



Obama-led pivot to America

many of its critics in the region

ist FARC guerrillas took an unusual turn last week when the rebels offered Bogotá a unilateral ceasefire. The rebels perhaps drew the lesson from the 18-months of backdoor negotiations that led to Washington and Havana's agreement that diplomacy, not confrontation, is the best way to resolve differences – a lesson Colombian opponents to the peace deal should also heed.

Old ways, of course, die hard. Evo Morales, Bolivia's leftist leader, last week claimed the fall in global oil prices was a US-led conspiracy to destabilise Venezuela. Indeed, it is ironic that the day after making his historic Cuba announcement, Mr Obama signed into law a bill that sanctions Venezuelan officials charged with human rights abuses. This may well provide Caracas with an unfortunate opportunity to saturate its already propaganda-filled airways. Yet the sanctions are limited to specific officials, not the country as a whole. Moreover, the bill itself does not impose sanctions – only the US president can do that. So far he has not.

Over his two terms, Mr Obama has patiently recast US relations towards the hemisphere for the better. He has acted on immigration; on narcotics, by reframing the “war on drugs” as a public health issue; and now on Cuba. These are three of the biggest irritants in north-south relations.

The effects of these measures will not be felt immediately. “I don’t expect a transformation of Cuban society overnight,” Mr Obama said. Nor is it likely that passage of any vote that entirely removes the embargo will be easy to get through the Republican-controlled Congress. Still, history will probably judge these measures as major moves. Change is coming to the Americas. It may or may not lead to better times. But they will certainly be different.

Leader who is real world

creasingly respected moral voice

In pursuing these goals, the Archbishop cuts a different figure from Rowan Williams, his predecessor. While Lord Williams was a cerebral theologian prone sometimes to obscurity and circumlocution, the current Primate is more of a practical doer, reflecting both his past in industry and his membership of the evangelising wing of the church. He has been a serious voice in the debate on banking ethics. He has also been pragmatic. He did not argue, for example, that the government should step in to quash payday lending. Instead he supported community-based credit unions, which can do a similar job to organisations such as Wonga, but not by charging eye-watering interest rates.

The challenges facing the Archbishop in the year ahead will only grow. Holding together the worldwide Anglican communion, which threatens to split over same sex relationships, will be perhaps his biggest test. At one end

Sir, One can only agree with Pilitra Clark that falling oil prices will not necessarily lead to the destruction of prospects for renewable energies – despite recent falls in renewable company share prices and the FT.com headline to her article (“The Big Drop: Cheap oil burns green energy”, December 18). Oil and green sources of energy are not direct competitors, particularly in power generation.

Pinchuk: ‘businessman and philanthropist’ does not tell the whole story

Sir, You give space on the Comment pages to the Ukrainian oligarch Viktor Pinchuk, who argues that, given promised reforms, the new Ukrainian government deserves financial support from the west (“Only tough love can stop Ukraine squandering its last chance”, December 16). In particular, “the west should make its support dependent on corruption and oligarchy being brought to an end”.

All very true, but what Mr Pinchuk fails to mention is the source of his own wealth.

Currently, according to Forbes, worth \$2.9bn and Ukraine's second-richest man, he made a large part of his fortune during the presidency of Leonid Kuchma, his father-in-law. The most notorious of several deals to which he was a party was the privatisation of the steelmaker Kryvorizstal. When Kuchma fell from power, having failed to push through elections in the face of the mass pro-democracy demonstrations known as the Orange Revolution, the incoming government reversed the privatisation, reselling Kryvorizstal to Mittal Steel for \$4.8bn – \$4bn more than Mr Pinchuk and his partner paid for it. Your description of him, at the foot of the article, as “a Ukrainian businessman and philanthropist” is inadequate.

Anna Reid
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TTP figures quoted are pure speculation

Sir, If, in their increasingly desperate attempts to revive the flagging prospects of a transatlantic trade deal (Letters, December 18), European business organisations want a debate based on “hard facts”, then they should stop quoting discredited and speculative figures of 0.5 per cent gross domestic product growth, equating to “at least” €120bn that will somehow “protect and create thousands of export-led jobs” in Europe.

When I and other civil society representatives met then minister, Kenneth Clarke, to discuss TTP earlier this year he readily agreed that the economic modelling used to produce such figures was “rubbish”. However, the real issue is whether or not the general public are content to hand over more power and influence to transnational corporations at the expense of their elected legislatures. The evidence we have so far seems to indicate that they would not.

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Why rage and reason are close relatives

Book review
by James Brenton

But the real reason that this episode in falling oil prices is unlikely to lead to cutbacks in renewables investment, as happened in the 1980s, is that now the main driver of renewables is China. And China is making its big push in renewables for reasons that have more to do with clearing its skies of smog and enhancing its energy security (by boosting domestic manufacturing of

renewable energy devices) than with other considerations – and lower oil prices will not shift these fundamentals.

The oil price can rise and fall, but investment in renewable energy is destined to go on getting stronger and stronger.

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Matthew McConaughey and Anne Hathaway in 'Interstellar' – AP

Let's think seriously about a Lazarus mission

Sir, Professor Stephen Hawking's warning on the rise of the machines should resound: going forward the chance of a disaster to planet Earth becomes a near certainty. Even if we rein in climate change, the unknown unknowns inherent in new technologies will expand. We can combat known dangers, but we cannot ask ourselves to stop exploring. And therefore we cannot ignore the risks associated with that exploration.

It is time then to start thinking seriously about an insurance policy for mankind. A “Lazarus-mission” is feasible, although it would look nothing like Christopher Nolan's *Interstellar*. In fact, it would not carry humans at all. Earth's life forms all contain the potential for each other in a common genetic root. Preserving that genetic root is our best shot at securing our own continuation.

In the form of complex micro-organisms, we can plant this root on some of the hundreds of habitable planets that NASA's Kepler observatory has identified, especially those near young stars. Time is no constraint in Lazarus, because resurrection in a day or an aeon feels the same to him.

Itai Agur
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Cuba has potential to be a big fish in Caribbean pond

Sir, Barack Obama's move to open diplomatic talks with Cuba deserves loud cheers from thinking people around the world. President Obama is on the right side of decency and humanity, and, above all, on the right side of common sense.

The US-imposed embargo on trade with the island nation has been a cruel failure. Under the embargo, the Cuban dictatorial elites and their families have always enjoyed the best of everything in imported luxury goods and food. Only the Cuban people have suffered. Mr Obama's bold move may well change that and can be likened to Richard Nixon's historic 1972 trip to

Sir, With reference to your front-page headline “\$1tn cost of longest US war hastens retreat from military intervention” (December 15): the war in Afghanistan is not America's longest. The Civil War lasted from 1861 to 1877, if you include the 20-plus years of counterinsurgency and nation-building called the “Reconstruction”.

Reconstruction was roughly what has been going on in Afghanistan after the Taliban were overthrown.

The US fought the Seminole Indians on and off from 1818 to 1858, including 11 years of serious combat, 1818, 1835 to 1842 and 1855 to 1858. I am not sure if you can count the quiet years in Afghanistan as wartime. Certainly, the war was over until the west decided to destabilise Pakistan, which took away the third wall of a three-walled box in which the insurgents were trapped.

American forces were engaged in sustained combat in the Philippines from 1898 to 1913. This began with overthrowing the Spanish and followed with putting down Filipino nationalists.

There is nothing in the Constitution that requires a formal declaration of war, so by any standard you choose, the war in Afghanistan is not America's longest. Of course, there is no meaning to a war's duration. Unless it is the view of the FT that there needs to be a fixed time regardless of objectives, I suggest a good war with good objectives should be fought to conclusion.

That would be the difference between baseball and soccer.

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Big Chocolate may be squeezing local exporters

Sir, Emiko Terazono repeats the old story that “cocoa farmers are finding themselves increasingly squeezed” by Big Chocolate (“Welcome to the world of Big Chocolate”, FT.com, December 18). No evidence has ever been forthcoming to support that claim. Moreover, the claim is implausible. If the four dominant ABC exporters had acted monopsonistically to squeeze down prices, they would have needed to restrict exports from the origins.

There is no mechanism by which they can do this and, as recent Ivorian history shows, the cocoa always gets out. Consequently, the multinational exporter-processors price purchases off the London and New York futures quotations. The only people who are squeezed are the (often vocal) local exporters who are often unable to offer such keen prices.

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Correction

● In a graphic published on the Companies pages on December 19, the first column of figures measured the difference between the offer price and the opening trade, not the offer price and the latest trading price.

COMMENT ON FT.COM
Nick Butler's energy blog
Forget Opec – sex and technology shape the oil market now
www.ft.com/nickbutler

academic and policy circles. Winter frequently cites the work of Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman, whose bestselling 2011 book *Thinking, Fast and Slow* argues that humans have two “mental gears”: slow, rational thought and fast, intuitive decision making. Winter's easy, conversational style is also similar to that of The New York Times columnist David Brooks, whose book *The Social Animal* argues that emotional and subconscious factors are some of the most powerful determinants of our decisions, from infancy to old age.

Winter's greatest strength – his rapid treatment of a variety of

We are told of how cultural norms make Palestinians unusually generous but also prone to insult when their magnanimity is not reciprocated. We read that, in the second world war, overconfidence in the probability of their own survival may have led pilots to reject a plan by US Air Force mathematicians, who concluded that the most effective way to bomb a Japanese island while minimising pilot casualties was for a small, randomly chosen group of pilots to fly suicide missions. And we find that herd behaviour, and the social pressures of teams, mean that even the most industrious employee in northern

Italy is likely to start celebrating off-bat

At some point during a summit in Slovenia in 2001 George W Bush, then US president, found an opportunity to look into the cold, light blue eyes of Vladimir Putin, his Russian

counterpart. On the basis of what he found there, Mr Bush would advocate greater co-operation with Russia, founded on Mr Putin's “straightforward and trustworthy” persona. “I was able to get a sense of his soul,” Mr Bush said.

History has judged this assessment harshly but it is a sentiment we can all relate to. Our conclusions about people and situations are often influenced by factors more emotional than rational. And while they seldom

interfere with the rational, they do not