

Fair Observer

Monthly



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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.

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Lesson from India to Make America Great Again

Ruyintan E. Mehta & Atul Singh
July 3, 2018

By granting asylum to Zoroastrians fleeing persecution a thousand years ago, a local Gujarati ruler inadvertently helped create modern India and benefited the entire world.

The conventional view of history is one of progress. This is not entirely true. Sometimes, societies regress, cultures decline and civilizations fall.

This is not a view that Steven Pinker espouses but Francis Fukuyama, the man who declared the end of history, is coming around to. Fukuyama is worrying about President Donald Trump and American political decay. Trump's zero-tolerance policy on migrants that caused the separation of children from their parents is certainly an example of this decay.

Trump won power in part thanks to his tough stance on immigration. He raised the specter of drug-dealers, criminals and rapists crossing the American border with Mexico. He promised to build the wall, make Mexico pay for it and stop the deluge of migrants flooding into the US.

In office, Trump has certainly delivered on his promise. Illegal migrants entering the United States are rounded up, locked up in detention centers and then shipped back across the border. Until

recently, Trump did not mind separating families and locking children in cages.

As per US immigration officials, 2,342 children were separated from 2,206 parents between May 5 and June 9. After much brouhaha and raucous international condemnation, Trump signed an executive order that allowed for immigrant families to be detained together while their legal cases are considered.

Before his U-turn, Trump claimed that an executive order would not solve the problem. He argued that the only solution possible was the passing of comprehensive immigration reform by Congress. In keeping with his past behavior, the abrasive American president has reversed his stand in the blink of an eye.

The US has now become Trumpistan, a land that is not only cruel and intolerant, but also dishonest and hypocritical in almost all its claims and actions.

IMMIGRANTS FROM IRAN

The US could do well to learn from a lesson from the past. This is not a story of Huguenots fleeing France to Prussia, England and Switzerland. It is not a story of Jews fleeing Spain. It is a story of Zoroastrians fleeing Persia or modern-day Iran because of fierce Islamic persecution in the eighth century.

These followers of Zoroaster were members of the world's first

monotheistic faith that began 1,200 to 1,500 years before Christ. Many tenets of Judaism, Christianity and Islam have their roots in Zoroastrianism.

In the eighth century, members of this rich ancient tradition fled for their lives to India. Landing in Gujarat, they sought permission from Jadi Rana, the local ruler, to settle in his lands. As per Qeṣṣa-ye Sanjān (The Story of Sanjān), the ruler was apprehensive about giving refuge to people who appeared warrior-like, dressed differently and spoke in strange tongues.

As per oral tradition, Jadi Rana presented a full cup of milk to the refugees to indicate that his lands were already full. These refugees put sugar in the cup to convince the king that they would be “like sugar in a full cup of milk, adding sweetness but not causing it to overflow.”

This purportedly convinced Jadi Rana to grant asylum to the beleaguered men, women and children thronging his shores. This was the sensible and humane thing to do. These newcomers came to be known as the Parsis, in cognizance of their Persian roots.

CREATORS OF MODERN INDIA

Fast forward to 2018 and you cannot imagine modern India without the Parsis. The second president of the Indian National Congress was Dadabhai Naoroji, an educator, intellectual and statesman. This Parsi did the early work on the drain of wealth from colonial India

to imperial Britain. After independence in 1947, Homi Jehangir Bhabha, another Parsi, created India’s now much-vaunted nuclear program. In 1971, Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw, arguably the most famous of Parsis, liberated Bangladesh from Islamabad’s oppressive rule.

Thanks to his brilliance, 92,000 Pakistani soldiers surrendered, ensuring Bangladeshis could finally live without the fear of being raped, plundered and slaughtered with wanton abandon. Soli Sorabjee, a legendary lawyer, jurist and yet another Parsi, has been a torch bearer for freedom of expression and protection of human rights for decades. In the world of music, Zubin Mehta, the elegant conductor, and Freddie Mercury, the flamboyant rock star, fly the Parsi flag high.

Tata, India’s preeminent business house, was founded and has been run by Parsis for more than a century and half. Not only has it run numerous successful businesses, this multinational has helped build towering national institutions such as the Indian Institute of Science, the Tata Memorial Hospital and the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research. Other Parsis have run successful businesses too and set standards for philanthropy in the country.

For centuries, the Parsis have been totally integrated in Indian society. There have been no reports of strife, tension or riots between Parsis and other communities in oral or written history.

With a literacy rate of 99%, they remain the most highly educated community in the land, exceeding the achievements of Brahmins, India's priestly caste, and Sayyids, purportedly direct descendants of Prophet Muhammad.

It is important to note that the Parsi population has never exceeded 100,000 at any point in history. Low birth rates and migration to Western countries has resulted in the population declining to a mere 61,000 today even as India's population continues to rise. By any standards, the Parsi contribution to India has been staggering and is totally out of proportion to the minuscule size of their community.

LESSON FOR AMERICA

The Parsi story underscores an important point. Penniless refugees and desperate migrants have often been a country's greatest assets. In the American context, this holds even more true. Immigrants made America great and it is they who will make America great again.

It not without reason that the sonnet on the Statue of Liberty declares, "Give me your tired, your poor / Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free / The wretched refuse of your teeming shore."

Over 1,000 years ago, the wretched refuse from Iranian shores drifted into the sandy land of Mahatma Gandhi. At that time, if Jadi Rana had acted like Donald Trump, the Parsis would have been cast back into the sea and not only

India but also the rest of the world would have been poorer today as a result.



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Atul Singh is the founder, CEO and editor-in-chief of Fair Observer. He has taught political economy at the University of California, Berkeley and been a visiting professor of humanities and social sciences at the Indian Institute of Technology, Gandhinagar. He studied philosophy, politics and economics at the University of Oxford on the Radhakrishnan Scholarship and did an MBA with a triple major in finance, strategy and entrepreneurship at the Wharton School. Singh worked as a corporate lawyer in London and led special operations as an elite officer in India's volatile border areas where he had many near-death experiences. He has also been a poet, playwright, sportsman, mountaineer and a founder of many organizations.

In Iran, the World Cup Is Bringing Change

Kouros Ziabari
July 5, 2018

For the first time in nearly 40 years, women in Iran were allowed to enter a stadium to watch football.

Since the 1979 revolution, women in Iran have been denied entry to sports stadiums. The reasons cited by authorities are mostly religious. In a theocratic state like Iran, they are worried about “ethical values” in society which, they believe, might be undermined if women are allowed to do certain things, such as play athletics or watch football in stadiums alongside men.

Now, after almost 40 years of debate and resistance by authorities, religious figures and activists, an important development has taken place: Iranian women were allowed to watch two FIFA World Cup matches featuring the Iranian national team. Thousands of Iranians packed the Azadi Stadium in Tehran, the biggest in the Middle East, where the games against Spain and Portugal were broadcast on a big screen.

From footage at the Azadi Stadium, along with photos published by news agencies and posts on social media, it is clear that young women and girls who had the chance to watch the matches were pleased with the change in policy. Despite not being in the actual stadiums where the games were played in Russia, women were finally allowed to

join their friends and families and root for their national team.

WHAT'S DIFFERENT?

In 2006, then-Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad announced that women would be permitted to attend football matches, but he faced resistance from high-ranking clerics who said this was impracticable on religious grounds. At the same time, many people said it was hypocritical of an ultra-conservative and dogmatic president such as Ahmadinejad to suggest that women could enter stadiums to watch a football match.

Ahmadinejad was notorious for his duplicitous approach to women's rights and religion. In 2009, he invited the late Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez to pay a visit to the shrine of Imam Reza, the eighth holiest Shia imam, in the northeast city of Mashhad. Under Iranian law, non-Muslims are not allowed to visit the site, and many critics at the time asked what would happen if a reformist president had brought a European politician instead. So, when Ahmadinejad, a hardliner and religious conservative, pledged to open the doors of football stadiums to women but never fulfilled this insincere promise, his critics said it was an attempt to garner public support among the youth and women when his popularity was plummeting.

But this time, things seem to be different. There are national campaigns and movements over the rights of Iranian women to watch football

matches in stadiums, as well as international human rights activists who are pressing for change.

In March, FIFA President Gianni Infantino met President Hassan Rouhani in Tehran and raised the issue with him. Rouhani has promised that he will do his best to make sure women can enter stadiums and watch football matches as they happen on the pitch.

The achievements of female Iranian athletes seem to be the driving force and may even serve as leverage on authorities and hardliners to relax restrictions on women to watch sporting events in stadiums. In May, Iran's national futsal team won the 2018 AFC Women's Futsal Championship despite the difficulties they faced, including insufficient resources and professional training opportunities. There was also a big difference between the Iranian squad and their rivals: The Iranians had to play futsal while wearing a hijab.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN?

Iran has a complicated political structure with uncooperative decision-makers who easily undercut and challenge the government's decisions. Even after permission was granted for families and women to watch the World Cup match against Spain, police in Tehran attempted to prevent people from entering the stadium, despite having purchased tickets and waiting outside the venue.

There are hopes that the 2018-19 season of Iran's Pro League, the top

division in its national football, and the future games of the national team will be attended by women. Time will tell if Rouhani fulfills his promise to allow Iranian women, who are just as passionate about football as men, to enter sports stadiums.

President Rouhani, who is under unprecedented pressure due to growing economic woes amid the US withdraw from the Iran nuclear deal, might be able to fulfill his promise and open the doors of stadiums to women. However, while he is still struggling to deliver on many electoral promises — such as freeing the leaders of the Green Movement of 2009 from house arrest, improving Iran's relations with the outside world, easing tensions with the US, and healing the economic wounds of the nation — the delivery of his promise to allow women to watch sporting events might remain in limbo.

What is clear is that women have faced so many restrictions that even a small change such as the lifting of the ban on entering stadiums can be seen as a huge victory and a reason to celebrate.



Kourosh Ziabari is an award-winning Iranian journalist. He has conducted numerous interviews with politicians, diplomats, Nobel Prize laureates, academics and other public figures from around the world. In 2015, he was the recipient of the Senior Journalists Seminar

Fellowship from the East-West Center in Hawaii. In November 2015, he won the Gabriel Garcia Marquez Fellowship in Cultural Journalism by the FNPI foundation in Cartagena, Colombia. He was the first Iranian delegate at the American Middle Eastern Network for Dialog at Stanford (AMENDS), addressing its 2016 edition. Ziabari is a reporter at Fair Observer.

We Won't Be Mourning NATO Any Time Soon

Guillaume Lasconjarias

July 12, 2018

Whatever Donald Trump says or does in Brussels, it will not be the end of NATO.

As the NATO summit in Brussels started its second day in disarray, what used to be an eventless and business-as-usual reconfirmation of unity and strength of the Atlantic alliance has turned into a power play between US President Donald Trump and NATO's European members. Can the crisis still be avoided?

Back in May 2017, during Trump's first visit to meet his NATO allies, even though things went relatively smoothly, a sentiment of frustration emerged. Allies had been expecting a formal commitment to Article 5 of the 1949 Washington Treaty — the central tenet of collective defense which postulates that an attack against one alliance member is an attack on all — yet Trump remained silent. It was left to Vice President Mike Pence and Secretary of

Defense Jim Mattis to damage-control, underscoring that, words aside, America's NATO commitment is clearly demonstrated by its actions.

A year later the situation has worsened. President Trump has been busy deconstructing President Barack Obama's legacy, withdrawing from the Paris Climate Agreement and the Iran nuclear deal, shaking hands with North Korean dictator Kim Jong-un and — in just a few days' time — meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

In every domain, Trump challenges traditional US foreign policy and its establishment. He prefers direct tweets to the soft and cautious wording of diplomatic communiqués and believes that his instinct and personal engagement with other world leaders can best serve his vision of America's future. The end of the G7 summit last month in Canada was a first glimpse of what NATO allies have feared and, indeed, had already experienced.

Trump landed in Europe for a week-long series of meetings, convinced that America's NATO allies have to do more, spend more on defense and, if not, they should be ready to face the consequences. America's traditional support for Europe in the case of an armed attack is no more unconditional. What Trump says is not new, and the lament of European allies being free-riders and not spending enough on their own defense was the core message delivered by President Obama's

Secretary of Defense Robert Gates when he left office in 2011.

Yet Trump goes one step further by recalling the defense pledge made at the Newport Summit in September 2014, where allies agreed to increase their defense spending to 2% of their GDP. Just this morning, at an emergency session called after Trump's renewed pressure on the alliance, he allegedly implied there may be "grave consequences" if allies do not immediately meet higher spending targets," claiming victory during his press conference.

Last month, Trump wrote a personal letter to the leaders of NATO member states (including Norway, Canada and Germany) urging them to do better as it would become "increasingly difficult to justify to Americans citizens why some countries fail to meet our shared collective security commitment." And no later than at the moment before boarding his flight to Europe, he said that meeting Putin would be easier than facing the NATO allies who "kill us on trade."

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY

As the North Atlantic Treaty Organization is due to celebrate its 70th anniversary next year, it appears to be in better shape than a few years ago. Gone are the doubts that overshadowed its commitment in Afghanistan and disagreement over Libya. NATO has started doing its homework and got its act together. Back in 2014, only three of

the 29 allies were spending 2% of their GDP on defense. In 2018, they are now five, and there may be eight by the end of the year.

There is a way to go still, but this shows good will and seriousness, with at least 15 allies promising to reach the 2% mark by 2024. In less than four years, the allies have increased their defense spending by \$45 billion, a number that demonstrates a willingness to contribute more. Of course, the crisis in Ukraine as well as other threats and risks at the margins of Europe have called for increasing up capabilities, but the trend has been upward.

From a military standpoint, NATO is also moving in the right direction. After two decades of crisis management operations, territorial defense and deterrence are back on the agenda. Military exercises, both in their training and diplomatic functions, have grown in number in response to Russia's aggression.

This fall, NATO plans to hold a military exercise — Trident Juncture 18 — in Norway, that would bring together more than 40,000 soldiers, something unheard of since the end of the Cold War. In the meantime, NATO Response Force has been upgraded to include a Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, acting as a "spearhead" and deployable within five days. Multinational battalions rotate in the Baltic States, protecting the east flank, whilst NATO air force scans the skies.

The alliance has also gone through a process of reorganizing its command structure, incorporating in its doctrine new elements dealing with hybrid and cyber threats whilst rethinking its partnership policy with other countries and organizations.

Not only will new headquarters be launched to deal with logistics and readiness issues, but the plan for the “four 30s” has been agreed upon, whereby allies commit to provide 30 mechanized battalions, 30 air squadrons and 30 ships under 30 days, in case of a major crisis. None of this cautions the idea of an “obsolete” organization, but instead reinforces the idea of a rejuvenated alliance.

WHAT ABOUT EUROPE?

In addition, similarly to what happened at the Warsaw summit in 2016, NATO and the EU could sign a new joint declaration, insisting on getting the two organizations to cooperate better. The European Commission, which has for a long period of time only considered itself as a civilian actor, has recently launched the Permanent Structured Cooperation framework which has its roots in the 2007 Lisbon Treaty but hasn't been enforced since then.

The European Intervention Initiative, championed by French President Emmanuel Macron, insists on the necessary strategic autonomy of Europe, something that even post-Brexit United Kingdom supports.

The longstanding debate between transatlanticism and Europeanism no longer makes sense, as the discussions focus on the possibility of having both organizations share their know-how and experience in domains such as responses to hybrid threats or the need to bridge the gap in identified shortfalls.

The Brussels summit will surely surprise us, in a positive or a negative way. Whatever Donald Trump will do or say, it will not be the end of NATO, even in the (very unlikely) case of US withdrawal — a Gaullist posturing. One could say that Trump has already achieved what his predecessors aimed to do — namely, Europe playing an active part in its own defense. Isn't that ironic?



Guillaume Lasconjarias is a French researcher at the NATO Defense College in Rome, Italy. His areas of expertise

cover counterinsurgency, capacity building and conventional forces, hybrid threats and professional military education. A former researcher at the Institut de Recherche Stratégique de l'École Militaire (IRSEM, Strategic Research Institute) and deputy head of the Research Office of the Army Doctrine Centre (CDEF), Lasconjarias has both an academic and practitioner's experience. He holds a PhD in History from Sorbonne University, Paris.

The Next Balancing Act for President Erdogan

Nathaniel Handy

July 12, 2018

The new presidential term offers Erdogan room for consolidation, but also the need to contain his allies.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan's inauguration on July 9 was a little different. Not in terms of personnel, since he has been president of Turkey for four years already, but in terms of substance. This was a reset. His inauguration brought in a new constitutional era in Turkish politics, one in which he takes the reins of a powerful executive presidency very different from what came before.

Many, of course, have pointed out that little will change. Erdogan has long confirmed himself as the colossus of Turkish contemporary politics, assuming a power that has dwarfed not just the many and varied opposition groups in the country, but even his own party, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP).

But this is the moment that his power becomes further cemented in constitutional hardware. Both he and those who follow him will be a lot harder to budge.

This presidential term is a momentous one for wider historical reasons. It will run until the republican centenary year of 2023, marking 100 years since the founding of the modern Turkish state. That a newly empowered and

emboldened President Erdogan will be at the helm come the centenary is telling, as he is now confirmed as the most powerful politician in the modern history of Turkey since its omnipotent founder, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk.

Despite long being an opposition figure apparently opposed to Kemalism (indeed, he was jailed by the secular establishment in 1998), the irony is that Erdogan has come to embody the ghost of Ataturk more and more as he has grown in stature.

In simply iconographic terms, the vast billboards that have covered Turkish towns and cities with his image have had more than a passing resemblance to the founding father. In terms of policy, he has also become decidedly more sympathetic to Kemalist principles.

BACK TO THE FUTURE

The benevolent paternalism or benign dictatorship that characterized the Ataturk era has been fought over by scholars ever since. While many viewed it as a period of necessary repression in pursuit of a noble Westernizing and modernizing cause, from it can still be traced the legacy of religious and ethnic fault lines that scar the country to this day. Yet Kemalism's unyielding blend of Turkish nationalism has remained a potent force in the state, one that has increasingly interwoven with Sunni Islam as it has matured.

As Erdogan finally vanquishes the vestiges of opposition to his rule, either

real or imagined, his reset presidency may well take on shades of what can be termed “Ataturkism.” While not espousing pure Kemalist doctrine, he will increasingly employ the untouchable, paternalist image so embodied by Ataturk, who is still present in the portraits and busts that grace town squares, schoolyards and living room walls across the country.

While he — and others in his party — may see his role as part of a much older inheritance, one rooted in the Islamic character of the Ottoman era, there is no escaping 20th-century history or the importance of the narrowly ethnic Turkish nationalism on which Erdogan has increasingly played in order to consolidate his power.

Where once the Islamist opposition in Turkey had much in common, and much sympathy for, the Kurdish cause, today’s ruling circle has not only turned its back on the Kurdish political movement, but actively embraced Turkish nationalists.

The embrace that Erdogan has offered nationalists — most particularly the new AKP allies, the Nationalist Action Party (MHP) — must be understood against the backdrop of the intra-Islamist power struggle between the AKP and the movement of exiled cleric Fethullah Gulen.

Much of the first decade of the 21st century was spent with both movements working in concert to subdue and eliminate the traditional secular

establishment in the judiciary, bureaucracy and military. Much of the second decade has been taken up with the power struggle that resulted from their defeat of that common enemy.

THE PURGED STATE

The Gulen movement was always highly opaque, politically ambiguous and only a tentative supporter of the AKP. Yet as the political Islamist takeover of Turkish institutions gathered pace, the Gulenist demand for power increased. The failed coup — widely attributed to the movement — and the wholesale purging of institutions that followed have left Erdogan with one of the biggest question marks of his next term at the helm: What to do with what is left of the state?

The numbers are staggering. The latest round of purges brings the total to around 130,000 people removed from the civil service since the failed coup. This has also involved the closing of media outlets and educational organizations connected with the Gulen movement. There has even been a concerted effort to disrupt the network globally, requesting that states transfer control of Gulenist schools to the TURGEV (Turkish Youth and Education Service) foundation, which has close ties to the Erdogan family.

With few, if any, friends among Gulenists or secularists inside or outside Turkey, the president will use the next term to bolster not only foundations like TURGEV, but also the imam-hatip

(religious school) system of educational establishments that will serve to produce a new generation loyal to his vision. He will also have to work to repair hollowed institutions of state that have seen some of the largest purges in modern history.

The polarized and majoritarian nature of Turkish politics, and the vast numbers of disaffected, will make this task particularly difficult.

Erdogan has always been an adroit political mover. He has formed and folded alliances with sometimes dizzying speed as and when he has been required to do so. He has kept an unerring compass for his destination — the epicenter of power in the republic — at all times.

Despite the many casualties, he has managed to retain vast support. Yet his latest alliance, that with the hard-right nationalists of the MHP, may determine the path he must tread going forward. The surprising electoral success of the MHP in June has made sure of that.

SECURITY AND INTROSPECTION

President Erdogan's alliance with the MHP plays into an older tradition in the country. A synthesis of Turkish nationalism and Sunni Islam — setting aside the usual Kemalist animosity toward the faith — was advocated by the junta that led the 1980 coup in Turkey, and elements of this thinking can also be found in the Milli Gorus movement, an Islamic community

organization out of which the president's own AKP sprung. This new alliance brings with it a much greater focus on traditional Turkish ideas of securitization.

During its first decade in power, the ruling AKP was a champion of the peace process with the Kurdish political movement, in particular the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). In this, they were a distinctive departure from the usual state position on the Kurdish question.

The end of the alliance with the Gulen movement, and the shift toward more traditional and militarist Turkish nationalist elements, has naturally seen a collapse of that peace process. The MHP views the Kurdish question through a purely security lens.

The more nationalist trend of current policy has also put a strain on relations with the European Union. Again, the early years of AKP rule saw some of the biggest movements toward possible accession to the bloc. The MHP, and the wider Turkish nationalist political landscape, has always been highly suspicious of the EU and its influence.

This has pushed Erdogan toward a more insular, less globally integrated policy. The economic implications of such a move, however, may give the president pause.

If one analyses the career of Erdogan to date, one notes his flexibility, his ability to react to the changing environment and to move beyond dogma. His latest

success has clearly emboldened the Turkish nationalist constituency, in particular the MHP. His next test may be to find a way to tame them. While there are clear overlaps between the nationalist agenda and the authoritarian, personality-driven politics of the president, their vision is not his vision. At some point, they diverge.

The next question for President Erdogan is how far to loosen the reins on the MHP and the wider Turkish nationalist vision, before finding a counterbalance to restrain them once more.



Nathaniel Handy is a writer and academic with over ten years of experience in international print and broadcast media. He is

the author of the chapter “Turkey’s Evolving Relations with the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) of Iraq since the Arab Spring” in Turkey’s Relations with the Middle East: Political Encounters after the Arab Spring (Isiksal & Goksel, Springer, 2018); the article “Turkey’s Shifting Relations with its Middle East Neighbors During the Davutoglu Era: History, Power and Policy” (Bilgi Dergisi Journal, 2011); and he presented a paper at the British Society of Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES) annual conference in 2014 on Turkish relations with the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq. He holds an MA in Middle East Studies from the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies at the University of Exeter.

The US President Attacks NATO

Gary Grappo
July 12, 2018

How else can one describe President Trump’s constant and pointless tirade against the Western world’s most successful and effective alliance? Former US Ambassador Gary Grappo explains.

It’s not a headline anyone would ever have expected. Established to protect the recovering nations of Western Europe from a menacing Soviet Union, the now 29-member NATO has been America’s core strategic alliance since 1949. But Donald Trump has been on the warpath against NATO since his 2016 campaign for the presidency. Why?

COULD TRUMP HAVE A POINT?

Trump seems to waiver between NATO’s relevance — he’s referred to it on occasion as obsolete — and possible need, but he has never deviated from his central criticism of the alliance and its members: they sponge off the US. The United States picks up the largest share of NATO’s overall budget, about 22%.

But it’s unclear whether President Trump’s harangues are based on members’ contributions to the NATO budget or their individual defense budget expenditures. Most of the American public is unaware that no NATO member is in arrears in its budget

contributions to the bloc; some having actually increased these contributions since he took office.

If Trump is referring to individual members' defense budgets, then he has a point. In 2014, NATO members agreed to establish a minimum goal — more of a guideline — of 2% of their national budgets for defense.

In 2017, the US spent 3.57% of its national budget on defense. In that same year, only four other countries met the 2% threshold: the United Kingdom, Greece, Poland and Estonia. Four others are on track to meet this goal in 2018. When it comes to the proportion spent on defense as a share of GDP, Europe has fallen from just under 3% in 1989 to 1.95% last year, according to Forbes. But since Trump moved to the White House, most countries have been increasing their defense spending.

Trump's criticism also has a certain resonance among many working-class Americans — i.e., Trump voters and others who struggle with health care, Social Security, childcare and other welfare-related challenges. Though spending on these programs is far from meager, when viewed against Europe's more generous welfare programs, Americans wonder whether they are bankrolling Europe's defense at the expense of their own well-being.

Trump has struck a nerve that the Europeans must acknowledge. After all, Americans expect that all must do their fair share.

IS IT ALL ABOUT THE MONEY?

Trump's sole basis for criticizing the alliance seems to come down to money, not surprising for the first president in US history with no prior military or government experience. He views NATO as a business proposition, though one wonders whether he might not see it as one of his golf club developments whose members are expected to pay dues.

It was always expected that America would outspend its NATO partners. The US comprises 51% of the allies' total GDP, maintains a triad nuclear force — aircraft, missile and submarine force capable of delivering thousands of nuclear missiles against any potential foe — and holds worldwide defense and economic interests unlike any other member. (The UK and France also have nuclear weapons but a substantially smaller force than America's.) Given its extensive defense commitments and interests, it shouldn't surprise anyone that the US spends considerably more than its NATO partners. In addition, for most of NATO's members, advanced weapons such as F-35 Stealth fighters, attack submarines, Apache attack helicopters and long-range B-2 strategic bombers are just unrealistic, not to mention unnecessary.

Nevertheless, 2% is a reasonable goal and Trump is right to keep members' feet, particularly those of NATO's larger economies, to the fire. His recent call that they increase spending to 4% is patently outrageous, however, since

even the US does not and is highly unlikely to spend at such a level.

His ham-handed approach, such as attacking ally Germany for its energy expenditures on Russian gas and claiming NATO members owe the US for Europe's defense, is tactless and unlikely to get the results that Washington should really want, and it ultimately undermines the integrity of the alliance.

Trump's phlegmatic support of Article 5 of the NATO charter — "An attack against one is an attack against all" — runs counter to the commitments of every US president and every American Congress since Harry Truman. (For the record, it's important to note that the US has been the only country to invoke that article, after the 9/11 attacks, which NATO members unanimously endorsed and supported.) His blistering criticism is more reminiscent of a street gang shakedown or mafia strong-arming for protection money.

FORGOTTEN

As befits his inexperience and apparent lack of understanding of the alliance, Trump fails to grasp the essential purpose and objective of NATO: collective security. It proved successful in prevailing in the Cold War, addressing the Balkans crisis of the 1990s and remaining engaged in the Afghanistan War.

Equally important, NATO has grown from just 12 — some fragile and facing

internal communist challenges — post-World War II states to 29 nations firmly committed to the same values of democracy, liberty, and open markets. It includes some of the largest developed economies and provides the security underpinning for the world's most successful economic coalition: the European Union.

Without that collective security, it's fair to assume that America would be spending much more to meet its broad security interests around the world. The US can count on the diplomatic backing that most often accompanies membership. America's closest global allies — Britain, Canada, France and Germany, among others — are members. Moreover, former Soviet bloc nations, such as Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, the Baltic States and others, are now members of NATO, having clamored following the fall of the Soviet Union to join the world's most successful alliance and are now among its most fervent members. By any measure, NATO has been an overwhelming success and well worth the resources spent.

Today, in the face of newfound Russian aggression in Crimea, eastern Ukraine and the Baltics, the alliance will prove much more capable of resisting Vladimir Putin's ambitions than could any one country, including the US.

It is not only the wrong way but the wrong time for Trump's assault. Instead, he should focus on: increased joint efforts and resources toward

cybersecurity within the alliance, perhaps the fastest growing threat at present; shared operations for Baltic security; North Atlantic and Arctic Ocean security; and the security challenges of migration, especially from the Middle East, North and Sub-Saharan Africa.

THE QUIET WAY: DIPLOMACY

Behind the scenes, US Defense Secretary James Mattis seems to be working to advance some of those goals, in spite of his boss' obvious lacuna when it comes to America's security interests. Flying beneath the radar, Mattis has secured a commitment by the alliance to the US Defense Department's "30-30-30-30 plan." The effort will require NATO to have 30 land battalions, 30 air fighter squadrons, and 30 ships ready to deploy within 30 days of being put on alert. A European Defense Initiative has also doubled its spending for 2019 to \$6.5 billion. Mattis' patient, quiet and deliberate diplomacy is achieving much more than Trump's bullying.

If Trump's thoughtless hammering of NATO members is a ploy to get them the pony up, then it's decidedly vulgar and intemperate, considering these are among America's very best friends and allies.

More likely, his attack on NATO is in line with his overarching dislike of and even repugnance for multilateral commitments. As a businessman, Trump looked at every relationship or deal as transactional; partners were to

be used and coming out ahead — as measured in dollars — was all that mattered. But that isn't how an alliance, especially this vital alliance, operates. America's alliances, agreements, partnerships, international commitments and collaborative approach to diplomacy, trade and defense have earned it dozens of friends and allies around the world, among non-democracies as well as democracies. That's something neither Russia nor China can claim.

Now, Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping doubtlessly rejoice as they watch Donald Trump attack and undermine one of America's best foreign and national security policy ideas — one they can neither match nor replicate.



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Meet Colombia's New President

Glenn Ojeda Vega & German Peinado Delgado

Iván Duque's foreign policy will center on reinforcing ties with Colombia's traditional allies and securing international support for the administration's agenda.

This has been a critical year for Colombian politics. In March, a new congress was elected and, three months later, Iván Duque won the presidency when he defeated the former mayor of Bogotá, Gustavo Petro. The new congress will be sworn in on July 20, and the new president is expected to do the same on August 7.

Nonetheless, the new head of state has already made some key ministerial and cabinet announcements. The first major appointment is that of Alberto Carrasquilla as minister of finance, position that he held previously between 2003 and 2007, during the presidency of Alvaro Uribe.

Carrasquilla has also been named head of the transition team, which has been particularly well received by figures such as Juan Jose Echeverria, governor of Colombia's Central Bank; Santiago Castro Gomez, president of the Banker's Association; and Julian Dominguez, president of the Chambers of Commerce Association. The fact that Carrasquilla is leading the handover from current President Juan Manuel Santos signals that the incoming

administration wants to reassure markets and investors about Colombia's pro-growth and business friendly agenda.

Other important appointments thus far include that of the economist Andrés Valencia as minister of agriculture; lawyer Nancy Gutierrez as minister of the interior; economist José Manuel Restrepo as minister of commerce and industry; surgeon Juan Pablo Uribe as minister of health; geologist Ricardo Lozano as minister of environment; economist María Angulo as minister of education; and economist Jonathan Malagón as minister of housing.

President-elect Duque's predilection for naming economists and lawyers to key posts in his administration should come as no surprise given his own background as a lawyer who spent years with the Inter-American Development Bank in Washington DC.

During the coming weeks, the rest of the new cabinet, as well as key ambassadors, are expected to be announced. Nevertheless, being an establishment figure, Duque is expected to continue naming individuals with experience working with the former Santos, Uribe and Pastrana governments.

On the legislative front, the Duque administration will count with a majority coalition in congress led by his party, the Democratic Center (founded in 2013 by Alvaro Uribe). This governing coalition is made up of most of the

traditional and center-right parties in the country. Furthermore, President-elect Duque has the political support of former Presidents Uribe, Andres Pastrana and Cesar Gaviria. However, the opposition also counts a significant and organized representation with key national figures, such as Gustavo Petro, Antanas Mockus, Jorge Robledo and Aída Avella.

During its first year, Duque's administration will have to tackle key domestic issues such as justice, tax and pension reforms as well as the implementation of the Havana peace agreement with the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia).

In terms of foreign policy, President-elect Duque has had a very clear agenda. His first foreign trips were to the United States and Spain, where he met with leaders in both the business and public sectors. During Duque's recent visit to Washington, he met with Vice-President Mike Pence; Secretary of State Mike Pompeo; Jim Carroll, head of the Office of National Drug Control Policy; National Security Adviser John Bolton; Gina Haspel, director of the CIA; and Senator Marco Rubio.

Similarly, during a recent visit to Miami, he met with Florida's other senator, Bill Nelson, as well as the state governor, Rick Scott. The most pressing bilateral issues between the two countries include combatting illegal trafficking, eradicating illicit crops throughout Colombia, dealing with the ongoing

crisis in Venezuela, advancing hemispheric security and fostering economic ties.

On the multilateral front, Duque met with the secretary general of the Organization of American States (OAS), Luis Almagro, as well as the director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Christine Lagarde. During this time, Duque also announced his intention of withdrawing Colombia from the Union of South American Nations, given the organization's failure to condemn abuses of power in countries like Venezuela.

These gestures by the president-elect set a clear tone for a foreign policy that is committed to the democratic and liberal order advanced by the inter-American system promoted by the OAS. Simultaneously, Duque has also participated in multiple academic and business forums, meeting with personalities such as Barack Obama, writer Mario Vargas Llosa and businessman Florentino Pérez.

During his visit to Spain, Duque met with the King Felipe VI; former Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar; the current prime minister, Pedro Sánchez; and Madrid's mayor, Manuela Carmena.

These meetings afforded the incoming president the opportunity to convey his intent to reinforce commercial and diplomatic relations between both countries. During these visits, Duque has been accompanied by lawyer

Carlos Holmes Trujillo, who has been appointed foreign secretary.

Holmes Trujillo has a respected political career, having served as a diplomat since the 1990s and standing as the vice-presidential candidate for the Democratic Center party in 2014.

It is clear that president-elect Duque's foreign policy will center on reinforcing ties with Colombia's traditional allies and securing international support for the administration's agenda.



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The Contradictions of France's World Cup Victory

Stephen Chan
July 21, 2018

The winning French team is populated by players who had been captured by football academies at a young age, and they too had led curiously privileged lives and enjoyed their own elite formation.

There was once a certain style. Rereading the 1953 English translation of Albert Camus's *The Rebel*, one is struck by its grandeur, its cosmic language where rebellion somehow expresses the contradiction of God. In a way it's silly; in another way, one remembers how such language made one into an idealist, the sort that imagined Paris as full of neatly piled cobblestones, ready to be thrown at small and great contradictions.

Camus's writing was the grand gesture for all adolescents, but the world has entered a late middle age of decrepitude. God is fake news. The earth is meanwhile flat. President Putin uses Botox. Unforgiving close-ups reveal the face of President Trump to be saturated with tiny broken veins. Circulation is a seepage, not a flow.

But the French President Emmanuel Macron, of the sort unimaginable to Camus, is young enough to look like the over-achieving teenager who would have invented a machine to prize up the cobblestones, having first privatized them. He seduced his schoolteacher

while still her student, danced in Lagos with the son of Fela Kuti, leapt to his feet punching the air as France wins the World Cup, all while never needing to loosen his tie.

And, across the Channel, Prime Minister Theresa May — who never looks glamorous despite wearing Parisian couture — holds nominal court over a government that is so divided on issues of economic and cosmic destiny that the ministers resemble toads and frogs in the blazer pockets of Eton schoolboys. Opposition leader Jeremy Corbyn, like the teacher brought out of retirement, remembers E.P. Thompson's 1975 essay on Europe and takes to heart its warning 43 years later, when all of Europe and all the world has turned upside down and when reading Thompson is like reading a village romance that warns against the wickedness of the big city.

A FRENCH INTERLUDE

As for France, it had its great moment of contradiction after World War II. Its sophistication and sense of equality, in elite circles at least, attracted Miles Davis to Paris in 1949. He would walk around the city hand in hand with Juliet Greco and feel, on his first trip outside the United States, a free man. He was taken seriously and treated with respect. Until his death, he kept coming back.

If Camus wrote *The Rebel* in 1953, its antecedent and, in many ways, its template, was André Malraux's *Man's Estate*, published in 1933, about a group

of revolutionaries who had gone to China to fight in the Shanghai uprising. The book's sense is exactly that of equality. I cannot think of any earlier book where Chinese people are depicted as complete equals in their human capacities, ideals and failures, to any others. In particular, they kill with as much hesitation, and die with as much resignation, fear and courage as everyone else. They rebel against the cosmos but seek an equality on earth that fits perfectly Camus's rendition of dying for others.

And, if one is to die for other human beings, why not for elephants? Romain Gary's 1956 novel, *The Roots of Heaven*, pioneered what is now a global ideology of equality in an almost anthropomorphic sense. Only for Gary, the elephants were always that Great Other who, nevertheless, had a right to life. Gary, like Malraux, had been one of those dashing adventurers and war heroes who gave life to Camus's idea of *l'homme engagé*, the fighting intellectual who was engaged with the world he contemplated. It all gave France a sense of sophistication, culture and cosmopolitanism in which morality reached outward.

Except that it didn't. The war with Algeria, which lasted from 1954 to 1962, was a war of terror on both sides. The horrendous and suffocating French military tactics were emulated by South Africa in the 1980s as the last stand of apartheid reached out to stifle the capacities of surrounding countries to support liberation. In France itself,

attempted coups shattered the capacity of the 4th Republic to produce a stable government. The strongman president, personified then by General Charles De Gaulle and by the constitution of the 5th Republic, gave all successive presidents almost Napoleonic power.

No other Western democracy has such a constitutionalized neo-dictator at its elected core, in which the president can never be completely outflanked. But in the outflanking and counter-flanking, ambivalences, if not contradictions, arise. The machinations of François Mitterand, the great complexity who became president of France in 1981, introduced a combination of sordid reality and residual idealism to the idea of politics. Suddenly, everything became worldly — not just in a philosophical sense, but with the attributes of cynicism.

In this, the descendant of Malraux, Camus and Gary is Bernard Henri Levy — the dashing opportunist who is so dashing, he doesn't have time to think. Not deeply at any rate, but who produces an onslaught of ideas and interventions that mark the current era of France as one of style and flimsiness. It has to be flimsy to avoid the pitfalls of immorality, to skate over them, as if thought was now postured on thin ice. It produces a figure like President Macron, whose politics of theater may yet transform France, but not in the way that Theresa May and Jeremy Corbyn might wish to transform the United Kingdom.

A TEMPLATE

What exists as a template for leftist thought in Britain is in fact more English than fully British. It rejoices in its heritage of the English Civil War and the overthrow of Charles I. A form of parliamentary government was attempted against the backdrop of debates on equality and John Milton's great poem in which Satan was right to rebel against God. These social and political liberties were threatened by the political economy of the Industrial Revolution, and it was E.P. Thompson who in 1963 stirringly wrote about the culture of resistance in *The Making of the English Working Class*.

Insofar as there was an internationalism, this was apparent in the long twilight of belief in Stalinism, until the evidence of gulags and massacres became too great, but was continued in subscription to the "actually existing socialism" of Yugoslavia. Thompson's brother, Frank, had been executed by Fascist collaborators while fighting alongside Tito's partisans, and E.P. himself had been part of the youth brigades that, after the war, came to help build Yugoslavia's railways. In between England and Yugoslavia was this thing called Europe, which seemed to be uniting its industrial and corporate classes in what is now the European Union.

The makings of the various European working classes and their own cultures of rebellion were unknown to Thompson and, in his famous argument with the Polish philosopher Leszek Kolakowski, it was Kolakowski who took almost

sarcastic delight in pointing out (in a very long 1974 essay) that Thompson knew next to nothing about Eastern Europe, the realities of socialist doctrine in Communist application and the intellectual culture of resistance outside England. In short, Little England was as much a preserve of the left as it remains of the English right in its current Brexiteering against Europe.

In this stylized and stylish hypocrisy, our only hope is for a Europe of the future — a Europe that stands against the dictators as they carve out spaces in the world.

In this, Jeremy Corbyn, who would remember at first hand the impact of Thompson, is as one with those around Theresa May. If it is England first (Scotland and Northern Ireland voted very much against Brexit), then it echoes that curious Anglophonic isolationism and self-righteousness that is heard in Donald Trump's USA: "America First," meaning in both the US and England a blue-collar, working-class sense of resistance to the outside, to the Other, to difference and to anything that is not part of its own corporatist ethnocentricity and ethos.

On both sides of the Atlantic, the left has lost the working class but dares not admit it. Mythologies that have replaced thought would crumble. There is, at it were, a Trump card against all thought.

This leaves the new great dictators of the world to carve out their large corners. Vladimir Putin in Russia, Xi Jinping in China, even little dictators like

North Korea's Kim Jong-un will have their slice. Xi's China will survive trade wars with the US and may even emerge from them stronger than America. Putin is very obviously a rival to the US, but his assiduous portrayal of himself as strong and manly has gripped the American imagination as a key desideratum of leadership.

It is something that seems so desperately desirable in the vacuum of thought and the seeming refusal or incapacity to think — manliness is projected into the corpulent and combed-over frame of 72 year-old President Trump who, as evidence of manliness, gropes women almost as an obligatory performance of male strength and leadership. Locker-room talk? Only strong men inhabit locker rooms.

An emaciated Europe without Britain will face Russia, and a reckless US will face China. Within 10 years we shall know who owns the new morning of future history.

MEANWHILE, IN THE BANLIEUE...

When President Macron cheers his national team, this is not necessarily a president at one with his people. The elite formation of French leaders leaves little room for identification with poverty in the poor suburbs. When Frantz Fanon, at the same time as Camus, was writing about trauma on the part of the oppressed, his research had begun precisely in the migrant communities of France.

However, the 2018 winning French team, although composed of people from the banlieue, was in fact populated by players who had been captured by football academies at a young age, and they too had led curiously privileged lives and enjoyed their own elite formation. But street cred is declared and performed as much as something actual and structured, and Macron knew about the values of performativity. Even so, the French president has reinforcements that no World Cup winner or other citizen can have.

So what is there finally about France in the nest of the world's perfidies that still makes it — with complaints and gestures of despair — something like the best of all possible decrepitudes? Not just a president who looks less wooden than the young Tony Blair when he attempted his Cool Britannia phase. And the French have their own long history of perfidies without a trace of English irony.

I think it is the absence of detachment, which begs the question as to whether elite engagement is better than none at all. But the impersonation of Macron in the French team's dressing room was not only performatively convincing, but more convincing altogether than Theresa May's inability to meet the survivors of the Grenfell Tower inferno, when she had to be prompted to go back to do so, after first having met only the fire crews and rescuers. And it is more convincing than Donald Trump's desperate and naked search for

validations and confirmations he is somehow not only great, but greater than anyone else. Being one with the people as a performance is not the same as being all things to all people as a pathology.

In this stylized and stylish hypocrisy, our only hope is for a Europe of the future — a Europe that stands against the dictators as they carve out spaces in the world. Not for obvious and "universal" human rights such as liberté, égalité and fraternité (and hopefully sororité), but against the gross turpitude of obvious governmental wrongs against a free judiciary, free expression and free organization whence all else flows. Outside the mandate of scriptures and handed-down mythologies is the possibility for people to carve their own way and establish their own sense of class, history, future and their own cynicism as they reflect on their own failures and self-achieved hypocrisies; within, new legends that the next generation may freely dispute and dismiss.



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Raising the Bar for Democracy in Pakistan

Shairee Malhotra

July 22, 2018

As the elections inch closer, the bar needs to be raised for democracy in Pakistan and the expectations that come with it.

Civilian leaders being pushed out of office is the norm in Pakistan. With the recent ouster and sentencing of Nawaz Sharif, it is the third time that the former prime minister has been forcibly removed during his tenure. The widespread belief that the Pakistani establishment has colluded with the courts to remove Sharif has led many to label this as a “judicial coup.”

Plots to topple the Sharif government were hatched ever since he came to power in 2013, and throughout his term he endured enormous pressure from the army and judiciary.

According to Husain Haqqani, the former Pakistani ambassador to the US, “Elected politicians in Pakistan are subject to the whims and superior judgment of appointed generals, judges, and civil servants.” Elections, without respect for their outcomes where leaders are consistently co-opted by the system, are meaningless and ridicule the sanctity of the popular vote.

The judicial duality in Pakistan’s treatment of military generals and prime ministers is evident in its history, and the National Accountability Bureau (NAB)

court’s convenient applications and political accountability this time around fit perfectly into the overall trend.

Since Pakistan is an army with a country, former President Pervez Musharraf — the ex-army chief — escaped trial in 2016 and now lives in exile in London and Dubai, despite his alleged illegal subversion of the constitution in 2007.

This is while the selective targeting of the party cadres of the Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) and the Pakistan Peoples’ Party (PPP) — the chief opponents of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) — continue to squeeze their support bases.

This manufacturing of electoral opposition toward the two mainstream parties (PML-N and PPP) is hardly surprising, given the prevalent notion that the establishment is backing the PTI. The Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT) assesses the neutrality of the military toward competing parties with a low score of 33.4%.

French writer and historian Alexis de Tocqueville emphasized the crucial role of lawyers and an independent judiciary in a democracy. In a country with several centers of power, the checks in the form of lawyers and courts have, rather than fulfilling their higher purpose of checking the establishment and its actions, supported its foul play.

The run-up to the elections in Pakistan on July 25 has also seen a massive crackdown on the media, including large outlets such as Dawn, Geo TV and Jang, with unprecedented levels of censorship and harassment. Intimidation and the coercion of journalists who have not towed the narrative of the establishment on issues or parties have taken place, and hawkers have been banned from distributing their papers.

Daniel Bastard, head of the Asia Pacific desk at Reporters Without Borders, said this interference in the form of draconian constraints is “absolutely unacceptable in a country that claims to be democratic.”

These attempts to influence the election’s outcome, as well as control the narrative by silencing the voices of leading parties whilst encouraging uncritical coverage of opponents, has stifled freedom of expression, free debate and alternative perspectives that are hostile to the establishment’s interests.

If this wasn’t enough, there has been a spate of violent attacks targeting parties like the Awami National Party (ANP) and the Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) in which candidates and hundreds of people have been killed. ANP General Secretary Hussain Babak holds the federal and provincial governments responsible for the lack of security arrangements.

The volatile security environment preceding the election has significantly

impeded and threatened the efforts of parties to effectively campaign and mobilize voters. The Economic Times reports: “Electioneering is a public activity requiring a guarantee of public safety. It is a poor indication of the health of this election if on-ground campaigning is suppressed or forcibly suspended.” This violent turbulence right before the elections is ironically at a time when the overall security situation in Pakistan has improved due to effective nationwide counterterrorism operations.

Very much in sync with the rest of this shady election, the 100-strong EU election monitoring team, which usually begins its work a month in advance, has this time been allowed to start just a week before the vote.

Also, in a recent move, the election commission has given the army the authority to act as magistrates and conduct spontaneous trials of anyone breaking election laws to ensure the integrity of the polls.

This expansion of the army’s already bloated powers by giving it a judicial function has been touted by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) as “unprecedented and bordering dangerously on micromanagement by an institution that should not be involved so closely in what is strictly a civilian mandate.”

The manner of Sharif’s dismal, the extreme levels of media censorship, and the selective targeting of political parties

while extremists get mainstreamed all espouse the persistence of the deep state that is continuing to rule covertly. Based on this electoral engineering and abnormal pre-election climate, the HRCP states, “There are ample grounds to doubt the legitimacy of the elections” and it has criticized the “unabashed attempts to manipulate their outcome.”

LACK OF CREDIBILITY

In this bleak run-up to the elections, the polls on July 25 are left with little credibility. Pakistani democracy is simply leaning on the procedure of elections and winning seats, while the very democratic institutions that are meant to protect democracy are engaging in maneuvering and foul play in an environment fraught with violence and extreme media censorship.

However, elections are only the tip of the iceberg. Perhaps, with Pakistan’s turbulent history, there is cause to celebrate the country’s only second peaceful and timely transfer of power, and it is an achievement if elections take place at the proposed time.

But maybe it’s also time to raise the bar for Pakistani democracy and hold it to international standards. And especially so in the run-up to the elections that has dented the democratization process in Pakistan.

As CNN host Fareed Zakaria famously said, “There is life after elections, especially for the people who live there. If a democracy does not preserve liberty

and law, that it is as democracy is a small consolation.”



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López Obrador’s Personal Safety Is Mexico’s Stability

Emmanuel Gomez Farías Mata,
Emanuel Bourges Espinosa & Iván Farías Pelcastre

By foregoing the use of a security detail, Mexico’s president-elect is putting public interest at risk.

On July 1, Andrés Manuel López Obrador was elected as Mexico’s new president. His victory marked a historic day for the country: López Obrador is the first left-wing presidential candidate to become successful in recent history. After two failed attempts at the presidency, he became the most popular winner in the country’s biggest election, taking more than half (53%) of

the nearly 60 million votes cast on election day.

Although the most anticipated announcement was the name of the winner in the presidential race, there were more than 8,000 public offices open for competition to tens of thousands of candidates from nine national parties and many independent contestants across the country. Of these candidates, 132 would never see the end of the elections. They were killed during the campaign — two of them right on election day — in what was the deadliest contest in Mexico's political history.

Local politicians, including candidates, public servants and campaign staff often face threats to their lives, families and properties from organized crime. "If politicians, from whatever party, seek to tackle corruption or criminal activities, they quickly become targets of organised crime. Drug cartels, in particular, are using the elections to ensure that politicians seeking election do not threaten their power base. They are using homicide as a strategy to maintain political control over local communities," argues Deborah Shaw from the University of Portsmouth. In a country where 99% of crimes go unpunished, it is unlikely that the culprits will ever be found, let alone face justice.

VOLATILE SECURITY

Despite this volatile security situation, López Obrador confidently toured the country in an effort to win support for his

candidacy, party and platform. He visited almost all the municipalities across Mexico, including some which the incumbent president, Enrique Peña Nieto, and other presidential candidates have never been to due to security risks. As president-elect, López Obrador has vowed to tour the country again to raise support for his incoming administration. Worryingly, he has stated that even as president-elect he will not to use a security detail for his personal protection.

Historically, the security of Mexican presidents has been handled by the Estado Mayor Presidencial (EMP), the elite arm of the Mexican army dedicated to protecting the head of state. Traditionally, this security is also afforded to newly elected presidents from election day until taking office, which in Mexico takes place on December 1. López Obrador, however, has vowed to not take the EMP protection. Even when threats have been made against his life, he has stated: "I have nothing to be afraid of. I have nothing to hide. My conscience is clear. I have a view of life ... where one walks straight ahead toward an ideal. Does not stray [from it]. And, if in that walk toward an ideal, one falls, that is it."

To justify his decision, López Obrador has pointed to the assassination of Luis Donaldo Colosio, the candidate from then-ruling Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party), who was assassinated at a campaign rally in Baja California during the 1994 presidential campaign.

López Obrador argues that even the life of sitting presidents is at risk, and that not even the protection of the highly praised US Secret Service prevented the 1963 assassination of John F. Kennedy.

By foregoing the use of a personal security detail, López Obrador hopes to convey a message that he will deal with insecurity in a way that is closer to the daily experiences of ordinary Mexicans. López Obrador insists that he aims at making radical changes to the way in which political power has been historically exercised in Mexico. This is a signal that the incoming president aims to eliminate — not just limit — the privileges that he considers were abused by those who governed the country before him.

SYMBOLS OF POWER

In his line of reasoning, the existence of a security detail is meant not to just provide protection to the head of state but serves as a show of strength and opulence, its staff and protocols all part of the theatrical features that have characterized political power in Mexico. They are signs and symbols of status that elites use to shape the act of governing and how they want ordinary people to look at the authority they hold.

This interpretation of the uses of the presidential security apparatus is close to reality. For instance, from January to August 2017, President Peña Nieto's staff spent about \$1.5 million on his protection while on official business

around the country. From January 2013 to January 2016, his staff spent \$10 million on 41 official trips abroad.

While these expenditures might appear to be small, the amount of money spent on providing security to Los Pinos, Mexico's presidential residence, is often off the charts. To secure the residence, just between January and May 2017, the president's office spent \$48 million. This amount includes the money spent on securing the 56,000 square metres that make up Los Pinos — a complex 14 times larger than the White House, which consists of several buildings whose commercial value is estimated to exceed \$92 million. The budget used to secure the residence could be substantially reduced should the activities of the president and his staff be moved permanently to the National Palace — the official seat of the Mexican government's executive branch — as López Obrador has proposed.

However, Mexico cannot be described as a safe country by a long stretch, and the threats that have been made against López Obrador's life are very real — to the point that former President Felipe Calderón has stated that “beyond any political differences, these threats, in this case, against López Obrador, are inadmissible, and that the State's response should be firm.” By foregoing the use of a security detail, López Obrador is putting public interest at risk.

To his supporters and those who voted for him, seeing López Obrador reach the country's highest office is the vindication

of a popular struggle, the culmination of a long fight for true democracy in Mexico. Even to his critics and those who did not vote for him, an attack on his life would put Mexico's political and social stability at risk. To both groups, López Obrador is now the president-elect. In the words of one journalist, "This is the institution of the presidency of the republic, this isn't just one person."

There are a number of alternatives to López Obrador's promise to run a government that is closer to the people. One of them would be using a smaller security detail. Another would be to make a more cautious use of the Mexican federal government's transport fleet, which includes the Presidente Juárez plane, a Boeing Dreamliner 787 that cost over \$350 million, making it the most expensive of its class in the world. Another option would be to limit the number of out-of-office official activities, which commonly involve the participation of more than 2,000 personnel.

Should López Obrador and his team discuss and consider these and other alternatives, there are many viable solutions that would both fulfil the need to provide security to the head of state while keeping him "close to the people."

Many Mexicans want to see justice being delivered for the families of the 132 candidates who were killed during the campaign. But many of them also want to see López Obrador assume office. As of July 1, López Obrador has

ceased being a social leader and candidate and, as president-elect, must act with full responsibility because his safety is now synonymous with the safety of the head of state and the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. Accepting the protection of his life and integrity is protecting Mexico's interests and stability. These are matters of national security that he simply cannot disregard.



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people online, because like any other “successful” business, sex traffickers rely on marketing and communication tools to ensure a steady cycle of demand and supply.

Tragically, this industry boom is being fueled by an astronomical growth in child sex trafficking. Between 2010 and 2015, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's CyberTipline received an 846% increase in the number of suspected cases reported, and the US Department of Justice has said that more than half of sex-trafficking victims are 17 years old or younger.

“Adult” sections on mainstream classified websites normalize easy, anonymous ways for traffickers and pimps to recruit, market and deliver women and children as commodities for sexual exploitation. Posting an online ad is quick, cheap and simple, and victims can be repeatedly bought and sold for large sums of money at relatively low risk. Traffickers are able to advertise in multiple locations, test out new markets, locate customers and transport victims to meet buyers while avoiding detection by authorities.

Meanwhile, the transitory nature of online sex trafficking makes it harder for law enforcement to locate victims, pimps and buyers; identify essential witnesses and evidence; and share information and intelligence across jurisdictions.

FOSTA

Interrupting the Vicious Cycle of Online Sex Trafficking

Romina Canessa
July 30, 2018

Legislation alone will not end the exploitation of women and girls in the United States.

The internet has enabled sex trafficking to become the fastest growing criminal enterprise in the world, worth a staggering \$99 billion a year. This expansion correlates directly with the increasing use of digital platforms to sell

In April, Congress passed FOSTA, a groundbreaking law that interrupts this cycle of abuse by holding internet companies accountable when they knowingly facilitate sex trafficking. An abbreviation for Allow States and Victims to Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act of 2017, FOSTA shrinks the online commercial sex market and opens up legal avenues for prosecutors and victims to take steps against social networks, websites and online advertisers that have failed to act sufficiently against users who post exploitative content.

However, not everyone is happy with FOSTA. Some have raised concerns that it will force online platforms to police their users' speech. There's even a lawsuit pending against the legislation. The plaintiffs, represented by the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), a nonprofit that is funded in part by Google, call FOSTA an "unconstitutional Internet censorship law."

FOSTA is a very narrowly tailored law that specifically holds anyone who knowingly facilitates and supports sex trafficking online liable. It doesn't cast a wide net over all internet activity — that kind of approach would be impossible. Industry giants like Oracle, IBM, Disney, 20th Century Fox and Hewlett Packard backed the bill because they realize technology can be used for good and bad and we shouldn't leave it undefended against criminals.

Sheryl Sandberg, Facebook's chief operating officer, supported FOSTA saying, "We all have a responsibility to do our part to fight this," and that we should "allow responsible companies to continue fighting sex trafficking while giving victims the chance to seek justice against companies that knowingly facilitate such abhorrent acts." Others have said that without sites like Backpage.com, women who choose to be in prostitution have fewer tools to screen potential "johns" and, as a result, are left vulnerable. But FOSTA does not target the adult services sector nor individuals — it explicitly targets tech companies.

Backpage was involved in 73% of all child trafficking cases reported to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (excluding reports made by Backpage itself). Before FOSTA, victims who were trafficked via the website were repeatedly prevented from getting justice through the courts — even in cases when Backpage knew of or participated in posting advertisements for sex from minors.

What survivors and activists knew to be true for years was finally confirmed by federal investigators when Backpage CEO Carl Ferrer admitted the website went so far as to assist advertisers in wording their ads so they didn't overtly declare that sex with minors was for sale. Flagged keywords associated with trafficking — such as "Lolita," "rape," "amber alert" and "teenage" — were deleted to conceal the true nature of the ads before they were published online.

The site, which was finally shut down in April 2018, may have been described as a “tool” for some but, in reality, it was overwhelmingly being used as a platform for commercial sexual exploitation — earning around \$7 per ad. A Senate report found that around 93% of Backpage.com’s revenue — estimated at \$150 million in 2016 — was from “adult services” ads.

ENDING DEMAND

While FOSTA is a monumental law, it alone will not end the exploitation of women and girls in the United States. We have to address this cycle of abuse at the beginning — and that means ending demand.

Legal rights organization Equality Now is working alongside survivors of commercial sexual exploitation, women and children’s rights organizations, policymakers and law enforcement officials to tackle the root causes of sex trafficking. This involves criminalizing those who exploit people for profit, including sex buyers, traffickers, pimps and brothel-keepers, and decriminalizing people in prostitution, including victims of trafficking, and providing them with much needed support services.

If we are going to make a dent in triple-digit percentage increases, we have to follow the money and hold those at the helm accountable. This is what FOSTA was made for.

July 30 marks World Day against Trafficking in Persons. Stand up for victims of online sex trafficking and together we can ensure the internet is no longer a tool for exploitation.



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