

Worries over Obama's Iraq involvement, Congressional slackers, and unrest in Missouri – US national blog round up for 8 – 15 August

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.

This week saw increasing scrutiny of President Obama's decision at the end of last week to begin targeted airstrikes against the forces of the Islamic State in Iraq, with concerns over the potential for the action to overreach into a long-term commitment. As the week progressed, the town of Ferguson, Missouri saw race riots that gained national attention after the fatal shooting by police of an unarmed black teenager on Saturday.

President Obama, the Democratic Party, the GOP and elections

In recent weeks, there has been a great deal of speculation and rhetoric over whether or not the Republican Party will try to impeach President Obama over his use of Executive Orders. On Saturday, *Daily Kos* [says](#) that given that the Tea Party wing of the GOP seems to be in charge, in all likelihood they will try for impeachment after the midterm elections in November, and that the voices of reason in the Republican Party cannot be relied upon to stop it. *National Journal* [takes](#) a different line on opposition to Obama's Executive Orders, writing that the Supreme Court is his biggest obstacle, rather than Congress. They write that the more Obama does to bypass Congress, the greater the likelihood that the Supreme Court will take a role in sorting out the disputes between the two.

On Monday, *Wonkblog* [looks](#) at the reason why Obama's second term has gone so badly, after his former advisor, Lawrence Summers suggested a six year presidential term limit. They say that the impossibility of a third term is what so often hobbles Presidents in their second term – without reelection as an incentive, Presidents may often act less decisively. Meanwhile, the *White House Dossier* is [critical](#) of Obama's vacation, saying that he has been 'golfing relentlessly' whilst staying on Martha's Vineyard. On Wednesday, *The American Prospect* points out that it is idiotic to complain when the President takes a vacation, [writing](#) that when the President goes away he's not out of touch with what's going on in the world, and that he has taken far fewer vacation days than the previous office holder, George W. Bush did.

On the issue of US re-engagement in Iraq, *The Atlantic* [writes](#) that Obama promised that he would not drag the country into another war, but then – just the next day – said that he would send US warplanes there 'to kill people for months'. They say that Obama is preparing for a new war that is a campaign against an enemy that America has never fought before, and that Congress, not the President, needs to decide whether or not the country commits to new wars of this kind. *White House Dossier* [writes](#) that in light of the new bombing campaign in Iraq, Obama has broken his 2012 election campaign promise that he had ended the Iraq War. They say that the US is at war again because of Obama's policies, including not supporting moderate Syrian rebels and not maintaining troops in Iraq. Meanwhile, *PoliticusUSA* [writes](#) that during an address to update the Iraq situation, President Obama has 'squashed' what they say are Republican calls for greater US military involvement in Iraq. They write that Obama has stated that there is no US military solution in the country, and that Iraqis must come together to solve their own problems.

This week was an interesting one for former Secretary of State and likely 2016 Democratic Presidential candidate, Hillary Clinton. On Sunday, *The Feed* [reports](#) that Clinton has commented critically on President Obama's policies towards the Middle East, which they say may well undercut Obama's authority abroad. By Wednesday, Clinton was 'walking back' her criticism of Obama, saying that she has spoken to the President to assure him that she was not attempting to attack his policies or leadership, [writes](#) *PoliticusUSA*. They say that Clinton and Obama will 'hug

it out' to show their unity on the weekend. *The Atlantic* has some advice for Clinton, [saying](#) that she may have much to learn from the legislative history of President Lyndon Johnson, as he was able to force Washington into action in the form of 1964's Civil Rights Act.

One person who is unlikely to be on the ballot in 2016 is Missouri Governor Jay Nixon, in the wake of race riots in his state this week. *Daily Kos* [says](#) that the Democratic Governor's ambitions for the vice-presidency are well known among party circles, but that his lack of action this week to remove the local and county police from the beat in Ferguson has cost him dearly.



Rand Paul Credit, Gage Skidmore (CC BY SA 2.0)

Moving to the Republican Party, *The Atlantic* writes on Saturday on Texas Senator Ted Cruz's presidential ambitions. They [say](#) that his legislative tactics which helped lead to last year's government shutdown and urging of House Republicans to reject border legislation last week have made him a hero to the hard right of the Republican Party, to the dismay of the GOP establishment. They say that despite his favorable environment, Cruz is not the odds-on favorites for the GOP's presidential ambitions in 2016; he is actually in 7th place in an 11 candidate field according to a poll aggregator. On Thursday, *National Journal* looks at another potential GOP presidential nominee – Kentucky Senator, Rand Paul. They say that Paul's presidential ambitions may hinge on two races for the Kentucky State Legislature. They [write](#) that Kentucky currently bans candidates for running for more than one ballot (Paul may run for both his Senate seat and the Presidency in 2016), and that the GOP is trying to win the legislature so that they can get this law changed.

Much of this year has been characterized by what has come to be known as the 'Republican civil war', between the party's Tea Party and establishment wings. *The Monkey Cage* [looks](#) at who won the civil war, given that the average GOP incumbent's primary vote share is at its lowest ebb in 60 years. They say that despite the low vote numbers, few incumbents actually lost, showing that while vote margins do matter, this is only true up to a certain point. On Tuesday, *Wonkblog* [reports](#) on new research which shows that 95 percent of Republican districts are majority white, and that those districts that have the lowest white, non-Hispanic shares, are overwhelmingly Democratic.

Looking ahead to the midterm elections in November, *National Journal* [writes](#) that if Democrats do lose the Senate – which now seems to be the consensus – that the Majority Lead, Harry Reid of Nevada, will deserve the blame. They say that he has been 'striking out' as he has tried to intervene in pivotal Senate contests in states like Montana and South Dakota. On Thursday, *Sabato's Crystal Ball* [writes](#) that this year's Senate elections are looking bad for the Democrats because of Obama's unpopularity, the tendency for the President's party to fare poorly in midterm elections, the fact that the party 'overperformed' in 2008, and that some states have experienced demographic changes that give them a distinctively more Republican tilt.

Government, the Beltway and Congress' agenda

On Saturday, *The Volokh Conspiracy* [looks](#) at whether or not the need for President Obama to take swift action in Iraq last week justified the presidential initiation of war without the authorization of Congress. They write that the

situation in Iraq has been building, meaning that there has been sufficient time for the President to seek Congressional approval for the use of force, and that he could have sought a conditional authorization, based on the action saving large numbers of civilians.

This week, *The Political Carnival* [accuses](#) Congress of being 'slackers', saying that as their inaction is made worse by the fact that a five week recess has begun – one that is actually mandated by law. On Monday, *Roll Call's Beltway Insiders* also looks at Congressional inaction, writing that while the 113th Congress may well become the least productive based on the number of bills signed into law, this simple measure does not show the complete picture. They [write](#) that Congress is shying away from controversial laws, and 79 percent of all laws are now 'suspension' bills which generally pass with little debate and controversy.

The Daily Signal [writes](#) this week that federal agencies are spending more than \$150 million annually on employees who do solely union work. They cite examples such as the Internal Revenue Service, which has 286 full time staff who work for the National Treasury Employees Union, whilst still receiving government paychecks.

Have you looked closely at a dollar bill recently? You may notice that the US Treasurer shown on the bill is a woman. This would normally not be surprising, but *The Atlantic* [points out](#) that every US Treasurer since 1949 has been a woman, something they put down, at least in part, to successive administrations wanting to show diversity in their appointments.

On Thursday, *Hit & Run* [says](#) that the US federal debt is still 'completely out of control'. They say that if things continue the way they are, then the debt will exceed US GDP by 2039, which will not be sustainable long term.

Foreign policy, defense and trade

Recent years have seen the US Navy's fleet shrink and shipyards close in various parts of the country. *The Daily Signal* [decries](#) this trend, writing that the Navy's goal of a fleet of 306 ships is in serious jeopardy, and that the fleet should be growing, given that world seems to be a more and more dangerous place.

Writing on Wednesday, *Hit & Run* [says](#) that the allegedly short term, narrow US mission in Iraq will actually last for a long time, and may well end up involving ground troops, given recent White House statements that the US could consider using them if military advisers recommended them to help rescuing Yazidi refugees. Meanwhile, *The Feed* [wonders](#) why US intelligence services did not see the Islamic State's offensives in Iraq coming, or their likelihood of success. They say if there are operational problems or that the White House has been insulated from the bad news, these are both signs that the intelligence system is broken.

Occasional Planet [writes](#) this week that the US has finally said that it will sign the Land Mine Treaty. The Treaty, which has been effective since 1999, bans the production and acquisition of anti-personnel mines. They say that even though the US has not produced such mines since 1997, it has taken 15 years of pressure from grassroots anti-mine organisations to get the US to match its policy with its practice.

Obamacare and health policy

On Monday, *Daily Kos* [reports](#) that the 24 states that have refused to expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act are in line to lose more than \$423 billion in funding over the next eight years. They say that while the states have said that the eventual costs of expansion would be too high, many would have been in line to receive more than ten times their expenditure in federal funds.

The economy and society

This week saw race riots in Ferguson, Missouri (a suburb of St. Louis), after an unarmed Black teen, Michael Brown, was shot by a police officer on Saturday. On Monday, *Wonkblog* [looks](#) at the broader context of the shooting, saying that it has much to do with the legacy of racial segregation in St. Louis, which remains among the most segregated metropolitan areas in the country. On Wednesday, *RedState* [writes](#) that after three nights of riots and looting in Ferguson the details of Brown's shooting were still hotly disputed, and that the unrest began because no one wanted to wait for the police's investigation to run its course. By Thursday, *Daily Kos* [wrote](#) that

'all hell broke loose' in the town overnight, with the police escalating their response to demonstrators protesting Brown's killing. They report that police also arrested journalists, and that the way the arrests were carried out has put them in question. *Occasional Planet* [puts](#) the police's actions in Ferguson in context, saying that the appearance of police in heavily armored vehicles is part of a national trend towards the militarization of local police forces.

On Monday, *The Daily Signal* [writes](#) that the fact that Washington DC is the second most liberal city in the nation, according to a new study, is not a good thing for the future of the US. They say that it is troubling because it suggests that Senators and House members are spending too much time in a liberal metropolis, away from the political make-up of the state or district that they represent.



Rally for Michael Brown in Washington DC, 14 August Credit: [Elvert Barnes](#) (Flickr, [CC-BY-SA-2.0](#))

This week *The Lonely Conservative* [slates](#) President Obama's economic policy, or 'Obamanomics', after a new report was released that shows that US jobs pay 23 percent less now than they did prior to the 2008 recession.

The Atlantic [looks](#) at a recent judgement in Tennessee which upheld the state's ban on same-sex marriage – breaking a streak of court victories on the issue. They say that while gay marriage is on a roll that is likely to continue, this decision notwithstanding, but that the movement must be careful of hubris, and activists need to avoid premature triumphalism.

And finally...

Florida Senator Marco Rubio is going bald – the *Monkey Cage* [takes](#) a tongue in cheek look at how this may affect the likelihood of him gaining the 2016 GOP presidential nomination, and concludes that it probably won't.

The Atlantic [looks](#) at the price of media entertainment for every hour consumed, concluding that while people who play *Candy Crush* are 'getting totally fleeced', basic cable is fairly cheap.

Roll Call has a video of the latest Congressional craze – the [Ice Bucket Challenge](#).

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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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