traction since he used it in his presentation at the International Monetary Fund Research Conference last month. It traces back to Harvard economist Alvin Hansen, who adopted it in the 1930s to explain why the Great Depression lasted so long. Hansen said that all the ingredients for economic growth — technological innovation, population growth, territorial expansion — had dissipated. The solution was constant deficit spending by the government.

The post-World War II boom discredited Hansen's theories. History may do the same for Summers's.

"Secular stagnation sounds cool and profound," says economist Arnold Kling of askblog. "It's appealing after five years of slow growth and high unemployment, but no one has defined it or written a peer-reviewed paper on the topic. No one knows what it means."

Even Summers seems to be backing away from his advice from 2008 that fiscal stimulus should be "timely, targeted and temporary."

"Now he's saying we need a permanent stimulus," Kling says. "He has to rationalize why the economy is doing what it's doing based on what he recommends."

Real secular problems need real secular solutions, not some Keynesian pump-priming dressed up as a long-term remedy. The focus should be on potential growth, or the supply side of the economy. Fed policy makers are concerned that

slower productivity growth — 1 percent over the last four years, less than half the 30-year average — is becoming the trend.

The economy's potential growth is circumscribed by the rate of increase in the labor force and in productivity. Labor force growth has averaged 1.5 percent since 1950, boosted by a 2.6 percent increase in the 1970s with an influx of working women and baby boomers. The current growth rate is well below 1 percent.

Productivity growth depends on technical innovation and business investment. If businesses aren't investing, it isn't because the cost of capital is too high. It's because the perceived return is too low. One solution is to lower the U.S. corporate tax rate, which at 35 percent is among the highest in the world. Another is to simplify rules and regulations in order to minimize compliance costs that impede small business.

A 2009 study by the Kauffman Foundation found that more than half the companies on the Fortune 500 list that year were started during a recession or a bear market. Some entrepreneurs obviously view bad times as an opportunity. They aren't waiting to see increased demand for an as-yet uninvested product to invest.

"Andrew Carnegie built new plants during recession," says Michael Lotus, co-author with James C. Bennett of *"America 3.0: Rebooting American Prosperity in the 21st Century."* The U.S. "productive potential is not materially different than what it's always been. The obstacles in its path are what's different."

In other words, American exceptionalism

