

# Fair Observer

Monthly



**BREXIT**

January 2019

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# Fair Observer Monthly



January 2019

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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.

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# The Rohingya Crisis: What to Watch for in 2019

Daniel Sullivan

January 2, 2019

*Bangladesh and the UN must continue to work together to improve the conditions for nearly 1 million Rohingya refugees.*

The year 2018 was a dire and desperate year for the Rohingya minority from western Myanmar. Two-thirds of the population that had been living in western Rakhine State before the end of 2017 remain displaced in crowded camps in Bangladesh. The several hundred thousand who remain in Myanmar face serious restrictions, and what the chair of an independent, international fact-finding mission describes as an “ongoing genocide.”

What will the year 2019 have in store for the Rohingya? Here are key developments to keep an eye on and some thoughts on what must be done to improve the outlook.

## **ROHINGYA RETURNING HOME?**

Repatriation of Rohingya to Myanmar is both the most necessary solution to the Rohingya crisis and the most controversial. It is not a question of whether Rohingya should be able to return to their homes; it is a question of when and under what conditions. To be clear, those conditions do not currently exist. Hundreds of homes have been destroyed. Rohingya in Myanmar continue to face restrictions and abuse.

And there is little sign of accountability or a path to citizenship as demanded by Rohingya who have been forced to flee. In fact, more than 15,000 Rohingya have continued to flee conditions in Myanmar for Bangladesh in 2018.

More than 40 humanitarian organizations working on the ground in Bangladesh have warned that returning the Rohingya to their homes now would be dangerous and premature. The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) has been clear that current conditions in Myanmar are not conducive “to the voluntary, safe, dignified, and sustainable return of refugees.”

Still, the governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh have pushed for returns to move forward. A bilateral deal to start returns by November 15, 2018, fell apart only because Bangladesh was unable to find Rohingya willing to return voluntarily. Pressure for returns will continue through 2019, but the reality is that, more than likely, most Rohingya will not and should not return by the end of 2019. Whether returns can take place in line with international standards — that is safe, voluntary and dignified — will depend mostly on what the government of Myanmar does or does not do.

## **REFORMS IN MYANMAR?**

The government of Myanmar has it within its power to create the conditions conducive to safe returns of Rohingya to Myanmar. It also has a blueprint for how to do so. The Advisory Commission on

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Rakhine State, led by former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, released a final report in August 2017 that was endorsed by the government of Myanmar. The report included recommendations for freedom of movement, recognition of basic rights and a path to citizenship for Rohingya in Myanmar.

By taking these steps, opening access to humanitarians and independent media and human rights monitors, and working with UNHCR, it may be possible to begin thinking about returns in 2019. But the window for doing so is quickly closing as the next election in Myanmar draws near in 2020. Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy, already reluctant to reform and address the Rohingya crisis, will be even more so as the military's party seeks to capitalize on anti-Rohingya sentiment. As this dynamic plays out, it will be even more important that pressure for change comes from outside — the sooner the better.

## **ACCOUNTABILITY FOR GENOCIDE?**

The push for accountability for the crimes committed by Myanmar's security forces against the Rohingya gained momentum in the last month of 2018. The US Holocaust Memorial Museum and the law firm that carried out a US State Department survey of the Rohingya independently concluded that there was strong evidence that crimes against humanity and genocide were committed. The State Department has not yet made a determination, but

the US House of Representatives voted 394 to 1 to declare the crimes as genocide.

In August 2018, an international fact-finding mission, authorized by the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), concluded that Myanmar's top military generals, including Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, must be investigated for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. The UNHRC then mandated the creation of an independent mechanism to collect evidence of abuses for future prosecution. Now it is vital that this mechanism receive the funding necessary to carry out its mandate.

The International Criminal Court has also begun an investigation into the crimes committed against the Rohingya. And international human rights groups continue to push for a mechanism for carrying out prosecutions. What forms of accountability are ultimately achieved will remain to be seen, but efforts will not go away in 2019.

It is also possible that the US State Department will be pushed to finally make a determination that crimes against humanity, if not genocide, have taken place. This would prompt further targeted sanctions. The United States has already placed sanctions on a handful of Myanmar military and border guard officials and the two army battalions that led the attacks on Rohingya civilians. But these sanctions need to extend to the highest levels,



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including Senior General Min Aung Hlaing.

## **MONSOON AND CYCLONES**

One of the greatest fears faced by Rohingya in Bangladesh through much of 2018 was the risk of a direct cyclone hit on the Rohingya camps. The worst was avoided in 2018, but flooding and high winds destroyed shelters, injured dozens and displaced thousands. With hundreds of thousands of Rohingya remaining in fragile shelters in crowded camps, that fear will be renewed with the 2019 monsoon and cyclone seasons. Beyond a direct hit, heavy rains will threaten land slides and flooding, not to mention the risks of rapid spread of water-borne diseases.

The humanitarian community and government of Bangladesh made great efforts to move the most vulnerable Rohingya to new areas in 2018. But, as highlighted by Refugees International, coordination and preparedness were limited by restrictions on the side of the government of Bangladesh and inefficiencies on the side of UN agencies. The Bangladeshi government continues to restrict the types of materials available to build more durable shelters. It also continues to push plans to move at least 100,000 Rohingya to Bhashan Char, an island in the historic path of cyclones and prone to flooding through much of the year.

Due to government restrictions, UN agencies have also struggled with a complex, hybrid coordination structure,

rather than the usual refugee response. Efforts are underway to assess the response and incorporate lessons learned for the UN response. The outcome of the recent general election in Bangladesh may create further space to address these issues. What is certain is that the 2019 monsoon and cyclone seasons will arrive and the extent to which space has opened and lessons been learned will be tested.

## **ANOTHER BOAT CRISIS?**

Finally, 2019 will likely see an increase in Rohingya fleeing conditions both in Myanmar and Bangladesh by boat for other countries like Malaysia and Thailand. With increased maritime monitoring and a break up of trafficking networks, we are unlikely to see something on the scale of the May 2015 crisis, in which thousands of Rohingya and Bangladeshi refugees and migrants were abandoned at sea. But the same questions of whether countries in the region will accept any abandoned boats or push them back to sea as they did in 2015 will have to be tackled. Already several boats have taken the journey.

Beyond boats, trafficking networks will prey on women in the Rohingya camps. The longer they remain in the camps in Bangladesh, the more vulnerable they will be to such networks. This underscores the regional aspect of the Rohingya crisis. How well Myanmar's neighbors in Southeast Asia work together to tackle trafficking and pressure Myanmar to improve conditions for Rohingya will greatly

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influence how the Rohingya crisis plays out in 2019.

The Rohingya will continue to face dire conditions in 2019. But there are ways that their plight can begin to be addressed. Above all, a positive path forward will depend on the ability of international actors to pressure and encourage Myanmar to create the conditions conducive to returns for the Rohingya.

In the meantime, the government of Bangladesh and UN agencies must continue to work together to improve the conditions for nearly 1 million Rohingya refugees living in the country. The year 2019 will not likely be the year that the Rohingya crisis is resolved, but with the right steps there is hope that, a year from now, we can say that the Rohingya have a better outlook for 2020.

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**Daniel Sullivan** is the senior advocate for human rights at Refugees International (RI). He joined RI in April 2016 as senior advocate focusing on Myanmar, Central America, and other areas affected by mass displacement. He spent the previous five years with United to End Genocide (formerly Save Darfur), first as a senior policy analyst and then as director of policy and government relations, leading strategic planning, report writing, and development of policy recommendations on Myanmar, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, and prevention of genocide and mass atrocities.

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## Tracking German Neo-Nazism Through Music

Bethan Johnson  
January 3, 2019

*German neo-Nazi bands attempt to appeal more broadly to an audience that is opposed to the government's position on asylum-seekers.*

Plato once wrote, in an argument postulating the banning of music, that “any musical innovation is full of danger to the whole State.” While an extreme position to adopt in its own right, the philosopher’s prediction about the interconnectivity of politics and music is not without its merits, least of all when it comes to Germany and some of its most radical citizens. Perhaps most infamous of all is the case of 19th-century composer Richard Wagner and his anti-Semitic views that inspired Adolf Hitler’s decision to venerate Wagner and his music during the Third Reich era.

While the literal tone of racially implicated music has significantly changed in postwar Germany — far fewer trombones and far more distortion of the vocal cords — its existence has endured. In the last three decades, National Socialist black metal and white-power bands have staged concerts that aim to blend entertainment with indoctrination, specifically with radical-right ideologies on race, religion and national identity. In 2018, the neo-Nazi concert scene in Germany experienced a decline in attendees, but it is critical to contextualize this in terms of how the events are policed, who attends the

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concerts and how they aspire to alter Germany's political landscape.

In his book, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism, and the Politics of Identity*, historian of fascism Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke demonstrates how the German neo-Nazi music scene was and is a product of globalization and alternative forms of European integration. Engagement with Nazi phraseology and symbology has been a notable element of fringe music movements in Europe since at least the 1980s, with a considerably active scene in Great Britain, Sweden and Norway. Although some bands like Endstufe predated German reunification, the metaphorical and literal fall of the Berlin Wall ushered in the discernible rise of a neo-Nazi music scene in Germany in the mid-1990s, with considerable promotional assistance from established Norwegian bands and commercial support from Norwegian fans.

## **NEO-NAZI MUSIC MARKET**

One of the earliest examples of extremely explicit engagements with neo-Nazism in German black metal occurred in the mid-1990s, when the band Absurd released "Thuringian Pagan Madness" — a demo with a cover of the gravestone of a boy whom members of the band were imprisoned for killing; upon their release, one member of the band openly called their victim a "race defiler." A band member subsequently joined forces with Heathen Front, a blood-and-soil style nationalist movement controlled by Norwegian

musician Varg Vikernes. Over the coming decade, Absurd collaborated with bands such as Kristallnacht out of France, SS1488 from Austria, Thunderbolt of Poland and an American group called Birkenau.

After bands such as Endstufe and Absurd emerged on the German radical music scene, dozens more groups professing pro-Nazi and other violent ideologies gained notoriety. Writing just after the turn of the 21st century, Goodrick-Clarke claimed that Germany had produced more than 50 prominent neo-Nazi bands, and that "Germany may be the largest and best-organized Nazi music market in Europe."

In these early years, the neo-Nazi music scene in Germany was responsive to myriad socio-political issues characteristic of the newly reunified Germany, including high unemployment rates and a rise in immigration, particularly from asylum-seekers coming from Iran, Romania, Turkey and the former Yugoslavia. Eventually, the government placed restrictions on asylum applications, and unemployment rates declined, but for a period in the early 1990s Germany saw a spike in far-right related violence.

According to Goodrick-Clarke, within this context, neo-Nazi bands wrote lyrics that referenced both violent attacks against asylum-seekers and Jewish people. (There is an intentional decision not to include any specific lyrics here so as not to amplify their message.) Lyricists wrote about the tensions in

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Germany at the time and promoted nostalgic images of a powerful Germany that were dated to periods prior to multiculturalism. As a result, Goodrick-Clarke estimates that Germany in the early 2000s had “about two thousand committed Nazi skinheads and as many as double that number of supporters.”

## **FRINGES OF THE MUSIC INDUSTRY**

Over the last decade, although they have remained on the fringes of the music industry and society more broadly, neo-Nazis have again invoked similar anti-immigrant, anti-Semitic, nostalgic pan-Germanic ideas in their lyrics to relative success. Whereas before the total number of enthusiasts of this music and its related ideology was estimated in the low thousands, recently concert venues for neo-Nazi music festivals have seen attendances of several thousands. For example, some 3,500 people attended Rock for Identity — Music and Speeches Against the Abolition of Germany in May 2016, and the 2017 iteration of annual musical festival, Rock Gegen Überfremdung, or Rock Against Foreign Inundation, drew a crowd of more than 6,000.

While these two were arguably the largest neo-Nazi festivals in Germany, there is a parallel rise in the overall number of music events that included neo-Nazi or far-right bands. According to German authorities, the number featuring far-right ideology has grown in the last five years, with a steady increase since 2015, which may be

related to the German government's alteration to asylum policies that year.

Despite indications that the number of attendees would increase in 2018, a series of notable outdoor concerts with neo-Nazi associations experienced significantly lower turnout. The October 2018 Rock Against Foreign Inundation event had approximately 800 attendees, and the eighth annual Eichsfeld Day — a Neo-Nazi event billed as family fun — drew only a quarter of its usual 800-person turnout. The decline in popularity can in part be attributed to how these events and crowds are being policed. Rock Against Foreign Inundation was originally scheduled to be held in an alternate location; local authorities twice successfully petitioned the court for the forcible relocation of the event, in the second instance only hours before the festival was set to begin.

This may be one aspect of an increasingly vigilant stance by German authorities on tampering down on the proliferation of far-right beliefs, most particularly following the violence in Chemnitz. Unofficially, moreover, counter-protest groups are also growing in size and attempting to disrupt such gatherings.

As was the case in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the music produced by neo-Nazi bands today very explicitly discusses issues of immigration and German identity. It is important to recognize that even though their concerts may be smaller this year than in the past, neo-Nazi bands have not

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changed their messaging. While they have by no means abandoned expressions of anti-Semitism, they bill their concerts with references to immigration, and signage at some events notes the ethnic, religious, or racial changes in Germany. These groups and events, it can be argued, are attempting to appeal more broadly to an audience that is opposed to the German government's position on asylum-seekers.

This aligns with findings published by the German authorities in July 2018 about the politics of extremism in the country. The report, which comprised data from 2017, identified 6,000 individuals as neo-Nazis (a slight rise from 5,800 in 2016), claiming Germany was home to some 24,000 people adhering to overall extreme right-wing ideologies. Moreover, a study by the Competence Centre for Research into Right-Wing Extremism and Democracy out of the University of Leipzig found that approximately one-third of Germans held some xenophobic views.

## **METHODS OF RADICALIZATION**

It is a well-known hypothesis that music and concerts are tried and true methods of radicalization, particularly for young people, and this is accurate in the neo-Nazi context. Their lyrics and events promise camaraderie and blame social and personal ills on outsiders. The upward trend in the number of events (now also spread through many parts of Germany) signifies an attempt to make neo-Nazism more accessible to

Germans and to bring its ideology into view of society at large.

But this music is not just rhetorically dangerous. There are some links between fandom of neo-Nazi music and political violence. For example, Weisse Wölfe (White Wolves) is a neo-Nazi band whose lyrics have been found to reference extreme violence against ethnic and religious minorities. German authorities have identified the White Wolves Terrorcrew as linked to the band, and in 2016 some of its members were accused of actions against migrant communities and those holding liberal political views in Germany, as well as the German state itself.

Finally, while certain neo-Nazi festivals were not as well attended this year, this likely does not indicate the early stages of a trend away from radical-right messages or music concerts as a means of dissemination. According to research produced by MOBIT, a group devoted to tracking the radical right, in recent years substantial property — specifically in the region of Thuringia, which is already a popular location for neo-Nazi concerts — has been purchased by members of the German neo-Nazi movement with the intention of holding future musical events.

Even though it is only a fringe element of the music industry, as journalist Erika Solomon has noted, the considerable financial profit from sales of concert tickets, CDs and promotional items can be used to help fund future neo-Nazi propaganda. Additionally and

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importantly, neo-Nazi concerts in particular provide the opportunity for devotees to meet each other, and neo-Nazi music in general continues to radicalize listeners and to claim space in the German social and political landscape.

In some ways, Plato's warning about music is correct: The current neo-Nazi music scene inherently challenges the German state both on a rhetorical level for its policies and on a material level through its incitement to violence. More subtly, though, the lyrics written by neo-Nazi musicians and the crowds they draw will continue to challenge the German people as a whole.

The endurance, and perhaps the increased visibility, if not popularity, of neo-Nazi music in Germany forces its citizens to ponder the implications of the persistence of white supremacy and radical-right ideologies, however fringe, in German cultural life. With its pageantry and its intentional militant presence, moreover, Germans will be forced to consider what challenges might lie ahead for their attempt to construct a 21st-century multicultural society when the specter of neo-Nazism is never far away.

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**Bethan Johnson** is a Cambridge Trust-funded PhD candidate at the University of Cambridge, where her doctoral research examines the intellectual underpinnings of violent sub-state nationalisms in the Cold War West. She holds a master's degree from the

University of Cambridge in modern British history, with a dissertation exploring the codification of cultural nationalism in 19th-century Wales, as well as bachelor's degrees in history, Jewish studies and English from Vassar College.

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## There's a Rock Heading for Earth

Arek Sinanian

January 14, 2019

*Now that we've got your attention, Arek Sinanian examines the global stalemate over climate change with this analogy about a meteor heading for Earth.*

There is so much in the world to be optimistic about. But when it comes to the current global position on climate change, I often vacillate between optimism and despair. My previous articles on Fair Observer demonstrate this.

Now imagine this: A group of highly-respected astronomers who have been studying the skies for decades with the latest available technology have observed a meteor (aka a very large rock), half the size of our moon, hurtling in our direction. A peer-reviewed scientific paper is submitted to the United Nations predicting that this very large rock is expected to collide with Earth in 12 months, with catastrophic effect. The paper predicts that this event will wipe out humanity and all the rest of living things on the planet. Action must be taken immediately, otherwise we are



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doomed. We can either take drastic action or we can just enjoy ourselves as much as we can for the next 12 months, and then it's all over.

How would the world deal with such a predicament?

No doubt, there would be the usual denialist responses. How do we know that these astronomers have got it right? If it's such a large rock coming our way, how come we can't see it in the sky? What if it's not as big as they say, and it won't be such a huge catastrophe? What if the calculations are mistaken and it will take hundreds of years instead of 12 months? Could it hit some other planet on its way to us and, therefore, get destroyed? And so on.

All the calculations are checked over and over, by hundreds of astronomers, mathematicians and scientists and the results confirm that the rock is somewhere between 40% and 60% of the size of our moon, and it will collide with Earth between 10 months and 18 months?

So the deniers now can latch on the uncertainty: Oh, so there's disagreement amongst the experts, and we don't know exactly how big it is, and don't even know exactly when it's going to reach us. A few scientists even claim that this is a completely fraudulent fabrication by large corporations and, in particular, the arms industry.

You get the picture.

While all the necessary questioning and reassessment goes on, that enormous rock is coming in our direction at 50,000 miles an hour. So, what would probably happen is the gathering of the greatest minds and technologists, locking them in a large room, give them a limited time and let them out only when they have a solution to the problem, at any cost.

Now, I'm not suggesting that such a scenario (if it were to happen) is the same as the current stalemate of climate change. Not least is that the "large rock coming our way" scenario is a singular effect, while climate change is more like millions of smaller rocks coming our way for the rest of time. And the rocks will get bigger as time goes by, unless of course we do something about it.

And here's the other main difference. While a likely solution for the "rock" is to destroy it, by contrast, we'll need many solutions on many fronts, to mitigate climate change (or destroy the numerous and smaller "rocks" of climate change). In other words, our response isn't to "do something about it," but we need to do numerous things.

And that's why the challenges of climate change are often described as a "diabolical problem." As I've described in my book, *A Climate for Denial*, climate change is diabolical because, firstly, it is difficult to define. Some people are now suggesting that it shouldn't be called climate change because the climate has been and will continue to change. And continuing the rocks-coming-our-way

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analogy, the rocks of climate change are different sizes (some enormous, some the size of a pebble), all traveling at different speeds, and they will all hit the Earth in different locations, at different times. Some rocks will be so small that a simple umbrella will be adequate for protection (is there a pun in there?). Some places on Earth will not even be hit or be affected by any rocks at all.

Climate change is diabolical also because its impacts are environmental, physical, social, and economic, and the solutions include technology, economic and social change, political will and global agreements amongst nations with enormously disparate economies, social structures and technological capabilities. And the impacts (the rocks) will be completely different in different parts and nations of the world. Ironically, tragically, some of those most impacted will be least capable of dealing with them.

## **CLIMATE PARALYSIS**

There is no doubt that the current stalemate in addressing climate change is mainly due to its diabolical nature. The appropriate way to deal with such problems is not to see them as a singular “rock” to destroy, but to tackle them in small steps and in achievable chunks.

I’m often asked, “What’s the one thing we must do?” The answer is that there are many things we must do, and we must all do them all now. And we must

all do them, all of us contributing to the desired outcome.

Because of that complexity, we get paralyzed. It’s all too much to bear and that contributes to denialism. We know what to do — we must drastically reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and reliance on fossil fuels — but there’s so much to do to achieve this. It’s so complex and debilitating that even an “agreement to agree to do something about it” becomes an exciting outcome of a UN climate conference.

As it turns out, actions are being taken on many fronts: renewable energy for power generation, electric and hydrogen cars for transport, energy efficiency in manufacturing and agriculture. But much of this is being driven by market forces, rather than urgent global responses to a significant existential threat. It’s almost equivalent to responding to the threat of the “rock” half the size of our moon coming our way because it’s likely to affect property prices in New York City.

Market forces rarely get it right when it comes to addressing social and environmental issues. It’s been suggested by eminent economists that climate change demonstrates the failure of market forces because of their lack of consideration of long-term environmental costs.

It may not be a stalemate. It may be described as paralysis. But relative to the required speed for climate action, it’s

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at best advancing at a snail's pace while the rocks keep coming.

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**Arek Sinanian** is the author of “A Climate for Denial” and an international expert on climate change, greenhouse gas abatement and carbon accounting, and he has extensive experience in resource efficiency, waste minimization and sustainable development. He is a member of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) expert panels of the clean development mechanism (CDM) Methodology Panel and the Accreditation Panel, providing advice on new methodologies and projects for CDMs submitted for registration under the Kyoto Protocol.

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## Why the US Is Still Losing Turkey

Nathaniel Handy  
January 15, 2019

*Reliably narrow definitions of national self-interest continue to drive Turkey and the US further apart.*

There's one thing Turkey and the US can definitely agree on these days: Unreliability is now the bedrock of their relationship.

It's perhaps not surprising when the two powers are led by notably unpredictable men — US President Donald Trump and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

In the latest antagonism, Erdogan's close adviser, Yasin Aktay, has spoken of the US as a “highly unreliable partner” due to its efforts to safeguard the Syrian Kurdish forces who have partnered with the US in defeating the Islamic State (IS) in Syria.

The criticism is a further illustration of the echo chambers in which diplomacy is being conducted at the moment. Far from seeking to reduce friction (the usual role of diplomacy), such statements are part of the new prickly nationalism that is everywhere in the ascendant.

The most glaring dimension of Aktay's statement is its subjectivity. Trump's announcement in December 2018 of the US troop withdrawal from Syria really did put America's Syrian Kurdish allies in potential harm's way, at the hands of the Turkish army. The recent move to safeguard that ally could be viewed, in fact, as reliability.

But of course, Aktay is speaking from within the echo chamber of Turkish politics. Within that chamber, the US has deserted its NATO ally in favor of a Syrian Kurdish militia with strong ties to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) — a movement within Turkey designated a terrorist organization.

His assessment discounts the fact that the threat from IS was very real. The US needed local allies on the ground in order to counter it. Indeed, it was a long time before the Turkish government decided to give the fight against the

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Islamic State the same priority that it gave the fight against Kurdish groups.

Yet the Turkish displeasure with its NATO ally is not all paranoia and blinkered Turkish nationalism. President Trump has been cavalier in his diplomacy within the international body. He has also been transparently shortsighted in his engagement with the Middle East.

In line with his “America First” policies, Trump was quick to single out IS as a grave threat to be addressed, largely because it had the capacity to impact America itself and American lives. Trump and his predecessor, Barack Obama, have been far less eager to address Syria’s civil war.

From the Turkish viewpoint, this looks a lot like abandonment. The war on its southern frontier has been highly porous. It has deeply impacted Turkey in terms of terrorist atrocities, refugee flows, political destabilization, economic impact and the very real threat of escalation from the Assad regime’s allies, Russia and Iran. None of this seems to have moved the US greatly.

## **EVERY MAN FOR HIMSELF**

The result is a zero-sum environment in which all the key actors have gradually amassed leaders who see the best strategy as entrenchment and national defense. This may have been led by Russian President Vladimir Putin — the past master of such tactics — but it has been a domino effect.

President Erdogan has veered sharply in the same direction ever since the start of the Syrian conflict in 2011. With the election of Donald Trump to the US presidency in November 2016, the world’s key superpower has followed suit. In the current dispute, the only real losers are likely to be the Kurds.

The Turkish government position has ossified. It cannot easily roll back on its war with the Syrian Kurdish militia now. The US position is more fluid. As President Trump as demonstrated, Washington is quite capable of dropping the Syrian Kurdish militia.

The reason the US government has so far stepped back from leaving the Syrian Kurds at the full mercy of other powers in Syria is not altruism. The Syrian Kurds merely offered the right guns for hire at the right time. But to drop them would hand valuable power to US adversaries.

In the cases of Russia and Iran, that would stick in the craw of the US administration. The irony is, as things stand, the other “adversary” who would clearly benefit is a country — Turkey — that is supposed to be an erstwhile NATO ally and a bulwark in the Middle East.

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**Nathaniel Handy** is a writer and academic with over 10 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

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(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.

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## **Pompeo Attempts US Reset in the Middle East**

Gary Grappo

January 16, 2019

*Secretary of State Mike Pompeo’s recent visit to the Middle East summed up America’s limited policy vision for the region.*

Nearly a year after his predecessor embarked on a similar mission, on January 15 US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo concluded a tour of the Middle East that included stops in Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, the UAE, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Oman. A planned stop in Kuwait was canceled. The ostensible reason for Pompeo’s hastily scheduled tour was to explain his boss’ sudden and unexpected announcement of the US troop withdrawal from Syria.

President Donald Trump’s December decision to leave the fight in Syria shocked more than America’s Middle East allies. His most senior officials,

including former Secretary of Defense James Mattis and others, were also caught off guard. Mattis, after subsequently failing to persuade Trump to reconsider, resigned. The president’s special envoy to the coalition fighting the Islamic State, Brett McGurk, also resigned.

Left questioning whether this was Trump’s first step toward Middle East disengagement — he also later announced that Iran can do what it wants in Syria — Arab states were once again whipsawed by an unpredictable administration. Could they no longer count on American security support, diplomatic power and considerable economic clout to maintain regional order, especially in the face of the Iranian challenge, continuing extremist activity from the likes of ISIS and al-Qaeda, and economic uncertainty?

For many, the announcement might portend a period of great power competition in the region, increased Iranian adventurism and consequent instability, all of which the US had resisted since it first became embroiled in the region after World War II.

## **NO FEAR: POMPEO TO THE RESCUE**

Enter Mike Pompeo. America’s friends needed reassurances and a way forward on the region’s many challenges. At last, America would speak from the pulpit on its broad strategy for the region, heretofore missing since Donald Trump assumed office two years ago.

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On what was his biggest stage at the American University of Cairo, Pompeo delivered what may now be called the clearest statement yet of US policy in the Middle East. In essence, however, it boiled down to continuing resistance to extremism, blunting Iranian influence and not being the policy of Trump's predecessor, Barack Obama. In 2009, President Obama had attempted to deliver his own version of an American reset of US policy, specifically as it related to Islam and Muslims, and seemingly apologized for the US role in the troubled region's problems.

In a not-so-veiled criticism of Obama's decision to withdraw US forces from Iraq in 2011, Pompeo declared that the Trump administration has learned much from its predecessor's naiveté and miscues: "We learned that when America retreats, chaos often follows. When we neglect our friends, resentment builds. And when we partner with enemies, they advance." On its face, that would appear a fair and accurate statement for any administration. Against the backdrop of Trump's announcement proclaiming the war against ISIS effectively won and the consequent US troop withdrawal, it's downright mystifyingly contradictory.

Indeed, ISIS has been set on its back foot, having lost more than 95% of the "caliphate" it once ruled between Syria and Iraq. But US intelligence experts still assert the presence of some 2,000-3,000 ISIS fighters in the two countries, and another 25,000-30,000 elsewhere around the world. One of the ostensible

reasons for Mattis' resignation was that in the career marine general's judgment, the war against ISIS and other extremists had most definitely not yet been won.

Moreover, America's friends, such as Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Saudi Arabia, not to mention the Syrian Kurds, who have been fighting valiantly beside the American forces for years now, must have been flummoxed to hear Pompeo's statement on the US having been "absent too much" and his reference to "neglect (of) our friends." How else to describe Trump's Syria withdrawal without as much as an advance notice or pre-announcement consultation with those most affected?

## **NOT A MESSAGE FOR EVERYONE**

Arabs in the region would have found little to address what is most on their minds today. Pompeo neglected to state where the US stood against the alarming increasing harshness of government rule, especially in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Nor did he attempt to address the dearth of respect for fundamental human rights, as Obama at least attempted to do 10 years before. The US secretary seemed to lay all the ills of the Middle East at the feet of the Iranians, who certainly deserve a share of the blame for ongoing instability in Iraq, Bahrain, Yemen and Syria.

But Iran is only taking advantage of existing circumstances of depressed economies and lack of economic opportunity, declining rule of law,



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absence of governmental accountability, government repression and insecurity. Would Pompeo address those underlying challenges for which Arab governments seem to have no answers?

In effect, Pompeo seemed to say to governments — as opposed to the people — that if you keep up the fight against the extremists and back the US in resisting Iran, then there is a basis for a relationship with this administration. That only reinforces the hopelessness that plagues the psyches of many in the region, especially young people, and offers encouragement for terrorism, Iranian troublemaking and instability.

In Saudi Arabia, Pompeo reasserted America's position that "all those involved in the murder of [Jamal] Khashoggi will be held accountable."

Yet, he had extended meetings with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, known as MBS, the official deemed by the CIA, his State Department and the US Senate to have ordered the execution of the Saudi journalist last October in Istanbul. He even seemed to have gone out of his way to excuse the crime, asserting that Saudi Arabia's "leaders are going to act in their country's interests."

To the average person on the street, that must have sounded like a blank check for governments to behave as they wish to preserve themselves, regardless of consequences for their citizens. America is ostensibly out of the

business of erecting human rights guardrails for autocrats, except when it doesn't like them, like in the case of Iran.

## **MORE CONTRADICTIONS**

Also mysteriously missing from Pompeo's sojourn was much of an effort to patch up the Gulf Cooperation Council, which Saudi Arabia and MBS set asunder over a year and a half ago in a misguided effort to get neighboring Qatar to bend to Saudi will. Forced to address it in Qatar without much effect, it doesn't seem to have figured too prominently when the secretary met with the engineer of the boycott, MBS.

The GCC had been the most effective multinational organization in the Middle East for dealing with the region's many challenges and a key security partner for the US. Yet the Trump administration, never one to embrace multilateralism, appears little motivated to bring the key Gulf partners together.

Aside from the Sturm und Drang against ISIS, Iran and the Obama policies, there was hardly a mention, if at all, of America's vision for the Middle East, its approach to ongoing civil wars and humanitarian crises in Syria and Yemen, or its prescriptions for the underlying economic and human problems still afflicting the Arab world.

It still has no answer for the infectious ideologies of extremism, however odious Pompeo wants Arabs to find them. Nor does the US have a plan for

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taming Iran's adventurism other than using sanctions, which few others seem to want, and the threat of regime change, which no one believes practical, much less possible.

Secretary Pompeo may claim some success for his limited agenda for the trip. Middle East autocrats may also claim success, the Trump administration having again blessed them. But for the people of the Middle East who ultimately bear the region's many difficulties, Pompeo offered nothing.

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## **Brexit Is Far from Over**

Tahir Abbas

January 16, 2019

*The underlying structural and cultural problems of the UK are not going to change by leaving the European Union.*

On January 15, the Tory government faced the biggest defeat in British political history, when Prime Minister Theresa May's withdrawal agreement from the European Union was categorically dismissed by more than 230 MPs.

Many have suggested that May is demonstrating a high level of determination that should be admired. While I have some sympathy for this sentiment, the real issue is that May has been the chief architect of her own demise.

The prime minister would not shift beyond her own entrenched red lines, largely to appease the hard Brexiteers on the backbenches of her own party. She did not want to work with opposition parties and is only now partially opening the door. She created the hostile environment as home secretary, which led to the Windrush calamity, 20,000 police officers now missing from the streets, and the anti-immigration sentiment that was a powerful force in driving people to vote for Brexit in 2016 remains a potent litmus test of intolerance today.

She will be safe as prime minister this evening after a no-confidence vote

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tabled by the opposition leader, Jeremy Corbyn, but her own party is deeply divided. It is May's persistence to keep to her false mantra of respecting the "will of the people" — based on a hugely problematic referendum, which included issues of dark money as well as dodgy interests driving it all — that has made Britain the laughing stock of the world.

While some of these discussions on the nature of the relationship between the UK and the EU are important in themselves, they do not reveal the extent of the structural and cultural dilemmas facing the country. Brexit is a symptom of the problems, not the starting point. The austerity program that was initiated in light of the events of the 2008 global financial crisis hit Britain far more severely than other countries within the EU. As has been reported by the UN special rapporteur, this austerity policy was ideological in nature and not based on sound economic thinking.

The poor, marginalized and unemployed felt the brunt of these policies. The groups left behind were a significant demographic in the Brexit vote, largely concentrated in the Midlands and in North England. The other voting bloc was the richer and far more affluent groups found in the south who felt their wealth status could be compromised by immigration.

Immigration, therefore, became the tipping point for so many voters who, at the behest of political elites, were able to instrumentalize the negative sentiment they all felt. This was created

by those very elites seeking to leave the EU in order to take advantage of the looser legislation they hoped it would bring.

These underlying structural and cultural problems are not going to change by leaving the European Union. In fact, they are likely to deepen due to the significant impact of leaving the most successful trading bloc in the world. The search for ever greater profits on the part of the established elite and the fear of "the other" stoked by sections of the media have led to rising intolerance, bigotry and issues of hate crime, anti-Muslim sentiment and distrust in the political process. Brexit will not fix these problem; it will exacerbate them.

### **BREXIT WILL GO ON AND ON...**

Unless article 50 is revoked, Britain is leaving the EU without a deal on March 29. A new withdrawal agreement is unlikely to be pieced together in time due to the fractious nature of this entire debate.

For me, it all starts with not accepting the 2016 referendum result because it was based on false promises at the very least and lies at the very worst. And this entire facade is all about the hard euroskeptics within the Conservative Party government who saw Brexit as an opportunity to get what they had wanted for 40 years.

Ultimately, Brexit has been pure folly. And the ill-informed electorate in Britain was forced into a corner by political

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elites who had no interest in questions of genuine issues of EU policy or domestic concerns about poverty, equality or diversity in an age of rampant, unfettered and unchecked free-market economics.

Having said all of this, I am miffed as to what can work now. Is there any solution that works for all? It's possible that article 50 will be extended to July and the softest of Brexits will be negotiated, which will allow a general election in 2022 and the winning party, which may well be Labour, to seek to re-enter the EU in some meaningful way. For now, a second referendum is unlikely, as is the no deal option. In many ways, last night was only the end of the beginning. To paraphrase the words of another (in)famous Tory prime minister, this will go on and on.

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## **Is Narendra Modi's Sanatan Socialism Failing?**

Atul Singh & Manu Sharma  
January 21, 2019

*India's economy faces big trouble as jobs dry up, consumption falls and industrial production declines.*

Prima facie, the gods are in their heavens and all is hunky dory in India. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has just presided over the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit. Heads of five world powers — Denmark, Czech Republic, Uzbekistan, Malta and Rwanda — flew over for a pilgrimage to the prime minister's native state. The media dutifully reports that over 28,600 memorandums of understanding were signed and would lead to 2.1 million jobs.

It is the purported success of the Gujarat model that enabled Modi to ride in a victory chariot to the Delhi throne in 2014. Like the Marathas, he knocked out a decaying dynasty and people expected him to bring about "achche din," Hindi for good days. Has that transpired?

It depends on whom you talk to. Pro-establishment economists proclaim that the Modi government has unleashed the "best years" of the Indian economy. Economists opposed to the government declare that it has "taken a quantum jump in the wrong direction."

The best guides to understand the Indian economy are government figures themselves and the accounts of ordinary people from around the country. They may not reveal bubonic plague and the death of the firstborn, but offer irrefutable evidence of achche din being as far away as the broad uplit sunlands promised by gallant Brexiteers.

**FORMAL STATISTICS REVEAL ANEMIC PRIVATE SECTOR**

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On January 9, the authors analyzed the economic pain India is currently experiencing. The new economics figures released recently vindicate the authors. The biggest warning sign has come from the rural sector. For years, rural retail inflation was higher than urban retail inflation. Since July 2018, that has reversed. Rural distress is weakening consumption.

Last month, the minutes of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) recorded that the economy was “weighed down by moderation in private consumption and a large drag from net exports.” “Growth in tractors sales — an indicator of rural demand — turned negative” in September as per the RBI. This fall in demand has led to a contraction in the industrial sector.

The Index of Industrial Production (IIP) figures for November 2018 were published on January 14. They record a contraction of -0.4% for November. Non-durable goods such as food, clothing and footwear have suffered the greatest fall. Since the 2000s, savings and investment have been falling. Last year’s Economic Survey, a government analysis of the economy, acknowledged this fact. This means there will be less money to invest in roads, factories and industrial production in the years ahead.

The story of any economy is better revealed by secondary indicators instead of primary ones. If the latter are dodgy, the former are diabolical. Auto sales fell during Diwali season, the peak season for big purchases in India. It is

this statistic that set your authors to start worrying about the Indian economy three months ago. Figures released in January confirmed their fears. Weak industrial credit growth, weak personal credit growth, negative food wholesale price index and plunging private investment in infrastructure reveal that the economy is on its knees, if not its back.

## **GRASSROOTS REPORT CARNAGE IN INFORMAL SECTOR**

Earlier this year, the authors explained how the informal sector did not show up “in direct taxes or other official economic data.” Demonetization and imposition of the goods and services tax (GST) have wreaked havoc on this sector. Businesses have closed, jobs have dried up, demand has declined and now manufacturing is suffering too.

The takeover of the retail space by online American giants has hurt too. Now, people use Amazon or Walmart-owned Flipkart to buy everything from smartphones to refrigerators. This has led to thousands of shops closing down and put many more thousands who worked in such shops on the streets. Urban India can certainly buy things for cheaper, but the ongoing destruction of the little guys is leading to catastrophic job losses.

The Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) estimates that 10 million jobs were lost in 2018. Unemployment reached a 27-month high of 7.38% in December 2018. This

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has rattled the government, and none other than star minister Piyush Goyal rode to the ramparts to charge at CMIE.

Despite all the sound and fury over employment and economic indicators, the stories from villages, small towns and even Gandhinagar, the capital of Gujarat, tell a familiar tale. Jobs are scarce and pay is worse. A recent story reported how 7,000 candidates, the majority of them college graduates, applied for a mere 13 waiter jobs on offer.

### **IS SANATAN SOCIALISM FAILING?**

Narendra Modi promised good governance when he was elected. He has certainly been energetic, his bureaucrats do not seem to have their hands in the tiller and his government has a good record building roads, railway lines, toilets and more. Yet tax administration still remains the same, bank processes are still primeval and ministries are bereft of talent.

All power still resides in bureaucrats, especially officers of the Indian Administrative Service. One day, they are lords of culture, the next day they form policies on agriculture and the third day they run the finances of the land. This means that policies are harebrained, implementation has little relation to grassroots realities and outcomes are suboptimal.

In February 2018, the authors coined the term “Sanatan socialism” because the Modi government’s annual budget

indicated a clear “socialist bent of mind.” Through formalization and financialization it sought to deliver benefits directly to the people. This twin process has been a double-edged sword for the people. The cost-benefit analysis might not have worked in their favor as fewer jobs, collapsing demand and declining manufacturing demonstrate. Like Nehru’s Fabian socialism, Modi’s Sanatan socialism might be failing too.

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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.

**Manu Sharma** is a political analyst with an international footprint. A dynamic, young thought leader in the field of global political research, communications strategy, public policy and political economy, Sharma has served in financial institutions, international organizations and media bodies across four continents. He brings a formidable mix of technical skills,



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multicultural experience and the ability to deliver across timelines. Sharma's areas of professional expertise include political risk research, psephology surveys and quantitative research papers on economic issues.

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## **Peace in the Central African Republic Requires Patience**

Alexandra Lamarche

January 21, 2019

*Central Africans have good reason to be skeptical about the peace process.*

This week will start the next, and possibly final, round of an African Union-led peace dialogue on the Central African Republic (CAR) held in Khartoum. The talks will bring together the CAR government of the 14 armed groups that collectively control the vast majority of the country.

This offers an important opportunity for CAR to begin the long, hard road to peace. A lot could go wrong, and stakes are high with millions of civilian lives hanging in the balance. But failure is avoidable if the negotiating parties are patient and stop repeating past mistakes.

Central Africans have good reason to be skeptical about the peace process. The CAR has leaped from conflict to conflict since its independence in 1960 and botched countless peace accords. Such deals often ignored tough socioeconomic issues, political marginalization and weak governance.

In the past, these mistakes were only magnified by the focus on demobilizing armed groups, which should have been accompanied by the inclusion of influential leaders in national decision-making.

The country has paid a high price for these failures. Since the last civil war in 2013-14, over 80% of the land in the Central African Republic has been controlled by a myriad of armed groups who pillage and slaughter with impunity. A quarter of the small country's population has been displaced by the violence — the highest number since the peak of the civil war. The UN estimates that 2.9 million of the country's 4.6 million citizens need humanitarian aid.

In late 2017, the African Union launched the peace process, known as the African Initiative, to broker an agreement between the armed groups and the CAR government. These militias dragged their feet on setting a date for the next round of negotiations. In the meantime, they became richer and more powerful. They also committed more attacks — on civilians, on aid workers and on the United Nations Peacekeeping force.

During my time in the CAR in the fall of last year, three densely populated displacement camps were set ablaze, and hundreds of their inhabitants injured and killed. Finally, last week, in a welcomed breakthrough, Central African Republic's president, Faustin Archange Touadera, announced that talks would

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resume in Sudan on January 24. But those at the negotiating table must take steps to ensure that the talks are meaningful.

## **ONE PEACE**

First, if real progress is to be made at the table in Khartoum, there can only be one peace process. Last August, Sudan and Russia held competing peace negotiations. This process undermined the AU's work to advance national reconciliation. Moreover, Sudan has been an active participant in CAR's history of violence and has provided weapons to armed groups in the country over the years.

The decision to hold the next round of African Initiative talks in Sudan may well be a move to appease Russia and Sudan in order for them to back the AU process. But there is still a very real danger that Sudan, as the host, may seek to meddle in the talks to further its own agenda.

The same goes for Russia, which has provided defense advisers to the CAR's forces, reportedly in return for mineral concessions. The African Union's commissioner for peace and security, Ambassador Smail Chergui, and coordinator of the African Initiative's Panel of Facilitators, Professor Mohamed El Hacen Lebatt, must assert their authority to lead the discussion. And they must be backed by other key regional and international stakeholders like Chad, Cameroon, the United States and France.

Secondly, for its part, the Central African government must be more proactive. It should demand that armed groups cease their attacks on civilians and guarantee humanitarian access. And none of the parties should expect that negotiations will simply lead to a ceremony in which amnesty is granted to armed groups. Several critical issues need to be addressed before amnesty is even considered.

Third, participants and mediators must set realistic expectations and avoid rushing the process. Patience to build a credible and sustainable process is crucial. The commitments generated should not be overly ambitious. This dialogue should be used as a platform to show good faith and culminate with an agreement on basic principles.

Technical working groups should be established to design and implement solutions. Those working on the African Initiative signaled to me that many issues have been sources of significant contention in past negotiations. The failure to address them has set the stage for a return to conflict. To be successful, the working groups must be staffed by outside experts with the knowledge and experience to help the parties and mediators.

## **NECESSARY EXPERTISE**

This expertise will be vital to create a peace-building agenda that includes demobilization, disarmament and reintegration programs for armed groups, building social cohesion

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between communities and determining a process of transitional justice that permits populations to voice and document their grievances. While armed groups may request amnesty, the Central African population has made it clear that justice is needed to heal from the vicious cycles of violence.

When the country eventually stabilizes, displaced populations — refugees and internally displaced alike — will want to return home. This process should be supported by the appropriate technical assistance needed to ensure their dignified return and address housing, land and property law issues for those whose homes have been damaged or occupied.

Lastly, transhumance access — the seasonal routes used by cattle herders throughout the country and into neighboring lands — will necessitate careful negotiation. This will also require the involvement of officials from Cameroon, Chad, Sudan and South Sudan.

The AU and Central African officials should move quickly to mobilize the necessary expertise. The Central African minister of humanitarian action and national reconciliation, Virginie Baïkoua, must seek and request the assistance of experts. Local civil society groups are being excluded from this round of talks; they should be called on to contribute their invaluable expertise to the thematic working groups and to the implementation of agreements reached.

Additionally, some of the technical expertise can be provided by the UN Peacekeeping force. The mission's mandate was amended late last year to allow it to play a supporting role to the African Initiative. Since its arrival in 2014, peacekeepers have worked to address intercommunal tensions at the local level. Their efforts to decrease violence and demobilize armed groups have been less visible but successful. While this new role is a welcome step, peacekeepers must not let their work on local peace efforts fall by the wayside.

Peace and reconciliation in the Central African Republic will take patience, difficult bargaining, well-thought-out plans and diligent implementation. Rushing the process or repeating mistakes of the past will only lead to more violence.

The people of the Central African Republic have long waited and long suffered. If done right, the African Initiative can, with time, give them the peace they have paid so dearly for.

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**Alexandra Lamarche** is an advocate for sub-Saharan Africa at Refugees International, where her work focuses on conflict, displacement crises and peacekeeping. A long-time observer of the Central African Republic, Lamarche lived there in 2017 and traveled there in November and December 2018.

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## Is There a Medical Reason for Trump's Behavior?

Jason Tarbox

January 23, 2019

*A neuropsychological condition might explain the US president's erratic behavior.*

There have been numerous explanations for the seemingly erratic and unpredictable behavior of US President Donald Trump. He has made otherwise sober analysts turn apoplectic with rage, such as George Will of The Washington Post, who has called Trump a “venomous charlatan.” Others have labeled him a “puerile, sophomoric sniveler,” and psychiatrists have diagnosed Trump as having narcissistic, sadistic and paranoid personality disorders.

Three factors influence human personality. The first one happens to be genetic predispositions. The second is common environmental factors that influence all sibling behavior, such as the socioeconomic status of the parents. The third is unique environmental factors, such as an individual sibling being molested or bullied. However, human personality research concludes that the influence of genes is stronger than the other two factors combined.

In the case of Trump, his impoverished vocabulary, inexplicably poor grammar and an inability to produce a single coherent sentence belie his education. After all, he studied at Fordham University and the University of

Pennsylvania — two schools that are not entirely useless. So is Trump a victim of his genes?

It is quite possible that the answer might be yes. This is indubitably a controversial statement, but let us examine the science behind it. The science of neuropsychology deals with brain behavior relationships and examines genetic predispositions in the cognitive domain. In neuropsychology, dysmetria — a Greek word that literally means “wrong length” — is a specific kind of ataxia. With this condition, a person loses control of motor function, unable to carry out an intended movement properly and tends to misjudge the target by overshooting it, undershooting it, or having an improper velocity or rate of the action. In 1991, neurologist Jeremy Schmahmann came up with a radical idea. He proposed that dysmetria of thought was as much a condition as dysmetria of action. In 2004, he coined the cerebellar cognitive affective syndrome (CCAS).

What is the cerebellum and why is it important in Trump's case? The cerebellum means “little brain” or “lesser brain” in Latin. It sits at the back and bottom of the skull, below the rest of the brain, also called the cortex. The words “lesser brain” are actually ironic, as scientists estimate that of the 84 billion neurons in the entire brain, about 61 billion are crammed into the cerebellum. It has been known for centuries, if not millennia, that the cerebellum controls motor movements and their smooth sequencing. However, starting from the

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1990s, there was evidence that the cerebellum “tweaks” thoughts just like it controls motor movements, and now three decades of cerebellum function research have clearly substantiated this claim.

Schmahmann was a pioneer in this field. He described CCAS as having four symptoms. First, the syndrome causes problems with executive functions such as poor planning, deficient abstract reasoning, working memory problems, decline in verbal fluency and trouble with multitasking as well as set-shifting. Second, this condition impairs visuospatial cognition, leading to disorganization and poor visuospatial memory. Third, CCAS leads to personality changes such as flattening or blunting of emotion as well as disinhibition and inappropriate behaviors. Fourth, it causes language difficulties, including trouble with prosody (melody, tone and quality of speech), word-finding difficulty and grammatical errors that cannot be attributed to a poor environmental upbringing.

Schmahmann also concluded that CCAS was associated with an overall lowering of intellectual functioning. It is important to note that Schmahmann developed the idea of this syndrome after studying patients with brain dysfunction as a result of strokes, tumors, brain atrophy or infections of the cerebellum — not upon non-clinical populations. Is it possible that Donald Trump is exhibiting CCAS without obvious cerebellar damage?

Although not proposed by Schmahmann, CCAS could be congenitally caused. This means that it could be genetically based or it could be a result of birth-related injuries. In other words, in people not suspected of cerebellar damage like Donald Trump, is it possible his speech fluency problems, deficient abstract reasoning, inappropriate and impulsive behaviors, poor grammar, strange word choices such as bigly, neologisms — coining of new words, like children and schizophrenic patients, such as covfefe — and his highly superficial exaggerations such as, big, great, fantastic, terrific, weak, bad, zero are all caused by subtle cerebellar compromise?

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**Editor’s note:** The author is a leading medical professional in his field who would like to remain anonymous and has used a pseudonym.

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## Davos Is Losing Its Shine

Ravi Tripathi

January 28, 2019

*Davos is essentially a symbol of crony capitalism camouflaging as a pro-globalization voice.*

This year is already witnessing a profound global political instability. Britain’s confusion over the Brexit deal continues, and so do the weekend protests by the gilets jaunes, or the yellow vests, in France. Donald Trump’s

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administration is reeling from the longest government shutdown in America's history, while the Chinese economy is slowing down.

Amid these pressing issues, the media attention last week shifted to a small Swiss resort of Davos, where the World Economic Forum (WEF) hosted its annual event. The name of the town has become synonymous with the WEF itself. The glitzy invite-only event is attended by over 3,000 decision-makers, top CEOs, civil society representatives and more than 60 heads of state who all come together, traveling in thousands of private jets, to "build a better version of globalization." Every year Davos becomes the world's largest concentration of billionaires.

Founded in 1971 as the European Management Forum, WEF is a brainchild of an obscure Swiss business professor, Klaus Schwab. The importance of the meeting gained prominence as globalization spread. The high-altitude setting in one of the world's most affluent countries that is a leading safe haven for illicit funds only added to its charm among the jet-setter corporate overlords.

Davos not only emerged as a neutral political platform but also an opportunity for emerging economies to showcase their "efforts" in deregulating labor markets and opening up local economies to global investments. The location of the forum ensures that it is mostly free from large-scale street

protests seen during World Trade Organization or G-20 summits.

In 2017, President Xi Jinping became the first Chinese head of the state to attend the meeting. In 2018, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi gave the keynote address. The 2019 gathering was rather low profile. US President Donald Trump, French President Emmanuel Macron, Modi and British Prime Minister Theresa May decided to stay home, prioritizing their domestic concerns.

## **GLOOMY TIMES**

Every year Davos picks up a new glowing theme that hardly sounds any different from the previous ones. This year's hot take was "Globalization 4.0: Shaping a Global Architecture in the Age of the Fourth Industrial Revolution." Davos employs a caste system of tiered badges determining access to sessions and segregating attendees into different categories. There were hundreds of vacuous panel discussion on the relevance of globalization and its challenges.

But an inconvenient question remains: Will the powerful Silicon Valley elites and philanthropists-capitalists assembled in Davos hear the angry cries recently raised by working poor in the Champs-Élysées?

Davos is essentially a symbol of crony capitalism camouflaging as a pro-globalization voice. In recent years, the summit has included social activists,



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environmental groups and even trade unionists within its folds. But its core group is made of billionaires and multinationals indulging in transnational tax avoidance that fuels global income and wealth inequality.

The annual meeting's hidden objective is to argue in favor of a corporate-run world and speed up the retreat of the public sector. For this purpose, technology has emerged as their tool of choice. A globalized world now means an interconnected digital world where e-commerce is the new marketplace. Artificial intelligence and automation offer ideal solutions for giant corporations who want to maximize profits and spread their reach without investing in a new workforce. But technology is not creating enough jobs for the low and middle-skilled workforce. The plight of farmers and global debt rising to \$244 trillion has no relevancy in the Davos paradigm.

The most usual answer coming out of Davos to every global issue involves words like "technology," "cooperation" and "multilateralism." But the corporate-dominated events won't explain the barriers that stop dispersion of technology and capital to poor economies. The elite attendees are complicit in these problems. There is a clear disdain for any strategy to clamp down on the tax haven. Meanwhile, the tech giant CEOs at Davos won't tell how they are spending more money than ever on lobbying politicians.

The recently published WEF Global Risk Report places extreme weather events and climate change at the top of its warning list. But the concern for the environment and climate change among the different tribes of "Davos men" is limited to extending the role of Western multinationals. No wonder Brazil's new president, Jair Bolsonaro, who pledged to roll back protections of rain forests and indigenous rights was invited to deliver the keynote address.

The latest Oxfam report claims that last year, 26 people owned the same amount of wealth as the 3.8 billion people who make up the poorest half of humanity. It is in Davos that our political representatives report to the top 1% holding the bulk of global capital. Davos is the collusion of self-serving interests between corporations and politicians undermining representative democracy. The forum's approach to multilateralism has no issue with Chinese digital totalitarianism or a Trump/Bolsonaro-style nationalism.

## **THE NEOLIBERAL GALA**

The kind of resort-capitalism that we see at Davos continues to function without any operational object. The private symposium debating globalization 4.0 remains silent on the excesses of globalization in form of the sweatshops in Dhaka to modern slavery in Abu Dhabi. Similarly, the debates on inequality stay silent on fair wages and work poverty.

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This year's forum takes place at a moment of growing concern about the risk of another recession. The concentration of wealth in a few hands is the true crisis of capitalism in our times. The slashing of taxes on the rich is happening everywhere, from France to United States. The seasonal corporate doves in Davos have no desire to combat the growing inequality and low wages.

Davos is a congregation of the "champions" in an unsustainable global economic system. Davos regulars are trying to shift the focus of attention from the global threat posed by the expansive monopolistic capitalism. The annual gathering is missing a key point: The attendees cannot close their eyes to the shrinking middle class and growing economic risks. It is only a matter of time before the working-class discontent echoes all the way to their snow peaks. Until then, much like the melting ice, Davos will continue to lose its shine.

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