

Fair Observer

Monthly



October 2019

Fair Observer^o

Fair Observer Monthly



October 2019

Atul Singh (Founder, CEO & Editor-in-Chief)

Abul-Hasanat Siddique (Co-Founder, COO & Managing Editor)

Anna Pivovarchuk (Co-Founder & Deputy Managing Editor)

Fair Observer | 237 Hamilton Ave | Mountain View | CA 94043 | USA
www.fairobserver.com | info@fairobserver.com

The views expressed in this publication are the authors' own and do not necessarily reflect Fair Observer's editorial policy.

Copyright © 2019 Fair Observer

Photo Credit: Fer Gregory / Shutterstock

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

International Standard Serial Number (ISSN): 2372-9112

CONTENTS

About Fair Observer	5
Share Your Perspective	6
How German Reunification Could Change Global Capitalism Today Dennis Snower & Markus Engels	7
Putting Out the Fires in the Amazon Niyanta Spelman	8
A Gen Zer’s Perspective on Climate Change Reform Neil Kapoor	10
Our Own Experiences of Poverty Shape Our Views on Its Causes Eric Meade	12
Turkey’s “Peace Corridor” Isn’t a New Idea Nathaniel Handy	14
Attacks on LGBTQ Rights in Poland: A Critique of Impure Reason Alicja Rybkowska	15
What Is Behind Football’s Persistent Racism? Ellis Cashmore	19
Mercenaries in the Desert: The Kremlin’s Libya Game Sergey Sukhankin	21
Facing the Consequences of Trump’s Decision to Abandon the Kurds Gary Grappo	23
The World’s Love Affair With Justin Trudeau Is Over Ramsha Zafar	25

ABOUT FAIR OBSERVER

Fair Observer is a nonprofit media organization that engages in citizen journalism and civic education.

Our digital media platform has more than 2,000 contributors from nearly 90 countries, cutting across borders, backgrounds and beliefs. With fact-checking and a rigorous editorial process, we provide diversity and quality in an era of echo chambers and fake news.

Our education arm runs training programs on subjects such as digital media, writing and more. In particular, we inspire young people around the world to be more engaged citizens and to participate in a global discourse.

As a nonprofit, we are free from owners and advertisers. When there are six jobs in public relations for every job in journalism, we rely on your donations to achieve our mission.

PUBLISH

Join our network of more than 2,000 contributors to publish your perspective, share your story and shape the global conversation. Become a Fair Observer and help us make sense of the world.

Remember, we are a digital media platform and welcome content in all forms: articles, podcasts, video, vlogs, photo essays, infographics and interactive features. We work closely with our contributors, provide feedback and enable them to achieve their potential. Think of us as a community that believes in diversity and debate.

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

For further information, please visit www.fairobserver.com or contact us at submissions@fairobserver.com.

How German Reunification Could Change Global Capitalism Today

Dennis Snower & Markus Engels
October 1, 2019

Thirty years after the Berlin Wall, the contours of a new, socially enlightened and responsible capitalism are beginning to take shape.

Nearly 30 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall, powerful images come to mind from those heady days of 1989: people dancing on walls and the related assumption that from now on freedom would reign around the world. Global capitalism had prevailed over the state-run socialist model, and people spoke of the “end of history.” Today, this euphoria has given way to a more sober mood, not least because Francis Fukuyama’s prophecy proved wrong on a number of levels.

Once the conflict between the systems of communism and capitalism came to an end, the face of the social market economy also began to change. The system people had yearned for, and for which they had broken down walls, experienced an astounding renaissance of neoliberalism. One reason for this was that a victor’s attitude had infused the process of German reunification, which reflected a presumption that the West had done everything right and the East had done everything wrong. Communism had failed in securing material prosperity and freedom, and Germany quickly seized the opportunity to reunite under market-based conditions.

The future weaknesses and risks of unfettered capitalism were hard to predict, and these were many: the instability of real estate markets; the dangers of debt accumulation at low interest rates; the risks of newly-invented, complex financial instruments that led to the global financial crisis of 2007-08; the polarization of many labor markets; and finally, the widening

gap between the winners and losers of globalization and technological progress.

Another unforeseen development was that a strong emphasis of economic policy on material success would lead to the neglect of other existential human needs, especially investment in thriving communities and the empowerment of people to shape their own lives. These failings fundamentally undermined many people’s confidence in globalization and automation — especially among the structurally disadvantaged in society — a problem that has long been overlooked by many decision-makers in politics and business. Because of the narrow focus on material prosperity, the achievements of the social market economy and the welfare society were also largely ignored. But this seemed a negligible loss because there was no alternative to the victorious West.

It was in this that Fukuyama’s “end-of-history” prophecy erred again. With globalization and the policy of opening up that began in the 1970s, China started down its path to being a world power — not as a democratic and social market economy, but as a very successful economy. The supposed winners of history gradually had to make room for new powers at the table of global decision-makers. Despite its great economic success, China did not democratize its political system. Suddenly, the West was faced with another systemic challenge: an economically successful model under completely different political conditions. The assumption that economic success always correlates with the acquisition of political rights has not been validated by the example of China.

In the 21st century, a host of new factors have also emerged. Climate change, growing inequality and the risk of dehumanization through artificial intelligence (AI) now pose threats to our planet and its inhabitants. It is no longer a question of who is the most successful, but whether and how the human race can survive.

This development is directly related to German reunification and the end of the former confrontation between economic and political

systems. For many people, the fall of the Berlin Wall was a symbol of the victory of the unrestricted market economy. The “social” in the social market economy receded into the background. It is fair to say, however, that the window of opportunity for German reunification was very narrow after the Berlin Wall fell and quick decisions were required. There was heavy pressure in the streets of East Germany, and the first free people’s parliament vote in March 1990 agreed to quickly merge both East and West Germany.

And so the neoliberal economic debate blossomed. It seemed as if the so-called free market could achieve the best results for society — if only the disruptive influence of state and society could be overcome. This meant a fatal disregard of the notion that human needs cannot be met by material security and prosperity alone. Man is a social being, and if his social needs go unfulfilled, tensions will arise that lead to populism, protectionism and xenophobia. Aside from the “strange non-death of neoliberalism,” as Colin Crouch titled his laudable book, another problem has arisen. While greater social interaction in the face of climate change and the challenges of AI may seem an obvious necessity, these problems have instead been met in many countries by a “me-first” strategy in politics and business. This attitude has replaced international cooperation and multilateralism with a “deal mentality.”

This is clearly a dangerous path, as the integration of the world economy through globalization and technological progress has also created major global problems — from climate change to migration and financial crises. These can only be solved through international cooperation. A different path is therefore essential.

Technological and economic progress need to be reconnected to social progress, and this must become a core task of the state, cooperating states, the economy and civil society. The neoliberal division of labor — consumers look out for their own interests, companies look out

for their profits and the state creates rules that optimize the use of resources — is obsolete. The “re-coupling” of economy and society is the prerequisite for a fresh start, one that will overcome the weaknesses of unregulated capitalism and the global challenges as well.

This is not about an unimaginative redistribution mechanism. Rather, recoupling means focusing on future-oriented education and life-long learning, with an emphasis on social solidarity and personal empowerment so that people can shape their own lives independently. In other words, this means all actions must include a social dimension. In recent weeks, 181 business leaders in the US published an appeal, saying that the golden calf of shareholder value benefits neither companies nor society as a whole. In a similar vein, it is now time for us to overcome the individual and collective me-first attitude in politics, business and society. Thirty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the contours of a new, socially enlightened and responsible capitalism are beginning to take shape.

***Dennis J. Snower** is the founder and president of the Global Solutions Initiative and **Markus Engels** is the secretary-general.

Putting Out the Fires in the Amazon

Niyanta Spelman
October 3, 2019

Understanding the economics that underpins forest fires offers us insight into how to solve this problem.

The Amazon is still burning. This isn’t new. The people who live there know that fires are set in the Amazon rainforest all the time. Tens of thousands of fires are set in the Brazilian Amazon every year and have been for decades.

But the scale is unprecedented this year, and the secret is out. For the first time, the international community has borne witness to this ongoing assault on the rainforest. We have been inundated with images: smoldering forests; dying animals; a Pataxó woman crying out, denouncing the fires set to her community's protected land, with mountains ablaze behind her; and a Mura man vowing to give every drop of his blood to protect his tribe's forests, their home.

Whether witnessing the horror or resolve in the face of ruin, the world can't help but feel an overwhelming sense of tragedy and loss.

The world community has long sought interconnection — through trade, thought and culture — but our understanding of the links between our actions and their environmental impacts has lagged far behind. Our planet is essentially a closed system, one that doesn't recognize, see or feel the political boundaries we have artificially set upon it. And our planet is incurring the devastating consequences of these human-imposed boundaries.

Why Is This Happening?

It's not surprising that we're focused on the fires. Yet if we want to change the future, we have to look beyond the smoke to understand why this is happening.

On one level, there seem to be multiple contributors to the acceleration of these rainforest-clearing fires. Forests are being burned to make way for oil and mineral production, for cattle grazing, for oil palm plantations and soybean farms. But on a more fundamental level, there's a common cause. It's all about money — how to make money from the land. The people who set the fires all believe they can make more money by torching the trees than by leaving them standing.

The tragedy is that they're largely right, and that's especially true now. In 2018, China responded to America's tariffs on Chinese goods with a tariff on American soybeans. With American soy now priced out of the market, China began seeking new sources, and Brazil had

an opportunity to fill the gap. Brazil just unseated the US as the world's largest soybean exporter.

The problem got worse when Brazil slashed its environmental protection budget in April 2019. The lack of monitoring and enforcement meant that landowners, squatters and speculators could burn with impunity. Even if Brazil reverses that terrible decision, we can be sure that tens of thousands of fires will be set next year. For now, as things stand, it makes economic sense.

What Should Be Done?

The only way to stop the fires is by changing the economics. We need to make the forest more valuable as it is. If an intact forest provides more economic benefit than an open field, then it won't be burned. The people who live in and around the forest, no less than the government in Brasilia, will protect it.

The simplest way to do that is to pay Brazil to protect this worldwide resource and to withhold payments if it fails. This would be a good deal for the rest of the world. The Brazilian Amazon absorbs 2 billion tons of carbon dioxide every year. When it goes up in smoke, it releases carbon into the atmosphere that hastens climate change. The rest of the world should be willing to pay for what's essentially a global resource.

This simple idea probably won't work, however. The fires aren't set by the Brazilian government, but by thousands of individuals hoping to make money by farming and ranching. The forest is vast and hard to monitor. Fires, once set, are hard to put out. Even if the government led by President Jair Bolsonaro agrees to a deal and tries to carry it out in good faith, fire-setters know they will probably get away with it. The economics are still in their favor.

There is a better way: make the forest more valuable. The Amazon forest is full of products the rest of us need: honey, essential oils, natural colors. Coffee, cacao and açai berries can be farmed in a clear-cut plantation, but they taste better and could command higher prices if grown in the forest. And there are valuable goods we are not even aware of yet. Many Western medicines

originate from rainforests, including 40% of anti-cancer treatments. But fewer than 1% of rainforest plants used by traditional healers have been tested in Western labs. The economic value of the rainforest has barely been tapped.

None of this will happen by itself. Honey, cacao and the rest grow in a lot of places. To stop the fires, we need the forest-grown versions to compete successfully with the cheaper, simpler, plantation-grown kind. They probably can't compete on price. True, the big trees fix nitrogen in the soil so understory shrubs like coffee and cacao don't need fertilizer; because they're grown in shade, less water evaporates so they don't need irrigation; and the plants aren't stressed, so they live longer than the plantation kind. But most of the time they take longer to mature, and yields per hectare are lower. Net plantation costs are lower.

On the other hand, the difference in quality between forest-grown and plantation-grown goods can be enormous. Aroma Ecuador, a company created by an Ecuadorian NGO that markets locally-sourced chocolates like fine wines, has developed a word wheel to describe the differences in taste among chocolates. Cacao beans from San Jose del Tambo produce earthy chocolate, with notes of moss and Thai basil. Cacao from Los Rios tastes like jasmine, with a hint of coffee. Terroir is as vital to chocolate as it is to wine, and the same can be said of honey, berries and other products. But most of the chocolate we eat today — even the good stuff — is raised, sold and processed in bulk. Many of us have developed a taste for single-malt whiskey and appellation contr ol ee wine. Developing a market for fine Amazon forest products would help them sell at the premium they need to offset higher costs.

Can It Be Done?

This sounds like work, but it might be easier than we think. Many of America's largest cities have adopted goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 80%. American homeowners will install 2.5 GW of solar panels on their homes in

2019, and the total installed capacity is expected to double in the next five years. Most people are buying washing machines and refrigerators that use 70% less electricity than the old ones they replace. If people are willing to spend thousands of dollars to protect their climate, many would be willing to splurge on a better bar of chocolate. Better chocolate, coffee and honey can be cheap thrills and still turn the tide.

This solution can't be imposed from above. Rainforest communities know their forests, culture and capabilities. Each village will have to develop its own plan for planting, harvesting and processing. It will require changing the centuries-old status quo. But the Patax o woman and the Mura man we saw on television meant what they said: They don't want their forests to burn. They want them to stand, for themselves and their children's children. When they protect their forests, they do it for themselves and all of us everywhere. They just need our help. After all, we all share our one and only planet.

***Niyanta Spelman** is the founder and CEO of Rainforest Partnership

A Gen Zer's Perspective on Climate Change Reform

Neil Kapoor
October 8, 2019

With the right investments, the private sector can take over an industry of highly lucrative potential, harnessing the beauty of capitalism to combat climate change.

Shortly after the turn of the 20th century, American muckraker Upton Sinclair published "The Jungle," a searing account of the savage working conditions in Chicago's meatpacking industry. Such a mind-boggling expos e of exploited workers laboring

amid rotten, contaminated and diseased meat, he thought, would shake America to its core.

It did. Public outcry was swift, and within a year, Congress passed two landmark measures creating federal food inspection standards in slaughterhouses and what became America's chief food regulator, the FDA, among other consumer protections. Today, this textbook example of mass mobilization in response to a public health crisis may seem out of touch, but it reminds us of a persistent government habit: Until a tangible, imminent crisis looms — like the one illustrated by Sinclair — it is a safe bet that little action will be undertaken on even the most pressing problems, climate change included.

However, this tendency is especially dangerous given the slowly-but-surely nature of climate change — and precisely why a new approach is needed. While the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement marked a watershed moment in global diplomacy, 2018 reports from the United Nations show most countries are not on track to meet their upcoming 2020 pledges. Coupled with President Donald Trump yanking the United States from the agreement — not to mention skipping climate talks at the G7 summit earlier this year — a diminished impetus from the West to meet those goals paints a gloomy outlook.

Economic Health

However discouraging these prospects are, a strong case can be made for a threefold approach spanning social, economic, political, academic and public-private lines. The first tenet follows an age-old aphorism: What gets measured, gets fixed. One reason economies today don't favor many common sense climate change proposals is because current economic indices, namely GDP, are too narrow. They give little consideration to the long-term necessity and benefits of climate-conscious proposals, favoring short-term growth at the environment's expense. Instead, we must use a more comprehensive measurement of economic health that factors in climate impact.

One possibility is the Gross Progress Index (GPI), popularized in the early 1990s with the

intention of subtracting “costs” — ranging from crime to family breakdown to pollution — from “benefits,” which GDP solely measures. Non-profits have calculated GPI time-series for America and a smattering of countries including Canada, France, the UK and the Netherlands, but just four US states have passed legislation to consider GPI. The European Union's Beyond GDP initiative has garnered attention among European think tanks but, by and large, alternative GDP indicators have not dominated the mainstream political conversation. That must change. GPI will need policy support from governments due to a default preference for GDP, but a global effort to universally adopt GPI with an established methodology can standardize its use for all.

Antagonists of GPI contend it is too vague given its social well-being origins, and higher GPI often would not indicate a true increase of a nation's wealth. Yet these objections are short-sighted for two reasons. First, a climate change-oriented GPI would primarily be focused on environmental impacts, not ambiguous factors like happiness. Second, GPI would be used alongside GDP as an equal economic index, not as a replacement or a short-term growth metric.

The second set of measures is aimed at public opinion, modeled after food labeling requirements. Researchers at Tufts University found that nutritional labels reduce consumer intake of calories by 6.6%, fats by 10.3% and other unhealthy foods by 13%, while increasing consumer vegetable consumption by 13.5%. The intent behind replicating the food labeling model is if the carbon footprint of a consumer item is reported front and center to consumers like nutritional value is for food, the public is far more likely to understand the direct impact it has on the environment.

For example, many are shocked to learn that both a pound of beef and almonds each requires a whopping 2,000 gallons of water. Worse, livestock farming generates 18% of the world's human-produced greenhouse gas emissions. The beef and poultry lobby will fight these facts being

reported on their products, but perhaps such a measure will cause people to think twice before consuming environmentally unfriendly foods and shift more attention to sustainability-friendly policies at the ballot box.

Third, a renewed public-private partnership is needed. This matters, because the main obstacle to implementing new carbon capture and storage (CCS) technologies is cost. A two-pronged approach is suitable. First, governments must reduce the gap between the price of carbon (around \$20 currently) and the cost of carbon capture techniques (currently around \$200) by ensuring ordinary people — not just government and corporations — become a stakeholder in the decarbonization process. For example, Canada recently announced an ambitious tax on fossil fuels, where most revenue will be awarded as a tax credit to Canadians. Another option is a cap-and-trade system, like in California, where dirty utility companies buy carbon credits from cleaner ones like Tesla.

The second prong incentivizes private sector investment in CCS and other technologies through significantly increasing tax credits. According to Jesse Jenkins, a researcher at the MIT Energy Initiative, America's 2018 modest increase in CCS tax credits makes innovation far more viable: High costs of CCS precluded companies from investing, which kept CCS technology expensive. By aggressively promoting research and development schemes, reducing the cost of CCS and distributing the tax benefits across society, government can accelerate progress toward the crossover point when the capitalistic virtuous cycle favors financially viable and sustainable business models.

Climate change is arguably the biggest crisis mankind currently faces. It requires global cooperation, innovation and diplomacy. But rather than sow blame or point fingers at carbon laggards, we must universally seek to implement the reforms put forth here through regional and federal approaches. With the right investment, there will be a point when government support is

no longer needed, and the private sector can take over an industry of highly lucrative potential, harnessing the beauty of capitalism. Yet ensuring the public has a fair stake in progressive economic and political reforms is still a crucial matter — one that can turn the tide of government intransigence into a catalyzing force, and one Sinclair might approve of.

***Neil Kapoor** is an American high school student and journalist from Palo Alto, California.

Our Own Experiences of Poverty Shape Our Views on Its Causes

Eric Meade
October 8, 2019

We can resolve the ongoing debate over poverty's causes, but only by examining how our own experiences of poverty shape our views.

Debate has raged for centuries over the causes of poverty, and the views expressed have not changed significantly over that time. The same ideas come in and out of fashion as seasons and sentiments change. Each person finds some potential cause that attracts them and presents it as poverty's so-called "root cause." Correlation and causation get jumbled together as experts write papers to promote their own conclusions and to prove their opponents wrong. But what if everyone in this debate is actually right?

Four Views of Poverty

In "Reframing Poverty," I summarize the four main views of poverty that have been around for hundreds of years. Surprisingly, the view a person chooses reflects their answers to two fundamental questions: Are the poor, generally speaking, like me (as a self) or different from me (as an Other)? Is poverty an individual or a

systemic issue? How one answers these two questions will determine one's place in the ongoing poverty debate.

A structural view (systemic issue affecting people like me) argues that the poor do their best to escape poverty, but traps and barriers keep them where they are. A trap consists of mutually reinforcing challenges, such as when you need money to pay for childcare, but you need childcare so you can look for a job. Barriers include things like racism, sexism, lack of education or lack of job opportunities that prevent a person from receiving the reward for their good efforts.

A cultural view (systemic issue affecting people different from me) claims that there is a coherent set of attitudes and behaviors — a “culture of poverty” — that keeps people poor. Adults transmit this culture to the next generation through parenting styles and through the community's self-defeating beliefs about the world.

A contextual view (individual issue affecting people like me) acknowledges that the bad behaviors of the poor perpetuate their poverty but suggests that these behaviors make sense within the absurd context in which the poor live. This view currently draws on brain science to show that conditions of scarcity can reduce cognitive capacity by up to 14 IQ points — the so-called “bandwidth tax” — producing bad decisions that the person would not make if they were not poor.

A behavioral view (individual issue affecting people different from me) claims that the self-defeating behaviors of the poor result from a lack of ability, motivation, or willpower.

Each of these views implies its own solutions to poverty. The structural view demands new investment in housing, education, transportation, etc., in order to dismantle the traps and barriers that keep people poor. The cultural view proposes interventions within families and communities to improve parenting skills and to foster positive attitudes. The contextual view argues for universal basic income and other supports to relieve the stresses that promote poverty-

perpetuating behaviors. The behavioral view wants to cut social programs for the poor, or at least to impose behavioral requirements (like working at a job) on those receiving benefits. And so the debate goes on and on.

Our View

If sincere, thoughtful people have expressed all four views of poverty for centuries, then each view probably contains at least some part — but not all — of the truth. Certainly, the poor are in some respects like me and in other respects different from me. Certainly, the poor, like all of us, face the consequences of their own actions, but at the same time they inhabit a systemic context where the consequences of an individual decision can prove catastrophic.

Common sense also supports the assertion that each view contains some truth. Somewhere a hardworking man cannot find a job despite his best efforts. Somewhere a father bestows upon his daughter a worldview that will not serve her well in life. Somewhere the stresses of poverty erode a mother's ability to care for her children the way she knows she should. Somewhere there is a poor and pregnant teenager who really should have known better.

If all of these views are true in some way, then why do we each choose the view we do? Where do our answers to those two fundamental questions come from? They likely come from our own experience, or from our family's experience, of poverty. Only 200 years ago, 84% of humans lived in what the World Bank now calls poverty (on less than \$1.90 per day, roughly, accounting for inflation). Most of us can probably point to an ancestor who genuinely struggled to survive and whose name we know. How our own ancestors escaped poverty, or why they were unable to do so, likely shapes our understanding of poverty today.

Integrating these different views of poverty is not just a cognitive exercise. It is an emotional process of looking at what we believe about poverty and why. When we look inside ourselves, we may find an uncanny connection between our own lived experience and the solutions we are

proposing out in the world. But leaders of change undermine their own effectiveness when they fail to distinguish between what the poor really need and what they themselves feel fulfilled in providing. Many end up simply projecting the emotional baggage they carry forward from the past onto the lives of others.

Integrating the poverty debate requires not just that we listen to other views, but also that we expand the emotional place from which we listen. It requires that we integrate our own thoughts and feelings through an often painful process of self-awareness and reflection. Only then can we share that integration with a world that so badly needs it.

***Eric Meade** is a futurist, speaker and author of “Reframing Poverty: New Thinking and Feeling About Humanity’s Greatest Challenge.”

Turkey’s “Peace Corridor” Isn’t a New Idea

Nathaniel Handy
October 10, 2019

The latest Turkish offensive in Syria isn’t exactly history repeating itself, but for the Kurds, it’s an idea they have heard before.

There is a strange irony to the latest Turkish offensive announced in northern Syria. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan couched it on his Twitter feed as a move that will “preserve Syria’s territorial integrity and liberate local communities from terrorists.”

Yet the creation of a “safe zone” in a swathe of Syrian territory looks in practice like the creation of a Turkish-controlled zone in northern Syria. What’s more, the proposed movement of a million of Turkey’s Syrian refugee population — the largest of any country — into that zone has some awkward historical echoes.

Whatever individual communities of Kurds in northern Syria may think of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), an alliance led by the People’s Protection Units (YPG) of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) — a political party seen as closely allied to the Turkey-based Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) — they may see Turkish designs as essentially anti-Kurdish.

That is because, in moving Syrian refugees into a border zone traditionally inhabited by Kurds, the Turkish government will be moving in a predominately Sunni Arab population into lands that have a history of Arabization projects throughout Syria’s republican era.

Uncomfortable Echoes of History

The refugees in question are innocent victims of circumstances: increasingly unwanted in Turkey, yet likely to be equally rejected in Kurdish lands within Syria. This lack of welcome will be intensified by their arrival behind Turkish tanks, rather than, say, the blue helmets of UN peacekeepers.

The northeastern borderland region of Syria that is the focus of Turkey’s efforts, an area known in Syria as the Jazira, has always been restive. As a part of Rojava, or western Kurdistan, it has never been fully integrated into the Arab nationalist Syrian state.

One solution was the attempt was a cordon sanitaire, named the Arab Belt, around the Turkish and Iraqi borders, to ethnically cleanse Kurds seen as susceptible to wider Kurdish nationalism and replace them with Arabs perceived as loyal. This 1970s program under Hafez al-Assad, father of the current Syrian dictator, Bashar al-Assad, was a continuation of discriminatory policies stretching back to the 1930s and the origins of the modern state. It included cultural cleansing like the changing of Kurdish place names, such as Kobani.

Kobani has become famous during the ongoing Syrian Civil War as one of the Kurds’ most decisive victories against the Islamic State group, but it is officially known within Syria as Ayn al-Arab, or the Eye of the Arab — a name

change that also connotes the state's watchful vigilance upon its border.

The latest offensive occurs against this historical backdrop. It is a backdrop that is largely unknown in the West, and may well be unknown to US President Donald Trump. Even if he knows about it, he could well regard it as irrelevant history book stuff.

After all, this is a president determined to tidy up America's commitments and let the locals sort out their own mess. His decision to withdraw US troops from positions on the Turkish border earlier in the week is what precipitated the Turkish offensive.

It is something the Turks have long pressed for. Having their traditional ally, the US, essentially guarding a Kurdish militia on the Turkish border that is seen as a terrorist organization by Ankara was always an awkward dance for all parties. By apparently ditching the Kurds, Trump has made it easy for Turkey.

Trump's Simplistic Worldview

Whether he has actually ditched the Kurds remains to be seen. President Trump likes clear cuts and clean decisions, but any student of the Middle East knows that those who go in don't tend to come out on their own terms. The chances of the US being able to simply ignore Syria and let the regional rivals slug it out are slim.

His combative tweet, shortly after the troop withdrawal announcement, telling Turkey that any move that goes "off limits" would lead him to "destroy and obliterate" the Turkish economy, gave a flavor of how the ties of Syria might bind the US.

Donald Trump's America is, as we all know, only on America's side. But of course, beyond political rhetoric, foreign policy requires states to choose where they stand. The US has played the Turks and the Kurds off for some time. If Trump's latest decision does lead to an all-out war between Turkey and the YPG militia in Syria, it may be difficult to stand on the sidelines.

What About the Turks and the Kurds?

As for the Turks and the Kurds, those at the heart of this new conflict growing out of the Syrian War, their fate is still caught up, like so much of the Middle East, with the limitations of a political map set a century ago.

President Erdogan is fond of alluding to historical treaties — from Lausanne to Sevres — in his quest for Turkish power projection. In pushing Turkish troops beyond the border once more in a bid to carve out a zone of Syrian territory which they will control, he is once again revealing how messy the Middle East's borders are.

Amidst these borders, the Kurds continue to languish. Stateless, many yearn for a Kurdish nationalism not unlike the Turkish, Arab and Iranian ones that surround them. If these states could develop social contracts beyond narrow ethnic nationalisms, they might offer Kurds a better future and less recourse to nationalist discourse that has led to so much conflict.

***Nathaniel Handy** is a writer and academic with over 10 years of experience in international print and broadcast media.

Attacks on LGBTQ Rights in Poland: A Critique of Impure Reason

Alicja Rybkowska
October 11, 2019

The arguments often employed against the LGBTQ community in Poland are based on prejudice and are seriously flawed.

It is already clear that the year 2019 in Poland will mark a record number of pride parades: 21 have already taken place and 6 further events are planned. The marches are organized not only in regional capitals but also locally, such as the march in Radomsko, a town of less than 50,000 inhabitants. In 12 of the total 27 locations, it was or will be the first event of

this type. These events often meet with resistance, ranging from attempts at a cool-headed argumentation against them to verbal and physical attacks on marchers. These seemingly rational arguments employed by those who oppose LGBTQ rights use the decorum of a public debate to disseminate inequality and hostility.

In the town of Plock, 15-year-old Jakub Baryla recently attempted to stop the first Plock Equality March that took place on August 10. Carrying a cross adorned with a rosary, he blocked the way of the procession and, when he refused to give way to the marchers, was carried away by the police. The photos of the young boy facing the cavalcade of armed policemen and raising the crucifix with a triumphal grin as he was being removed from the scene gained considerable popularity and invoked many expressions of admiration.

Baryla, who describes himself as a “Catholic, traditionalist, conservatist, Pole, patriot, and nationalist,” is an eloquent, well-behaved, sleek young man who declares interest in history and theology. Next to his handkerchief he wears a silver Chrobry’s sword, the symbol of Polish nationalist movement. After his symbolical gesture, Baryla was invited to the studio of the right-wing TV channel Telewizja Republika, where he gave an interview to Tomasz Sakiewicz, the editor-in-chief of the conservative Catholic weekly, *Gazeta Polska*. He was introduced as “the boy, the man who stopped the LGBT march in Plock.”

It marks the confusion about how to define him: the virile hero who is clearly just a boy, perhaps talked into his action by someone else. Baryla insists to be taken seriously despite his young age and complains that “labeling people because of their age is detrimental because it leads to ignoring outstanding individuals.” Despite the somewhat Raskolnikov-like purport of this claim, it is hard to disagree that a person of his age is capable not only of planning an independent action but also of understanding its consequences. However, a reconstruction of his

arguments suggests that he overlooks essential repercussions of his gesture.

It’s Not the People

These arguments are not new. They are also not very difficult to counter. The biggest challenge is their ostensible rationality and consistency with facts, which give these arguments an air of informed opinion and cannot be easily dismissed as hate speech. Quite the opposite, Baryla had stressed on many occasions that he loves and respects all members of the LGBTQ community, and it is only their actions that he disapproves of. It is one of the often-used argumentative strategies.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church explicitly condemns homosexual acts but calls for treating homosexuals “with respect, compassion, and sensitivity.” Homosexuality is understood as bad luck that happens to a person and calls for pity. The ambiguity of this call and the condescending undertone of “compassion” does not offer any guide on how to reconcile love and respect with the “unnatural” character of homosexual acts. When the Polish Archbishop Marek Jedraszewski called homosexuals a “rainbow pest” in his recent sermon, after a public outcry he went on to explain that he meant the “ideology, not the people,” and that the Church “does not condemn people, but it condemns evil.”

Similarly, Baryla writes on his website: “I love and respect non-heterosexuals, also those from the LGBT movements, I do not decry them as people, but I do decry and disagree with the great majority of their actions.” In an interview granted to the website wrealu24.pl, he stated that the organization of pride parades should be forbidden, and the organizers imprisoned or fined, and called for eradicating “not people but the deeds, and that decidedly, even by the use of power.”

Love becomes an empty declaration when it is accompanied by a staged act of public discontent, and when protecting an inanimate object that is a wooden crucifix becomes more important than

protecting vulnerable members of society. It is an act of willful ignorance to believe that there is no causal connection between verbal or physical expressions of disapproval and the feeling of insecurity among the LGBTQ community.

According to the report by the NGO Campaign Against Homophobia, three out of 10 LGBTQ people in Poland experienced violence motivated by their sexual identity, which shows clearly that the operation of detaching a person from their course of action is just a rhetorical figure.

It's Against Nature

Stating that homosexuality is against nature may seem appealing because it is supposedly based on scientific knowledge, easily propped up by “evidence.” In his conversation with TV Republika, Baryla spoke against “the sin of Sodom that happens not only silently in the bedroom but goes on the streets and shouts that ‘love is love,’ while it is untrue because there exist factual differences.” His grimace left no doubt about his opinion on the “differences” in question.

Marek Chodakiewicz, the expert of the Institute of the National Remembrance, in his recent lecture on the “civilization of death,” presented a vivid description of violent, scatological fantasies and used some 30-year-old urban myth of gerbiling (inserting small live animals into human rectum for stimulation) to support his conclusion that homosexual practices are an abnormality. In this line of argument, non-heteronormative sexual preferences are presented as contrary not also to natural instincts, but also to common sense because they question fundamental “natural laws.”

Arguments of this type assume that whatever is natural is inalienably good — a delusion confuted by George Moore in his critique of the naturalistic fallacy. Furthermore, same-sex attractions actually happen quite often among animals, although it cannot be used as a valid argument either.

Furthermore, a variation of the “against nature” argument uses fraudulent scientific data to prove that homosexuality is associated with a number of aberrations, starting with an exceptionally high number of sexual partners — 25% having more than 1,000, according to the Polish priest and anti-gay activist Dariusz Oko — and going as far as the claim that pedophilia is directly linked to a homosexual orientation. These sensational claims are often introduced by phrases such as “Numerous studies have found that,” “Research shows that” and the like, creating an impression that the subsequent condemnation of homosexual acts is scientifically supported and thus resistant to critique.

It is, however, worth noticing that a 2018 report showed that the acceptance of same-sex relationships among Polish scientists is noticeably higher than average, with 86% of those working in the natural sciences having a positive or very positive attitude toward the legalization of same-sex unions. Easy access to reliable data seems not to weaken the impact of this type of argument. It can be partly explained by the partisan media landscape and confirmation bias, but readiness to abuse science in order to legitimize prejudice is concerning and may further deepen not only the hostility toward LGBTQ people, but also the distrust in science among the general public.

We Have to Protect Ourselves

False information spread as a part of the second strategy results in a distorted perception of LGBTQ people as expansive and threatening. Their unquenchable sexual appetite is said to lead to assaults on “normal,” heterosexual people, and that their ostensible pedophilic inclinations may put children in danger. Indeed, it is children in particular who have been instrumentalized in the political campaign against LGBTQ community. Protecting “our children” has become the highlight of this backlash, and it is a concern equally shared by parents and childless people.

Jaroslaw Kaczynski, the head of Poland’s ruling Law and Justice party, who does not have

children himself, often uses this argument, perhaps in an attempt to appear as the “father of the nation.”

Pride parades are seen as a totalitarian attempt to force the majority to conform to the will of the minority and hence vehemently opposed. Baryla disagrees that he wanted to stop a peaceful demonstration and claims that the march was not peaceful at all: The very fact that people manifest their affiliation with or support for the LGBTQ community is argued to be a threat to one’s own freedom.

Baryla maintains that “peaceful” means that it mustn’t be offensive, but he seems to ignore the basic distinction between intentions and consequences. The primary intention of the equality marches is the wish to express solidarity with other LGBTQ people, celebrate their diversity and support their demands for equal rights. The Equality Parade in Warsaw lists as its postulates, among others, marriage equality and legal protection from discrimination, but none of them calls to change others’ sexual preferences.

It is both untrue to say that the aim of the parade is to “sexualize” the citizens and naïve to believe it could change biological mechanisms of the brain. However, it stands in line with the first strategy of setting apart sexual beings from their sexuality and claiming that the latter can be controlled or manipulated.

Guarding Our Faith

Similar to the rhetorical trope of “protecting our children,” the need to protect “our faith” argument allows its proponents to speak on behalf of a community and helps to maintain a collective identity. Baryla defends his opinions by asserting that he “only says what the Lord says,” that he is not personally offended by LGBTQ events, but he cannot accept the fact that they offend God.

The Polish penal code actually recognizes offending other people’s “religious feelings” as a legal offense that can be punished with up to two years in prison.

With such a lax formulation it is possible to sue any person for not complying to one’s own religious standards as an offender. It seems nevertheless dubious to make the state the arbiter in spiritual matters.

Also, it undermines the meaning of religious faith if it can be threatened by other people exercising their freedom of belief. It is impossible to argue conclusively that the right to self-determination — also in the sphere of sexuality — is a constraint for those who choose to follow the morals of a specific religion on that matter. Presenting the current invigoration of LGBTQ initiatives as a persecution of Catholics in the country where 87% inhabitants are baptized in the Roman rite does not do justice to the real oppression experienced by many LGBTQ people.

At the same time, it ridicules the victims of actual persecution in many places of the world. Furthermore, it ignores the fact that many members of the LGBTQ community belong to the Catholic Church and wish to participate in its communal life. The strategy of casting them out as an ideological enemy is a manipulation that could be well said to offend the religious feelings of those Catholics who want more acceptance and support for LGBTQ rights.

It is easy to hastily dismiss the arguments discussed above and people who advance them as irrational, driven by anger or fear. We should, in fact, take them more seriously as an expression of a rationally motivated reasoning and try to avoid the symmetrical bias of refuting whatever does not support our own views.

However, upon closer examination, it turns out that the assumptions of this reasoning are seriously flawed and are actually preceded by a number of prejudices. They can be called the effects of the “impure reason” — that is, reason that produces arguments against other people but fails to see its inconsequence and inner bias. It is way of thinking that does not critically question its own assumptions and masks hostility with exterior logic.

The philosopher Martha Nussbaum describes three conditions under which — according to

repeated psychological experiments — people behave badly: when they are not held personally accountable, when nobody raises a critical voice against their actions, and when human beings over whom they have power are dehumanized and de-individualized.

It is, therefore, particularly important to hold those using the fraudulent arguments accountable for direct hostile remarks. It is vital to express criticism of such antilocution and take a clear stance on the side of the LGBTQ community and to remember that, despite the dehumanizing and de-individualizing effects employed by those who oppose LGBTQ rights, their words do not give them power over LGBTQ people who can, and do, confidently speak for themselves.

***Alicja Rybkowska** is a philosopher and contemporary culture commentator based in Vienna, Austria.

What Is Behind Football's Persistent Racism?

Ellis Cashmore
October 15, 2019

Football has failed to deliver what is after all the most basic requirement — a fair and healthy environment where all competitors start as equals.

Imagine it's 1979. Britain's national game, football, is still anchored to its working-class roots. The tribal violence known as hooliganism surfaces at practically every game, and the stadiums are often dilapidated monuments of the previous century.

A handful of black players are breaking through at a number of clubs in the Midlands, the Northeast and London. The 90-minutes of play is, for them, like a trip to hell: The unsavory taunting, banana pelting and racist epithets are relentless. Every game.

Black players, who were schooled in Britain and grew up alongside white children, find themselves interned in a world where they are not just unwelcome, but despised. Britain has legislation to outlaw what was then called racial discrimination, but it can do nothing to change the animosity of football fans, much of it stirred up by neo-Nazi movements.

Football authorities show no urgency. The prevailing feeling is that the fans' rage will subside — and it does. As more black British players rise to the top, they are complemented by generously gifted black players from overseas. It becomes absurd to mock players who are among the best in the world and contribute to what is becoming an entertainment rather than just a game. England's Premier League will soon become the envy of the world.

The Gravity of Racism

Eastern Europe appears to be where Britain was 40 years ago. Football fans rarely miss an opportunity to vent their hate and intimidate black players. The exact ethnicity of the players is irrelevant to xenophobes — as long as they are not evidently white, they are targets.

In a sense, the first evidence of racism in football is intelligible. The sport developed in England: It was designed by white men, intended as a white man's game and governed by organizations full of men with working-class roots. The fans reflected this, and the appearance of black players alarmed them. They regarded black players as contaminants (I choose the word carefully, having conducted research in the early 1980s). White fans sensed their game — and, even today, they feel proprietorial about their clubs — was being polluted.

The racist elements in British football became less and less visible, though probably never truly vanished. The 1991 Football (Offences) Act made racist chanting at football matches unlawful. But even today, odious messages on social media are reminders of that remnant racism.

Earlier this week, a game in Sofia between the national teams of Bulgaria and England was

interrupted twice because of racist chanting and Nazi gestures in the crowd. The Vasil Levski National Stadium was already partially closed as punishment for previous displays of racist hate. Further punishment will no doubt follow. It will be just as ineffective.

East European societies appear to have little conception of the gravity of racism. Unlike Western Europe, they have no history of migration in the post-World War II period, nor of the bigotry that typically accompanies the arrival of conspicuously different strangers who become at first neighbors and workmates and, later, when unemployment arrives, competitors and enemies.

They have no knowledge of “race riots,” some precipitated by angry whites, other by rebellious blacks. No experience of pursuing multiracial and then multicultural education policies, equal opportunities in employment and, more recently, cultural diversity. For Eastern European fans they are not just immaterial, but inconceivable. All they see are players on the opposing team, who are visibly different looking and accordingly fair game — targets. If this sounds like an overly sympathetic approach, it’s based on the view that, without an understanding of the causes of racism, we can’t even manage it, let alone banish it.

Paradoxical Persistence

I don’t think football can rid itself of racism, at least not in the short term. Football is the most popular, most culturally diverse and ethnically mixed sport in history, so the paradoxical persistence of racism is an acute embarrassment to fans, governors, players and every group affiliated. No other sport has been so bedeviled by racism.

In the UK in the 1980s, apologists would weakly argue football’s racism is a reflection of society; and, in a perverse way, it was. Perhaps the kind of episodes we’ve witnessed in Russia, Ukraine and Bulgaria, among others, mirror a more general condition.

Football’s governing organization in Europe, UEFA, dares not tolerate it. But, in a way, it’s doing exactly that. The repertoire of penalties, as

the Bulgaria match illustrated, is worthless. UEFA has one weapon available that would probably extirpate racism, not from society, but from football: expel nations from competition.

There is precedence: In 1985, English clubs were suspended indefinitely by UEFA from European competition. The ban was eventually lifted in 1990-91. The reason for the ban was violence rather than racism and, even after five or six years, the return to competition was not totally peaceful. Violence gradually returned. But it was a sanction that, at least, had purpose.

Were UEFA to consider such draconian measures, it might be pressured to extend the punishment to clubs involved in Europe. The clubs wouldn’t appreciate the idea of taking responsibility for their own fans, of course. And were UEFA to ban one or more of the marquee names in football, then the lucrative broadcasting and sponsorship contracts that are now the lifeblood of the sport would be subject to scrutiny. The Champions’ League minus glamorous clubs may be less valuable to commercial organizations.

Could sponsors exert independent influence on football? Chevrolet, for example, has a £450-million contract with Manchester United. The carmaker is owned by General Motors (GM), a corporation with headquarters in Detroit, Michigan, where African Americans make up nearly 80% of the city’s population. It’s worth wondering what might happen if GM pressed Manchester United to develop some initiatives to ensure racism of any kind is obliterated from its sphere of influence. If other club sponsors around the world followed the example, who knows where it might lead the sport?

Football has been tortured by racism for four decades and, after this week, must recognize that the sport has failed to deliver what is after all the most basic requirement — a fair and healthy environment where all competitors start as equals.

*Ellis Cashmore is the author of "Elizabeth Taylor," "Beyond Black" and "Celebrity Culture."

Mercenaries in the Desert: The Kremlin's Libya Game

Sergey Sukhankin
October 16, 2019

Watching other parties blunder in Libya, Moscow will not willingly dispose of its competitive advantage by allying itself with one side.

Since the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, Libya has been consumed by a destructive domestic struggle for power aggravated by the involvement of major external players. By 2014-16, two main centers of power emerged. The so-called "western bloc," nominally led by Fayez al-Sarraj, rests on the authority of the Government of National Accord and the military power of the Tripolitania militia consisting of the four most powerful "brigades." This bloc, despite having international recognition as the main center of control, lacks military capabilities and strong leadership, making Saraj's power rather nominal and quite illusory.

Conversely, the "eastern bloc" is led by a strong and experienced military leader (yet a relatively weak diplomat), Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, who is backed by a broad spectrum of military forces, including various tribal factions and mercenaries from Chad and Sudan. Haftar has also received support from a host of Arab states — Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates — along with France.

Russia is also an integral part of the Libyan conflict. Nevertheless, Moscow has not openly bet on either player, trying to preserve an equilibrium while playing an "earnest broker" role. To date, Russia's competitive advantage in

the region has fitted what the director general of the Russian International Affairs Council Andrey Kortunov defined as an ability to "maintain constructive ties with all actors." In other words, pragmatism — an element that is implicitly maintained in the Foreign Policy Concept approved by Vladimir Putin in November 2016 — shapes Moscow's Libya policy.

The Libya Policy

That said, the Kremlin's stance on the situation in Libya now rests on a combination of the following main objectives.

First, Russia aims to maintain a balance between all actors, assuming the role of an intermediary/broker. This approach, which is opposed to both Soviet foreign policy practices and the post-2011 Western actions, could secure Russia's presence in Libya irrespective of who becomes the ultimate winner. Namely, aside from preserving ties with two main parties in the conflict, Moscow is maintaining contacts with Gaddafi's son Saif al-Islam via reported use of political technologists. Similarly, the Russian side has repeatedly voiced its readiness to use its resources to make Moscow a platform for intra-Libyan negotiations.

Second, Moscow is using the Libyan conflict as a platform for fortifying ties with Egypt and the UAE, thereby alleviating international pressure on Bashar al-Assad in Syria.

Third, the Kremlin aims to secure Russia's future role in the Libyan economy — particularly the hydrocarbon sector, as well as arms sales and large infrastructural projects — and simultaneously precluding other players, especially Italy and France, from doing so.

And, finally, Russia is intent on stopping the spread of Islamic radicalism beyond the region.

Despite Moscow's willingness to maintain an adequate distance between all parties, it appears that Russia's sympathies, at least in the short term, are with Haftar, which is related to both his image and background — against the weakness of his opponents. Saraj is not viewed by Moscow (especially among Russian military circles) as a

decisive leader, whereas the reputation of Saif al-Islam, who also lacks sufficient military power, is tainted by international obstruction.

The pro-Haftar sentiments in Russia were profoundly boosted after the commander's successful campaign in February this year and the seizure of the El Sharara and El Feel oil fields. But the initial excitement and Haftar's confidence that he could quickly take control of Tripoli were cooled by ensuing difficulties. In response to Haftar's plea for help — apparently boosted by promises of lucrative contracts for Russian companies and businesses in Libya — Moscow reportedly increased the level of technical-material support for the field marshal's forces, with private military companies (PMCs) being one of the main elements.

Fact or Fiction?

One of these private outfits, the RSB Group, which is headed by Oleg Krinitsyn, is known to have operated in Libya since at least 2016. Yet between its first reported appearance in 2016 and new cases in 2019, there has been a big difference.

Initially, the RSB Group was primarily involved in non-military missions such as sapper works and protection of infrastructure in the Benghazi area. Now it would be adequate to argue that, in terms of both composition and functions performed, Russian PMCs in Libya have made a dramatic shift toward patterns observed in Ukraine and Syria. Rumors about Russia's use of PMCs during military missions in Libya appeared in February 2017, after Haftar's visit to the Admiral Kuznetsov aircraft carrier near the shores of Syria, but were dismissed by Russian officials.

The rumors received more substance after Haftar's visit to Moscow on November 7, 2018, when his delegation was, among other notable figures, met by Yevgeny "Putin's chief" Prigozhin — the oligarch behind the notorious Wagner group, a shadow PMC that took part in hostilities in eastern Ukraine and Syria, and is now said to be operating in sub-Saharan Africa.

During this visit, the Russian side may have agreed to increase military backing for Haftar, providing necessary technical-material support for the offensive launched in April in an exchange for lucrative concessions for Russian businesses, once success is attained. At that point, however, details about Russian mercenaries fighting in Libya did not go beyond rumors. However, fresh information may help add clarity to the issue.

On September 9, mentions of "seven Russian mercenaries killed in Qaser Bin Ghashir" (in the Tripolitania region in northwestern Libya) appeared on Twitter for the first time. Later, this was picked up by Bloomberg, which reported the arrival of 100 mercenaries from the Wagner group to fight for Haftar. At this juncture, an investigation based on data from open sources carried out by the Conflict Intelligence Team demonstrated three important aspects.

First, it helped to ascertain potential location of Russian mercenaries in Libya: Ajdabiya (capital of the Al Wahat District, in northeastern Libya, controlled by Haftar forces, located 438 miles from the line of direct confrontation) and Asbia (the area of the International Airport in Tripoli, a sight of intense urban fighting).

Second, in terms of logistics and transportation, Russian mercenaries in Syria are using the same pattern as in the Central African Republic — the Ural-4320 off-road 6×6 vehicles, produced in Russia.

Third, based on the profiles of the mercenaries, it is possible to ascertain that they are not current members of the Russian armed forces, yet do have vast fighting experience from previous military campaigns.

Russian Casualties

An investigation carried out by Meduza brought to light other important details. Based on information from an unnamed source close to the FSB and the Russian PMC industry, the actual number of mercenary casualties may have reached 35 militants coming from Krasnodar (where the Molkino military polygon serves as a

training ground for the Wagner group), Sverdlovsk and Murmansk regions.

The source claimed that Russia's interests in Libya "are solely concerned with the oil," whereas members of the Wagner group are involved in a broad spectrum of operations ranging from non-military (rendering physical security to logistical flaws and critical infrastructure) to para-military (surveillance and intelligence gathering) and military (actual participation in fighting) operations.

According to Meduza, the recent attack caused casualties among the Rusich group, with one of Wagner's commanders, Alexander Kuznetsov, severely wounded; he has now been transferred to St. Petersburg. This points to the fact that Russia employs Wagner veterans in Libya, meaning experienced fighters and its most valuable cadre.

Now, with the presence of Russian mercenaries in Libya established, it might seem that Moscow has made a shift from subtle — primarily economic and diplomatic — to direct support for Haftar in his push for the ultimate victory.

This impression may, however, not be fully accurate. In effect, one could not be sure that a complete victory for Haftar is what Russia wants. While watching other parties blunder in Libya, Moscow will probably not willingly dispose of its competitive advantage by allying itself with one party and breaking up with the other players in the conflict.

First, it seems obvious that in Ankara, which considers Libya a matter of national security, the ire with Russia's actions in Syria and Libya is brewing. Therefore, by taking one side, Russia might get into a confrontation with other stakeholders involved in the Libyan conflict, which would signify a departure from policies that have secured a visible share of success in Russia's post-2015 policies in the Middle East.

Second, it is not at all apparent — and Russia is well aware of that — that the "Syrian model" will work in Libya. In other words, Haftar's

victory is unlikely to automatically put him under Moscow's direct control.

As political scientist Khalifa al-Haddad noted, both Russia and Haftar realize that they could not fully rely on each other in the long run. While maintaining an ad hoc alliance with Haftar, now fortified by Russian mercenaries from the Wagner group, the Russian side is unlikely to fully break up with other forces comprising the Libyan political landscape.

Libya's status quo temporarily serves Russian regional objectives. On the one hand, Russia is interested in acquiring a major stake in the Libyan economy, which could be done through Haftar's decisive success.

On the other, given the number of stakeholders in the conflict, Moscow realizes that achieving unilateral control in Libya by a single player is utterly unrealistic under current circumstances.

***Sergey Sukhankin** is a fellow at the Jamestown Foundation in Washington, DC, and an associate expert at the International Center for Policy Studies in Kyiv, Ukraine

Facing the Consequences of Trump's Decision to Abandon the Kurds

Gary Grappo
October 25, 2019

Following Donald Trump's decision to suddenly abandon the Syrian Kurds, we still don't know what the full aftermath of the move will entail.

The sad tragedy of US President Donald Trump's precipitous decision to suddenly abandon the Kurds of northern Syria is that it may have been inevitable. Turkey had long warned the Americans that it viscerally opposed its partnership with the People's Protection Units (YPG) — a Syrian Kurdish

militia. Seen by Ankara as an affiliate of the long-banned Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) of Turkey, there was no way that this partnership with its NATO ally, the US, would ever be acceptable. It might lead to a Kurdish-controlled region along its border with Syria. Sooner or later, the US and the YPG would have to part ways. But it was the way in which it was done and the absence of any effort to mitigate the results through diplomacy that make this decision so monstrous.

Deliberate and serious diplomacy between the US, its allies and Turkey, with proper consultation with Syria's Kurds, could have resolved this dilemma. Both sides were more than capable. It would have preserved the vital alliance between two founding NATO members without casting the Kurds to an unknown, though likely dark, fate. What the US side lacked, however, was the backing of its president. Donald Trump, who has repeatedly demonstrated his ignorance of diplomacy and its value, seemed driven to only one solution, suitable to him and him alone.

US Allies Take Note

The Syria move confirms that the leader of the world's only superpower makes decisions based on misinformation, simplistic perceptions and no consultation. To make matters worse, he's compulsively impulsive, a condition apparently exacerbated after speaking with autocrats like Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. What this means for issues of global importance, such as the current US-China trade dispute or North Korea's growing arsenal of nuclear weapons, should alarm not only Americans.

No president in modern US history has governed in such a cavalier manner. Typically, American presidents are thoroughly briefed by CIA experts and senior policy advisers on both risks and options. Moreover, all presidents since the end of World War Two, as well as their relevant senior cabinet members, senior military officers and senior diplomats, consulted extensively with US allies. And all of that would

happen before final options were considered and a decision made. Trump effectively bypassed all of that and resorted to ... well, no one is sure. Perhaps gut instinct, the "great and unmatched wisdom" — who can know?

The Kurds and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), of which the YPG was the major component, are now victims of that erratic decision-making process. To be honest, neither the region nor its forlorn population is of existential consequence for the United States.

But abruptly abandoning an ally that had fought valiantly alongside Americans will not quickly be forgotten by the Syrian Kurds or any of America's allies. Surely, Israel, Jordan, South Korea, Poland, the Baltic States or any of America's dozens of allies and friends around the world that have staked their security on the US alliance must now be asking themselves if the same fate could befall them. Saudi Arabia, too, may now face a new future, though it may be an exception given Trump's fondness for those who pay and sign big-dollar defense contracts. Pity poor Afghanistan — it may be next on Trump's "bloody sands" list.

America's extensive network of allies and friends has become not just the trademark of its national defense and foreign policies. More than anything else — more even than its formidable military might and economic power — that alliance network has been the fulcrum, the indispensable sine qua non, of American post-World War II security and global influence. Since assuming office almost three years ago, Donald Trump has set about vitiating that network at every turn, whether denigrating NATO, belittling the alliance with Japan and South Korea, or insulting its two closest neighbors, Canada and Mexico. Leaving the Kurds to fend for themselves may be more poignant but far less impactful for the US.

Hopelessness Ahead

The US decision to leave Syria isn't just life-altering for its Kurdish population. It is also devastating for Syria's Arab population. Many of

them had long ago likely abandoned hope of realizing a positive outcome to their nation's deadly and destructive civil war. Nevertheless, they may have clung to some scintilla of feeling short of despair, with the Americans holding a modicum of leverage for a final, potentially positive, outcome due to US presence in the northeast and the Kurds' combat successes.

That leverage was given away by Trump after his phone call with President Erdogan. After nearly nine years of indescribable suffering and devastation, all they will have to show is lives lost in vain or forever disrupted, and a nation laid waste, with Bashar al-Assad astride the ruins.

America's master dealmaker surrendered the only advantage the US may have had in realizing a suitable end to the conflict. He got nothing in return, either for the US or for the citizens of Syria. He has subsequently claimed credit, however, for a breakthrough in the crisis and for saving Kurdish and American lives, this delusion another trademark in his governing style. One suspects the Syrian people would laugh at such self-congratulatory pronouncements, were it not for their miserable state and grim future.

Instead, Erdogan, Assad, Russia's President Vladimir Putin and Ayatollah Ali Khamenei of Iran may all claim an unqualified victory as they stand amidst the rubble. The script of the Syrian Civil War's last chapter could not have been written more perfectly, thanks to Donald Trump. Osama bin Laden's prediction of America's overseas adventures was proven correct: "Look at Vietnam, look at Lebanon. Whenever soldiers start coming home in body bags, Americans panic and retreat. Such a country needs only to be confronted with two or three sharp blows, then it will flee in panic, as it always has." Over the course of some five years, the tally of body bags from Syria was eight Americans. More than 11,000 Kurds were killed in the fight against the Islamic State (IS) in Syria. They were prepared to continue fighting alongside their American allies.

And what of President Trump's claims of getting Americans out of the Middle East's endless wars? He may wish — though contrary to

his apparent instincts — to consult his generals and senior diplomats. One doesn't end wars by merely walking away. America, and indeed the entire West, faces a forever enemy in the Middle East and South Asia. Groups like IS, al-Qaeda and others of the same ilk have declared permanent enmity against the West, with the US sitting at the top.

Their war is far from over. Therefore, the world and the United States can expect to hear from a reconstituted Islamic State, which still numbers 15,000 to 20,000 fighters in Syria and Iraq, with thousands more now positioned to rejoin its ranks. America will face an endless war until it and its allies understand they must forever vanquish their forever enemy, and not before. Wars do not end merely because one side, or one side's ill-informed president, says so. Just ask the people of Syria.

***Gary Grappo** is a former US ambassador and the chairman of the Board of Directors at Fair Observer.

The World's Love Affair With Justin Trudeau Is Over

Ramsha Zafar
October 30, 2019

The only person to hold responsible for Justin Trudeau's eventual undoing is Justin Trudeau himself.

Canada's 43rd federal election took place on Monday, October, 21, in which the incumbent prime minister, Justin Trudeau, managed to win just 157 out of 338 seats in Parliament while losing the popular vote to the country's Conservative Party. He still retains his position as prime minister and will govern Canada via a minority government for the next four years. As political analysts sit down to

predict what that would look like, it is important to also have a look back at how this happened.

Trudeau's first election win in 2015 marked the end of a decade of Conservative rule in Canada. On the global stage, it was seen as historic. The international media's post-election coverage only worked to reinstate the perception of Trudeau as the liberal hero the world had been waiting for. As J. J. McCullough, a Canadian political commentator, once put it, "There are two kinds of Canadian Prime Ministers — the ones no one has ever heard of and Justin Trudeau."

What the World Had Been Waiting For?

Inundating social media with Instagram photos of himself doing yoga, wearing goofy Halloween costumes, appearing in the pages of Vogue, GQ and Rolling Stone, Trudeau represented a new brand of politics in Canada that stood in stark contrast to the previous prime minister, Stephen Harper.

The promises he made were equally as vibrant. The 2015 Liberal Party platform consisted of a whopping 353 pre-electoral commitments — nearly double of what Harper promised in his 2006 campaign. These included economic security for the middle class, electoral reform, affordable housing, welcoming more Syrian refugees, climate action, engagement with indigenous communities and legalizing marijuana.

The world happily drew comparisons of him and Hugh Grant's character in "Love Actually." He was adulated in the international press as the physical embodiment of all things left and progressive at a time when the rest of the world was experiencing a radical-rightward shift. But back home, he was always met with a fair amount of skepticism and seen largely as a politically naive, wealthy son of a former prime minister who rose to the top owing to his last name. His attention-demanding antics and failed publicity stunts over four years in office only served to solidify that perception.

In February 2018, the prime minister took an eight-day trip to India that quickly turned into a colossal political disaster. Besides donning needlessly elaborate outfits, learning to make rotis with a celebrity chef at the Golden Temple and being ignored by Prime Minister Narendra Modi through most of the trip, Trudeau also managed to dine in the company of a convicted attempted murderer. The only reassuring thing to happen during this trip was its end.

But this was neither Trudeau's first nor last fiasco in office. As columnist Crawford Kilian puts it, "He seemed to be too eager to please too many people and ended up pleasing very few." This was perhaps best illustrated by his decision in June 2019 to declare a climate emergency on Monday and announce the expansion of a massive oil pipeline on Tuesday.

You Only Have Yourself to Blame

But even more amusing than his ability to deliver one political debacle after another was doing it fairly unscathed. It is strange how a political career built entirely on Trudeau's reputation as a woke, progressive, inclusive, racially-sensitized feminist survived damning accusations of groping and racist behavior that have proven career-ending for others. But this just speaks to how good he is at the PR antics that define his brand today.

Months before the election, Trudeau stood accused of yet another malfeasance: pressuring former minister Jody Wilson-Raybould into helping the engineering giant SNC Lavalin avoid criminal prosecution on fraud and bribery charges. The ethics commissioner found the prime minister guilty of violating the Conflict of Interest Act, and his popularity took a nosedive. With an approval rating below that of US President Donald Trump at the time, the Liberal Party leader dissolved the Canadian Parliament in September and announced elections for October 21.

Seven days into campaigning, the outrage around SNC Lavalin seemed to be dying out in what political analysts described as "scandal

fatigue.” Trudeau, appearing more confident, resumed taking questions from the press, which he had suspended. Conducting one successful rally after another, with heckles dying out in the loud crowds, things were looking up for Trudeau. It was all rainbows, butterflies and selfies at the Liberal camp before the storm hit when photos of a 29-year-old Trudeau dressed in racist blackface make-up were published by Time magazine.

The next day, The Independent read: “And so, the progressive prince might actually be a frog.” The New York Times described it as “The Downfall of Canada’s Dreamy Boyfriend.” Local media also echoed the outrage as more photos emerged. Apologies were made. And then, within mere days of the news breaking, the outrage started to die down. Scandal fatigue seemed to be very kind to the Liberal leader.

A few other relatively minor controversies followed. But even with Trudeau’s plummeting popularity and the questions raised about his ability to run the country with such public displays of poor judgement, it was hard to picture either of his major opponents, Andrew Scheer or Jagmeet Singh, as prime minister. The two ran relatively meek campaigns with little sparks along the way that failed to ignite a fire.

Election Day kicked off with CBC News describing the Liberal camp as being “cautiously optimistic.” But as the results started pouring in, it became clear that no party would succeed in winning a majority. After what CNN termed a “humiliating night” for Trudeau, he stood at Montreal Convention Center and promised to fight for all Canadians regardless of whether they voted for him or not.

But no matter what this means for the prime minister’s political future, one thing is evident: Somewhere between the Vogue photo shoots, Halloween costumes and yoga poses, the luster rubbed off. And the only person to hold responsible for Justin Trudeau’s eventual undoing is Justin Trudeau himself.

***Ramsha Zafar** is a medical student from Pakistan who likes to keep a keen eye on current affairs.
