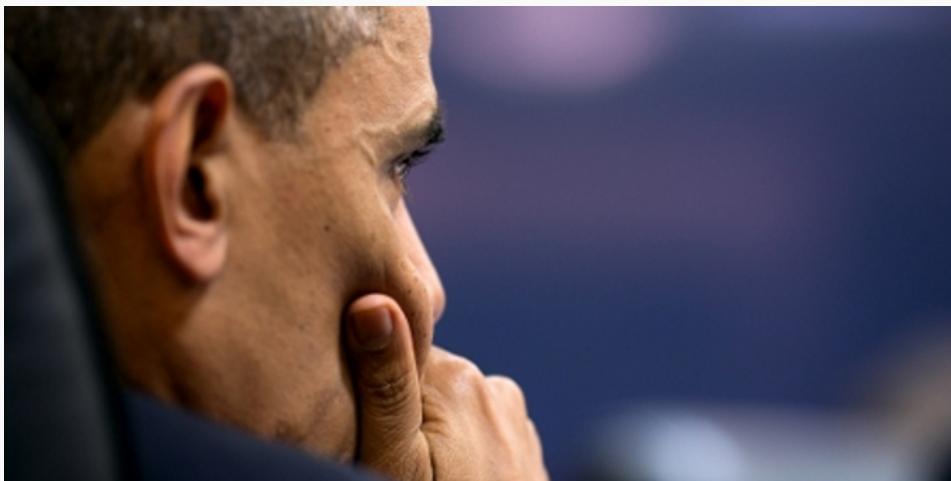


## Obama under fire for Taliban prisoner swap, EPA announces new carbon rules, and is the GOP in ‘war withdrawal’? – US national blog round up for 31 May – 6 June

*USApp Managing Editor, Chris Gilson looks at the best in political blogging from the Beltway. Our round-up of state blogs will follow on Saturday afternoon.*

### The Democratic Party, the GOP and elections

This week has been a rough one for President Barack Obama, as he has faced heavy criticism for his handling of a prisoner swap with the Taliban, as well as the ongoing Veterans Affairs Scandal. On Tuesday, *National Journal* takes a [look](#) at the Republican Party’s calls for Obama to be impeached throughout his presidency so far. Highlights include calls over the Benghazi affair and during the government shutdown last year. If Obama’s problem isn’t currently impeachment, then it’s one of incompetence, at least according to *The Lonely Conservative*. They [write](#) that a new poll shows that a plurality of Americans thinks the Obama administration is incompetent, and that people think that the Clinton and Bush presidencies were more competent.



Credit: The White House

The main news this week was the release of Army Sergeant Bowe Bergdahl, who has been a prisoner of the Taliban in Afghanistan since 2009, in exchange for five Taliban leaders. On Sunday, *The Lonely Conservative* is positive about Bergdahl’s release, but expresses [concern](#) that the U.S. is now ‘negotiating with terrorists’, especially without the consultation of Congress, which is required by law. On Monday, *Informed Comment* points out that the U.S. has a long history of [negotiating with terrorists](#), from negotiating with Filipinos who rejected U.S. rule in the early 1900s, to the Viet Cong in the 1970s and with the regime of the Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran in the 1980s. They say that current accusations that the prisoner swap will just encourage the Taliban to take more prisoners are ahistorical. *The Political Carnival* is [critical](#) of the GOP over the prisoner swap, writing that it would have been ‘cowardly’ to not take advantage of the opportunity to peacefully return Bergdahl, and that the swap will actually reduce the costs of the Guantanamo Bay detention centre by \$13.5 million annually. *The Atlantic* looks at the [two kinds of backlash over Bergdahl](#): that from other service members given that he allegedly walked away from his base, and many died trying to rescue him, and that (as previously mentioned), Obama did not consult Congress. On Tuesday, *The Volokh Conspiracy* takes a look at [the legality of Obama’s decision](#), arguing that it violated a 2013 law that requires the President to give Congress 30 days’ notice before releasing Guantanamo prisoners. They say that while the President may feel that it tactically advantageous to make such deals, Congress may disagree with that sentiment.

On Wednesday, *The Lonely Conservative* [reports](#) that Senator Chuck Schumer (D-NY) recently mixed up the authorship of the Bill of Rights – stating that Thomas Jefferson would agree to changes to the First Amendment over campaign finance – when it was actually penned by George Mason and James Madison.

Moving on to elections, on Thursday, *Sabato's Crystal Ball* takes another look at [potential Democratic Vice-Presidential candidates](#) for the 2016 election. They say that despite the recent hype around him, new Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Julian Castro is unlikely to be on the 2016 ticket because he is relatively inexperienced in presidential primaries – the traditional feeder position for Vice Presidents.

This week saw a number of Republican primaries across the U.S., ahead of November's mid-term elections. On Saturday, *Roll Call's At the Races* [writes](#) that 2012 presidential hopefuls, Mitt Romney, Rick Perry and Rick Santorum, and newcomers like Marco Rubio are using Iowa's Senate primary to their advantage in the crucial nomination state. They say that the endorsements from Republican leaders can cement relationships which will become useful in 2016. Whoever is endorsing who, *Daily Kos* [writes](#) on Wednesday after the primaries, that results in Iowa are part of the GOP's 'nightmare night', after Iowa nominated Joni Ernst for the state's open Senate Seat, who is likely to lose to the Democratic nominee, Bruce Braley, because of her opposition to a farm bill, and far-right stance on many issues. On Tuesday, *The Daily Signal* [argues](#) that this year's mid-term elections are not about the Tea Party vs the 'establishment' wing of the GOP – what matters is whether or not there will be enough lawmakers in Congress to rein in Obama's 'imperial presidency'. In light of this week's primaries, *Roll Call's Rothenblog* [wonders](#) on Thursday why, suddenly, there is a great deal of concern over races for Lt. Governorships, especially when five states do not even have that position. Meanwhile, *Hit & Run* reports that in Georgia, Florida, and North Carolina, the candidates for the Libertarian Party have all polled well, at around 9-10 percent, in the lead up to their primaries.



Governor Bobby Jindal of Louisiana credit: Gage Skidmore (Creative Commons BY SA)

Thinking about the GOP side of the 2016 presidential race, *The Hill's Congress blog* [writes](#) on Sunday that the current Governor of Louisiana, Bobby Jindal, would be an 'exciting' choice for Vice President. They [argue](#) that Jindal could reenergize the ticket and gain Washington experience for his own presidential bid. Moving to potential Republican presidential candidates for 2016, *FreakOutNation* [reports](#) that Texas Senator Ted Cruz recently topped a presidential straw poll at a summit in Louisiana.

### **Government, the Beltway and Congress' agenda**

The Veterans Affairs (VA) scandal continued this week, with *PoliticusUSA* [reflecting](#) on the resignation of Secretary Eric Shinseki last Friday. They write that it was a mistake for two reasons: there is now no pressure on Republicans to fund the VA, as Shinseki's resignation suggested the problem rested with him, and that it was a lost political chance for the Democrats, as they could have campaigned on the GOP's lack of funding for the VA in the past. On Monday, *United Liberty* [writes](#) that Shinseki's resignation will not solve the systemic problems facing the VA, and that Senator Rand Paul (R-KY), has called for a review of the VA's services, care and possible abuses. *FreakOutNation* [points out](#) that the current problems date back to at least 1995, and that a 'raft of violations', including the use of 'secret' paper lists were reported on in 2005, under the presidency of George W.

Bush. On Thursday, *The Atlantic* [argues](#) that the next head of the VA will need to be a skilled administrator, rather than a decorated soldier, in order to deal with the size and complexity of the issues facing the agency.

Looking at Congress, on Monday, *Outside the Beltway* [writes](#) that this summer may see House Republicans move forwards on immigration reform, after Speaker John Boehner (R-OH) was reported to have suggested he may try for an immigration vote later this month, so that it occurs after the primary period ends.

This week also saw the Environmental Protection Agency announce new rules for power plants that will mandate a 30 percent cut in carbon emissions in fossil fuel fired power plants by 2030. *The Lonely Conservative* [writes](#) that the new rules will send electricity prices skyrocketing, and even if the next president rolls back the new regulations it will be too late.

### **Foreign policy, defense and trade**

This week, President Obama visited Europe. Ahead of his visit to Poland, *The Daily Signal* [warns](#) Obama, 'don't insult the Poles'. This stems from his previous pulling out of an agreement for missile defenses in Poland in 2009, playing golf on the same day as the funeral of the Polish President Lech Kaczynski in 2010, and sparking outrage in 2012 over comments concerning a concentration camp. They say that Obama should deepen ties with Warsaw, especially at a time when Russian nationalism is on the rise. Whilst in Poland, Obama announced an \$1 billion plan to boost the presence of NATO in Eastern European member states in response to the perceived threat from Russia, [reports Hit & Run](#). They are not convinced that Russia poses enough of a threat to justify this latest military expenditure, especially given that the country's economy is in trouble after taking over Crimea.

On Wednesday, *Informed Comment* [wonders](#) if the Republican Party's hysteria over the Taliban prisoner swap this week is a sign that the GOP is in 'withdrawal' for war. They say that Obama has been winding down 'America's decade of war', by pulling troops out of Iraq and Afghanistan, something that Republicans now need to 'get over'. Meanwhile, *Outside the Beltway* [looks](#) at whether or not the world really does think less of U.S. foreign policy under Obama. They say that in many countries, the U.S. is more popular now than when George W. Bush left office.

Are drones the answer? *PoliticusUSA* [thinks so](#). Writing on Thursday, they say that despite the controversies over their use, the targeted killings that they practice have grown out of the needs of modern asymmetrical warfare, where enemies are not obvious, and battlefields may not exist.

On Thursday, just before the commemorations of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of World War II's D-D-day landings, *The American Interest* examines the now '[not-so-special-relationship](#)' of the U.S. and the UK.

### **Obamacare and health policy**

On Sunday, *The Feed* [writes](#) that every year it is estimated that Medicare loses on the order of \$6 billion in fraud and error, mostly due to doctors billing in error, but that the Centre for Medicare and Medicaid Services (which runs Medicare) does not plan on reviewing these billings as it is not cost-effective to do so.

*Daily Kos* reports that new data from the Kaiser Family Foundation [shows](#) that at least 25 percent more people now have health insurance because of Obamacare. They say that this puts paid to Republican arguments that people have signed up but not paid their premiums. These numbers may continue to grow, as *The White House Dossier* [looks](#) at a new report this week that says that 80 to 90 percent of employer provided health insurance will disappear, as companies eventually move over to Obamacare plans, which are subsidized by the government. They say that this will only lead to 'more choice' of bad healthcare and taxes to fund the scheme. *The Lonely Conservative* is also critical this week, writing on Thursday that half of Obamacare applications contain 'flawed' data. Meanwhile, *The Atlantic* [wonders](#) whether or not the GOP has given up on repealing Obamacare, after incoming Secretary of Health and Human Services, Sylvia Burwell won confirmation quickly and easily in the Senate this week.

### **The economy and society**

On Saturday, *Outside the Beltway* [reports](#) that the House of Representatives voted to give states that have

legalized marijuana for medical protection from the Drug Enforcement Administration's targeting. They say that while the bill will not end all Federal raids in states which have legalized medical marijuana, it will give states more leeway to liberalize their laws as they see fit.

On Monday, *Daily Kos* [writes](#) that the retail industry's low wages and 28 percent pay gap between men and women keeps 1.3 million women workers in, or near, poverty. They say that this number will rise by 100,000 if retail employers do not raise their wages.

While coal companies have been predictably concerned about the new rules on fossil fuel power plant emissions proposed this week, *Wonkblog* [writes](#) that the economic logic of coal production in the U.S. is breaking down in any case. They say that the change is partly due to previous environmental regulations, but mostly because of the rise of fracking, which coal cannot compete with in many states.

On Wednesday, *PoliticusUSA* [reports](#) that the conservative LGBT organization, GOProud is shutting down, something they put down to the intolerant views of the wider Republican Party. They give the example of a dispute in 2013 where the group was initially denied participation in the annual Conservative Political Action Conference.

### **And finally...**

This week, *Outside the Beltway* [writes](#) that now that NASA has created 'what is basically' an Internet link to the moon, it may well now have a better connection than you do.

*FreakOutNation* [reports](#) that Annette Bosworth, a Senate candidate in South Dakota, not only lost her bid in a primary on Tuesday, but also turned herself in to the county jail after a warrant for her arrest was issued on perjury charges.

Finally, *Hit & Run* [wonders](#) whether or not a leaked tape of President Obama working out whilst in Poland, and lifting much smaller weights than he did in 2008, will lead to his impeachment, or more 'manly' drone attacks.

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*Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of USApp– American Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.*

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