

# Fair Observer

Quarterly



September 2016

**FAIR OBSERVER**<sup>o</sup>  
make sense of the world

# Fair Observer Quarterly



September 2016

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# ABOUT FAIR OBSERVER

Fair Observer is a US-based nonprofit media organization that aims to inform and educate global citizens of today and tomorrow. We publish a crowdsourced multimedia journal that provides a 360° view to help you make sense of the world. We also conduct [educational and training programs](#) for students, young professionals and business executives on subjects like journalism, geopolitics, the global economy, diversity and more.

We provide context, analysis and multiple perspectives on world news, politics, economics, business and culture. Our multimedia journal is recognized by the US Library of Congress with International Standard Serial Number (ISSN) 2372-9112.

We have a [crowdsourced journalism model](#) that combines a wide funnel with a strong filter. This means that while anyone can write for us, every article we publish has to meet our editorial guidelines. Already, we have more than [1,800 contributors](#) from over 70 countries, including former prime ministers and Nobel laureates, leading academics and eminent professionals, journalists and students.

Fair Observer is a partner of the World Bank and the United Nations Foundation.

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Join our community of more than [1,800 contributors](#) to publish your perspective, share your narrative and shape the global discourse. Become a Fair Observer and help us make sense of the world.

Remember, we produce a crowdsourced multimedia journal and welcome content in all forms: reports, articles, videos, photo features and infographics. Think of us as a global community like Medium, Al Jazeera English or *The Guardian's* Comment is Free on world affairs. You could also compare us to *The Huffington Post*, except that we work closely with our contributors, provide feedback and enable them to achieve their potential.

We have a reputation for being thoughtful and insightful. The US Library of Congress recognizes us as a journal with ISSN 2372-9112 and publishing with us puts you in a select circle.

For further information, please visit [www.fairobsver.com](http://www.fairobsver.com) or contact us at [submissions@fairobsver.com](mailto:submissions@fairobsver.com).

# Fair Observer Quarterly

Atul Singh

September 30, 2016

In the northern hemisphere, September is the time when farmers start harvesting crops. At least in the US, this has been a jolly good year in terms of yields and production.

You might imagine that farmers might be thanking the gods for such fecundity. Ironically, it turns out they might not be. The simple reason is that increased supply from a bumper crop has pushed down prices. This means consumers instead of farmers might be thanking the gods this year.

The fall in crop prices is not only hurting American farmers, but also farmers elsewhere, particularly in poorer countries. It is a classic example of the fact that the global economy offers both promise and peril. This year, rebels against globalization are gathering force. Spectacularly, rebellion has broken out even the US. This is the country that led the charge on globalization after World War II and, in particular, during the post-Soviet era. Its satellites orbit the planet, its navy patrols the seas and its currency is the global medium of exchange.

It is in the US that institutions like the United Nations, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund are based. Not only does this give US officials the opportunity to host everyone else in their land, but it also gives them a great opportunity to influence others. Uncle Sam has largely written the rules of the game and practically the entire world uses Microsoft Office, Google or Facebook. Yet many Americans have not partaken of the rich fruits of globalization and these multitudes have been tuning into the siren song of Donald Trump, an unsavory real estate tycoon and an uncouth reality-TV star.

Americans are not alone in their angst. Opportunity, equity and hope are not quite in the air. Violent attacks took place this quarter all over the map from Dallas to Dhaka, Bangkok to Baghdad. The reasons for each of them are different and yet all of them have uncanny similarities. These attacks have been largely carried out by young men who were highly dissatisfied, socially isolated and greatly enraged at perceived



injustices. This makes them highly susceptible to the radical ideologies and the propaganda of extreme groups.

It is not just young men alone who are angry. “Depressed and down-at-heel” places are falling prey to demagogues such as Nigel Farage and Marine Le Pen. In poorer countries, the likes of the Islamic State and Boko Haram are making merry in a climate of discontent. This is turning out to be an age of fear, anger, hate and terror. The scale and speed of change is unsettling individuals, communities and entire societies.

In such a climate of uncertainty, strong men such as Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan are making hay while the sun shines. The former has doubled down in Syria where his troops are now propping up the Assad regime. The latter has crushed a shambolic coup attempt and is engaged in power grab of staggering proportions. Suffice to say, Putin is now the tsar of Russia and Erdoğan is the sultan of Turkey.

Many hoped the Rio Olympics would provide cheer amidst all the gloom. After all, human beings are hardwired to see athletic spectacles from the good old days of ancient Greece. However, the Olympics have turned into a bit of a racket. The games went off fairly alright, but the already suffering people of Brazil have been left with a fat bill even as their country suffers a terrible recession. Television made money, the international officials running the Olympics dipped their hands into the tiller, and the Brazilian elites are laughing all the way till the bank.

Many in the rest of the world enjoyed a jolly good show of men and women, including refugees, displaying their youthful athletic prowess. Yet the idea that executives, officials, politicians and contractors were swilling champagne and gorging caviar while the *hoi polloi* in the *favelas* were kept out of post places and hounded by the police makes many wonder if the Olympics have turned into a modern version of the Roman circus.

Every age presents new challenges and ours is experiencing its own. At Fair Observer, we are striving to be the chroniclers of our time and *Fair Observer Quarterly* is an attempt to make sense of the last three months through the eyes of our contributors.

*Atul Singh is the founder, CEO and editor-in-chief of Fair Observer.*



JULY

# White America Needs to Talk About Race

Ryan J. Suto  
July 12, 2016

*In “dishonest America,” inequality and informal segregation remain in a divided nation.*

Since the time of honest racial segregation in America—when whites wrote down race-based rules of exclusion—we have been formulating modes of dishonest segregation: denials of equality and inclusion in areas such as [housing](#), [criminal justice](#), [employment](#), interpersonal relationships and private organizations.

Once institutionalized, this dishonest segregation becomes subconscious for us whites. We do not create race-based rules; we just live by the status quo. We are not racist, after all. We just [call balls and strikes](#). We’re objective when pressing charges, citing criminal statistics, administering standardized tests, [drawing political districts](#) or selecting the [best candidate](#).

Many whites were born into this dishonest America—told that ours is a diverse country, only to be raised in [all-white neighborhoods](#), sent to local [property tax-supported](#), largely white schools, with few opportunities placed in our laps to have black friends.

By the time Rodney King made the news in 1991, we had to learn the goings on of America from strangers on the screen. We had no loved ones who experienced institutionally tolerated racial prejudice or violence. We knew no faces on which to see pain. We had no connections.

Twenty-five years later, and what has changed?

Inequality remains. Informal segregation remains. This is still a dishonest America. Whites only know more because there are more cameras, not because of an increase

in interracial neighborhoods, places of worship, or other voluntary activities or organizations.

This reality does not create people without tolerance; it creates people without empathy. It is difficult, and perhaps unnatural, to feel empathy for a group excluded from your childhood, education, community and workplace—especially when you are simultaneously told they are not actually being excluded.

Our crisis today is not that us whites are any more racist than anyone else. It is that we do not engage in empathy. We see a country that functions reasonably well for us and fail to ask how well it works for others. Whites need to view #BlackLivesMatter not as implying that other lives do not matter, but as a plea for empathy, a plea to help create a country that works just as well for others as it does for us.

Our crisis tomorrow is that any unrest—any threat to change the status quo, any risk of this country continuing to work as well for us as it did in our childhood—will push white people to increasingly blame others.

### **“MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN”**

In accepting the Republican nomination for president in 1968, Richard Nixon [stated](#): “When a nation that has been known for a century for equality of opportunity is torn by unprecedented racial violence ... then it’s time for new leadership for the United States of America.” Nixon could not have possibly been talking to a black America, fresh off the heels of a century of Jim Crow and the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.

He was talking to white people—the same people that Republican presidential presumptive nominee Donald Trump excites by the promise of making America great again.

As we did in 1968, we risk looking to a presidential candidate who promises to restore order and, implicitly, ensure that America continues to work well for us whites.

We do not need to make America great again for us white people. We do not need to tell ourselves that police officers are increasingly [targets of violence](#). We do not need more excuses to dig our heels into the status quo.

We need to begin a social evolution in which our influence is real. We must listen to how America works for all minorities—black, Latino, Muslim, LGBTQIA, disabled, women, etc.

Real understanding will foster empathy between communities, allowing for the creation and promotion of more inclusive spaces, institutions and policies. Through listening to the voices, pain and strife of our fellow Americas with whom we may not live, work or pray, we can begin to create the nation we were raised to believe we already had.

*\*Ryan J. Suto is a writer on the United States and the Middle East. This article is available online at [Fair Observer](#).*



# When Commodities Crash, Populists Suffer

Samuel Guzman

July 13, 2016

*State policy that prioritizes insulation from the world economy and redistribution of natural resource rents is a road to instability.*

A new wave of [center-right political leadership in Argentina](#) is systematically putting an end to 12 years of isolationist, leftist populism under Peronist President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, with the latest development a [judicial decision](#) to freeze the former leader's assets. After an inward turn that saw Buenos Aires rely on "progressive" allies like Venezuela, an election in late 2015 [swept reformist Mauricio Macri into power](#).

Since the upset victory, Macri has made efforts to repair Argentina's tainted image in global financial markets and [attract foreign investment](#), settling [massive debt](#) from the Peronist era and reviving trade talks with the European Union. In February, the nation agreed to a \$4.6 billion settlement with creditors, ending years of refusals by the Peronist government.

Kirchner-era Argentina was reliant on high commodity prices for the country's exports to fund the government's populist policies and ignore market imperatives on free trade, but falling prices have forced the country out of this self-imposed exile. The reforms sought by Macri and other centrist leaders will face a number of challenges, particularly economic ones—his administration had to reduce a budget deficit equivalent to [5.4% of gross domestic product \(GDP\)](#) last year. While this move back toward the international markets will no doubt benefit Argentina in the long run, this chain of events mirrors a pattern seen in many of the world's resource-based economies as commodity prices plummet.

## **RENTIER STATES**

The precipitous drop in oil prices in particular has forced rentier states, which were able to count on massive energy profits to fund generous state largesse up until a few years ago, to diversify their economic relationships with Europe and the rest of the world. These profits allowed states like Saudi Arabia and Iran to get by with incredibly inefficient economies, which officials in both countries are now actively restructuring in order to stimulate real growth and attract international business.

In June, Saudi Arabia announced the details of a comprehensive, widely-reported [plan to boost the private sector](#) and limit state handouts with a focus on building a non-oil revenue base. With government revenue [90% reliant on oil rents](#), falling prices have deeply afflicted Saudi Arabia's finances.

In March, King Salman's government announced Vision 2030, a reform plan to wean the national economy off this all-consuming dependence on oil. [Bankers in New York and London](#), for their part, have responded with great interest to news that Saudi Arabia was looking into a public offering of state-owned oil company Saudi Aramco. The global financial industry apparently sees major opportunity in backing and financing these privatization reforms, and even small firms like the United Kingdom's Verus Partners have [made windfalls](#) helping the Saudi government issue sovereign debt.

## **STATE-HEAVY ECONOMIES**

Iran's challenges appear far more daunting, with the lingering effects of US banking sanctions giving pause to European firms that are otherwise rearing to go back into the

coveted market. Nonetheless, President Hassan Rouhani is attempting to liberalize the nation's state-heavy economy and reestablish economic ties with the rest of the world. Iran has thus far been able to [repatriate about \\$7 billion](#) since last year's nuclear deal was sealed and sanctions were scaled back.

Iranian government sources (perhaps addressing concerns over Tehran's role in the Syrian conflict) insist this money will be used for development projects and to stimulate the economy.

There have been other victories, notably [prospective deals](#) with Airbus and Boeing to update Iran's badly dated civilian airliner fleet. Outside experts and [the International Monetary Fund](#) have echoed Rouhani's insistence on [diversifying the economy](#), and Iran's extraordinarily well-educated [pool of human capital](#) has already helped it develop domestic automotive, telecommunications and aerospace industries since the 1979 revolution.

Hard-liners in Iran and some conservatives in the United States, however, are doing their utmost to dampen enthusiasm. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps profited immensely from the sanctions regime to [expand its own hold](#) over the domestic economy (especially over the energy sector), while members of the US Congress are [exploring ways to block](#) the Boeing deal.

While Saudi Arabia and Iran try to open themselves up, at least one of their fellow producers is fighting tooth and nail to protect an ill-fated "socialist revolution." Under Nicolás Maduro, Venezuela is now [rationing basic goods](#) against a backdrop of severe shortages and rampant hardship. Since the drop in oil prices, the economy has essentially fallen apart and Venezuela is on its way to becoming a failed state.

Many Venezuelans are now forced to get by on [a single meal a day](#). Beyond having the second highest murder rate in the world, Venezuela [cannot even afford to print its own money](#).

As much as falling oil prices, [gross economic mismanagement](#) is at the root of the country's struggles. Maduro's obstinate stance toward the US has done little to help, and Hugo Chávez's embattled successor now faces a movement intent on ousting him from power. The opposition has begun checking signatures on a petition to begin the process, which [recently amassed](#) the 200,000 signatures it needed to move forward.

Argentina, Saudi Arabia and Iran can learn from the failure of the Venezuelan model. Opening themselves up as full, balanced participants in global trade offers improved long-term conditions and security against the worst excesses of oil dependency. As Venezuelans are learning the hard way, state policy that prioritizes insulation from the world economy and redistribution of natural resource rents is an easy road to instability and collapse.

*\*Samuel Guzman is a policy analyst based in Washington, DC. This article is available online at [Fair Observer](#).*



# Education is the Key to a Healthier UAE

Khadija Mosaad

July 19, 2016

*What is the UAE doing to combat its growing obesity epidemic?*

How can health education develop a public health infrastructure based on prevention? In 2011, *Forbes* ranked the United Arab Emirates (UAE) number 18 on a list of countries with the highest obesity rates, estimating that [68.3% of the country's citizens are overweight](#).

Obesity is a [risk factor for diseases](#) including Type 2 diabetes, chronic kidney disease, osteoarthritis, cardiovascular disease and cancer. Public health initiatives and disease prevention are only effective through means of education, which the UAE is determined to improve.

Obesity is not a problem for the UAE alone as it has [increased in prevalence](#) across all Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Due to similar cultural and social norms, this issue has become a major public health challenge for the region.

The UAE's obesity rates have not slowed in recent years. As a result, there is a [growing incidence](#) of Type 2 diabetes in children, which is alarming. What factors

have contributed to this problem? How can health education be used as an effective tool to develop a more health conscious society?

## **FACTORS**

Generous hospitality is imbedded in Arab customs and culture. Food is central in gatherings and social events, especially the offering of sweets—juices, dates, chocolates. Traditional Arab foods tend to be [unhealthy and fattening](#), with an increased intake of saturated fats and sugars and decreased intake of cereals, legumes, vegetables and fruits.

According to [The National](#), “half of all women and a third of all men in the region do not exercise enough. Studies by the World Health Organization (WHO) found that the Eastern Mediterranean Region, of which the UAE is a part of, was second only to the Americas in terms of low activity rates.” There have been efforts made by the UAE to create parks and open spaces to encourage physical activity. However, in general, a sedentary lifestyle still prevails.

Furthermore, the population is at risk for developing a myriad of mental health problems such as depression, low self-esteem or issues related to body image due to obesity and a lack of activity. Preventative measures can be taken to reverse these dangerous trends. However, the culture of the GCC states does not have a preventative health care mindset.

This fatalistic behavior is rooted in the Arab and Muslim culture’s surrender to “God’s will.” This attitude offsets the recognition of necessary preventative measures. Many patients, especially those of Bedouin origins, who [hold tightly onto traditions](#) and are not educated on health awareness, do not believe in modern medicine. The combined intersections of culture, religion, eating habits and lifestyle choices make health education a growing challenge to integrate into not only schools, but throughout society as a whole.

Economic development in the UAE has experienced progress on a variety of fronts: better access to education, improved living standards and the rise and use of information and communication technologies.

## **FAST FOOD AND HEALTH EDUCATION**



However, not all advancements have been associated with positive outcomes. Given the impact of globalization, an influx of Western fast food restaurants has dominated the food industry in the UAE: McDonald's, IHOP, Pizza Hut, KFC and Shake Shack just to name a few. The "Mcdonaldization" of the food industry has enabled individuals to enjoy a more efficient, predictable and timely food experience. According to [George Ritzer](#), "They offer a limited, simple menu, that can be cooked and served in an assembly line-fashion." Adding to this, [most fast food restaurants](#) have delivery options.

Combining these factors—along with a sedentary lifestyle, hot climate and limited outdoor activity—creates a recipe for disaster, especially for the most vulnerable population: children. The [number of overweight children has steadily increased](#) over the past two decades, from 25.6% in 1980 to 31.2%—a third of the nation's youth—in 2013. Childhood obesity in the UAE is ranked 16<sup>th</sup> in the world. What is being done?

In 2015, [officials announced that health education](#) would be incorporated into Abu Dhabi's school curricula by the 2016-17 academic year. According to Amer Al Kindi, a health manager for Abu Dhabi Education Council, "it will be a separate curriculum that will be integrated into the system at all grades."

In a recent study analyzing obesity rates in students attending government schools in the Emirate of Ras Al-Khaimah, it was found that obesity starts in toddlers and is most prevalent among boys. Early intervention strategies, such as improved school health policy and practice through initiatives involving better nutrition choices and exercise classes are [recommended to improve the quality and delivery](#) of health education. Initiatives need to be created to raise public health awareness of issues affecting both children and adults.

## **HEALTH EDUCATION INITIATIVES**

The Health Authority of Abu Dhabi, along with the Abu Dhabi Education Council, launched the Iftah Ya Simsim initiative for health education this year across schools to promote and raise awareness of health issues for children. Iftah Ya Simsim is comparable to the American children's TV show *Sesame Street*. The initiative contains a series of educational materials, including activities for students, parents and teachers. [Over 150 Arabic teachers](#) across Abu Dhabi are offered training workshops

and necessary resources and tools to promote and encourage a healthy lifestyle inside the classroom.

The program focuses on nutrition, physical activity, oral health, hygiene and vaccination. In addition, the overall campaign also incorporates the [launch of an app to encourage the adoption](#) of healthy habits through educational video games. It is a fun and interactive way to not only raise public health awareness, but to engage students, parents and teachers in the process. Children need to learn at an early age the impact of their eating habits and lifestyle choices.

As per the UAE's 2021 Vision, the Ministry of Health and Prevention aims to [decrease the prevalence of obesity among children](#) between the ages of 5-17 to a target goal of 12%.

To reach this target goal, a variety of initiatives have been created to tackle childhood obesity. For example, over 1,200 students from public and private schools participated in the "let's walk" activity in April 2015. The walkathon is part of the "Healthy Children 2021" national campaign to promote the [importance of exercise](#) and a healthy lifestyle.

## **COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY**

Health education should not only come in the form of initiatives, school curricula or awareness campaigns. Rather, physicians also play a vital role in a patient's overall welfare; they act as educators, role models and advisors. An educated patient, who understands his or her illness or risk for illness, is more likely to be accountable and invested in health care. However, there are many instances where physicians fail to inform and educate their patients.

Generally speaking, doctors in the Arab world do not take the time to educate their patients, while at the same time most Arab patients do not feel the need to understand the science behind their ailment. There are many examples of cases where diseases such as diabetes can be prevented, but due to a lack of intervention measures by the doctor, patients will likely develop the disease.

The UAE is aware of these tremendous health challenges and has been proactive in creating initiatives, partnerships and importing Western health institutions.

In the United States, the UAE has a long-standing relationship with the Children's National Medical Center in Washington, DC. Through generous donations from Abu Dhabi, the Sheikh Zayed Institute for Pediatric Surgical Innovation at Children's National Medical Center was established in 2009. In 2015, other reputable Western institutions such as [Cleveland Clinic opened their doors in Abu Dhabi](#). The UAE continues to establish partnerships with US health institutions for the purpose of gaining Western health values, disseminating cutting edge research and creating preventative public health programs, as well as enhancing medical education and care.

The UAE has taken progressive steps to tackle some of the most challenging health issues facing its citizens today. What must remain clear is the role, importance and need for health education, which comes in many forms. It is not solely the responsibility of the education sector, but both public and private sectors, the media and the medical community. In order for the UAE to witness meaningful and lasting change, society as a whole would need to make conscious health choices and lead by example for future generations to come.

*\*Khadija Mosaad is pursuing a PhD in Higher Education at George Mason University. This article is available online at [Fair Observer](#).*



## **Brexit Brings Revolution to Britain**

Christina Dykes

July 20, 2016

*The UK is not seeing anarchy but a revolution as large sections of the ruled are rebelling against the will of the ruling.*

On July 2, *The Economist* had a surprisingly alarmist cover-page heading. "[Anarchy in the UK](#)" it read, a claim it justified in an editorial that said the United Kingdom "[has seldom looked so wildly off the rails](#)." Having backed the Remain campaign, the magazine is either a bad loser or it has been blinded by its own narrative. It is not the country that is off the rails—it is the political class. And that has become evident.

Such a heading from an international magazine will do nothing to illuminate what is really going on in the UK. So, let me offer my observations that are based on 34 years as a Westminster “insider.”

## **ENGLISH EXCEPTIONALISM**

In an [article for \*Fair Observer\*](#), CEO and Editor-in-Chief [Atul Singh](#) has already made the point about English exceptionalism. It is not just that we inhabit an island that has safeguarded us against land invasion and from war-ravaged battlegrounds, but it is because as a fringe country we have had a history of standing alone.

Many would recall 1940 and the fight against the Germans, or the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. But there was also King Alfred the Great and his stand against the Vikings, Aethelstan and his defense against the Irish and the Scots at Brunanburg in 937, Henry VIII and his snubbing of Catholic Europe or our persistence against Napoleon. It is a history of English consciousness that, up to the 1960s, was imprinted on every generation by popular history books such as *Our Island Story* by H.E. Marshall or in the Lady Bird History books for children. Lords, members of parliament (MP) and visitors can still see such heroic versions of history in William Dyce and others’ murals in the Palace of Westminster.

English exceptionalism also found voice in the nation’s tradition of non-conformism and its associated radical politics. The referendum’s pattern of voting shows the areas that were most solidly [Brexit](#) paralleled the areas where non-conformism was the strongest: the east and northeast of England.

That dogged stubbornness and willingness to stand alone is part of the English character that lies dormant unless it is stirred by adverse circumstances.

We are at such a time now. It is not anarchy, but a revolution of sorts when large sections of the ruled are rebelling against the will of the ruling—the government. It is an echo of the attitude that sustained the English Reformation, produced the Glorious Revolution, and the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century constitutional reforms of Parliament. You could liken it to a process of checks and balances of the Constitution to reflect society as it is, not how it was.

## **ECONOMIC DISPARITY**

Grievance and isolation, fear and frustration stand behind most revolutions. The signs of discontent were detectable. Many have [cited growing economic disparity](#) in the patterns of wealth. But the answer is not only about regeneration or revitalization of the less affluent areas, which has been the government's approach. It is about fairness, a very potent sentiment.

The new rich are those who have benefitted from the success of the service industry and the entertainment business, but the rewards have not filtered down as they once did when investment was in land or when manufacturing carried—certainly in the former—social obligations. The new wealth is about self-interest characterized by self-oriented social totems such as luxury toys and indulgent fashion.

Moreover, while large areas of the UK outside the capital struggle, the City of London has come to epitomize greed and privilege. The culture in the banks encouraged bad behavior for which too few have been held to account. Millions of pounds were irresponsibly lost while the majority had to pick up the bill. This is about social justice as well as legalities.

As resentment smoldered, voters felt their grievances were not being heeded. MPs, sullied by the [expenses scandal](#), seemed remote and impervious to the country's needs. Too often, consensus between the major political parties on political topics—of which the Brexit debate is the latest example—blinded real debate. Try as I might, I am unable to define Cameronism as an ideology. It looks too much like political pragmatism, but then David Cameron did of course say he was the heir to Tony Blair.

Consensus government, both in Britain and in Europe, stood as a barricade of jargon and bureaucracy, protecting those who the people thought were in positions of authority. In Europe, the system is not flexible enough to tackle the problems of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Globalization, the counter sentiments of identity politics, economic imbalance, the ease of population movement, and more aware and savvy populations have shamed the solid bloc approach that offered no ready answers. Above all, the lack of accountability of the European Union gave the Brexit camp a golden pass.

## **OUR LEADERS**

In Britain, representative democracy is being undermined by the strength of social media. There are too many politicians in the UK who “do not get” social media—or more to the point its power. It is just not acceptable these days that an MP will not accept correspondence by email.

Those in authority too often see leadership in a heroic style when adaptive leadership would encourage greater participation. But many politicians have no idea of different styles of leadership apart from the sense that they must lead. Politicians are the only “profession” I know that does not have any official professional development. Mention a need of support or coaching and you will get a blurry-eyed look and a mutter that they had been elected so that is OK—forever. Campaigning is not the same as governing. Politicians fail because they see themselves as a race apart that cannot be improved. That is wrong.

These themes are not new, but the political elite have not tackled them owing to a self-righteous group-think or just temerity. It has encouraged a singularity that has incited narrow thinking. I worry about immigration, but I am not a racist. I think the National Health Service (NHS) needs major reform, but that does not mean I am against a health service for all.

All too often, those who dare disagree with accepted thought are labeled truculent at best and mistaken at worst. Look at the abuse heaped on those who supported Leave. A new propaganda has been encouraged, aided and abetted by disappointed politicians, which has labeled them racist haters. In turn, this has encouraged demonstrations presenting spurious arguments against the referendum result. It is the most cynical upshot of the last four weeks.

The system of patronage, which rests with political leaders whose influence is seldom doubted, encourages the stifling, stupefying and narrowness that characterizes political parties. Political promotion is seldom on achievement—it is mostly naked patronage. There was too many who were “exposed” during the expenses scandal and have since been rewarded by promotion or membership of the House of Lords. Job for the boys, and girls, encourages insularity and their pool of self-interest.

There are good MPs but too many are remote and seen to be irrelevant. Parliament is failing in its primary duty of being the fulcrum of the nation’s concerns. The result of the referendum and the popularity of people like Donald Trump, Boris Johnson and Nigel

Farage who do speak their minds and do not conform are a signal that things have to change. Like most “revolutions,” we do not know where it will end—although typical of an English revolution it has started softly and tamely.

When I was working in politics, I was seen as an irritant for asking challenging questions. Now that I am doing my PhD, I find asking challenging questions is encouraged. That is the saddest remark I can make about the state of British politics.

*\*Christina Dykes is a political consultant. This article is available online at [Fair Observer](#).*



## **A Conversation on Turkey’s Failed Coup**

Kip Whittington and Joshua W. Walker

July 23, 2016

*In this edition of The Interview, Fair Observer talks to Turkey expert Dr. Joshua W. Walker.*

On July 15, Turkish citizens were startled by the appearance of [Turkish armed forces on the streets of Ankara and Istanbul](#). Two bridges connecting Istanbul’s European side to the Asian continent were blocked by uniformed soldiers and tanks. Turkish rooftops were buzzed by F-16 fighter aircraft and Cobra attack helicopters.

Simultaneously, Turkish forces fast-roped into Marmaris, a resort town on the Mediterranean coastline where President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was on vacation, in an attempt to decapitate the government. This was the beginning of the Turkish military’s fifth intervention in the country’s politics.

Turkey’s military has long seen itself as the guardian of secular democracy. Against the backdrop of Syria’s civil war and terror attacks on Turkish soil by Islamic State (IS) militants and the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), President Erdogan has instituted increasingly authoritarian policies that have enlarged tensions in the country. It is, therefore, probable that a group within the armed forces believed they were acting in the democratic interests of the nation. But they miscalculated.

Erdogan escaped from his Marmaris hotel alive and [narrowly avoided](#) being shot down by rebel fighter aircraft on his return to Istanbul. Despite the fact that the chief of staff of the Turkish military was captured and an official statement from the junta was aired on national television, the coup failed. Erdogan was able to rally his supporters by issuing a video message via Facetime and eventually in-person in Istanbul. The Turkish people responded by occupying the streets and Taksim Square, eventually forcing the largely conscript armed forces to disarm and surrender.

By the morning of July 16, over 240 Turkish citizens lay dead and another 1,541 wounded. President Erdogan immediately blamed [Fethullah Gülen](#), a US-based Turkish cleric, and his allies in the Turkish government. Erdogan has swiftly used the crisis as a pretext to [purge](#) all public institutions of threats, both real and perceived. Furthermore, he has now instituted a three-month [state of emergency](#) (this interview took place before this announcement).

In this edition of The Interview, *Fair Observer* talks to Turkey expert Dr. Joshua W. Walker about Turkey's postmodern coup attempt.

**Kip Whittington: What precipitated this coup attempt? Was the coup a reaction to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's increasingly authoritarian tendencies, his failure to address the rising security issues in the country, a combination of the two, or is there more?**

**Joshua W. Walker:** I think it's really hard to answer the question of why this coup happened. Many people were surprised the coup happened at the time it did, but maybe not completely surprised that one occurred. Turkey has a long history of coups and, if anything, Turkey is long overdue for one. I think people had forgotten about the intense feelings that lay beneath the surface in Turkish society. At the moment, Turkey is an extremely polarized country. However, I believe many people thought Turkey had turned a corner and that coups had become a thing of the past.

The specific question of the timing is an interesting one. The reason it happened when it did is the group of military officers that committed the coup were very disgruntled. They were part of one particular group that came mostly from the gendarmerie and the air force. One has to understand that in the first week of August, Turkey begins handing out military promotions. All these individuals knew they were not going to be promoted. There is a very petty and personal reason for their actions.



Also, one of the reasons the coup was botched so badly is we now know that the intelligence services got wind of the coup before it was launched, so a lot of things were off from the beginning.

Why would you launch the coup when they did? I think most of these individuals who were about to be purged, we now know, were not senior commanders. And the timing in terms of why they struck when they did was a reaction to this. Normally, coups take place in the middle of the early morning after you've rounded up the leaders—you don't want people to catch wind and come out onto the streets to complicate things. The intelligence service seemed to know this was coming and they seemed to be moving in. That caused a lot of the uncertainty early on.

Having said that, I was actually shocked how much planning went into the coup. There were a significant number of people involved. Indeed, when it first started, it had all the hallmarks of a successful coup, except for one key aspect: have you eliminated the head of state?

Furthermore, the junta didn't have a leader, there was no public face. Even when they read their statement on national television, it was read by a Turkish newscaster, not by the head of the junta or somebody that would inspire leadership. Therefore, of course, everyone, even the junta's natural supporters—the secular opposition, the nationalists who historically do not have much love for Erdogan—none of them came to their aid because there was no leader to rally behind. The plotters also miscalculated: They fundamentally didn't realize the Turkey they were trying to take over is no longer a Turkey of the Cold War era that we are used to seeing.

**Whittington: This has been portrayed by many as an amateur coup. Do you see it that way?**

**Walker:** Yes, it was amateur in the sense that if you are going to have coup, you need the entire military on the same page. The fact that they had to kidnap the chief of staff not only shows that it was amateur and unprofessional, but it was doomed from the start.

The only other time in Turkish history that a coup was successful without senior leadership was the 1960 coup. That's when the colonels rose up, but the colonels were absolutely on the same page in 1960.

In this case, you basically had military-on-military confrontation in barracks and military bases around the country that were, quite frankly, ugly. We are still seeing the ugliness, and I think there is a real trauma and shock to the Turkish nation because the military is the most highly respected institution in Turkey. Now, it has one of the most serious black eyes in its history. How do you recover from that?

**Whittington: As someone who was following the coup live via Twitter and the news, my initial impression was the coup was succeeding. What was the turning point?**

**Walker:** I was on an airplane following the news before I had to turn on my airplane mode. When I first heard about it, the bridges over the Bosphorus river were closed and there were F-16 fighter aircraft flying over Ankara. Given what has happened over the last couple of years in Turkey, I assumed it was another terrorist attack and the military was moving in to protect against the threat.

But then I landed in Washington and found out it was a legitimate coup because they read out a statement of their intentions. But, to me, the fact that they read out a statement of their intentions without having fully secured the head of state and without having the country under full control caused me to have doubts. I'm not going to lie and say that I knew immediately it was a failed coup, but as someone who has lived and worked in Turkey for a long time, I thought a lot of the signs were off.

One of the more frustrating things was to watch the way the Western press immediately jumped on the bandwagon. Right up until the morning in Turkey, there were many people who were basically talking about, and analyzing, a successful coup, as opposed to being a little more circumspect and saying, "Let's wait and see what happens."

I certainly wasn't one of those who jumped out immediately and said "the coup has failed." But I read the same tweets you are talking about which was, "Erdogan is in the air and we don't know where he went," and the next thing we know he is on Facetime talking to the nation. I was watching his speech live and I was amazed because we

saw a coup play out in real-time, which is exactly why it was doomed to fail. The coup plotters couldn't control all the media channels that were broadcasting live, and the president and the prime minister were capable of getting their message out via the press. Friends in Turkey informed me [that] every cellphone received a text message saying, "Come out and support your leaders." Even the minarets in various communities were broadcasting, "Get out onto the streets, we need your help to defeat the anti-democratic coup" that is taking place. Coups are clearly not how they used to be in the 1980s.

**Whittington:** It's ironic that President Erdogan had to utilize social media, a medium he has cracked down on in the past. We have seen the power of digital media in the Arab Spring and now in a modern-day coup attempt. How has digital media helped shape major global events where anyone can watch or participate in real-time?

**Walker:** The irony that you are pointing out is exactly what I was watching as well. Erdogan has railed against social media and its "evils" in the past. Yet social media is essentially what saved his presidency. Had he not gotten on the television via Facetime and reassured the Turkish people, there might have been other people that switched sides, people who might have thought to themselves, "Well, clearly the coup is winning, we might as well join."

But, instead, the first thing the Turkish people saw is the president come out defiantly saying, "I told you there was going to be a threat against me because I am trying to do what's good for the Turkish nation. Look what has happened, they have plotted against me. Come out into the streets for your honor, for your Turkish nation, etc." Then you see the president triumphantly returning to Istanbul and giving this amazing press conference with a large portrait of [Mustafa Kemal] Atatürk literally sitting right behind him. Lots of people, especially the secularists, thought to themselves, "Wow, Erdogan just took the amazing symbol and imagery of Atatürk and owned it for himself."

I think that is one of the major frustrations the opposition to Erdogan have because now Erdogan is painting anyone who is anti-Erdogan as being pro-coup. That's going to be a legacy that stays with Turkey for quite a while now because of the polarization. I think the trauma and shock of watching the coup play out live and the way in which people reacted to it is something that is maybe not unusual to Egyptians or to other countries that have gone through it in the new digital age. Except for Turkey this was

something brand new. I believe this was the first time the world has seen what could be called a postmodern failed coup.

**Whittington: The anti-coup demonstrations were notably conservative and religious in nature. Does this signify a significant split in the country between secularists and religious conservatives? Or do you feel that the majority of the Turkish people didn't want to see their country under the leadership of another military junta?**

**Walker:** The problem is that polarization has already existed for a long time; therefore, in that sense, this is nothing new. But you are right: One of the things the Western media didn't quickly pick up was the nature of the tens of thousands of people listening to Erdogan speak in Istanbul. It's significant that Erdogan stayed in Istanbul because he was a successful mayor there. Even people that don't like Erdogan from a secular point of view can admit that Erdogan was a master politician and a great mayor. Erdogan, therefore, stayed in his home base.

When you look at his supporters in the streets, 99% were Turkish men with a mustache, and they all somewhat fit the build of a Turkish nationalist. Many came out onto the streets, stayed up all night, and went to Taksim Square and other parts of Turkey that they probably didn't reside in, but they came out because they were called by their leader.

This once again demonstrates the strength of Erdogan's loyalists versus the fractured anti-Erdogan crowd. Erdogan has won every election he has participated in but, notably, he always wins by 50%. Therefore, if there was a unifying figure on the other side, you might have had a different story. But because the opposition can't unify itself, they all came together and condemned the coup. This was quite striking because this was the one thing that brought them all together when they could have used the opportunity to unify against Erdogan. The reaction we are seeing now is troubling for a lot of different reasons, but that is because we have to understand the trauma and the shock of the Turkish people at this moment.

**Whittington: You mentioned that President Erdogan stayed in Istanbul because he has substantial support there. Do you see that as the primary reason he failed to return to Ankara immediately, or is it due to security concerns?**

**Walker:** I think there are major security concerns. The coup conspirators came from the major military bases in the Ankara region. That's why, initially, Ankara seemed the most likely to fall. In my estimation, Istanbul did not face the same danger. Ankara is where parliament was attacked and that's where a key airbase was used.

Still, even now, we are not quite sure of the location of certain military assets. For instance, there are still a few aircraft missing. Even though Erdogan made a triumphant return to Istanbul, he still has to be sure of the security situation before he returns to Ankara to address the people and the parliament.

**Whittington:** We are currently seeing a significant purge take place where thousands of military personnel, judges and even deans have been removed from office. What are your thoughts on this post-coup purge that Erdogan has instituted?

**Walker:** The thing that is hard for Americans and Westerners to understand is the Turkish mentality. It's not just uniquely Turkish—it also encompasses the Mediterranean. Turks are both hot and cold; they are either your best friend or your worst enemy. They are not Anglo-Saxon with a somewhat cold hard realist perspective devoid of emotion.

I think there is necessarily going to be an overreaction and caution on Ankara's part. The government is going to be sure to rid Turkish institutions of anyone that can be connected to the perpetrators of the coup and sympathetic. This includes members of the Gulen movement—a group with significant influence in the Ministry of Education. However, there is a distinction: There are those that are being arrested who are mostly military officers directly involved, and those associated with the Gulen movement that are basically being fired or pushed out of their civil servant positions.

Let's wait to see how this plays out. The signs right now are troubling in terms of there being an overreaction. But, again, that's because it's hard to understand how traumatic this event has been to the Turkish nation.

**Whittington:** Do you see any truth to Fethullah Gulen himself being involved?

**Walker:** It's hard not to weigh in here and say "you're either too far on one side or the other." I think the challenge is this has been a really ugly battle for the last three years

between Gulen and Erdogan. At this point, the United States has asked for evidence and I think the Turkish government is probably working behind the scenes to provide evidence. It seems clear to me that there were people within the Gulen movement that were behind this coup, or at least sympathetic. The question is: Did [Fethullah] Gulen make a phone call to spur the coup itself? I think that is something we are never going to find out unless we have a smoking gun. Even if there is a smoking gun, everyone is going to say the evidence is fabricated. At this point in time, the polarization in Turkey is so extreme that the Turkish people are going to believe whichever side they want to listen to.

From an international perspective, political leaders are in a situation where they are thinking we are going to have to go with the legitimately elected government in Turkey right now, and we are going to have to just make sure there is rule of law and due process. Right now, I think that is what everyone needs to be focusing on because the world is seeing images of soldiers and military officers being lined up naked and humiliated (something that is very unusual in Turkey, given that the military has historically been the most popular institution). When you see Gulen in the United States making statements and speaking publicly, that's a very different world from what you are seeing in Turkey right now.

If, ultimately, Gulen is sent back to Turkey and has to face a trial there, it's going to be difficult to see how this plays out in a way that's not impartial. If you are a loyalist you are going to see him as evil, and if you are a supporter you are going to see him as unfairly implicated. Thus, it is really hard for outsiders to get involved with this. We are still waiting for the facts to come out.

**Whittington: How do you see this impacting US-Turkey relations in the future? On a broader scale, does this shake NATO?**

**Walker:** This is what I am most concerned about. This is an internal Turkish fight, but the fact that the United States already had to defend itself is an issue. For instance, Secretary John Kerry had to make a statement to counter the American involvement narrative, one he seemed pretty irritated to make. You also have officials on the Turkish side accusing the United States of complicity. In fact, most Turks believe America is involved because Gulen lives in the United States and he is a green card holder. There were also many people in the American media saying things that do not represent American interests. I think this is going to be a very difficult sour spot for the

United States. There will be turbulence in the US-Turkey relationship until the question of what to do about Gulen, specifically, is answered.

This is all going to affect NATO as well. We just had a NATO Summit, and I think all the good work that was done there is going to have to take a step back because Turkey is going to be internally focused. The glue of the US-Turkey relationship has always been the strategic relationship and, over time, that military-to-military cooperation has eroded. And now you have a military in Turkey that has a black eye and is seen with complete suspicion by the Turkish government. Anybody that is a friend of the Turkish military is going to be immediately suspect to many Turks right now. The United States is going to have to continue defending itself against being involved, even though to an American audience that seems ridiculous. Yet every Turk believes the United States had something to do with the coup.

**Whittington: Will this have negative consequences on international efforts to resolve the situation across the border in Syria?**

**Walker:** Absolutely, we already have a couple of failed states in the region. The fact that Turkey could have gone down that same path if the coup had been successful is very troubling. It shows you how quickly things can change in this part of the world. The bottom line is you can't solve Syria without Turkey. If Turkey is going to be internally focused for a while, then that means it is going to be more difficult to figure out a solution in Syria.

It also increases the likelihood that a country like Russia will have a larger role in the region, which I think from a US point of view is not particularly helpful. Erdogan is already repairing relations with Russia and using the coup as an excuse saying, "The people that shot down the Russian plane might have been the same people who led this coup. The perpetrators were trying to drag Turkey into something." Therefore, I think this is going to have a direct impact on the Syria situation.

**Whittington: What are the short- and long-term challenges for Turkish civil-military relations?**

**Walker:** I think in the short term, one of the biggest challenges is that the civil-military relationship in some ways was reinforced. Civilian control was able to reinforce its power over the military. We already knew that the military was basically not what it

used to be. Look back to when the Turkish military chiefs of staff resigned in the 2011 and the e-memorandum that wasn't meant to be during the Abdullah Gul presidency discussion. This reinforces the fact that the military no longer has power. However, one of the challenges is if political leadership goes too far in its punishments. If they purge the military too far and eliminate all the top general staff that maybe had nothing to do with this, then the operational capacity of the Turkish military will be significantly eroded. This is notable because the Turkish military is the second largest in NATO and important to the sovereignty and security of a country dealing with terrorists from ISIS [Islamic State] and the PKK.

I'm worried the military might swing too far [in] the other direction. The Turkish military has a rightful place within Turkey. If the leaders in Turkey are serious about continuing the Turkish military institution, they have to work together.

In the short term, making sure there is no overcorrection is key. Erdogan's government should look at what happened over the weekend as not something to fear, but to celebrate since the Turkish people came out onto the streets to face the tanks and soldiers. And, remarkably, those soldiers didn't fire on them. The only soldiers that fired on the parliament and elsewhere were the coup plotters in helicopters and F-16s. They were not the conscripts who were told to deal with the terrorists and do these things. We are now hearing that some of the pilots that were going after Erdogan were told that he was a terrorist target and they didn't even know that they were going after their own president. That just shows you how fractured the military is today. That should be a sign that Turkey needs to be rebuilding itself.

In the long term, the only way to do that is through cooperation. Therefore, it has to be done through the NATO framework. That's why I am worried if Turkey focuses exclusively on its domestic well-being and isolation, that's not good for anybody. It's bad for Turkey, it's bad for the United States and it's bad for the world.

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# Deconstructing Reporting of DNC Email Scandal

Peter Isackson

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*The lack of facts to work with couldn't be more obvious, but this doesn't prevent the journalists from getting the job done.*

What we read in newspapers isn't just a list of facts or an objective account of an actual event. It's always an exercise in style, such as this [creative piece in \*The New York Times\*](#). I love creative journalism. Well, actually I hate this particular type of it, but I love having a go at deconstructing it. So here we go.

The title promises an exciting read even before we understand the context: “As Democrats Gather, A Russian Subplot Raises Intrigue.” The reader will get the impression that this could be a compendious John Le Carré novel. It sounds like something akin to terrorism. The word “subplot” followed by “intrigue”—although literally used in the sense of curiosity, it subtly connotes conspiracy—clearly suggests subterfuge and criminal complicity. “As Democrats Gather” establishes a setting that sounds friendly and harmonious. As in a Hollywood horror film, the *gathering Democrats* are designated as the innocent, unsuspecting community of targeted victims on whom the horror will be unleashed. For the moment, we have no reason to suspect that the subject at the heart of the article is the recently broken scandal of intercepted [emails released by WikiLeaks](#) that revealed the Democratic National Committee's (DNC) tipping of the scales in favor of Hillary Clinton.

Let's look first at one key sentence from the lead paragraphs of the article, a gem of journalistic style worth spending the time to deconstruct. Here's where we first get an idea of what the article will be describing:

*“But the release on Friday of some 20,000 stolen emails from the Democratic National Committee's computer servers, many of them embarrassing to Democratic leaders, has intensified discussion of the role of Russian intelligence agencies in disrupting the 2016 campaign.”*

“Stolen emails” tells us we are confronted with not just a petty crime (20,000 indicates it isn’t petty), but a form of *lèse-majesté*, an affront against our sacred privacy, a cross-border act of evil intention that is worse than an ordinary crime because, as we quickly learn, it has a sinister international dimension. By the end of the sentence we learn that the guilty party is “Russian intelligence.”

## GOAL OF THE CRIME

But before we can identify the culprit, we need to appreciate the goal of the crime, “embarrassing Democratic leaders.” This tells us why we should be reading this. From a journalistic point of view, the embarrassment of leaders makes for great copy. It’s even become a major trend I wrote about [recently](#). The story we are about to read isn’t just important. It is also titillating. Who doesn’t enjoy hearing about the powerful being humiliated?

The next thing we read is that the *crime* “has intensified discussion of the role of ...”—a dramatic way of saying we are about to talk about what are, for the moment, nothing more than tendentious rumors, while carefully obscuring the fact that they are both tendentious and rumors. We are nevertheless intriguingly informed with these words that things have become *intense*.

Then comes the climax we were waiting for, “a crime of our enemy, Russian intelligence.” Russia is peremptorily designated as “our enemy,” something which hasn’t been the case since the fall of the Berlin Wall. Those who remember 2009 will know that newly appointed Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had “reset” the relationship between the two nations, cancelling the very idea of enmity.

But our diligent journalists are making sure we understand what they understand. This is where we should ask ourselves, who are the authors and what do they mean by “our enemy”? Should we imagine that “our” refers to an enemy of *The New York Times*? No, our pair of journalists are making it clear that we—you and I, the readers as well as the authors themselves—feel that we are together in this, as a people. Russia is America’s enemy, our common enemy, an enemy we can share among ourselves.

Of course, the authors bring forward nothing to justify considering Russia as an enemy. They are simply counting on the reader’s reflex of feeling that Russia is “our enemy.”

When we learn that it the enemy they are referring to isn't just Russia in general, but that fearful entity known as Russian "intelligence" we can feel authentically frightened. We've been transported momentarily into the cultural space of a James Bond movie.

This is when we get a special surprise. The aim of this sinister initiative is described as "disrupting the 2016 campaign." This suggests the lovely fiction that all was going smoothly until then in the Republican and Democratic primaries. There was no drama, certainly no low blows or tampering as the two champions, Trump and Clinton, progressed valiantly through the ordeal of the long months of primaries to earn their nominations. In the end we find the calm splendor of Amityville awaiting the ghastly horror we, as spectators, bought tickets to see. We are invited to think that the 2016 campaign was Norman Rockwell's America before the Russians barged in.

We are thus compelled to understand that this is clearly a gratuitous, evil foreign invasion, something far more fearful than finding out and reflecting on the fact that DNC had undermined its own democratic principles by seeking to sabotage the Sanders campaign. This is journalism that tells you how to think, because it supposes you don't need to. All that in one sentence.

## **RHETORICAL PLOYS**

But the article has only begun to create its intriguing story. Just before the sentence we've just looked at, the authors had taken the trouble to whet our appetite with this question: Is Vladimir Putin trying to meddle in the American presidential election? As we read the article we expect to see evidence that will support this. So we must keep on reading.

What we do see is an elaborate construct of speculation that takes us further and further away from the issue of the stolen emails and their content. Leaving aside the ethical issue of how the DNC might justify violating its own principle of objectivity—attacking a legitimate, popular candidate—readers of as serious a newspaper as *The New York Times* might at this point expect to see the analysis focusing on the more interesting point: how the Democrats, by launching this accusation against Russia, were dodging the real issues by constructing a strategic defense against embarrassment.

The journalists could have pointed out that this is a somewhat typical case of using the tactic of deviating the discussion toward an imaginary but more serious event: foreign

interference in our democratic process. Had they pursued this idea they would have had the opportunity to teach us a lot about how political strategy works and, in this particular case, also throw light on a visible trend promoted in the media of branding Russia—a country with which we have no formal conflict—our enemy.

But these are themes that most of the media avoid developing probably because it would require tact and subtle analysis—something for which readers are assumed to have no time or patience.

## **GOOD JOURNALISM**

The trigger for the article was a statement by Ron Mook, Clinton’s campaign manager. Good journalism would immediately have focused on his motives for making that statement. But at no point do the journalists even consider this. His opinion is the story, not how he formed that opinion. The obvious observation would have been to point out that this is a classic wag the dog strategy—an attempt to distract from the actual and tangible scandal of the emails and develop a more exciting and frightening talking point: the scandal of not just Russian but Putin’s personal interference in American election processes. Threatened by the effects of their own scandal, the Democratic establishment preferred creating the idea of a threat to all of us from *our enemy*.

Instead of pursuing the logic of the Clinton campaign’s strategy, the authors develop an entirely imaginative, if not imaginary, scenario that involves not only unidentified Russians as well as Putin himself, but also—wait for this—Donald Trump. The story is beginning to be worthy of Alex Jones. The journalists begin by quoting verbatim Mook’s sensationalist claim that the emails were leaked “by the Russians for the purpose of helping Donald Trump,” a speculative and tendentious attribution of intention and agency that serious journalists should immediately query.

At the same time they should point out how predictable this would be from the mouth of the head of Clinton’s presidential campaign. But rather than query it and remind the reader of Mook’s political motive, they are content with approvingly citing his own analysis which “also suggested that the Russians might have a good reason to support Mr. Trump.”

This is wonderfully creative journalism, whose effects of style are again worth analyzing. Let’s have a closer look. Ron Mook, the interested party who launched the

story, *suggested* (i.e. gave a self-interested interpretation) that the Russians *might have* (i.e. are not known to have) a *good reason* (i.e. we know nothing about their actual motives and intentions) to support Trump (the other declared enemy, this time of the Democrats, not the Americans).

The fanciful lack of substance continues in another sentence that ends tellingly: “Whether the thefts were ordered by Mr. Putin, or just carried out by apparatchiks who thought they might please him, is anyone’s guess.”

This is a clever rhetorical ploy. Although there is no conclusive evidence for either hypothesis, by offering the choice between the two, the reader is invited to select the most likely to be true and is left feeling that one of them must be valid. It’s either this Russian or those Russians—take your choice. Binary algorithmic processing always does the trick. In its perverse way, this can be compared to the “opportunity” Americans have in 2016 to express their deepest, most sincere democratic ideals by choosing between Clinton and Trump.

But we haven’t finished. As the article continues, following the threads suggested by Mook, we learn yet another technique for making the speculative appear to be substantial, this time with the key phrase—“would be among”: “But the theft from the national committee would be among the most important state-sponsored hacks yet of an American organization ...”

It combines a conditional (would be) and a superlative (most important), but of course we are told nothing either about the conditions or the points of comparison. It sounds dire, though, so it must be effective. And yet the implied dire comparison appears singularly weak when the journalists admit later in the article: “Intrusions for intelligence collection are hardly unusual, and the United States often does the same, stealing emails and other secrets from intelligence services and even political parties.”

And then, we get this: “It is unclear how WikiLeaks obtained the email trove. But the presumption is that the intelligence agencies turned it over, either directly or through an intermediary ... Moreover, the timing of the release ... seems too well planned to be coincidental.”

The lack of facts to work with couldn't be more obvious, but this doesn't prevent the journalists from getting the job done. Our thinking is carefully guided towards the desired form of speculation: "seems too well planned to be coincidental."

*Seems? Seems?* An honest journalist should take Hamlet's wisdom to heart and counter: "'Seems,' madam? Nay, it is. I know not 'seems.'" But "is" requires checking for truth. And if the truth isn't available, there will be no story.

Finally, the rhetoric moves to another dimension when the journalists consider another declared enemy of the United States, WikiLeaks: "But the release to WikiLeaks adds another strange element, because it suggests that the intelligence findings are being "weaponized"—used to influence the election in some way."

The concept itself is strange, *weaponized emails*. But the newspaper that did the most to support George W. Bush's pursuit of imaginary weapons of mass destruction in Iraq back in 2003 may well have developed a culture of seeing weapons everywhere.

## **CODA AND WARNING**

I hope that I have been able to establish that although appearing in a "newspaper of reference," this is clearly a partisan article that exploits sensationalism and a certain number of pop cultural memes at the expense of political analysis, but uses a degree of detail that makes it appear seriously analytical. Caveat lector. Let the reader beware.

This article exemplifies a certain type of journalism with a purpose and a style. The style may, in certain cases, obscure the purpose. We need to understand what journalists and politicians are trying to tell us. We need as a society to develop skills that enable us to do that. We live increasingly in a world of shifting perspectives and multiple subjectivities. We can and must acquire the tools to make sense of our world. A personal note: I studied literature in three universities in two different countries and somewhere along the line learned the importance of what we call close reading. This is the tool I've used to write this article.

Today, among politicians, all the emphasis in education is on what is called STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. Some generous souls would like to include the Arts to make a program called STEAM. In our hyper-technological world,

all of the arts are important, if only because they take us outside of and beyond our increasingly materially constructed environment of devices and gadgets, allowing us to achieve a more holistic view of the universe we live in.

Creativity and imagination, which can and should be applied to technology and mathematics, are born in the domain of the arts. They should always occupy an important place on their own and at the same time accompany the development of the technical competencies our 21<sup>st</sup> century civilization seems to privilege. Learning to read, unpack, deconstruct the texts that concern our lives is a particular skill we cultivate in the realm of one of the arts, literature. Largely neglected in the past and threatened in the present, it should be developed in schools. It is the only hope we have of making sense of a world in which we are all called upon to see ourselves as responsible citizens.

*\*Peter Isackson is the chief visionary officer of SkillScaper and the creator of innovative solutions for learning in the 21st century. This article is available online at [Fair Observer](#).*



# AUGUST

## Britain's Missed Opportunity to Reset Nuclear Button

Ian McCredie

August 2, 2016

*It is time the UK considered a more realistic set of security and defense policies that reflects its position in the world.*

Now that the UK is heading for Brexit and reconsidering her role in the world, the UK Parliament's decision to renew the Trident nuclear weapons program was a missed opportunity to recalibrate the UK's outmoded view of itself and its international role.

The original rationale behind UK's desire for an independent nuclear weapon capability disappeared at the same time as the risk that Western Europe could be overwhelmed by conventional armed forces from the Warsaw Pact—back in the day they had 55,000 tanks lined up against NATO's 5,000. The argument ran that the numerical superiority of the Warsaw Pact's conventional forces could quickly overrun all the combined NATO forces in Western Europe—including any US reinforcements that could be flown in—and that a swift military defeat could be achieved without launching any Soviet nuclear weapons.

This was the reality of the Soviet threat during the Cold War. The NATO strategy to prevent this happening was the assertion that NATO was willing to launch a first strike nuclear attack of such ferocity that the capability of the Soviet nuclear forces to retaliate would be decimated, the major cities of the USSR would be destroyed and the capability of the conventional invading forces obliterated. This was a real deterrent, and it worked.

### THE NEXT EUROPEAN WAR

But for the UK—and for France—the worry remained that this policy assumed that the NATO response in the face of the Soviet aggression would be unified. The lessons of



the First and Second World Wars reminded everyone that the US might decide to sit out the initial stages of the war while the Europeans settled their differences. The US government might decide that allowing a European conventional war to come to a resolution might be preferable to going nuclear and risking a nuclear bombardment of its own cities.

The US population and Congress may well be inclined to agree. [Ernie Bevin](#), the foreign secretary in Clement Attlee's government, was well aware of this in 1946. After a testy meeting with his US opposite number he said: "I don't want any other foreign secretary of this country to be talked to or at by a Secretary of State in the United States as I have just had in my discussions with Mr Byrnes. We've got to have this thing [a nuclear bomb] over here whatever it costs. We've got to have the bloody Union Jack on top of it."

The UK policy was set to ensure that the US would not have the option of sitting out the next European war because the UK could independently go nuclear and remove the possibility of the European conflict remaining sub-nuclear. A unilateral UK nuclear strike would, so the reasoning ran, be able to slow down the Soviet invasion of Western Europe and buy perhaps two or three weeks before the Warsaw Pact conventional forces regained their composure and resumed their march west.

But the US would have to consider the consequences for itself if the USSR retaliated with nuclear weapons—almost certainly against the US as well as UK targets. In reality such decisions would be made very quickly indeed and the result would almost certainly—at least in the minds of the Soviets—be that the UK would be able to force a US nuclear first strike against the USSR. In effect, a UK finger on the US nuclear trigger.

## **NUCLEAR BLACKMAIL**

This theory behind the need for an independent UK nuclear capability held up as long as the Warsaw Pact maintained enough conventional forces to overrun Europe. This is not the case now and the need for the UK to be able to force the US into initiating a nuclear exchange has evaporated.

So what is the point of the UK's independent nuclear capability? There is still a case for an allied nuclear weapon capability to deter nuclear weapon states and even those

with conventional forces from major military adventures—and to deter and to respond to those that might attempt nuclear blackmail—either from North Korea or even ISIS or al-Qaeda, if they ever captured a nuclear weapon. David Cameron [made this point](#) in 2013 when he said: “We cannot be sure on issues of nuclear proliferation, and to me having that nuclear deterrent is quite simply the best insurance policy that you can have, that you will never be subject to nuclear blackmail.”

But this deterrent is much better placed within the collective European and NATO response. It is not something that the UK has any good reason to attempt independently. The UK does not seek independence for its conventional military response—indeed quite the reverse—so why for its nuclear capability?

The sensible and thoughtful nuclear deterrent is one that is part of the collective defense of the NATO and European theater—not as an independent capability whose only real use is to oblige the US to come to the UK’s rescue.

## **SMOKE AND MIRRORS**

There is, however, massive amounts of pride, amour-propre and vanity tied up in this subject. We need only look at one: the UK’s permanent seat on the UN Security Council (UNSC). The status of the UK as a permanent member has become an anomaly. The UK gained this seat at a time when with its vast empire it was one of the victors of World War II and could assert that it ruled over and had legitimate interests in a quarter of the earth. It would have been odd for the UK to be left out.

But in 2016, the UK is a fraction of what it was in terms of its geographical interests, military reach, share of population and global GDP. For years the UK has fretted about losing the UNSC seat and has devoted significant resources to finding out about and thwarting the plans of the Indian, Brazilians, Indonesians, Germans and whoever else might think that a permanent seat was more rightly theirs than ours.

The trump card—at least in the UK government’s mind—is the UK independent nuclear status, though even that wears thin considering the Indians, and perhaps other contenders, have a nuclear capability too.

But take away the independent nuclear power card and what is left? Smoke and mirrors. Only the UK government is fooled by this. The reality is all too apparent to the rest of the world. [Kofi Annan](#) speaks for many as he recently put it:

*“I firmly believe that the [UN Security] council should be reformed: it cannot continue as it is. The world has changed and the UN should change and adapt. If we don’t change the council, we risk a situation where the primacy of the council may be challenged by some of the new emerging countries.”*

*“I think those in privileged positions will have to think hard and decide what amount of power they are prepared to release to make the participation of the newcomers meaningful. If they do that, they will get cooperation; if they don’t, we risk confrontation.”*

Instead of clinging to the past, a forward looking policy would be to seek a nuclear doctrine in sync with conventional military doctrine and a more sustainable role for the UK in international affairs—something for the new UK Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson to consider. The UK has many assets, and its nuclear capability and the UK UNSC seat still have value—for now.

The UK would be wiser to use them before they depreciate any further to negotiate a durable, more realistic set of security and defense policies that recognizes the real UK position in the world.

Collective nuclear security is a lot cheaper and more effective than an independent deterrent and the UK can spend the savings squandered in Trident on rebuilding its depleted conventional forces and rebalancing its security doctrine.

*\*Ian McCredie is a former senior British foreign service official. This article is available online at [Fair Observer](#).*



# Rio Olympics: Winds of Change or Tides of Turmoil?

Daniel Currie

August 4, 2016

*Can the Olympic Games help Brazil through its economic problems?*

As many sporting fans await the start of the Olympics, it is hardly an understatement that the host country, Brazil, faces a number of economic and political challenges. Some of the many problems include an ailing economy and an uncertain political situation. Other countries have also seen their share of problems leading up to the Olympics, from the Russian team's doping [scandal](#) to Pakistan's dire state of its sporting [facilities](#). Yet, as Brazil lurches from one [crisis](#) to another, it remains to be seen if the Olympics will help the country overcome its problems.

[The Economist](#) notes that Brazil enjoyed a period of economic growth of 2.2% year-on-year average from 2011 to 2014. Between 2002-2008, the country experienced an average GDP year-on-year growth rate of 3.5%. The article also noted that Brazil's unemployment rate even dipped below 5% for most of 2014. This was reflected by the National Index of Consumer Expectation as the statistic remained above 100 from 2008 until early 2015—a number above 100 indicates increasing confidence.

According to [Trading Economics](#), the consumer expectation measure “focuses on consumer's current financial situation and on expectations about inflation, unemployment, wages and major purchases for the next 6 months.”

## **ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL MALAISE**

These statistics seem to paint a rosy picture. However, Brazil has faced a number of severe problems that have compounded over the past five years. The fall in the commodity markets is especially painful for Brazil, considering that its commodity exports [comprised](#) more than 50% of total exports. From 2000 to 2013, China's annual [trade](#) with Brazil grew from \$2 billion to \$83 billion.

Yet as China grapples with its economic restructuring, Brazil suffered as commodity prices saw a sharp downturn.

These external problems were furthered by what John Lyons and Paul Kiernan of *The New York Times* have [reported](#) as the “resource curse.” Countries with abundant resources will benefit from great booms, but will inevitably fall into a trap of economic mismanagement and overvalued currencies.

The [European Central Bank](#) supports this, noting that Brazil has structural weaknesses ranging from poor infrastructure to a considerable informal sector. Such structural problems inevitably weigh on the economy, with the [GDP falling](#) by 3.8% in 2015. [Inflation](#) has now reached 8.84% in June year-on-year—considerably higher than the government-set target of 4.5%. The high inflation has forced the Central Bank to keep its [benchmark](#) interest rates of 14.25%.

With all these problems, Brazil’s credit rating has been reduced to junk [status](#) by Moody’s Investors Service, S&P and Fitch. With growing government debt and increasing interest payments, Brazil’s interim president, Michel Temer, will look to [cap](#) government spending.

As Brazil tries to put its economy together, the country still faces political difficulties. High-profile [corruption](#) clean-ups have implicated the oil giant, Petrobras, and several politicians. Suspended President Dilma Rousseff is currently undergoing an [impeachment trial](#) for [altering](#) the budget in her favor.

The Transparency International corruption perception index allocates a score of 100 to a “clean” country, while zero indicates the most corrupt. From 2014 to 2015, Brazil saw its score [fall](#) from 43 to 38.

## **OLYMPIC PROMISE**

With Brazil’s economy reeling, it is a wonder if the Olympics will be the boon that the country needs. Other than the sporting marvel that will come to Rio de Janeiro, the host city, there are some economic benefits. Around 350,000 tourists are [expected](#) to come and view both the Olympics and Paralympics, which means that there will be an increase in consumer spending. With an uptick in consumption of goods and services, this could translate to increased employment to serve the swell in tourism.

Kevin Daly, from Goldman Sachs, [wrote](#) about the London 2012 Olympics that there are longer-term benefits “such as the promotion of London and the UK as a tourist venues and as a potential location for investment.” Within the same report, Daly also mentioned that London may not accrue as many longer-term promotional benefits from its time hosting the Olympics because it is already known for tourism. The same could be said for [Rio](#).

The city could also benefit from increased investment that may not only boost the infrastructure for sporting events, but to also improve transportation and other venues. Indeed, Moody’s has [explained](#) that there will be benefits from the \$7.1 billion investment in the city’s infrastructure such as metro advances.

Investments such as these could be utilized in the future—lest they become “white elephants”—as Goldman Sachs economists Yu Song and Michael Buchanan stated in a [report](#) on the Beijing Olympics that “more than 90% of the total investment for the games was in telecommunications, transportation and utilities ... and most of this has been fully utilized since.” The positives from increased investments in Rio have also brought forth controversies through [forced evictions](#) and the fact that the [Olympic budget](#) has already been exceeded by 51%.

Yet, there are other factors that cannot be measured—from the promotion of the host country’s culture to the pride that comes from hosting the Olympics—as suggested by sports scientist [Holger Preuss](#). Daly, Song and Buchanan mention other benefits of promoting sport as well as healthy lifestyles and even increased environmental awareness—the final point specifically benefited Beijing.

Tim Toohey, researcher from Goldman Sachs, [stated](#) that “defining feature of whether the London Games provides a better economic return than the Sydney Games could well be the high degree of slack in the UK economy.” [Slack](#) refers to the amount of resources, which includes labor and capital that are currently unemployed. Brazil does face an unemployment [rate](#) of 11.2%. While labor and capital can be employed to help during the Olympics—whether it would be transitional use or not—the structural problems still remain.

In order for Brazil to benefit from the Olympic potential, it will have to rein in corruption and get rid of the uncertainty in the political system. It should also reduce its

dependency on commodity exports so as to not be susceptible to adverse changes in prices. With so much uncertainty in the economic and political realms, it may be best to simply enjoy the sporting marvel that the Olympics promises to be.

*\*Daniel Currie is the former economics editor at Fair Observer. This article is available online at [Fair Observer](#).*



# Trump's Comments on NATO Threaten European Security

Benjamin Denison

August 5, 2016

*Donald Trump's comments on NATO threaten to embolden Russia and reduce European security.*

With Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump continuing to make comments [praising](#) Russia, perhaps his worrying comment about his disinterest in [NATO](#) should not surprise us. However, Trump's contemplation over recognizing Russia's annexation of [Crimea](#), the business ties of his [advisors](#) and his generally positive [comments](#) about Vladimir Putin [worry](#) not only many Americans but many Eastern European allies as well.

Most worrying, however, is his continued [insistence](#) that his administration will not support certain NATO allies unless they pay more for the protection of the United States. While Trump insists that he can make a better deal for America, these comments about NATO and American alliance partners shows he fundamentally doesn't understand the intricacies of deal-making in the international political arena.

With Russia attempting to claim they are once again peer rivals with America, the continued commitment of the US to uphold its alliance commitments remains an imperative. As old Cold War boundaries have shifted from the Fulda Gap to the Baltic Sea following NATO expansion, the alliance remains relevant. Donald Trump's

misunderstanding of the partnership threatens to undermine American interests and security throughout Europe.

## **FLAWED LOGIC**

Trump's [main argument](#) over the NATO alliance system is that he would be reluctant to defend members of the alliance that are not paying their fair share into the budget. Two major problems emerge from his claim. First, more superficially, Trump seems to think NATO members are required to pay the United States for their defense rather than use their military spending for their own defense. The NATO treaty [requires](#) members to spend 2% of their GDP each year on the military to maintain a robust military force. This is in no way paying the US to defend them, and instead is helping create a robust defense force that the US will supplement.

However, the countries most threatened by Russia today, [Estonia and Poland](#), are meeting the 2% of GDP military spending threshold. Yet Trump continues to insist they pay for NATO protection, indicating a massive misunderstanding of how alliances and the Euro-Atlantic community operate.

Second, and more dangerously, Trump's lack of understanding of the basis of the NATO military alliance network completely undermines the deterrent value of the alliance and makes a Russian military action in Europe much more likely. Deterring a land grab by Russia requires three things: a clearly (1) communicated threat to defend the territory that is (2) credible and the alliance possesses the (3) capabilities to follow through on the threat. In his discussions of NATO, Trump undermines all three of these components of deterrence.

By claiming that he may not defend the territories if they are not paying for protection, he is directly removing the clearly-communicated threat the NATO alliance is based on. Further, by stating that he would have to think about whether it is worth defending fellow states from Russian aggression, makes the US and NATO look less credible in their threat of retaliation against Russia.

Finally, in his remarks that he is interested in removing some elements of or eliminating the NATO alliance structure, he is threatening to remove the capabilities that will deter Russian aggression as Russian capabilities far outstrip the militaries of Estonia, Poland and others. Combined, the comments by Trump are already worrying as they make



deterrence in the region more difficult and probably require a more prominent American presence in the region to reassure allies and dissuade Russia from land grabs.

## **SECURITY DILEMMA**

In addition, Trump's impact on reducing the deterrent capability of NATO would force Eastern European militaries to invest even more heavily in their militaries, which could make the Russians feel compelled to increase their force posture and view Eastern Europe as increasingly hostile. A reduced American presence and reduced NATO credibility in the region would create a security dilemma with both the Baltic states and Russia building up their military strength in the neighborhood. The threatening posture from the Baltic states would then give Russia a pretext to engage in a land grab (as they have already done in [Ukraine](#) and [Georgia](#)) without worrying about negative consequences. Or, more slyly, Russia might look to probe the defenses of the Baltics and test US resolve over whether they will defend their allies in the region.

Without a solid US deterrent backing Eastern European allies, Russia will feel free to try to regain its status as a great power and undermine the democratic societies created in post-communist Europe. Any policy platform that advocates for conditions that would invite Russian interference and military action in Eastern Europe is a failure. Trump's foreign policy platform that would remove the deterrent value of NATO and leave the Baltic states open to annexation is a total disaster.

After two decades of questioning the enduring legacy of NATO, the re-emergence of the Russian threat to the region reaffirms the need for NATO and the role of America in defending their interests in the region. The NATO system is a good deal for the US in the long term that enshrines the US as the dominant player in the Euro-Atlantic security hierarchy, allowing the US to reap the benefits of this position through basing, force posture and a secure economic market.

Creating a long-standing deterrent for Europe is also beneficial for the US as it prevents a military crisis in Europe from emerging that could necessitate a European or American response. Avoiding actions that could mandate military action or action by another close ally is a positive for American prosperity.

Ensuring that the deterrent remains robust is the best way to maintain the American interest in a stable and conflict-free Europe. Pushing that deterrent line east post-1991 creates a larger area of stability that should be embraced and protected. Trump's dangerous rhetoric threatens the alliance structure and the stability of the region, threatening all gains made in the region since the 1980s.

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# Why Latinos Support Donald Trump

Bryan Betancur

August 13, 2016

*No amount of semantic somersaulting can whitewash the racist overtones of Donald Trump's campaign.*

The [55 million](#) Latinos in the United States embody diversity. We come from African, European, Asian and indigenous backgrounds. We represent every shade of skin, eye and hair color. We are Catholic, Protestant, Muslim and Jewish. We run the political spectrum from conservative to liberal.

Our diversity is worth celebrating, which makes this article at once difficult and necessary to write. Difficult because Latinos, like all Americans, have the right to support the politicians who best represent their beliefs. Necessary because personal ideology must arise from thoughtful introspection, not from the unconscious effects of racism.

And, as difficult as it may be to accept, a Latino Donald Trump supporter is a textbook example of internalized oppression.

## LATINOS AND INTERNALIZED OPPRESSION

Internalized oppression is a complex process founded in repeated exposure to racism and discrimination. The internalization of these negative experiences can create

patterns of “[self-invalidation, self-doubt \[and\] fear](#)” among minorities and lead them to [believe and act out the stereotypes to which they have been exposed](#).

What’s worse, the unconscious self-hatred associated with internalized oppression often leads minorities to criticize each other in much the same way that they themselves are put down in the first place. For Latinos, this means blaming fellow Hispanics for stealing jobs or abusing social welfare.

Take, for instance, A.J. Delgado, a conservative Hispanic columnist and attorney. In a [radio interview](#) during the Republican National Convention (RNC), Delgado reiterated the narrative that Latinos “don’t want to have to compete with illegal immigrants for our jobs,” a claim that is [demonstrably false](#). In the interview, she claims to speak for all Hispanics.

I am the son of Colombian immigrants and, like many other Latinos, I do not fear competing with undocumented workers for jobs—and, to be fair, as a columnist and attorney, neither does Delgado. So why propagate the fallacy?

Such are the sounds of internalized oppression in today’s political climate. Trump’s inflammatory comments about minority groups have opened the doors to a large-scale display of Latino self-hatred.

He [accused Mexico of sending criminals and rapists](#) into the US. He has called for the mass deportation of undocumented immigrants and the construction of a wall at the US-Mexico border. He [declared a judge unfit](#) to preside over the Trump University case because of his Mexican ancestry.

In short, Trump has turned every racist comment anyone has ever directed at me into a political platform. He embodies every “go back to where you came from,” every “of course the criminal was Latino, you people are violent,” every “you’re Colombian, you must do a lot coke” I heard growing up, and he has told America that such vitriol is acceptable.

In a recent [NPR interview](#), Jacob Montilijo Monty, a Hispanic immigration attorney, acknowledged that the idea of building a wall and deporting tens of millions of undocumented immigrants “is not practical,” but nonetheless, he justified Trump’s proposal as the “rhetoric [and] words” of a businessman who “can bring people

together.” Monty affirmed that he could “see ... beyond the words” of stereotype and bigotry.

So, too, did Ralph Alvarado, a Kentucky senator and one of the few Hispanic speakers at the RNC. Like Monty, Alvarado says that while Trump “[may not say things the way you want him to say it](#),” the Republican presidential nominee is worth supporting because “he’s straight up on things.”

Delgado took a more nuanced approach to Trump’s comments regarding Mexican immigrants: “He didn’t say Mexicans were [rapists]. He said some were that crossed over the border, and that’s fact ... Literally it is fact that some people who come over the border are criminals.”

Why would Hispanics try so hard to justify attacks against their own?

Delgado used the inclusive “we” in her interview, and I found her semantic choice telling of an unconscious attempt to ease the self-hatred associated with internalized oppression. The argument seems straightforward: If all Hispanics agree with Trump, then his message is not bigoted and Latino Trump supporters are not advocating against their own people.

Unfortunately, Delgado and other Latino Trump apologists do not speak on behalf of Hispanics, most of whom [support Hillary Clinton](#). Trump did not say “some” illegal immigrants are rapists—rather, he merely “assumed” “some ... are good people.” He *assumed* some are “good” but spoke as if he *knew* that many are criminals. And while “literally” *some* illegal immigrants are rapists, the same is true of *some* whites, yet that does not excuse racist generalizations.

## **IT’S BIGOTRY**

No amount of semantic somersaulting can whitewash the racist overtones of Trump’s platform. Latinos cannot claim to hold Hispanics’ interests at heart and then mince words to justify derogatory comments directed at their community.

You can call Trump’s hurtful bombast “rhetoric,” or you can be honest and call it bigotry. Saying that immigrants are criminals is no less racist coming from a well-dressed billionaire at a podium than from a child in a schoolyard.

I heard plenty of derogatory comments growing up, and it was tempting to play along for the sake of fitting in, particularly during the difficult years of identity formation. But blatant racism is never acceptable, and sugar-coating it as “joking around” during adolescence is no less evidence of internalized oppression than calling it “brutal honesty” as an adult.

If you are a Latino conservative and agree with the Republican stance on trade, foreign policy and social issues such as abortion and marriage rights, I understand and respect your commitment to the Party. But when it comes to immigration policy, take hold of that urge to support Trump and ask yourself where it comes from. You know what racism looks and sounds like—you have been exposed to it your entire life.

Now we must come to terms with the effects of those experiences, to realize the insidious power of internalized oppression. If you want Hispanics to thrive, do not uphold ideology meant only to exclude us. Speak for us, not against us.

*\*Bryan Betancur is an assistant professor of Spanish at Furman University. This article is available online at [Fair Observer](#).*



## **China is Diving into the Gulf, But For How Long?**

Jeffrey Payne

August 15, 2016

*It's getting harder for Beijing to sell the story of non-interference in affairs of sovereign states.*

Like most other major global powers that have preceded it, China is becoming entangled in the Middle East. A friendlier region to its interests than its own neighborhood in East Asia, China found in the Middle East an attractive zone for building economic ties. It did not come to the region with much baggage and, as a result, found itself a trusted partner of virtually every state in the Middle East and North

Africa (MENA). China's warm welcome throughout MENA encouraged Beijing to deepen its footprint—especially in the development and energy sectors.

The problem is that the MENA region is currently in tumult. State failure, civil war and regional conflict have all emerged simultaneously and in different ways have threatened the interests of every involved actor. China, for its part, continues to claim that it adheres to its tradition of non-interference in the affairs of other sovereign states and neutrality in regional disputes, but it is getting harder for Beijing to sell that story. China, whether they like it or not, has invested in the MENA region in such a way that it is now a party to some of the region's most heated disagreements. No dispute looms larger and has more significant implications for Beijing than that of the proxy competition between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

## **CHINA IN WEST ASIA**

The MENA region—or what China calls West Asia—has been a critical area for Beijing for several decades. China's booming economy constantly required greater energy resources to fuel growth, and the MENA region was an accessible locale for obtaining necessary fossil fuels.

Additionally, rising tensions with its neighbors throughout East Asia and increased pressure to find new market access for commodities [encouraged](#) the Chinese state to seize new opportunities in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The MENA region offered more opportunities than most—the region, beyond being resource rich, was actively looking to build stronger economic and diplomatic relations throughout East Asia. Beijing created a presence in Libya, Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Israel and Turkey, among others. Of chief importance were Saudi Arabia and Iran. Both are relatively stable states in an unstable region, possess immense natural resource wealth and can effectively serve as a target for strategic economic investment.

China's interest in the MENA region only intensified upon the implementation of the [One Belt, One Road Initiative](#), or what is called OBOR. The initiative is one of President Xi Jinping's prominent foreign policy efforts and calls for the construction of communicative, infrastructural and transportation networks that connect Europe with China. The initiative or, more appropriately, strategy, follows two paths—a maritime path that goes through the Indian Ocean and a continental path that flows through

Central Asia and the Middle East. The [intent](#) of OBOR is to initiate a period of intense development throughout Asia and eastern Africa, while easing the distance between China and its largest trading partner—the European Union (EU). OBOR has made existing multilateral groups, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, more important for Asia and led to the creation of new institutions to assist development, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.

For China, OBOR is a means to further expand trade, make obtaining natural resources easier, enhance China's regional reputation, and to strengthen underdeveloped western provinces within China. The downside of OBOR is that it is a massively expensive undertaking through regions that are prone to instability. More importantly, the deeper China's footprint becomes in Eurasia and elsewhere, the more important it becomes to protect investments against potential loss. In other words, the more economically tied China becomes with nations to its west, the less likely it is that China can remain removed from regional politics.

## **THE GULF PROBLEM**

The risk of Beijing's increased foreign engagement is represented by China's current situation in the Gulf. A decade ago, China was a rising, reliable consumer of Saudi and Iranian oil and other natural resources. Beijing had very little to do with politics in the MENA region and operated under the notion of being an opponent to none and a friend to all.

Today, China finds itself with a much different footing in the Gulf. China remains Saudi Arabia's largest petroleum customer and several high profile [joint ventures](#) between Saudi and Chinese firms have created durable ties between both nations. In Iran, China's forceful, if private, [support](#) for a nuclear agreement helped the P5+1 talks succeed. Since then, China has actively sought to comprehensively intensify its ties with most sectors of the Iranian economy.

China, due to changing domestic economic conditions and the forces of OBOR, has substantially increased its engagement throughout MENA. The scale of China's interests in the region has made it one of the most active non-regional actors throughout the Middle East. China's prevailing political interest in the MENA region is stability, but Beijing's intensified interest just happened to correspond with the Arab Spring and its aftermath, one of the most unstable periods in recent history throughout

the Middle East. This regional instability has been off-putting for the leadership in Beijing, so China has become more vocal in its support for stable regimes and the forces within the region that in Beijing's accounting have the best chance to enhance stability.

## **BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE**

Thus, Iran and Saudi Arabia are critically important states for China, now more than ever. Unfortunately, the peak of China's interest comes at the same time as the intensification of the Saudi-Iranian rivalry that is being undertaken through proxies in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and elsewhere. This rivalry is difficult to navigate. Beijing's [approach](#) to Syria, for instance, has consistently argued that stability should be the first goal and until another actor emerges that can effectively lead, President Bashar al-Assad and his regime must remain the faction in charge of Syria. This interpretation of events in Syria is purely premised on China's regional economic interests and has very little to do with geopolitics, but backing Assad means that China supports the same faction as Iran and opposes Saudi Arabia.

OBOR, due the geographic elements of the continental route, [emphasizes](#) Iran over any other MENA state. Beijing has consistently pointed out that the benefits of OBOR will be felt by the entire region, but geography cannot be denied. For OBOR to work, railways, telecommunication systems, port facilities, bridges and more comprehensive economic projects will be built in Iran. Such investment will inevitably assist the Iranian economy and make it a stronger rival for Saudi Arabia.

Beijing understands the increasingly difficult situation it finds itself in the Gulf. During President Xi's January 2016 [visit](#) to the Middle East, he made sure to visit both Riyadh and Tehran to combat any perception of China favoring one over the other. Yet China's plans do seemingly support Iran over Saudi Arabia, and this has been noted by both Saudi Arabia and its regional partners in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

Will China's actions lead to a decline in China-Saudi Arabia ties? No, but the impression that China will not back Riyadh in its opposition to Iran's influence will harden the perception that China cannot be relied upon in the long term. Likewise, the appearance of Beijing's support for Tehran could be misinterpreted by the Iranians as ratification of their regional aspirations.



The scope of Chinese engagement in the Middle East has reached a scale where it seems natural for China to begin to develop certain key friendships with regional states. Thus far, Beijing resists such actions. China's leaders believe they can continue to navigate the region's politics without blowback. Yet, as China's investment portfolio grows even further and becomes more entangled in global issues like countering violent extremism, the ability to act internationally without reliable friends will become a hindrance. Today, China can pretend it does not see the MENA region's political crises, but one day soon that luxury will no longer be affordable.

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# The False Sense of Secularism Behind France's Burkini Ban

Susannah Savage

August 26, 2016

*France's veiled prescription of what Islam should be is a poor guise of secularism for the country's citizens and migrants.*

Burkinis are "[not compatible with French values](#)," said Prime Minister Manuel Valls on August 17. He was defending the French mayors who have recently banned the body swimsuits, usually worn by Muslim women, from beaches. Cannes and Nice are among 30 seaside towns in France to have issued bans. On August 26, the high court in France [suspended the ban](#) in Villeneuve-Loubet, stating that the move "seriously and clearly illegally breached fundamental freedoms."

## FRANCE'S FOUNDING PRINCIPLES

To many outside the country, particularly the more liberal, it seems that the government is intervening where it has no business to, dictating what Muslim women should and should not wear. But within France, the ban has broad support. Those on the right and the left both see banning the burkini as an act that defends women's rights, as well as religious freedom.

[“I don’t think anyone should tell women what they can and can’t wear,”](#) Sadiq Khan, the mayor of London, said during a visit to Paris. Many left-wingers across the world would agree with him. But for the French left, the burkini, like the [burqa and the niqab](#) (full-face veil), is a symbol of male oppression. Women are made to cover their bodies so men can control them. If Muslim women have chosen to wear a burkini or burqa themselves, this is because their culture prescribes the limits of that choice. It was not really a choice at all. As such, so the argument goes, Muslim women need to be protected from oppressive garments like the burkini in the name of equality.

The only hitch is that this infringes on another of France’s founding principles: liberty. Nonetheless, this is a sacrifice that France’s socialists, and several others of their compatriots, are willing to make.

## **FRENCH SECULARISM**

The chief justification for banning the burkini is France’s famed *laïcité*. Since 1905, the country has vigorously separated matters of church and state. This is implemented across all public spheres. School children do not receive religious education; religious dress is banned in public institutions; and politicians, though not obliged to, generally avoid discussing their own religious beliefs with zealous determination. In short, secularism is at the center of France’s national identity.

Yet *laïcité*—originally introduced to combat Catholic authoritarianism—has become a weapon wielded by the French government over its Muslim population.

Banning burkinis from beaches is just the latest example of the French state stepping in to curb Muslims’ actions and forms of expression—in a way that seems to go beyond secularist measures applied to other religious groups, particularly Catholics. Niqabs and hijabs (headscarves) are banned from state schools, as are conspicuous Christian and Jewish symbols. Since 2010, however, burqas and niqabs have been banned from public places altogether.

Burkini-wearing causes offense to France’s mayors and ministers, as well as many of its people, not just because it is seen as an act of defiance against French secularism, but because, for them, it also symbolizes a wider refusal to integrate and become “French.” Adhering to *laïcité* is part of this identity.

But, for some, being French means more than just limiting one's religion to their private life. It also carries with it veiled prescriptions on what that religion should be. The French are attached to their secularism, but this does not mean that many of them are not also attached to the country's Catholic, or at least Christian, cultural heritage.

There are large and numerous exceptions, but to a great extent France is not yet comfortable with Islam, nor with many of the multiple forms of Islamic culture that are, today, thriving in the country. *Laïcité* is a convenient tool for forcing French Muslims to, outwardly at least, assimilate and adopt cultural practices that the government and much of society feel more at ease with.

## **DEEPENING DIVISIONS, NOT HEALING**

This is not to suggest that France is a country of xenophobes. Far from it. The mistrust and misunderstanding between communities in France has much to do with poor integration policies. Most migrants from North Africa and the Middle East, even after several generations, find themselves living surrounded by other migrants in the *banlieues* (suburbs) of big cities like Paris and Marseilles. With higher rates of poverty and worse schools than in other parts of these cities, migrant communities lack the opportunities that might foster social mobility and integration.

The French government's overeager assertion of *laïcité* for Muslims also derives from fears of terrorism. Over the last few years, France has been targeted more than any other western European country. Since terrorists charged into the offices of *Charlie Hebdo* in January 2015, French citizens have been shot, stabbed and killed.

The burkini, [Prime Minister Valls has suggested](#), is not simply a fully body swimsuit, much like a wetsuit, but a symbol of political Islam. Women sporting burkinis on France's beaches are akin to recruitment adverts for militant Islamists. For the government to allow them to do this would amount to an admission of defeat at the hands of its terrorist enemies.

The French government has good reason to fear Islamic radicalization, but singling out Muslims under the guise of secularism is more likely to encourage it than prevent it.

Some argue that counterterrorism is not the point. With the burkini ban, France's local and national politicians are simply preparing for the 2017 presidential election, pandering to an electorate universally terrified by recent terrorist attacks.

This is certainly true. Right-wing voters who feel that "French culture" is under threat will feel particularly comforted by the sight of police patrolling beaches, [forcing Muslim women to remove their burkinis](#). As will others, including those on the left, who believe a religious symbol that is so often tied to female oppression can never be a choice.

The government's endorsement of the ban, or more importantly the consequences of this, cannot just be dismissed as a political stunt, albeit a successful one. For most French Muslims, being French and Muslim are not incompatible, but by suggesting there is a choice to be made—and doing so with such aggression—France is playing a risky game.

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## Immigration is a Tale of Two Countries

Ivan Farias Pelcastre, Emmanuel Gomez Farias Mata and Silvia Adriana Sanchez de la Rosa

August 29, 2016

*Germany and Mexico must remain vigilant to prevent public perceptions from negatively impacting their asylum, refugee and migration policies.*

Germany is facing the most important immigration crisis in its history since World War II. The recent attacks that took place on three consecutive days in [Munich](#), [Reutlingen](#) and [Ansbach](#) broke the fragile peace that reigned in the country after the Islamic State-linked attacks in [Würzburg](#) and [Hanover](#) earlier this year. These unfortunate events, which are all regarded as part of the latest wave of terrorist attacks to hit Europe, have renewed criticism toward the open-door asylum policy that German Chancellor Angela Merkel has [vehemently pursued and defended](#).

The fact that the state of Bavaria was the main point of entry for many refugees and the target of the recent attacks by asylum seekers has left a bitter feeling among Germans. Just months ago, German citizens had warmly welcomed refugees arriving on board the trains from Hungary following their treacherous journey from Syria and other areas of the Middle East and across eastern Europe.

In 2015, many homes and buildings in Munich, Berlin and other [German cities displayed signs](#) of “Welcome, Refugees.” Now, the so-called immigration crisis has politically polarized German society. Today, popular demands and proposals to swiftly combat the terrorist threat have taken the place of such welcoming attitudes.

## **INCREASING SECURITY OR INFRINGING RIGHTS?**

Increasingly, some sectors of German civil society are [openly calling to review](#) and retract the freedom of movement and political liberties that the country granted to and upheld for its citizens and inhabitants until just recently. So far, some of the demands that seem to be gaining ground in the political discourse in Germany include: setting stricter border controls within the Schengen area and German borders themselves; expanding personal data holding programs on German and foreign citizens; increasing the number of police officers on the streets of Bavaria and the rest of Germany; and even using the army to safeguard public places.

Worryingly, many of such demands and the resulting policy proposals are aimed specifically at two particularly vulnerable groups: new immigrants and refugees. They include, for instance, the decision to process the deportations of irregular immigrants more expeditiously (regardless of [human rights concerns](#) of doing so), and monitoring refugee camps more closely (therefore, blurring the line between [sanctuary and ghetto](#)).

Bringing the issue of immigration to the realm of national security has created a dilemma between the German government’s priorities and societal preferences. Until recently, Merkel and her cabinet had directed the government’s attention and efforts at promoting and sustaining the image of Germany as a country willing and eager to become a haven for persecuted and displaced people from around the world—especially from the Middle East.

After the recent attacks, however, some sectors of society appear to believe that Germany's borders, police and military forces cannot adequately protect them from global terrorism and organized crime. Increasingly, immigrants and refugees in Germany are seen as a danger that must be addressed and controlled. Hence, the government's priority has rapidly shifted toward regulating immigration flows and managing and enforcing its borders more strictly.

## **PERCEPTIONS AND POLICY IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

As with any other government, the kind of immigration policy that the German government pursues and sustains is also based on the perceptions that its people have about borders and immigrants. Should the immigration phenomenon be perceived as an opportunity, the government's priority will then move away from security and enforcement and on to the effective integration of immigrants into society for its benefit. Achieving this latter objective is not only possible, but has already been done in previous decades.

During the 1950s, the German Federal Republic welcomed the *Gastarbeiter* (guest workers) in response to the labor shortages that followed World War II. In need of rebuilding itself but facing a shortage of low-skilled labor, the government recruited mostly male workers from Italy, Spain, Yugoslavia, Greece, Portugal, Tunisia, Morocco, South Korea and Turkey through bilateral agreements with these countries set up in collaboration with West German employment offices.

The programs were generally considered successful. By the end of the boom years of foreign recruitment in 1973, the level of qualification of these workers remained relatively low, and most of them were employed and remained in low-skilled jobs. This issue had not been of concern to the government or the public. It was thought that the program responded only to the temporary demand for labor and that, by the end of it, foreign workers would simply leave. Nonetheless, when the workers did not leave and instead permanently settled in the country, German society gradually integrated them—albeit [not without problems](#).

## **NEW IMMIGRANTS, NEW CHALLENGES**

The experiences of today's immigrants to Germany, however, have been very different from those of their counterparts in the early 1960s. First, their arrival is not the outcome

of a search for better job opportunities, but a forced departure from their homes in Syria, Afghanistan, Serbia, Kosovo, Iraq, Albania, Eritrea, Pakistan, Somalia and Ukraine due to wars and domestic conflicts. Such conflicts have caused a wave of asylum applications that has been steadily rising since 2011.

This phenomenon, along with an increase in the number of immigrants from the European Union, has brought the total number of foreigners in Germany to 10.9 million—a figure with which not all sectors of the German population feel comfortable. On the one hand, some sectors, including the [German left and the Social Democrats](#) (CDU), as well as a large number of intellectuals, look favorably on the open-door policy of Germany and the arrival of refugees. On the other hand, there are groups like PEGIDA, or Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the West, and the radical right. These groups argue that “uncontrolled” immigration from the Middle East has exacerbated the prevailing social and economic disparities existing in the country and has disrupted and threatened their lives and German society as a whole.

The perception of foreigners as a threat to Germany has become a headache for the country’s government and institutions. Initially, Merkel had sought to show a “[friendly face](#)” to refugees, which she upheld with more conviction than most of her fellow party members in the Christian Democratic Party. Now, she is being pressed into choosing between helping refugees, or responding to the [demands of the public and her party](#) to take a tougher stance on the fight against immigration.

## **GERMANY AND MEXICO COMPARED**

Surprisingly, the political debate and infighting that Germany is currently undergoing to ensure the civil liberties of its people while protecting the security of the country has parallels with Mexico. While Mexico has historically been a [source country](#) for migrants, from the 1940s onward, it also started to become a [host country](#). Therefore, it has experienced similar problems to Germany.

In those years, Mexico witnessed the arrival of tens of thousands of [refugees from the Spanish Civil War](#), as well as others escaping from European countries that had been [invaded by Nazi Germany](#). Similarly, three decades later, a large number of Lebanese, Argentines and Chileans left for Mexico, fleeing civil wars and political persecution in their countries. Likewise, in the 1980s, Mexico welcomed and became

a [transit country for millions of refugees](#) from the civil wars in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala.

Immigrants, especially refugees, were perceived in a positive light in Mexico, and their status in the country benefited from such a view. At that time, for instance, Mexico's policy of open arms toward Central American refugees sharply contrasted with the unwavering refusal of the United States to provide asylum. Such perceptions and policies resulted in one of the largest increases in the number of immigrants to the country. By 2000, the [number of Central American immigrants](#) in Mexico had reached about 40,000 people. In 2015, that figure had surpassed the 60,000 mark.

With the rapid increase of immigrants, including those en route to the US via Mexico, [perceptions about migrants](#) soon changed and [their circumstances in Mexico quickly degraded](#). Law enforcement agents as well as criminal groups began profiting from [human trafficking](#) across Mexico's borders, while Mexicans in general began developing a negative view of immigration, especially from Central America. Consequently, [immigration policies](#) toward the region began hardening.

Paradoxically, the discrimination and xenophobia that many Mexican migrants still endure in the US were reproduced by Mexico's government and citizens against Central American immigrants. For instance, in 2015, [Mexico deported more Central American](#) immigrants than the US. In Mexico, just as in Germany, borders began to be thought of as "floodgates" against the immigration upsurge.

## **THE IMPACT OF POPULAR PERCEPTIONS ON IMMIGRATION POLICY**

It is worth noting that in Mexico, just as in Germany, the government does not regard immigrants as a national security threat. On the contrary, Mexico has traditionally been a refugee receiving country and, over the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it also became a transit country. However, at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the country started receiving more and more immigrants. Increasingly, it has become a reluctant host to many Central American migrants who have escaped the [wave of violence](#) that has hit their countries and have failed to enter the US.

Such a rapid increase in the number of immigrants is [an issue of concern to the Mexican government](#). Without adequate attention and support from the government, it is thought that such groups could become an economic burden to society or even a



potential risk to public safety. One of such concerns, for example, is that if they are not provided with employment alternatives, they could be recruited by organized crime groups.

Views such as these have led individuals in both countries to speak of immigrants and refugees in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as “qualitatively different” to those who arrived in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While the immigrants and refugees of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are usually considered as integrated socially, economically and culturally, their counterparts of the 21<sup>st</sup> are regarded as a collective threat to the security and wellbeing of Germany and Mexico.

Such a view of immigrants as a “danger” has alienated both local populations and newcomers. This hinders the effective communication, adequate integration, collaboration and mutual support that are the pillars of any society.

By toughening their immigration policies, Mexico and Germany are not only closing the doors to a social phenomenon that inevitably accompanies economic, political and social globalization. They are also breeding a critical mass of tension and mistrust within their countries which, as seen in Germany, could lead to harmful and deplorable attacks against civilians.

To meet these challenges, Germany and Mexico must seek progressive and sustained integration of newcomers. In the search for solutions, immigration should be understood as a complex and heterogeneous phenomenon, produced by economic differences between countries; historically-rooted patterns in bilateral relations; family and community ties; and political or humanitarian crises, such as those that have created the current flows between the [Middle East and Germany](#), and [Central America and Mexico](#). Unfortunately, many of these issues appear to be increasingly disregarded in the current immigration policies of both countries.

## **RESTORING TOLERANCE, RESTORING SECURITY**

A large number of civil society groups in Mexico and Germany seem to have radicalized their attitudes and perceptions toward immigrants and refugees. For conservative groups and politicians in both countries (although more evidently in Germany), immigrants have become a “danger” to be contained. In domestic and international contexts marked by insecurity, terrorism and organized crime, the

radicalization of such a discourse has led to the exclusion (and, in extreme cases, persecution) of immigrants and refugees, making these groups even more vulnerable.

The radicalization of anti-immigrant discourse makes both societies more likely to witness hate crimes within their borders—making them, in turn, more insecure for everyone. Germany and Mexico must remain vigilant to prevent public perceptions from negatively impacting their asylum, refugee and migration policies.

In previous decades, immigration to these countries had been a source of prosperity and well-being to both immigrants and host societies. By all means, Germany and Mexico could still see such a tolerant and mutually beneficial relationship restored early in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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# SEPTEMBER

## In Greece, Syriza Jeopardizes Freedom of the Press

Polina Popova

September 2, 2016

*The Greek government has been taking steps that curb the country's freedom of the press.*

While outside media coverage of Greece this summer has focused on the migrants stranded at the gates of Europe, the far-left Syriza party continues to juggle the state's astronomical debt and contentious negotiations over bailouts and harsh austerity measures.

The [just-completed sale](#) of new television licenses has become the latest battleground, as the government effectively forces some stations off the air through a new media licensing regime. While the government claims the policy will [reduce media corruption](#) and increase revenue, critics charge it is a blatant attempt to control the media for Syriza's own political purposes. According to this narrative, the move is just the latest in a string of actions by Syriza to enhance its own power and weaken its opponents.

Over past several months, Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras and his party have taken several steps to shore up their position in power in the face of poor polling. One particularly blatant move was a plan to change the way parties are awarded seats in the Greek parliament. In July, Syriza's leadership moved to eliminate the 50-seat bonus typically awarded to the party with the most votes, instituting a truly proportional representation system.

Many suspected the plan was [actually intended](#) to mitigate losses to Syriza's main rival, the center-right opposition New Democracy party. Without bonus seats, the thinking went, New Democracy would need Syriza as a coalition partner in order to

form a government. Furthermore, the new system could have caused New Democracy to break apart, encouraging members to split and form their own parties instead.

As the parliament's refusal to let Tsipras [immediately institute](#) these changes goes to show, the rest of the establishment fears further chaos in a political system that went through two general elections in 2015.

## **FALSE STARTS**

Given the false starts and outright double-speak that has dogged Tsipras' government since it took power 19 months ago, the Greek premier has not exactly earned the trust needed to enact such reforms. The most egregious, of course, was last year's much-hyped referendum on austerity. [Despite campaigning](#) against a bailout deal with creditors and asking Greek voters to support them—which they did in the July 2015 referendum—Tsipras [turned around](#) and quickly approved wide-ranging austerity measures. These included substantial pension adjustments, a hike in value added and corporate taxes, collective bargaining reform, privatization, pay cuts for public employees and strict public spending limits.

Tsipras asserted he had no choice but to pass the measures in order to keep Greece in the eurozone, but many of his political allies and European observers (former Italian leader Mario Monti [among them](#)) saw it as a betrayal of democracy.

Even when going along with European demands for privatization and reform, Syriza has undermined confidence in itself. For example, the government has attempted to nationalize and resell already privatized infrastructure assets, as was the case when it [offered](#) the Skaramangas shipyard to potential Chinese buyers.

## **FLOW OF INFORMATION**

The controversial media reform measures might turn out to be yet another blemish on the government's record. Despite its justifications, there is plenty of reason for skepticism that Syriza can truly act as a disinterested arbiter in determining which television networks can stay on the air. To be certain, Greece does not have a stellar media landscape, with the industry run by a [small handful of powerful interests](#) who dictate the flow of information.

Harsh austerity measures have left private media outlets in dire financial straits, forcing layoffs of many journalists. Much of Greek media income comes from government advertising and subsidies, helping create a culture in which journalists are reluctant to criticize the government. Non-mainstream publications have been subject to a number of lawsuits for uncovering government scandals.

Syriza's move to [limit](#) the number of national TV broadcast licenses to four (down from eight at present) is ostensibly meant to close off avenues for corruption and make the surviving networks more commercially viable. However, the bidding process was handled not by Greece's independent regulatory authority, but by the government itself. Thanks to a small number of stations, the government can now more easily wield influence through the distribution of public advertising and the control of licensure.

The European Union (EU) has expressed its concerns over the course of press freedom in Greece, feeding into an [already-vociferous debate](#) over the media's independence from the government.

If Syriza is trying to assert control over Greek media, Tsipras and his political allies could reach out to their acquaintances in Moscow for advice. Greece's current government, after all, has already positioned itself as a [close and reliable ally](#) for Russian President Vladimir Putin and his inner circle within the EU.

The evolution of the Russian media landscape since Putin first came to power offers a masterclass in how a supposedly independent press can be brought to heel, with the state [dictating the flow](#) of information and developing international channels (like Sputnik and Russia Today) to broadcast the Kremlin's talking points to an international audience.

Of course, Tsipras doesn't necessarily need an international platform for his purposes. He simply needs friendlier domestic coverage to help keep his party in [striking distance](#) in the polls.

*\*Polina Popova is a Russian-British writer and journalist. This article is available online at [Fair Observer](#).*



# The Philippine “Punisher” Could Be a Man of Peace

Mong Palatino

September 3, 2016

*How has Rodrigo Duterte fared as president of the Philippines 100 days after taking office?*

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte is hitting headlines for all the wrong reasons. He has threatened to pull the Philippines out of the United Nations (UN); he has ridiculed diplomats; he is [unapologetic for making rape jokes](#); and the most serious case against him is his [alleged involvement](#) in the spate of drug-related extrajudicial killings across the country.

Yet this seemingly madman on the loose is also the same statesman who has brokered a landmark peace initiative with communist rebels barely two months after assuming the presidency. In fact, Duterte has already achieved what his predecessors in the past 30 years have failed or refused to do: Draft an indefinite ceasefire agreement with the group behind Asia’s longest-running insurgency.

So, how do we make sense of Duterte’s contradictory priorities? Is he a ruthless killer of petty drug lords who is intent on hiding his misdeeds by presenting himself as a peacemaker? Or is he a sincere reformer whose commitment to upholding peace and prosperity for the benefit of all is overshadowed by the vicious “war on drugs”?

## “DIRTY HARRY” FROM DAVAO

Duterte was mayor of Davao City for three decades before becoming a prominent national figure in 2015 when he ran for president. He claims to have made Davao a safer city for both residents and investors by fighting crime and corruption. His tough methods against criminal suspects earned him both praise and criticism. He was called “Dirty Harry” and “The Punisher” by the media, while some human rights advocates tagged him as the real brains behind the notorious vigilante group known as Davao Death Squad.

Due to his anti-crime advocacy, various groups in the capital Manila urged him to run for president. The clamor snowballed into a popular grassroots movement, which led to his [electoral victory](#) in May 2016.

Duterte's win was phenomenal. The political and cultural significance of his rise to power is quite similar to the victory of US President Barack Obama in 2008.

The new leader of the Philippines defeated the administration candidate and other politicians with bigger political machineries and resources. Duterte became the first president from Mindanao, an impoverished island that symbolizes the oppression of Muslims and other minorities by the Manila-based elite.

During the campaign, Duterte condemned the oligarchs for perpetuating poverty, and he mocked the ineffective and corrupt leadership of traditional politicians.

His populist messaging worked because he was seen as an underdog candidate, an outsider challenging the status quo, a man of the masses, and a simple mayor from a city in the remote region of Mindanao. Other candidates also promised change, but Duterte's nonconformist brand of leadership proved to be more popular and credible.

His principal campaign tactic was to focus on his crusade against organized crime—in particular, his plan to wipe out drug syndicates. Duterte vowed to accomplish this in three to six months. He warned that it would be a brutal war against the drug protectors, financiers and their well-entrenched operators on the ground.

There were those who thought Duterte was simply making a sensational remark to attract more votes. It may be true, but as things stand today, it seems the president is hell-bent on fulfilling his bloody promise.

## **EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLINGS**

The killings started a few days after the May election. Suspected drug peddlers were found dead almost daily in the streets—their bodies [covered with piece of cardboard containing a message that implored the public to reject illegal drugs](#). Some believe the killings were the handiwork of dirty cops who wanted to silence potential witnesses who might expose their links to drug cartels. Others think the police were sending a

message of support to the incoming president's plan to launch an all-out war on illegal drugs.

After Duterte became president on June 30, the killings intensified. Some of the killings were attributed to the police and vigilante groups. In other cases, the police reasoned that criminal gangs could be involved due to their attempts to liquidate rivals. But the majority of killings involved suspected drug mules and pushers who were killed after violently resisting arrest or while under police custody.

Duterte blamed drug lords for the rampant killings. He praised the police for the vigorous campaign to eliminate the scourge of illegal drugs in communities. He [released a list](#) of politicians, judges and police generals who have suspected ties to drug lords.

Only two months after the inauguration of the new government, almost 2,000 suspected drug operators [had been were killed](#) by the police. The number of dead bodies continues to rise every day. Disturbingly, the majority of dead drug pushers were from urban poor *barangays* (villages).

The human rights community was quick to denounce the extrajudicial killings, which have mainly victimized the poor and powerless. Lawyers pressed for the respect of due process. Some senators voiced alarm over the sudden rise of drug-related deaths. Activists reminded Duterte about the futility of the militarist approach in solving the drug menace if the people's socioeconomic needs are not addressed.

But President Duterte and the police are relentless as they refuse to acknowledge the traumatic and terroristic impact of their violent anti-drug campaign in poor communities.

## **DUTERTE: THE TRUMP OF THE PHILIPPINES?**

Aside from his uncompromising stance, Duterte has hit back at critics whom he maliciously accused of being supporters of drug lords and criminals. He has insulted opposition lawmakers and mocked the work of human rights groups, and he has threatened to declare martial law if the Supreme Court challenges his anti-drug campaign.



When UN agencies issued a statement of concern about the extrajudicial killings, Duterte retorted that the United Nations is “[inutile](#)” in solving conflicts across the world. He cursed at diplomats, telling them to stop interfering in Philippine affairs.

Duterte has been compared to US presidential candidate Donald Trump because of his politically incorrect and provocative remarks that undermine the international rule of law.

The comparison, which was [detailed in an article at \*Fair Observer\*](#), is not apt and accurate. Duterte has been wrongly depicted as another crazy upstart Third World dictator who resembles the rise of Trump and Trump-like leaders in politics. The global media’s fascination over Duterte’s perceived similarities to Trump is a disservice to those who genuinely seek to persuade the Filipino leader to abandon his ill-conceived “war on drugs.”

Indeed, both Duterte and Trump use foul language to intimidate the public and their enemies, and both are guilty of offending women and the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community. But their personal and political backgrounds are totally different.

Duterte has served his country as a lawyer and civil servant for more than three decades. He is not a billionaire; he is not part of the mainstream elite; he has good relations with the Muslim community; and he claims to be a leftist and a socialist who intends to smash the rule of oligarchs.

Trump is merely a candidate who spreads fear by making nasty comments, while Duterte is already at the helm of the government. Trump is a recent spectacle, while Duterte has been displaying his uncouth manners as a well-seasoned politician—he could a better leader than Trump because of his consistently good record as a local chief executive.

## **LEGACY OF PEACE**

Duterte’s pledge to promote peace in the land, for example, has often been overlooked. While he continues to be pilloried in the press for the violent unfolding of his “war on drugs,” his government negotiators have quietly but successfully initiated a ceasefire agreement with the communist-led National Democratic Front (NDF)—so

much so that Muslim separatists have been convinced to go back to the negotiating table.

Instead of launching a total war against rebels, he has placed more emphasis on peace negotiations. He released a number of political prisoners, which led to the resumption of stalled peace talks between the government and the NDF.

On August 26, the two sides agreed to [“implement a unilateral ceasefire for an indefinite period.”](#) Both parties say they are now [drafting a comprehensive peace agreement](#), which they hope to sign and implement in the next 12 months. If the peace treaty is signed, it would be similar to the historic [agreement between the Colombian government and FARC rebels](#).

The announcement of an indefinite ceasefire today is already a welcome development. If implemented properly, the ceasefire can provide immediate relief to militarized communities.

The Maoist-inspired New People’s Army, which has been fighting the Philippine government since 1969, operates in more than 70 provinces. A ceasefire in hostilities between the New People’s Army and government troops is a goodwill measure, which can instantly benefit residents in conflict areas. This is also a good opportunity to peacefully address the roots of the armed conflict such as landlessness, development aggression and systemic corruption.

That Duterte succeeded in negotiating a ceasefire is proof not only of his decisive leadership, but also his commitment to improve the lives of Filipinos. Unlike his predecessors who simply wanted to crush the rebels with military might, President Duterte understood that the insurgency can never be defeated as long as extreme poverty continues to stalk the land. That is why he opted to talk peace with the rebels, hoping that it would lead to the resolution of the armed conflict.

## **DUTERTE’S ONE TRUE “WAR”**

The peace talks are also a proper venue to discuss the necessary social and economic reforms that can uplift the lives of the poor.

Raising the quality of living in the Philippines, especially in rural regions, is the best alternative to the current framework of the government's "war on drugs." The best incentive for the poor to reject the quick money schemes offered by the illicit drug trade is to provide them with stable jobs, livelihood and adequate social services.

Duterte risks the loss of popular support to his government if the anti-drug campaign is not overhauled. His allies in the peace movement are, in fact, upset over the unabated extrajudicial killings. Communists have denounced the president's war on drugs as anti-poor and anti-people. Activists are wary because the killings could be used as a precedent to stifle dissent in the future.

President Duterte's laudable peace efforts will be meaningless if impunity is not ended and human rights abuses continue to worsen. He can fight drugs and lay the groundwork for peace at the same time without curtailing rights. If he can reason with rebels, he should also be more aggressive in mobilizing the public to his campaign against drug consumption and pushing.

The war against poverty is the true war that Duterte needs to prioritize in order to successfully combat illegal drugs in the Philippines. This is the best path to achieve a just and lasting peace.

*\*Mong Palatino is a Filipino blogger, activist and former legislator. This article is available online at [Fair Observer](#).*



# **The Ganges is Too Toxic to be Holy Anymore**

Yash Bharodia and Yuvraj Rajan  
September 5, 2016

*The holy river washing Indians from their sins is itself in dire need of being cleansed from the sins of the people to whom it gives life.*

The Ganges, India's river of life, is in imminent danger. One-tenth of the world's population relies heavily on the Ganges and its tributaries. Yet the river has become one of the most polluted on the planet, denying hundreds of millions access to clean water and robbing the world of its once sublime beauty.

With the recent boom of e-commerce in India, online retail giants like Flipkart, Amazon and Snapdeal are setting down roots in modern Indian society. Everything from basic needs like food and clothing to fancy items such as electronic gadgets and gold jewelry is now available online. A Canadian company is even looking [forward to selling "fresh" air](#).

Now Ravi Shankar Prasad, minister for communications, is planning to [deliver the supposedly sacred water of the Ganges](#)—or what Indians call *Ganga Jal*—to people's doorsteps. In an age of American consumerism, even the water of the Ganges will be available at a click of a mouse.

## THE GANGES

The importance of the Ganges to Indian culture cannot be overstated. Almost all Hindu ceremonies across the Indian subcontinent involve the sprinkling of Ganges water. In fact, Hindus consider all rivers holy just as they venerate the cow. But the Ganges is considered the holiest of all rivers.

The Ganges originates in the icy summits of Himalayas, also known as *Devbhumi*, which simply means the land of the gods. [As per ancient myth](#), a sage had to perform years of penance for the river to descend from the heavens to provide life to the land.

Located on the banks of the Ganges is the holy city of Varanasi. [Mark Twain described the city](#) as "older than history, older than tradition, older even than legend, and looks twice as old as all of them put together." Hundreds of millions come to the city from all over the country to pray, bathe and to celebrate their divine river goddess. Millions also come here to cremate their dead. Many Hindus believe that by burning the corpse of their loved ones, they liberate their souls from the perpetual cycle of rebirth, enabling them to attain *moksha*, which is Sanskrit for liberation.

Every year, up to 30,000 bodies are cremated on the legendary [ghats in Varanasi](#), the riverfront steps leading to the Ganges. Tourists have long found this spectacle haunting and mesmerizing. For Hindus, cremation by the Ganges is a way of life. Yet cremation on the *ghats* is now beyond the reach of ordinary people. It has become far too expensive and many families simply dump dead bodies directly into the Ganges instead of cremating them.

## **POLLUTION IN THE GANGES**

The Ganges is now a toxic river. Its levels of pollution are terrifying. It is not only dead bodies and the ashes of burnt bodies that pollute the river, but also industrial effluents and untreated urban sewage.

Hundreds of industries on the Ganges release their waste directly into the river. This discharge of effluents has more than doubled in the last 20 years, and experts predict another 100% increase in the following 20 years. The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) classifies a mere 764 industries as “[grossly polluting industries](#),” but provides few details or analysis of the level of devastation and does precious little to tackle this problem.

Kanpur, the center of India’s leather industry, is on the banks of the Ganges and lies upstream from Varanasi. For decades, tanneries in Kanpur have released large amounts of toxins into the river, making its water [unfit for humans](#).

In fact, the evidence for the [pollution of the Ganges](#) is frighteningly stark. During India’s hot and dry summers, the pollution of the Ganges increases as water recedes and tanneries boost production. In 2013, the government had to shut the tanneries temporarily for the [Kumbh Mela](#), the biggest human religious congregation that occurs on the banks of the Ganges.

## **STATE RESPONSE**

Government action to clean up the Ganges is not the norm though. In fact, both the central government in New Delhi and the governments of states through which the Ganges runs have been corrupt and incompetent in dealing with the pollution of India’s supposedly holy river. The measures governments take are often muddled, cosmetic and even bizarre. For instance, the government once released [25,000 flesh eating turtles](#) into the Ganges in the hope that they would devour the dead bodies dumped

into the river. Corruption and mismanagement ensured that the plan was a monumental failure.

India's infamous *babus*, the deservedly pejorative term for the country's bureaucrats, have [stolen millions in the name of cleaning the Ganges](#). Tragically, they have lacked both will and skills to deal with the gargantuan problem of an increasingly toxic river that has been the lifeblood of Indian civilization.

Meanwhile, the rapid explosion of India's population is putting great strain on rivers and water resources. Increasing use of groundwater has resulted in [water levels in the Ganges-Brahmaputra Basin falling annually by 15-20 millimeters](#). Even as water is decreasing, pollution is rising as over a billion people consume more stuff and throw the waste directly into rivers.

The amount of toxins, chemicals and other dangerous bacteria found in the river are now [almost 3,000 times over the limit](#) that the World Health Organization deems as safe. The Yamuna, the main tributary of the Ganges, is now [the most polluted river in India](#). Delhi, India's national capital, lies on the Yamuna, and this megalopolis dumps 60% of its untreated sewage into the river. Coliform bacteria, heavy metal, nitrogen and other pollutants have killed the river. Yamuna's toxic waters join the Ganges at Allahabad to further contaminate India's holiest river.

For years, Indian politicians have been making slogans and announcing programs to clean the Ganges. Prime Minister Narendra Modi left his home state of Gujarat to contest from Varanasi, India's holiest city, to project himself as a national figure instead of a regional one. He declared grandiloquently, "*Mujhe Maa Ganga ne bulaya hai,*" which literally translates as "Mother Ganga has summoned me."

To his credit, the Modi government approved a five-year, [\\$3 billion budget for Modi's pet project called the Namami Gange Program](#). Yet it is doubtful this program will work. It has taken two years for the prime minister to come up with the initiative, but details about how it would work are still fuzzy. Opposition parties rule the states through with the Ganges flows, and it is unclear who is to do what to clean up the mess.

The Ganges is still toxic and Varanasi continues to be dirty. India's *babus* continue to be in-charge of everything from educating the masses to cleaning the rivers. Under Modi, some argue that they have grown in power. Their track record does not inspire

confidence though. Tellingly, India's Supreme Court has delivered a stinging rebuke to the *babus*, damning their shambolic efforts and [remarking that the steps they have taken](#) will not clean the country's holiest river even after 200 years.

It is a grim irony that Indians who worship the Mother Ganges are killing the river they revere. Yet even now, the problem of pollution in India's rivers can be solved. Indians have to snap out of apathy and ignorance. They must accord the same importance to the cleaning of the Ganges as they do to attending the Kumbh. The first step in solving any problem is recognizing it. It is high time that Indians come to the realization that the Ganges is far too toxic to be holy anymore.

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## The Battle for Venezuela is Heating Up

Arysbell Arismendi

September 13, 2016

*National surveys show the economic crisis and food shortages have taken their toll on the quality of life for Venezuelans.*

In Venezuela, more than half a million people marched on September 1 to protest against the government, calling on the electoral authority to approve a [recall referendum against President Nicolas Maduro](#).

“In light of these objectives, amply fulfilled, I declare that the ‘taking of Caracas’ was a resounding success, marking the time of a struggle that starts now,” said Jesús Torrealba, secretary of the opposition Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD).

Opposition supporters have expressed their disagreement with government policies and said that they felt “anger” because of the difficult situation Venezuelans currently

face. Food shortages exceed 80% and more than half of the population claim to have gone to bed hungry, [according to several national polls](#).

The MUD has devised new methods of protesting and called on citizens to participate in a “National Cacerolazo” at 8:00pm and pound kitchen pots outside their homes. Opponents stood in the streets for 10 minutes on September 7, and another demonstration is expected on September 14. Once enough support has been generated, Torrealba said, “we will call [everyone to take part in] ‘the taking of Venezuela’ for 24 hours straight, demanding the recall referendum.”

Parallel to the opposition protest in eastern Caracas, the Chavismo movement was concentrated in the west of the capital. Maduro spoke to his crowd of supporters, visibly smaller than the opposition’s, and said: “If you see them do something against President Maduro, take to the streets in a civilian-military union and make the most radical revolution ... Today, we defeated an attempted coup that sought to fill with deaths this beautiful Caracas.”

In his speech, the Venezuelan president announced that he would request an override of “parliamentary immunity of the opposition’s elected National Assembly members.” Days earlier, Maduro said he would file a lawsuit against opposition member Henry Ramos, the president of the National Assembly, for his “racist and violent speech.”

Three days later, on September 3, Maduro traveled to the island of Margarita, one Venezuela’s top tourist locations, and visited the Villa Rosa, a traditionally Chavista community. He toured the area without his security cordon, and a group of people pounded their kitchen pots to protest, and some even approached the president to push him. Maduro fled the place running. The government made no official statement about the incident, but a spokesman claimed it was an opposition montage, referring to a [video](#) that later went viral. Five people were arrested.

[Political analysts](#) agree that Maduro has radicalized his speech and become more aggressive with the opposition. Before the “[taking of Caracas](#),” nine opposition leaders were arrested or transferred to prison for allegedly being involved in acts of destabilizing Venezuela. Most of them are members of Voluntad Popular, the party of political prisoner Leopoldo López.



On September 5, the Supreme Court declared null all acts of the Venezuelan parliament for the swearing in of three members of the opposition, who had been suspended by the court. The assembly was declared unfit to legislate.

## **POLLS FAVOR THE OPPOSITION**

Between February and June 2016, the support for a recall referendum increased from 40% to 58%, according to [a poll by Venebarómetro](#), one of the biggest pollsters in Venezuela. The study concluded that more than 10 million voters would vote against the president, and this number exceeds the required number of signatures needed to carry out a recall referendum.

The discontent in popular neighborhoods also seems to affect the popularity of the president. In a national survey by Datincorp, 57% of inhabitants in shanty towns said they want Maduro to leave the government.

The opposition has accused the National Electoral Council (CNE), which is responsible for conducting the elections, of violating internal regulations and delaying the process. It is still unknown whether the recall referendum will be held this year or next. If it is carried out in 2017, Vice President Aristóbulo Istúriz would assume the presidency instead of an election being held. However, the electorate is willing to vote on both dates, according Datincorp's study.

## **OPPOSITION HAS THE BALL**

“What matters now, what is now different from the past, is that polls show that the opposition is the majority. And the size of this mobilization (the taking of Caracas) shows that now the opposition is able to stay in the street,” says Luis Vicente León, director of the Datanálisis national consultancy, in an article published by [Prodavinci](#) a day after the march.

“Although it advances slowly, the recall referendum is leaving sequels that are increasingly determinants. It's like a snowball that grows over time. The march of September 1 seems to reflect a point of no return, and what happened at Villa Rosa shows an effect of that snowball, that it is already reaching the lower strata,” [writes political analyst Michael Penfold](#).

Both León and Penfold agree that the “taking of Caracas” was a victory for members of the opposition because they showed their political muscle and their power of mobilization.

“Well, the opposition needs to keep pressure on the central objective: the fulfillment of constitutional rights. Today the issue is not size: the opposition majority is something we already knew. It is time to use [the] peaceful pressure ... that began today. The key is to understand how it is maintained,” says León.

What will the Chavismo do? Penfold responds in his article by saying: “Once the opposition has collected 20% in October, President Maduro will bet on an abstention. He will try to convince his own [base] that he can prevent the opposition getting enough votes to recall him. But Chavismo looks exhausted after a futile resistance, and it is very likely they abandon him publicly.”

The CNE has already said that a recall referendum will be held between the October 24 and 30, but it has not announced a final date.

Political analyst Alberto Aranguibel differs with León and Penfold. In a conversation with *Fair Observer*, he says that on September 1 “the winner was Venezuela ... It showed that there is full political freedom, a proper performance of democracy, and there is no risk of persecution against the opposition political leadership.”

Despite the projection, Venezuela’s political future remains uncertain. One question that remains unanswered is what will happen if parliamentary immunity is removed. How will the opposition react to this? What will the government do? Will the president of the assembly go to prison?

It seems the battle for the recall referendum will take more than a few months.

*\*Arysbell Arismendi is a Venezuelan journalist based in Caracas. This article is available online at [Fair Observer](#).*



# El Nino Exacerbates Africa's AIDS Epidemic

Hugo Norton

September 15, 2016

*Faced with a choice between using their sparse income to access anti-retroviral therapy or nourishment, many affected by AIDS in Africa opt for the latter.*

In July, [UNICEF issued a stark warning](#) that the El Nino climate cycle had created a humanitarian disaster in the developing nations most prone to its effects. The severe flooding and drought caused by El Nino had resulted in widespread hunger, malnutrition and disease in parts of eastern and southern Africa, the organization warned, while cautioning that La Nina—El Nino's counterpart—would likely exacerbate the situation.

As well as ravaging many African nations' economies and directly causing high levels of starvation, the chaos created by El Nino is expected to trigger [a large uptick in HIV/AIDS infection levels and death rates](#) in the region. Faced with a choice between using their sparse income to access anti-retroviral therapy (ART) drugs or nourishment, many Africans in affected countries who have the virus are opting for the latter.

At the same time, impoverished African women and girls whose lives have been made worse as a result of El Nino's effects [are turning to sex work in increasing numbers](#), putting them at a higher risk of becoming HIV positive.

## **WORST FAMINE SINCE 1985**

It's a sad fact that governments in the region are unable feed their malnourished populations, let alone treat victims of the most serious HIV/AIDS epidemic on the planet. According to a Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation-sponsored article for [The Observer](#), Africa is facing the worst famine it has experienced since 1985—a situation that is being made worse by the fact that donor nations are preoccupied with ongoing war in the Middle East and the European migrant crisis.

According to the United Nations (UN), more than \$650 million of aid and 7.9 million tons of food are required immediately to prevent the worsening famine in Africa from becoming severe by Christmas.

Middle East unrest and the resultant flow of migrants across the Mediterranean aside, the main reason the required funds are not reaching the African nations most affected by El Nino is donor fatigue, highlighting the importance of encouraging countries in the region to develop their own economies so they are better placed to support themselves.

Indeed, donor funding to some of Africa's poorest countries [began to slow considerably](#) after the global financial crisis of the late 2000s, and has failed to pick up again as the world economy has stabilized, making it all the more important that African nations are able to stand on their own feet.

## **OUTGROWING THE AIDS EPIDEMIC**

It can be done, as the landlocked African nation of Botswana has demonstrated. Almost [25% of all adults in Botswana are HIV positive](#), making the country second only to Swaziland in terms of infection rates. To address this, the Botswana government has managed to establish and manage one of the most effective HIV/AIDS treatment programs in the whole of Africa. The country offers all infected citizens ART drugs for life.

It has been able to do this, as well as becoming one of the most stable countries in Africa, thanks to its economic independence. [According to the World Bank](#), Botswana has grown from being one of the poorest nations in Africa when it first declared independence from the United Kingdom in 1966 to one of the fastest growing economies in the world. It has achieved this thanks to the success of its diamond mining operations, which are forecast to help the country's economy grow considerably faster than many developed nations over the next couple of years.

While it is true that Botswana's neighboring countries could not hope to emulate its success without discovering natural resources similar to its hugely profitable diamond mines, opportunities do exist on the African continent, especially in Mozambique, [which is rich in offshore natural gas](#).

In order to protect its economic future from the scores of pirates operating in its waters, the country decided to invest in buying a number of patrol vessels using government-backed [bonds](#) through the state-owned fishing company, EMATUM. If Mozambique can successfully exploit the opportunity presented by its gas reserves as energy prices rise, it could follow in the footsteps of Botswana toward a future where its fortunes are not reliant on donor funding during times of crisis.

This will take time. Until Mozambique and other African countries are able to harness their natural resources and build self-sufficient economies that are able to withstand the effects of disasters such as El Nino, most of the continent will remain vulnerable to both HIV/AIDS outbreaks and malnutrition.

While countries get to grips with the significant task of realizing the opportunities they could enjoy, it is vital that donor nations make sure Africa's food supplies and health care systems do not fall apart. While it may be the case that the world's attention is focused on serious issues elsewhere at present, a failure to support African nations as they seek to forge strong economies that are able to weather disasters without the need of excessive amounts of external aid will only end up costing developed nations more over the longer term.

The recent Tokyo International Conference on Africa's Development (TICAD)—where the World Bank's Global Fund along with Japan and other partners [announced a commitment of \\$24 billion](#) to help accelerate the expansion of universal health coverage in Africa—was a good starting point. But developed nations must realize that money spent on African aid now could prevent them from having to continue to shell out on the region's problems in [perpetuity](#).

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# Italy's History in Africa is a Messy Affair

Fasil Amdetsion

September 16, 2016

*In the first of a three-part series, Fasil Amdetsion looks at the evolution of Italy's relationship with its former colonies in the Horn of Africa.*

Earlier this year, Italy hosted the first ever Italy-Africa Ministerial Conference in Rome. Held at the cavernous travertine-laden Farnesina headquarters of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the meeting was attended by high-level delegations from over 40 African countries.

In his closing remarks, Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi underscored his intention of broadening political and economic ties with the African continent, by [voicing his hope](#) for a “future in which Africa is seen not as the greatest threat—as some demagogues would have it—but as the greatest opportunity.”

The conference, which is intended to be a biennial affair, and Renzi's visits to sub-Saharan Africa (the first ever by a sitting Italian premier) reflect the Italian government's commitment to reinvigorating the relationship.

## MUTUAL BENEFITS

Italy has been late to realize the mutual benefits that can accrue from a more robust partnership with Africa. Even though it is the world's eighth largest economy, and Africa's sixth or seventh most significant trading partner, Italy's postwar political engagement with the continent has been [episodic](#), and commercial exchanges are below their potential.

Other countries have realized much sooner that regular high-level political dialogue featuring targeted discussions about trade and development could spur investment. China and India, for example, both hold triennial summits with African leaders, whereas the United States holds the biennial US-Africa Business Summit. The French arrange an annual Africa-France Summit, Japan regularly organizes the Tokyo International Conference on African Development, and Turkey has periodically spearheaded summits with continental leaders.

What accounts for Italy's laggardness to date?

Italy's insularity and relative economic underdevelopment explains Italian officialdom's comparatively low level of engagement with Africa post-World War II. Political instability wrought by constant changes in government—63 since 1945—also stunted long-term strategic thinking at la Farnesina.

Moreover, at varying times and to varying degrees, Italy's former colonial possessions—and their relationship with Rome—were beset with problems, some of their own making, others attributable to Italy. As a result, for most of the postwar period, Italy, unlike Britain or France, could not use its former colonies as a launch pad for strengthening political and business ties elsewhere on the continent.

Understanding the factors impeding closer ties between Italy and the sub-Saharan African countries with which it had historical ties requires understanding the nature of Italy's postwar exchanges with Eritrea (an Italian colony from 1890 to 1941); Somalia (Italian Somaliland comprising most of modern-day Somalia was a colony from 1889-1941, it continued to be ruled by the Italians under a United Nations trusteeship until 1960 when, at independence, it was conjoined to British Somaliland); and Ethiopia (occupied, but never fully pacified, from 1936 to 1941).

## **ERITREA**

The Italian community in Eritrea was mostly nestled in the picturesque capital, Asmara. Initially a settlement of a mere 150 inhabitants, Asmara was officially founded as a town when the governor of the then Ethiopian Mereb Mellash province, Ras Alula, opted to make it his new capital. When it fell under Italian rule, Asmara blossomed. In a bid to turn it into Africa's "Little Rome," the Italians expended significant resources to modernize the city's infrastructure and to beautify it with Art Deco architecture for which it is renowned to this day.

The colony's most prominent Italian businessmen made Asmara and its environs their home. These included figures like Barattolo, who got his start in the textile sector, opening a single factory employing a mere 200 workers and eventually growing his business to around 10,000 workers.

Emma Melotti was certainly the region's most prominent female entrepreneur. After her husband's passing, she took over his namesake brewery, and under her sapient stewardship, Melotti came to dominate the Ethiopian market through a network which enveloped even remote villages. Melotti was also available throughout the region, being sold in Sudan, Djibouti, Somalia, Yemen and Kenya.

## **ETHIOPIAN-ERITREAN FEDERATION**

The first snag in relations between Eritrea and the Italian community—principal propulsor of relations—emerged soon after Eritrea was re-conjoined to Ethiopia under a federal arrangement in 1952, as mandated by United Nations (UN) Resolution 390 (V). Previously Ethiopian, then colonized by the Italians, and after World War II a British protectorate, Eritrea was federated to Ethiopia upon the condition that Eritrean institutions bequeathed by the British—such as the legislature and courts—would continue to function unimpeded.

This resolution of the Eritrean issue via federation—though temporary it later turned out to be—occurred in spite of competing formulas floated by other states at the UN. Among those opposed to the federal arrangement, for instance, was Italy. Though Italy's post-World War II government may have been post-fascist, it was not postcolonial.

Rome favored a solution where Eritrea remained an Italian colony; and barring that, advocated that Italy continue to administer Eritrea under UN trusteeship. Ultimately resigned to the fact that neither of these proposals would garner sufficient support, Italy called for Eritrean independence. Indeed, during this time, Ethiopia and Italy financially supported rival (and armed) groups—pro-union on the one hand, pro-independence on the other.

Ethiopian diplomats secured a diplomatic coup by obtaining sufficient international support for the Ethiopian-Eritrean Federation, but the same imperial government also helped sow the seeds of the two countries' eventual separation.

In a pique of royal obstinacy and heavy-handedness, and only 10 years after consummation of the Ethiopian-Eritrean Federation, Emperor Haile Selassie, unwisely going against the counsel of some of his advisers, forcibly dissolved the federal



arrangement. His decision subsumed Eritrea into the unitary Ethiopian state and gave further impetus to Eritrean agitation for secession.

## **THE DERG**

The beginnings of armed resistance, and the consequent instability in Eritrea, began to hinder Italian (and, indeed, all) commercial activity. The Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF)—a precursor to today’s governing Eritrean People’s Liberation Front—for instance, regularly engaged in extortion by levying “taxes” on agricultural land concessions run by Italians.

The coming to power in 1974 of Ethiopia’s military government, the Derg, in 1974, made the business environment particularly inhospitable for Italians; most private enterprises were nationalized and expropriated. The Derg’s decision to close all foreign consulates in Eritrea, including the Italian consulates in Asmara and the port town of Massawa, further hastened the Italian exodus.

In one particular act of ruffianism, Derg functionaries went so far as to break into the then vacated Italian consulate in Asmara and temporarily occupied its premises. The final nail in the coffin of a continued Italian presence in Eritrea was the then province’s envelopment by civil war throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

## **ETHIOPIA**

In Ethiopia, much like Eritrea, the “vanguard” of Italo-Ethiopian ties were Italian residents. The Italian community thrived due to its industriousness and ingenuity. Its prosperity, however, was also enabled by Haile Selassie’s injunction prohibiting retribution against Italians who had not committed war crimes.

Among the most successful businessmen entrepreneurs were Mario Buschi, who was involved in public works and ran a company with boats for hire on Lake Tana, source of the Blue Nile; or Mezzedimi, the Italian architect responsible for designing a number of buildings that came to dominate Addis Ababa’s postwar urban landscape, including the UN Economic Commission for Africa’s sprawling Africa Hall.

Such commercial activity occurred in spite of what were often lukewarm political ties between the two countries. Closer postwar relations between the two governments were inhibited for several reasons.

In the first instance, stalled negotiations over payment of reparations hindered the establishment of closer ties. Italy reneged on its obligation to pay Ethiopia \$25 million for war damages and moral harm, as laid out in the 1947 Treaty of Peace. Indeed, at one point, the negotiating positions of both parties seemed irreconcilable. The Italian government maintained that it owed Ethiopia no money, because any moral or physical harm caused by Italy's five-year occupation of the country was supposedly outweighed by public works the Italians had built. Ethiopia countered that Italy's egregious war crimes warranted that it pay above and beyond the \$25 million stipulated by the peace treaty.

Giuliano Cora, an Italian journalist who at the time commented on the absurdity of this diplomatic impasse, rhetorically asked: "Do we really have to compromise our situation and our future in this region for want of \$25 million?" It appears that the Italian government was prepared to do so.

Ultimately, Italy secured the better bargain. Addis Ababa agreed to a lower figure of \$16.3 million and the payments occurred under the guise of "technical and financial assistance" for the construction of a dam not far from the capital and a textile mill in the town of Bahir Dar. No mention was ever made of reparations.

Even with this hurdle cleared, another remained: restitution of the 1,700-year-old Axum obelisk, which the Italians had plundered during the occupation. To placate Addis Ababa, Italy offered to build a hospital or an interstate road, in exchange for the uncontested "right" to retain this concrete reminder of its colonial past. Here, too, Italy conveniently forgot that the 1947 treaty mandated the obelisk's return.

The saga finally ended in 2005 when Italy bore the costs of surgically slicing the obelisk into three parts, so as to have it transported back to Axum in three trips aboard an Antonov plane. Ironically, it was Silvio Berlusconi's center-right government (whose governing coalition included neo-fascists) that made amends.

Italy still retains other important wartime loot, most importantly a portion of Ethiopia's prewar Ministry of the Pen archives that appears to be within the custody of the Italian

Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This issue has been forgotten by both sides. The government of Ethiopia ought to try [secure the archives' return](#).

## HAILE SELASSIE'S IMAGINATION

The most curious stumbling block to closer postwar Italy-Ethiopia relations, however, was the delay by Rome in extending an official invitation to the emperor to visit Italy. The Ethiopian monarch fervently wanted to revisit the country he had last seen in 1924 as regent.

His trip had been perennially postponed due to a disagreement over a number of issues, including negotiations over reparations and the Axum obelisk; as well as the impolitic decision by the Italians, at one point, of scheduling Haile Selassie's visit for shortly *after* the planned visit of Somalia's president, at a time when the two countries were at loggerheads over disputed land.

Perhaps no two countries captured Haile Selassie's imagination as much as Italy and France. The monarch's fondness for the French is easy to comprehend. Haile Selassie was Francophone, and after an early traditional Ethiopian church education, schooled by a Guadeloupian physician and a Francophone Ethiopian Capuchin monk. But what to make of his affection for Italy on both an emotive and psychological level?

After all, it was Italy that had unseated him, and it was in Italy that his first daughter, Princess Romanework, and two of her sons had died after having been captured by the Italians.

According to Italian historian Angelo Del Boca, Haile Selassie reputedly confided to Giulio Pascucci-Righi, the Italian ambassador accredited to Addis, in 1970:

*"I owe nearly everything to Great Britain. The British gave me a place to live when I chose to go into exile, and they brought me to my homeland. All the same, as it may seem, the Ethiopian people have no love for Great Britain. Only two countries are our friends and understand us. Those countries are France and Italy. I hope that my successors will keep the faith [with regard to] this two-fold constant."*

The likelihood that the emperor's words reflected the Ethiopian people's state of mind after a [brutal war and occupation is close to nil](#). His pro-Italian gestures soon after the

war ended could, in theory, be attributable to a desire to play off the Italians against the British.

British forces had fought together with Ethiopian patriots to dislodge the Italians and had remained behind after Ethiopia's liberation. It is possible that Haile Selassie wanted to guard against Britain's accumulation of undue influence in Ethiopia, and the risk that having gained such influence, Britain would wield it to declare Ethiopia a protectorate. But the words spoken to Ambassador Pascucci-Righi were purportedly spoken in 1970, years after the threat of falling under Britain's sway had passed.

Regardless of whether the words spoken privately to the ambassador were accurately recounted by him, clearly the emperor's attachment was heartfelt. First, because he persisted in sending signals, at times subtle and on other occasions explicit, to the press and visiting Italian officials that he was eager to receive an invitation to visit Italy.

## **ENEMY COUNTRY**

A further example of the emperor's sympathy for Italy occurred in the 1960s when, having dispatched a delegation to Italy, the imperial government secured a loan from a consortium of Italian banks (with the facilitation of the Italian government). The Ethiopian government submitted the loan to the senate for final approval. The Ethiopian senate, whose members included several veterans of the Italian-Ethiopian war, rejected the loan's terms because they considered the interest rate unduly onerous.

The emperor initially responded to the senate's recalcitrance by claiming *lèse-majesté* and rebuking legislators for still treating Italy as an "enemy country." Ultimately, in relenting, the emperor resorted to what Cambridge historian Christopher Clapham has termed a familiar imperial stratagem employed by Haile Selassie in the face of insurmountable political opposition to a deal: professing ignorance as to its details. The loan was never disbursed for want of the senate's approval.

The incident bore an uncanny resemblance to an earlier loan negotiation between Italy and Ethiopia. In 1889, Ras Makonnen (the emperor's father and duke of Harar), visited Italy to conclude a loan agreement on behalf of his cousin, Emperor Menelik II. Upon his return to Ethiopia, Ras Makonnen was castigated by courtiers for having agreed to a loan with interest rates that were deemed usurious, several courtiers went so far as to impugn his patriotism.

When Haile Selassie's trip to Italy finally occurred, the emperor was received with all the pomp and pageantry reserved for Italy's most illustrious postwar guests. Perhaps the most evocative scene of the trip was described by the Italian daily, *Il Giorno*, which wrote of the emperor, with his diminutive figure, standing erect in an open state vehicle side-by-side with Italian President Giuseppe Saragat, accompanied by a phalanx of fully-mounted cuirassiers whose horses' hooves click-clocked on the Roman cobblestones as the pair majestically made their way to the Quirinale Palace.

In the run-up to, and after, the emperor's 1970 visit, official Ethiopian-Italian ties were on an upswing. Following the 1974 revolution, commerce suffered another prolonged denouement; this time caused by the military government's nationalization of private enterprises and, later, the country's descent into an all-consuming civil war.

## **SOMALIA**

In post-independence Somalia, as was the case in Ethiopia, some leaders harbored an affinity for Italy, which encouraged continued engagement. Somalia's one-time minister of planning and international cooperation, Ahmed Habib Ahmed, in words that were somewhat similar in spirit to those reportedly uttered by Haile Selassie, remarked: "[Though] I studied in France, 'my world' is Italian; the French are distant to me."

Several decades post-independence, Italian commercial involvement in Somalia centered upon agriculture. The Italians set up cotton, sugar and banana plantations and, after 1929, the year in which worldwide cotton prices collapsed, focused mostly on bananas. Bananas eventually became Somalia's most significant export.

Indeed, of the 235 Italian concessions existing in Somalia at independence, comprising more than 45,300 hectares of land, most were devoted to bananas. During their colonial suzerainty over Somalia, and for several decades following independence, Italy gave preferential treatment to banana imports from Somalia by imposing higher tariffs on those imported from other countries.

Italy further bolstered its political position in Somalia by tilting in its favor in territorial disputes (this policy may not have been adhered to consistently given the frequent change in governments in Rome).

Almost immediately after independence, in the early 1960s, Somalia pressed territorial claims on Ethiopian-controlled territory inhabited primarily by ethnic Somalis. It did the same with regard to lands inhabited mostly by ethnic Somalis in neighboring Kenya and Djibouti, avowedly announcing pursuit of a Greater Somalia encompassing all ethnic Somalis.

Somalia lent pressure to its irredentist claims by supporting armed militias who made frequent forays into Ethiopia, where they were pursued back into Somali territory by forces led by General Aman Andom—an Eritrean who was an interesting historical figure in his own right; in charge of Ethiopian counteroffensives against Somalia, and later, briefly, head of state after Haile Selassie was toppled, before he too suffered the same unceremonious fate.

## **ALL-OUT WAR**

In the late 1970s, Somalia and Ethiopia actually fought an all-out war over the ethnically Somali Ethiopian Ogaden province. Italy maintained an outward veneer of neutrality, but leaned toward Mogadishu, surreptitiously allowing it to purchase military helicopters, trucks and light weaponry on the Italian market.

The support emanated, in part, from the fact that since Somalia had been Italy's longest-held colony, it was treated with some affection. Beyond that, it is reasonable to surmise that Italy's support for Somalia may have emanated, at least in part, from lingering bitterness over the Ethiopian-Eritrean Federation—a solution to the Eritrean question which Italy had strenuously opposed.

Aside from official institutional ties, for many years Somalia also benefited from another sort of linkage with Italy: the sympathy and support of the Italian Communist Party (PCI). Promotion of commercial interests and mobilization of investment in postwar Italy were not the sole province of the government, but of political parties too. The PCI, and its competitors, jockeyed for influence at home and abroad, by supporting foreign regimes they deemed to be their ideological brethren.

Following the 1969 Somali revolution, the PCI extended cultural and technical assistance and invested in the country through Italian labor unions and affiliated entities. It provided Mogadishu with expertise and machinery to help bolster the Somali

construction and agricultural sectors. Italturist, the PCI's travel and touring company, was also tasked with arranging facilitation tours for Italian tourists in Somalia.

The Italian community in Somalia thrived as a result of the good political ties between Italy and Somalia. As was the case in Ethiopia under Haile Selassie, the Italians benefited from the protection of Siad Barre, Somalia's post-revolution strongman. Barre inveighed against any harm befalling the Italians and expressed his sympathy toward Italians on more than one occasion, such as when he declared: "I have said, and have repeated, that for us Somalis, Italians are not considered foreigners; and this is a privilege which we have not extended to any other community."

At one point, Barre even assured the Italians that he was "no Gadaffi." In saying so, he was communicating to the Italians that he would refrain from following in the footsteps of the Libyan leader who had nationalized the property of Italian settlers after Libya gained its independence from Italy.

But such sweet-talking aside, as Barre fell under the Soviets' orbit and he increasingly moved his country to the left, ideology trumped his apparent affection for Italians and a spate of nationalizations followed. The local branches of the Banca di Roma and Banca di Napoli, multiple insurance firms and AGIP—the precursor to today's oil conglomerate, ENI—were among the Italian firms affected.

Though some firms and small factories were spared, the damage was done. Italian companies and most of their expatriate personnel left the country, never to return. Once Somalia spiraled into civil war, even the small Italian community that had faithfully remained behind returned to Italy.

Italy's engagement with countries in the Horn of Africa was peripatetic. In Ethiopia, Africa's second most populous country, relations were frequently rocky. Disputes arose over Eritrea and the implementation of commitments undertaken by Italy at the end of World War II by signing the 1947 Treaty of Peace; more generally, it appears that for several decades Italy struggled to come to terms with the fact that the colonial era had ended.

Italy's focus on other geopolitical priorities, Ethiopia and Somalia's adoption of economic policies that were inimical to an Italian presence, and their enmeshment in

civil wars also minimized Italy's engagement with the Horn and, by extension, other African countries.

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# A Polarized Referendum Puts Peace to the Test in Colombia

Elizabeth Troolin

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*Voters will decide if the negotiated settlement ending decades of conflict with the FARC moves ahead.*

As the sun was setting in Cartagena, Colombia, on Monday, September 26, thousands of national and international spectators, including dozens of world leaders and US Secretary of State John Kerry, gathered to bear witness to a sight that not long ago would have been unimaginable: Timoleón Jiménez, commander of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the country's largest guerrilla group, signing a peace accord with President Juan Manuel Santos.

The agreement ends 52 years of armed conflict between the two groups that has cost over 220,000 lives and left over eight million conflict victims. As an international witness, I was swept up by the emotions of those around me. Flags waved in the breeze, groups of victims and children sang, and the sunset over the Caribbean seemed a harbinger for a new dawn of peace. Over four years of negotiations had succeeded and the war was over.

Yet even as the ceremony was concluding, an impending sense of uncertainty set in; the accords were not final. They have to pass a referendum by the Colombian people this Sunday, October 2. If the majority says yes, implementation of the accords and FARC disarmament begin immediately. However, if the answer is no, the fragile peace will fall apart.



## IMPENDING SENSE OF UNCERTAINTY

To many abroad, voting no to peace seems unfathomable. However, in Colombia it's not that simple. For the past months the political climate has been marked by polarization and uncertainty. Across the board, misinformation abounds on media and social networks. Few people have actually read the 297-page accords and rely on often misleading mass and social media to learn about their content. While government agencies have attempted to disseminate concise, easy to understand information on what the accords really mean, those who are against the peace agreement have been actively disseminating rumors and myths.

Most Colombians agree that the agreement isn't flawless. The most controversial points include transitional justice mechanisms, guaranteed political participation for demobilized ex-combatants as early as 2018, and subsidies including education and support for productive projects for demobilized ex-combatants. But transitional justice processes are rarely flawless, and Colombia's agreement goes beyond what others have reached elsewhere in the world.

Moreover, in this case it's important to remember that Colombia is not negotiating a transition from a dictatorship to democracy, as in Argentina and Chile, but rather from a sustained conflict to peace. And unlike post-World War II, the FARC were never defeated militarily by the government, which has meant that the two parties always negotiated as equals. Both sides have ceded certain points, and in general analyses have found that the [FARC ceded more](#).

For its part, an active No campaign has been led by ex-President Alvaro Uribe, who has always denied the existence of an ideological armed conflict, reducing FARC to nothing more than "drug terrorists" and advocating a military victory. However, despite over 50 years of conflict and billions of dollars of military aid from the United States, a military victory has proven elusive. Rather than defeating the FARC, the ongoing conflict has caused extensive forced displacement (Colombia is [number one in the world](#), according to UNHCR), landmine accidents (Colombia is [number two after Afghanistan](#), according to the Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor), forced disappearance (more than Argentina and Chile combined), sexual violence, forced recruitment, murder, and other human rights violations to millions of people.

Furthermore, it has prevented Colombia from addressing other pressing development issues including education and public health in its poorest regions and targeting criminal gangs dedicated to drug trafficking. Uribe, whose fight *The Economist* has called “[wrong-headed](#),” was present leading protests in Cartagena on Monday, likening the Santos administration to Narco-Chavistas—a reference to the former Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez, who supported bringing FARC to the negotiating table. While some proponents of a No vote express valid concerns about post-conflict scenarios, its loudest and most public voices have relied on scaring the population back to war.

## **A CHANCE FOR PEACE**

For its part, the Yes campaign has also been active through efforts of private citizens and the Santos administration. Its proponents have worked hard to dispel myths and misleading memes circulating on social media, clear up the accords’ contents, and explain the benefits that Colombia will have as a country in peace—including the opportunity to redirect millions of dollars that are currently spent on the war machine to dire social needs.

The Yes movement has worked tirelessly around the country to get out the vote. While the government has been a flag-bearer for the peace agreement and one of its principal proponents, supporting peace does not necessarily mean that one supports Santos. Many citizens who disagree with the administration’s overall direction have come together to support peace as a larger goal beyond party politics.

In general, this is the last chance to reach peace with the FARC. While the guerrilla group is notably weaker than 15 years ago, when it was capable of taking over entire towns and carrying out attacks in capital cities, its staying power is undeniable.

Colombia has faced multiple failed peace processes with FARC in the past, none of which came as close to succeeding as this one. Now, both the government and the FARC’s top leadership are completely on board. They have decided that it is time, and that if they don’t negotiate they will die in the jungle of old age or at the hands of a targeted smart bomb, perhaps facilitated with [support from US forces](#). This time, commitment to the peace process has been fundamental.

The agreement itself is monumental. Despite massive differences and serious mistrust, the government and FARC came together to negotiate rural development, ending drug

trafficking, victims' reparation, disarmament and demobilization, and other sticky topics. Their negotiations set a standard to live up to for other conflicts around the world. Perhaps the agreements could be better, but as so many people are saying in Colombia these days—including President Santos at the peace signing: Do we prefer a perfect war or an imperfect peace?

While opinion polls continue to shift back and forth from No to Yes, the most recent ones suggest that the referendum will pass. In general, it seems that Colombians agree it's time to move on. For their part, conflict victims in rural areas are generally strongly in favor of the agreements and tend to be more willing to forgive than those who haven't been directly affected by the conflict. They understand the importance of guaranteeing that the next generation does not have to suffer the same painful, all-encompassing conflict.

The peace accords are just a first step. The important part is what comes next. Colombians are skeptical, as are members of the FARC—in the past demobilized ex-combatants have been [targeted and killed](#) by other illegal armed actors once they disarm. Implementation and long-term peacebuilding, including stopping criminal groups from filling spaces left behind by FARC as it demobilizes, present serious challenges. But peace also presents significant opportunities for Colombia to leave behind a legacy of conflict and move on to a better tomorrow, creating a culture where dialogue, and not violence, is the way to solve differences.

Near the end of Jimenéz's speech on Monday, three supersonic jets unexpectedly blasted over the outdoor site where the ceremony was held in an apparent miscue. FARC's top leader's face seemed to fill with fear. Spectators also expressed shock. Understandably, in a country that has been wracked by decades of conflict this was a frightening sound.

It also felt like a reminder of what could happen if Colombians don't choose Yes on Sunday and the country slips back into the [longest ongoing civil war](#) in Latin America.

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