

MORE NARCISSISTIC “AUTO” “REPORTING” FROM DAVID SANGER

✖ As I keep saying, the NYT is not an institution to quit while it's behind. Exactly one week after David Sanger wrote a highly criticized article claiming the nationalization of auto companies would carry ominous risks that the forgotten (by Sanger) nationalization of much more expensive finance companies did not, he's back, this time applying the lessons of the Middle East peace process to the auto negotiations.

As a sitting president and a president-elect maneuver over how to bail out Detroit – and ultimately how to convince the Big Three to radically change their ways – there may be some instructive lessons in the Middle East peace process.

The Middle East? At first blush it may seem a bit farfetched. But all complex, intractable negotiations – especially those involving ancient, entrenched interests in which sheer survival is at stake – share something in common.

Of course, Sanger's masturbatory exercise is all premised on his assumption that he knows diddly shit about the auto industry. Which doesn't seem to be the case. Consider Sanger's inapt comparison of the absence of trust between the stakeholders in an auto negotiation and between the Israelis and Palestinians.

Again, there is no trust: the unions believe the companies are trying to break them, the retired think their pensions are under assault, the company executives don't want lectures about prudence and planning for the future

from a Congress that has run up
trillions in deficits.

Um, no, David. If you haven't noticed, the union and the companies have displayed a good deal of trust in recent past, as the last union contract shows. It crafted a way for manufacturers to take retiree healthcare off their books and bring wages into line with the transplants. That took a great deal of trust. If you need further proof, though, you might consider all those pictures of Ron Gettelfinger testifying with the CEOs of the Big 2.5 before Congress. Did you notice that the UAW and the Big 2.5 were on the same side of the table, in both a metaphorical and literal sense? The UAW knows well who is trying to break them. It's not the Big 2.5, it's the plantation caucus.

Furthermore, it's not so much that the Big 2.5 don't want lectures from a Congress that has run up trillions (besides, I thought it was Bush and his unfunded Iraq War that did that?). I rather suspect the Big 2.5 were wondering why they were getting lectures from people—like Sanger—who had no fucking clue what the auto industry has been doing in the last two years, who had missed the UAW contract, the number of American models that match or exceed their Japanese competitors' gas mileage, and reorganization efforts already underway.

You see, David, if you tried to negotiate peace in the Middle East—but had no clue who the parties were and who distrusted whom—you wouldn't be very successful. And that seems to be one of your problems here.

Then there's the really funny problem with this comparison. I don't dispute that Sanger is an expert on foreign affairs. Still. Why would you apply lessons from Middle East peace negotiations to the auto industry? Last I checked, efforts to establish peace between the Palestinians and Israel were even less successful than GM's efforts to regain market share against Toyota. So we want to replicate

that failure in the auto industry?

Ultimately, though, this article is about David Sanger, not about any real plans to resolve the crisis in the auto industry. Witness Sanger's "evidence" why a program subsidizing people to trade in clunkers for more efficient models might not work.

I tool around Washington in a 1996 mid-life crisis classic with six figures on the odometer, a dead radio and a Blue Book value that hovers below what the government would probably pay me to crush the thing into a small cube. It's expensive to run, and more expensive to fix. But I love my clunker, and you can tell the czar I'm not giving it up.

David Sanger, someone who makes considerably more than the people who still own clunkers because they don't have the ready cash to replace them, won't trade in his "mid-life crisis classic." And that, apparently, is the standard of evidence the NYT is now adopting for its articles on the auto negotiations.