

Fair Observer

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Fair Observer^o

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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.

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It's Time for a New Global Movement

Andrea Venzon & Colombe Cahen-Salvado
December 2, 2019

We are running out of time to solve crises like climate change, and citizen movements are our last hope.

When arguing that political parties cannot solve global issues such as climate change, nuclear proliferation and fiscal justice, and that we need a new global movement capable of pushing forward concrete solutions and harness the energies of the youth, we meet a few “deniers.” Critiques of such statements normally move along the lines suggesting that social movements are nothing new, that political parties are great and much needed, and that young people should wake up and join these parties.

Yes, various movements existed in the past and literally changed the world for the better — women’s and civil rights, and the anti-Vietnam War movements being some of the most memorable ones. Those movements created change for billions of people, gave hope and a purpose to humanity and created a sense of community. That is because, as Gloria Steinem said, “When unique voices are united in a common cause, they make history.”

And yes, political parties still do have an important role in society. There is no functioning democracy without functioning parties — they are the pieces on the chessboard. At least a part of the population in any given country relies on the work of these entities to express its voice on current matters, to seek guidance, to have a meaningful role in the political process that produces legislation.

We, the Youth

The big difference is that today’s youth doesn’t join parties anymore, and party membership is declining. The Joschka Fischers (a well-respected

German politician who started his career in left-wing movements) of today are not lobbying their way into the Social Democrats or the Greens, but are more likely to work to take up the next battle with the movement they have started or supported. Like it or not, the fact that an overwhelming majority of young people do not want to sign up for party membership is reality, not a question up for debate.

No effort from those who deny the power of social movements will change their mind — no elaborate op-ed from well-known writers, no call for mobilization from middle-aged politicians or the rebranding of old recipes à la Matteo Renzi’s Italia Viva will change that.

For every revolution and for every step toward social progress that takes place, older generations say that the youth is doing it all wrong. The conservative seniors try to impose their ideas or methodologies that are often inadequate. However, let’s all remember that the modus operandi has brought the world today to where it is today, where we — the youth — might not get to die of natural causes, because climate change went unchecked for so long. We — the youth — live in a world threatened by nuclear proliferation. We, — the youth — have high unemployment and low wages when corporations don’t pay taxes. We — the youth — have to deal with a world shattered by previous generations.

Older generations had a responsibility toward us that they haven’t upheld, leaving us to pick up the pieces. People belonging to our generation might be tempted to dismiss this with a casual “OK, boomer.” While this may be tempting, we call for unity. Just like no single country can solve global challenges, no one generation can bring the world forward. We value the work of our elders who fought tirelessly for our rights and for a more peaceful society like they did in the 1960s. We are thankful that we are in a position to continue their legacy and focus on what truly matters — creating new ways to affect change.

And what truly matters today are the global issues that are shaking the world to its core. While we could spend decades debating the pros

and cons of party politics, the fact of the matter remains: Parties can't solve global issues. Indeed, even in perfect health, political parties would still be incapable of coping with a complex world where issues are interconnected and global, with little respect for borders or electoral timetables. There is no global democracy enabling parties to put forward a clear agenda to solve those issues. To make matters worse, 44% of the world population live in non-democratic systems.

The truth is that global challenges and existential threats are not being adequately dealt with. No political party is solving the pressing issues, no government is getting close to where it should be heading in order to do so. So far, the world is not doing better today following the few successes of some progressive liberal politicians and parties, nor will it. Even the so-called "success cases" like Emmanuel Macron shift their narrative to try to appeal to the hard right, using far-right language such as "taking back control on migration" and putting back border controls while talking of open societies.

We Are Not Complaining

And guess what: We are not just complaining. Millennials are actively looking for a better way forward, and we are proposing a solution. We do not say it's the only available one, nor that it should be, but what other feasible alternative is currently present on the market? Criticizing innovative endeavors won't do, nor will asking young people to join archaic structures that do not have a role on the global stage and cannot affect change.

Let's be bold enough to create the world we dream of, not just think inside the box. Continuing down the same path is like taking an aspirin to cure cancer — almost laughable, and no one would ever believe that it could work. Let's stop being scared of disturbing the status quo and actually work to better our shared future.

The new El Dorado is within the grasp of those adventurers who will manage to convert the energy of the millions who hit the streets every Friday to demand action on the climate

emergency into meaningful political capital to advance much-needed legislation like a global carbon pricing scheme or a harmonized digital service tax to deal with tech giants. The work of groups like NOW! toward solving the issues that affect us all is rooted in precisely this vision.

A truly global movement can leverage volunteers' involvement and advanced campaign methods to strategically and conclusively push common solutions in the form of legislations across the globe. Harnessing the great democratic awakening we are witnessing from Hong Kong to Santiago, people can work to gather all those ones who don't want to sleepwalk into an illiberal era — or intend to leave one behind — under one roof. The only allegiance this type of movement requires is the dream of having humankind collaborate for our future.

This is the way we can tilt the balance in favor of a society we hope for. Don't try to put the million marchers into a political party: You won't succeed. But if you ensure that clear demands are pushed via all democratic tools available, and you might get real results. We know that our approach is a bet, but we don't see an alternative than trying to fight for the world to act as one, together, through mobilization.

***Andrea Venzon and Colombe Cahen-Salvador** are co-founders and co-executive directors NOW.

Meet the New IMF, Same as the Old IMF

Michael Galant
December 4, 2019

Ecuador has erupted in protests over its new IMF program, revealing just how little progress the fund has made.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has changed. Gone are the days when it would use its lending powers to strong-arm

countries into adopting a slate of “free market” reforms that put the interests of investors before those of the people — or so it claims.

The IMF truly has progressed since the heyday of the Washington Consensus in the 1990s. Combatting inequality has been incorporated into its mandate and is now one of its own criteria for success, at least nominally. Capital controls, previously frowned upon by many mainstream economists as an impediment to globalization, are now recognized as a potentially useful tool for developing countries. And concerted, if inconsistent, efforts have been made to reduce the burden of conditions attached to IMF loans.

These are real improvements, and commendations are due to those inside and outside the organization who fought for them. But beneath these much-publicized reforms, the fundamental structure of the IMF’s approach remains the same. Today, as before, the organization privileges the interests of businesses and investors over the needs of the people it purports to help.

Nowhere is this clearer than in Ecuador, where President Lenin Moreno’s implementation of a \$4.2-billion IMF loan agreement sparked a wave of mass protests led by a coalition of students, workers and indigenous groups.

Flexibilization

Moreno came to power in 2017, after the left-leaning former President Rafael Correa’s occasionally deficient but generally successful decade in office. From 2006 to 2016, per capita GDP growth rates more than doubled on average, and inequality fell considerably. The percentage of people living in extreme poverty — defined as those earning roughly \$48 per month or less in today’s dollars — was cut almost by half, in part due to significant increases in social spending on health, education and housing.

Much of these gains were enabled by an extractive development model and windfall from high international oil prices. But when those prices plummeted in 2014, Correa’s

administration weathered the storm better than many other oil-exporting countries, in some measure due to Ecuador’s intentional default on \$3.2 billion of historical debt that Correa criticized as illegitimate.

After winning an election campaign during which he promised to continue Correa’s policies, Moreno unexpectedly broke from his predecessor and shifted the country sharply rightward. The IMF agreement, signed in March, solidified this shift — and reveals how little the IMF has really changed.

First and foremost, the agreement is a classic austerity package, mandating dramatic cuts in public spending on the order of 6% of GDP over three years. Mark Weisbrot, co-director of the Washington-based Center for Economic and Policy Research, estimates that this budget tightening will entail “firing tens of thousands of public sector employees, raising taxes that fall disproportionately on poor people, and making cuts to public investment.” This, in turn, will lead to higher unemployment, an increase in poverty and an economic downturn that will be longer and deeper than even the IMF’s own projected recession. The country’s current unrest was sparked by one piece of this austerity program — a sudden and significant cut to fuel subsidies.

Second, the agreement calls for the suppression of labor rights. In addition to the firing of public workers, the IMF package mandates reduced public sector benefits and a decrease in the public sector minimum wage. The agreement’s “flexibilization” reforms, which apply to the private sector as well, include looser restrictions on worker dismissals, weaker regulations on hours and overtime pay and fewer protections for contracted workers.

Third, the agreement pushes for a reduction in capital controls. In doing so, it contravenes even the IMF’s own supposed evolution on the topic, and makes Ecuador susceptible to the same volatile “hot money” flows that resulted in numerous catastrophic financial crises during the 1990s.

The agreement also makes Ecuador's tax system more regressive, moves toward the privatization of publicly owned enterprises like airlines and utilities, and undermines Ecuador's state-led development model by weakening the role of the development planning ministry in the budget process. Beyond its specific provisions, the agreement as a whole has been criticized by Ecuadorian civil society groups for what they claim to be an unconstitutional circumventing of the legislature.

IMF Equals Hunger

Ecuador is not alone. Egypt, under the authoritarian, US-backed hand of Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, recently implemented austerity policies mandated by the IMF that have led to rising poverty, deepening inequality and the slashing of social benefits. In 2018, the prime minister of Jordan was forced to resign following mass protests against a similar IMF program. And in Argentina, anti-austerity demonstrators have adopted the potent slogan of "FMI = Hambre" — IMF equals hunger.

Austerity, suppression of labor, capital liberalization, regressive taxation, privatization, by-passing of the democratically elected representatives of the people and the use of state force to suppress resistance — to those who endured the IMF programs of the 1980s and 90s, this all surely sounds familiar.

Fortunately, this may not be Ecuador's future. After weeks of unrest, Moreno was recently forced to concede, promising to cancel at least part of the package and work with indigenous leaders on a negotiated alternative. Whether this promise is kept, and what the compromise looks like, remain to be seen.

For now, though, the people have fought back, and won. But their very need to do so exposes how little the IMF has changed. The IMF's agreement with Ecuador would likely have been even worse a few decades prior. But to those forced to suffer under austerity today, that is likely cold comfort.

***Michael Galant** is a recent graduate of the Master of Public Policy program at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government.

Has Macron Given NATO a Much Needed Wake-Up Call?

Guillaume Lasconjarias

December 5, 2019

By criticizing NATO ahead of its 70th anniversary, Emmanuel Macron has taken a bet that, in the long run, might benefit the alliance, the EU and himself

In a recent interview with *The Economist*, French President Emmanuel Macron shocked fellow NATO allies by calling the organization "brain dead." His words, described as "astonishingly candid," received a harsh rebuke from Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel as well as from Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

While NATO celebrates its 70th anniversary this year and has gathered all the heads of member states for a summit in London this week, this French attitude is more than just "grandeur" or Gaullism. Macron only articulated what think tanks and diplomats have been saying since at least 2016: The North Atlantic Treaty Organization needs to wake up.

Defining Macron's foreign policy style has to do with to what degree the French president recognizes himself in certain Gaullist impulses or movements. This is something that has been pointed out recently, after several occasions where Macron criticized the United Kingdom over Brexit, Italy over its populist government or, more recently, the United States for unilaterally imposing new digital tariffs that would harm major US companies such as Amazon. Some commentators have seen this as a move to take the lead in Europe, at a moment when other European leaders are being weakened.

One Against All

Macron's comments to *The Economist* reveal the discrepancy between his deepest aspirations — the need for ensuring peace and stability in Europe — and what he described as the return of the Great Powers competition, where the European Union seems unable and unwilling to act. The context in which the interview was recorded, just days after Turkey's invasion of northern Syria, underlines the frustration of having to deal with some difficult allies.

Interestingly, the French leader took this opportunity to use forceful rhetoric by going back to what could be seen as a traditional French defiance vis-à-vis the alliance. Even after the full return of France within the integrated military command structures of NATO — which took place in 2009 under President Nicolas Sarkozy — there were some debates on its necessity. Hubert Vedrine, an iconic minister of foreign affairs under President François Mitterrand, concluded that France had no other credible alternatives.

Yet since his election in 2017, Macron has decided to go it alone. In a speech at La Sorbonne in September 2017, the president of the French Republic unveiled his idea of an initiative that would facilitate the emergence of a European strategic culture and create the preconditions to conduct coordinated and jointly prepared future commitments. This European Intervention Initiative (EI2) is aimed at reinforcing the ability Europeans have to act together and to carry out all possible military operations on a whole spectrum of issues that could affect Europe's security.

However, it took almost a year to start implementing this cooperation. The first nine ministers of defense signed the letter of intent in June 2018. And, despite all the potential benefits of such an initiative, there were some concerns about possible duplication with NATO or/and EU. Macron believed — and still does — that Europeans have to start moving from words to actions and to explain their commitment to European security by engaging in operations.

This happened at a moment when US commitment in Europe was wary, with US President Donald Trump refusing to back Article 5, which caused some tension among those member states who have been under Soviet rule. Macron did not consider the particular situation of those countries for which US commitment to their defense has been essential.

By revealing, very loudly, that there were concerns, Macron has echoed Hans Christian Andersen's tale by saying that, yes, the king was naked. By doing so just weeks before the celebrations of NATO's 70th anniversary in London, Macron has spoiled the expectations of the summit, which was supposed to celebrate unity and renewed cohesion.

Where Next?

Of course, no other European leaders agreed with the assessment. Angela Merkel was the first to condemn the Macron's comments. As weeks passed by, the invectives went on, culminating with Erdogan asking if Macron was not brain dead himself, and even with Trump calling the French analysis "insulting."

So, what purpose did these comments serve? First of all, France has taken credit for asking NATO to do more in the fight against terrorism, and by shifting the focus to the south and the complex security operations France leads in the Sahel — two directions aligned with France's strategic goals.

Second, it has forced NATO to accept the principle of a group of experts "to further strengthen NATO's political dimension including consultation." Third, it has created enough turmoil to wake up NATO, but also to force Europeans to think more for themselves.

Somehow, Macron has taken a bet that, in the long run, might benefit NATO, the EU and himself. In forcing the US to reinvest in the alliance, by making the Europeans aware that the US security guarantee might be coming to an end, and by again being at the center of attention — even if this center is of criticism — Macron

might have played a better hand than he imagined.

***Guillaume Lasconjarias** is an associate researcher at the French Institute of International Relations (IFRI) in Paris.

Can a Brutal Murder Shake India into Facing Its Rape Culture?

Akshata Kapoor
December 6, 2019

The public anger at the brutal rape and murder of Priyanka Reddy seems contradictory to the indifference shown to other violations of women's rights in India.

On November 27, Priyanka Reddy, a veterinary doctor from the Indian state of Telangana, was brutally gang-raped and murdered. Her body was burned to leave little trace of the misdeed. The incident took place when, while traveling home alone on a scooter, Priyanka got off at a toll plaza. A group of four men deflated the tires of her scooter and then, pretending to help her fix it, took her away to a secluded spot and raped her.

The horrific incident has shocked the population of Telangana and all of India. On social media, #RIPPriyankaReddy started trending, with outrage flowing freely from all corners of society. Although a response from the Telangana state government was slow, Chief Minister Chandrashekar Rao did condemn the rape as “ghastly” and reiterated the need for greater awareness about dealing with sexual harassment and assault, and of safety measures such as the such as using the “100” helpline number to contact emergency police services. National politicians too joined in condemning the murder.

The gruesome nature of the rape and the public outcry that has followed is reminiscent of the infamous Nirbhaya rape case that shocked the

capital New Delhi and reverberated throughout the country seven years ago. In 2017, the Supreme Court of India upheld capital punishment for the perpetrators of the brutal rape of Jyoti Singh Pandey, nicknamed “Nirbhaya” (fearless), that led to her death. At the time, Fair Observer noted that capital punishment wasn't enough to deter rape in India. Has anything changed since then?

Considering the Death Penalty

A trending hashtag, #HangRapists, has provoked several debates in India. Politicians have called for the lynching of the rapists, celebrities have called for capital punishment. Telangana's IT minister, K.T. Rama Rao, the son of the chief minister, has floated the idea of petitioning India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi to amend the Indian Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code to award capital punishment for all crimes against women and children.

The problem with the death penalty is two-fold. First of all, it may not allow for repentance or restitution. It also reduces the incentives for societal and cultural change. Severe legal repercussions, such as life imprisonment, already exist. This indicates that severe punishment is unlikely to be a sufficient deterrent against crimes such as rape. The death sentence handed down to the Nirbhaya rapists, by such logic, should also have acted as an effective deterrent for Reddy's killers.

But these horrific crimes are fueled by indifference toward the rights of women or minorities, and to the consequences of violating them. The social amnesty granted to perpetrators of sexual harassment and assault allows men to subscribe to this harmful narrative of impunity for crimes against women.

The first step to correcting this indifference toward crimes against women, at an individual level, would be to attempt to reeducate the individual rather than resorting to capital punishment. The question here is not about whether or not rapists can ever be reformed or deserve that chance. Instead, it is an

acknowledgment of a fundamental flaw in both the society's and individuals' understanding of minority rights and is an attempt to correct this. Simply by acknowledging this, we recognize that the problem is one of immorality and inhumanity, rather than an unchangeable right or characteristic of men to overpower and abuse women.

While capital punishment in no way intends to impart this message, it is possible that disregarding the principle of restitution for this particular crime in this particular country allows for a notion that men are rapists and will never change. If there is no hope in changing the men, then our only resort is to protect the women.

While this argument may sound weak in a vacuum, its logic strengthens when you look at the need to reform society as a whole. Calling for a death penalty following Reddy's murder has almost become a means of expressing the level of outrage felt by an individual. For politicians, such public displays of anger may actually excuse the flaws in society and governance when it comes to preventing rape.

However, the converse can also be argued. The severity of a death sentence would perhaps indicate the gravity of crimes against women. Regardless of the possible demerits of blindly calling for capital punishment, there are several reasons as to why such punishment is justified. Such justice helps give closure to the family of victims, prevents any manifestation of impunity and definitely cannot be disregarded.

Double Standards

The calls to hang the rapists point to another problem. The anger at the rape case seems contradictory to the indifference shown to other violations of women's rights. This became apparent when Sandeep Reddy Vanga tweeted out in response to the rape that "FEAR is the only factor which can change things radically in society and FEAR should be the new rule. The brutal sentence will set an example. Now every girl in the country needs a firm guarantee."

Vanga is known for directing "Kabir Singh," a Bollywood film in which an alcoholic, abusive doctor, who is frequently violent with women, is ultimately glorified as a hero. The movie was called out for its misogynistic plot but to no avail. It did splendidly at the box office, with people watching and enjoying the film, indifferent to the toxicity propagated by it.

Vanga went on to comment that "If you can't slap, if you can't touch your woman wherever you want, if you can't kiss, I don't see emotion there." This double standard that endorses sexist narratives and violence against women but condemns rape is both confusing and disgusting. Singer Sona Mohapatra was one of the public figures who called out Vanga's hypocrisy.

A few weeks earlier, Mohapatra had alleged sexual harassment claims against the composer Anu Malik and demanded his resignation as a judge for the popular reality TV show "Indian Idol." Her campaign against Malik saw her abused and harassed online, subjected her to name-calling and shaming on various levels.

There was barely any media coverage of her campaign, nor was there discernible outrage from either Bollywood figures or politicians, who largely ignored the issue. This has been the treatment of #MeToo and other sexual harassment cases in India since 2017. It seems that violence against women becomes a problem only when the public is forced to see the physical manifestations of the abuse in the form of a brutalized and charred female body. Until then, the woman's word holds no weight, and the accused naturally get the benefit of the doubt lest their career is ruined as a result of their own inappropriate behavior.

Shameful Dichotomy

At the most basic level, the dichotomy created between the treatment of victims of sexual harassment and rape points to a deeply ingrained sense of entitlement endowed by men upon themselves, wherein women are not believed until absolutely necessary. While poor policing in the remote area where Reddy's rape took place

failed to prevent the crime, the fact remains that the law is not entirely ineffective.

Following the death of Jyoti Singh Pandey, a precedent was set for rape cases to be tried in fast-track courts, with a death penalty now applicable to rape convictions resulting in death or a vegetative state. Government efforts to strengthen the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (Amendment) Bill, 2019 are increasing awareness about the vulnerability of children to sexual abuse. Calls for better policing and awareness about the pernicious nature of sexual violence are also in progress.

There seems to be growing recognition of the unsafe atmosphere in which the women of India live their lives day after day, but this is largely restricted to the educated circles and the women themselves. This realization saw several women speak up about their experiences traveling in public spaces and instances where they have felt unsafe and vulnerable.

Priyanka Reddy's case is horrific, and undoubtedly deserves the media attention and outrage it is receiving. But it is problematic when the same society fails to recognize that more subtle forms of sexual harassment and abuse fuel this rape culture. Rape culture is not just a violated body of a woman. It is normalizing the objectification women in film. It is the refusal to believe women's allegations of sexual harassment, either by the online community or by the police and statutory authorities. It is the societal impunity granted to perpetrators of sexual harassment by allowing them to continue holding influential positions. Rape culture means it takes the shocking sight of a dead woman to remind society of its humanity.

One of Mumbai's leading newspapers, Mumbai Mirror, compared this high-profile killing to "India's most sensational Nirbhaya rape and murder case." One can only hope that Priyanka Reddy's fate is never described and trivialized as remotely "sensational," nor is a comparable case given the opportunity to arise. For this, change cannot be restricted to legislation. Awareness, education and public

outreach need to be used better to instate social change as well.

On December 6, the four accused rapists were taken to the crime scene for a crime scene reconstruction. According to the Telangana police, all the four accused attempted to attack the police and escape. In self-defense, the police shot and killed the men. The extra-judicial nature of the shooting was largely ignored by the police, politicians and the public. The Cyberabad police commissioner, V. C. Sajjanar, stated: "I can only say that law has done its duty."

The public celebrated and lauded the police as heroes. This bloodthirstiness that is undermining democratic processes is dangerous and regrettable. There is some respite, however, as India's Supreme Court has set up a three-member inquiry commission to probe the extra-judicial killing.

***Akshata Kapoor** is a student at the Cathedral and John Connon School in Mumbai, India.

Aung San Suu Kyi's Defense of Genocide

Daniel Sullivan
December 13, 2019

The ICJ probe has the potential to ratchet up international pressure on Myanmar and to prevent atrocities as the risk of genocide persists.

The specter of Aung San Suu Kyi, the Nobel Peace laureate, standing before the UN's highest legal body to defend Myanmar against charges of genocide is striking. Suu Kyi was once the revered face of international human rights, but she is now defending the most indefensible of crimes. But beyond the bizarre irony of her defense, the case may have real consequences. The attention it garners will increase pressure on Myanmar to

change discriminatory policies and prevent further atrocities.

Suu Kyi's appearance before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague this week echoed strange defenses she made when more than 700,000 Rohingya Muslims fled from Myanmar in late 2017. Even as the fires of destroyed Rohingya villages continued to rage, with the smoke clearly visible just across the border in Bangladesh, she argued that no one was concentrating on the villages that hadn't been destroyed. She has now further downplayed the widespread and coordinated nature of the attacks against Rohingya civilians, who she refused to refer to by name. She also claimed that a handful of domestic convictions of military officers — some already overturned — showed Myanmar was taking care of justice sufficiently itself.

Our Findings

Refugees International was on the ground in Bangladesh in the first days of the Rohingya crisis, speaking with refugees streaming into the country.

As we testified before the US Congress in September 2017, there was a striking consistency in what we heard: “[S]oldiers surrounding villages, using various incendiary devices to set fire to homes, at times locking or throwing people inside the burning structures; young women singled out to be taken away and raped; dayslong flight by foot and/or boat across the border to Bangladesh, arriving with just the clothes on their backs.”

Our initial findings have since been backed up by the UN's Independent Fact-Finding Mission, the US State Department and several other independent groups. The evidence is overwhelming. The crimes committed are indefensible. Suu Kyi's comments can only be described as disingenuous or delusional.

But beyond the media storm unleashed by Suu Kyi's appearance in The Hague on December 11, the case before the ICJ could have real consequences for the Rohingya in exile and those still living in Myanmar. The charges include not

only that Myanmar committed genocide, but also that the Rohingya remain at risk of genocide inside Myanmar. The case calls for “provisional measures” — effectively restraining orders — for Myanmar to halt further abuses.

Such measures could help curtail ongoing abuses in the country and thereby create the conditions for Rohingya refugees to return home. As Refugees International documented earlier this year, Myanmar authorities continue to arbitrarily arrest Rohingya, use them for forced labor and target them for sexual assault. Myanmar also continues to limit Rohingyas' freedom of movement, maintain displacement camps that are effectively open-air prisons, and force Rohingya to accept national verification cards that Rohingya believe will strip away any chance of citizenship.

UN Security Council on Myanmar

In reality, the ICJ cannot enforce these “provisional measures.” However, an ICJ ruling can encourage the UN Security Council and individual states to engage Myanmar on the issue of the Rohingya's safe return home. The case is led by the Gambia and supported by the 57-country Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

The support of such a large swath of countries at the highest UN court has made it impossible for Myanmar to ignore. The fact that an official as high-level as Suu Kyi came to The Hague herself is unprecedented and only underscores the significance of the case.

This attention will also make it harder for China — a key supporter of Myanmar — to dismiss such abuses and continue to block stronger statements and further actions by the Security Council. Condemnation at the UN Security Council level could not only bring further targeted sanctions on top military officials and military-owned enterprises in Myanmar, but it would also make businesses wary of investing in this relatively new market. Short of Security Council action, the global scrutiny could also galvanize individual countries to impose their own sanctions. In concrete terms, this heightened

disrepute worldwide could damage Myanmar's economic attractiveness.

Even as Suu Kyi flies back to Myanmar, the ICJ case has focused the world's attention on the Rohingyas' plight. This ICJ probe has the potential to ratchet up international pressure on Myanmar and to prevent atrocities as the risk of genocide persists.

Rohingya refugees know a final judgment will take years. However, those with whom I have recently spoken are encouraged that Myanmar's authorities may finally have to answer for their crimes. For these reasons alone, the ICJ case is welcome and deserves our attention.

***Daniel Sullivan** is the senior advocate for human rights at Refugees International.

Why Democrats Should Vote for a Moderate

Neil Kapoor

December 16, 2019

Democrats should look to a moderate, center-left candidate in the primaries for the best chance of dislodging Trump from the White House in November 2020.

As Democratic primary voters gear up to choose among a diverse lineup of candidates in Iowa, New Hampshire and other key battleground states starting in early February, only one thing is certain: Under our electoral system, the early primary states — despite having smaller populations and demographics that don't represent the country's diversity — have disproportionate influence over a party's nominee.

That means Democrats cannot simply pay attention to national polls about which candidate might defeat President Donald Trump in the general election. These polls tend to show center-left former Vice President Joe Biden as having the best chance of beating Trump, while primary

polls tend to indicate rising star and South Bend mayor, Pete Buttigieg, or progressives like Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders or Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren as the frontrunners in Iowa and New Hampshire.

For most Democratic voters, the hypothetical matchups and endless polling can be a real head-spinner. Given that polls can fluctuate drastically day-to-day and, as the 2016 election proved, are not necessarily accurate, Democrats should look to a moderate, center-left candidate in the primaries, such as Biden or Buttigieg, for the best chance of dislodging Trump from the White House in November 2020.

Looking for a Common Ground

Let's start with some presidential election history. As political strategist James Carville famously said during Bill Clinton's 1992 campaign, "It's the economy, stupid!"

Clinton capitalized on the worsening recession to unseat George H.W. Bush. Barack Obama similarly focused on the economy in 2008 while casting the Iraq War as misguided and the most disastrous foreign policy decision in a generation. These were centrist positions resonating with most Americans. In 2016, with a strong economy, no major overseas wars to criticize and aiming to extend Democrats' hold on the White House for a third subsequent term, Hillary Clinton did not have the unifying issues Obama or her husband had.

What does this mean? Democrats have traditionally won with moderate candidates, but since 2016, not enough has changed for the worse on the economy or foreign policy fronts that previously propelled a Democrat to victory. With unemployment at 50-year record low, and Trump seemingly against an assertive or interventionist foreign policy, what type of candidate, broadly speaking, do voters favor?

The answer appears to be a moderate. According to a recent New York Times/Siena College poll of primary voters in Michigan, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Arizona and Florida, 62% want a candidate who

“promises to find common ground with Republicans” versus 33% who want a candidate who “promises to fight for a bold, progressive agenda.” On ideology, 55% want someone who is “more moderate than most Democrats,” while 39% want someone who is “more liberal than most Democrats.” And, finally, 49% want someone who “promises to bring politics in Washington back to normal,” and 45% want someone who “promises to bring fundamental, systematic change to American society.”

These polls should be taken with a grain of salt given their mercurial nature. But broadly speaking, the numbers seem to boil down to one simple thing: the “electability” factor, or how likely a candidate is to win.

Electability Factor

The problem with very liberal candidates is that while their ideas may appeal to large swaths of the Democratic base, especially in states like California, the aforementioned survey indicates that generally these ideas — like eliminating private health insurance, for example — are not as appealing to voters in swing states. We know this has historically been the case, but how do we know swing districts still prefer moderate candidates today?

Look no further than the 2018 midterms, when the Democrats flipped the House of Representatives. While media attention tended to focus on the most bold or progressive candidates, such as members of “The Squad,” most of the Democrats who flipped seats from red to blue were, in fact, moderates. They convinced Republicans, independents and suburban women disappointed with Trumpism that they were not radical left-wingers or socialists.

More recently, in Louisiana, Kentucky, Virginia and Pennsylvania — many of which are states Trump won in 2016 — Democrats prevailed in off-year gubernatorial and state legislature elections for two big reasons.

First, young people and the suburbs voted in unusually high numbers. Louisiana’s governor, John Bel Edwards, a conservative Democrat, won

reelection on November 16 with 51% of the vote by a margin of 40,000, but since his first election in 2015, his vote total skyrocketed by 127,609 votes even as GOP turnout spiked by 228,199. In blue strongholds in East Baton Rouge and Orleans, his margins widened from 42,000 and 69,000 in 2015 to 51,000 and 102,000 — staggering statistics.

Second, conservative and independent voters were willing to consider the candidate themselves — moderate or conservative Democrats — rather than just the party label, evidenced by Republicans winning five out of six state offices in Kentucky but losing the Trump-backed GOP gubernatorial contests in deep-red Kentucky and Louisiana.

Notice a Pattern?

Democrats have to assemble a diverse coalition for 2020. One, mobilize the party’s base to turn up in huge numbers. Two, assure those who flipped voting preferences from red to blue in the House in 2018 and state offices in 2019 that they should do the same when voting for the president and shouldn’t have to fear a far-left liberal agenda coming out of Washington — losing their private health insurance, free college for all, tax hikes or handouts for illegal immigrants.

Only a moderate can accomplish both goals. The main argument in favor of a progressive nominee is that he or she will unequivocally mobilize the Democratic base, including 7 million newly-eligible teen voters, sufficiently enough that it would outweigh losing the swing voters who fueled recent blue victories — something a moderate might not be able to do.

However, the benefits of a progressive nominee are outweighed by two voting patterns. First, most of these young, first-time liberal voters are not concentrated in swing states like Iowa, New Hampshire, Florida or Michigan; they live on the coasts. In terms of defeating Trump, that means it doesn’t matter if a progressive nominee galvanizes a few million new votes in California and New York — states that vote blue anyway — if that nominee also repels 80,000

swing voters in the industrial Midwest, the total vote margin by which Hillary Clinton lost key swing states to Trump in 2016.

Second, the sheer disenchantment with Trump among Democrats of all shades of blue was enough to spur a record-high turnout even with centrist and conservative Democratic candidates in the 2018 and 2019 elections. The same will likely be true 11 months from now, especially as damaging revelations surrounding the Ukraine scandal unfold during impeachment hearings.

The bottom line is that from the perspective of independents, suburban women and Republicans dissatisfied with Trump, there is much less to fear from a moderate than a progressive. It is true that in the long run, the US may very well transition to a single-payer health-care system and make the cost of college far more affordable. That would suggest many of the current crop of candidates may simply be ahead of their time.

If that's the case, they must realize they are not looking to be the president of the Democratic Party, or of California: They are looking to be the president of the United States.

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How International Media Cover Kashmir

Shailee Malhotra
December 17, 2019

The lack of context in the international media's reporting on Kashmir leads to a distorted picture of events.

Four months after India's abrogation of Article 370 in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, different reports on the situation have emerged from national and international media. Indian media have focused on the return of normalcy in the region with limited mention of the human rights violations taking place.

International media have primarily looked at the human rights situation with little mention of the preexisting security situation.

While there is no denying the occurrence of human rights violations in Kashmir, including a communications lockdown, a curfew and the detainment of political leaders, there has been a lack of discussion about the volatile, historical context in the state and the genuine reasons for India's undeniably disturbing lockdown.

Firstly, the crucial fact that Article 370 was a temporary provision granting special autonomous status to Jammu and Kashmir in the Indian Constitution has rarely found mention. India has not attempted to redraw any external boundaries. It has merely removed a complex and temporary article within its own constitution.

Since August 5, India has stressed that its objective is to increase economic investment and development in Jammu and Kashmir and to integrate the state into the rest of India. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has also promised that Jammu and Kashmir will not remain a union territory for long and its statehood will be restored at some point in the future.

Meanwhile, Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan's loose, absurd and disturbing talk of genocide in Kashmir, all whilst ironically refusing to recognize the state of Israel and fueling anti-Semitic sentiment, only brings serious dishonor to victims of genocide. The means can be rightfully questioned, but the move by India with its consistent language of development and progress at least appears well-intentioned.

A Diverse State

International media have not adequately explained the complex demography and diversity of the region. Muslim-majority Kashmir makes up only 15% of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, yet it comprises 53.9% of the population. The rest of the population is Hindu or Buddhist Ladakhi.

It is hypocritical when global media outlets unabashedly, yet understandably, criticize alleged majoritarianism in Modi's India but apply a

majoritarian lens to view Jammu and Kashmir. As Atul Singh and Manu Sharma state in an article on Fair Observer, there is often little mention of the ethnic cleansing and mass exodus of Kashmiri Pandits who, in the 1990s, were driven out of their homes in fear of persecution. This is also the case with Buddhist Ladakhis who have faced systematic discrimination by Kashmiri Muslims. Hindus and Buddhist Ladakhis have thus celebrated the removal of Article 370, as well as the decision to divide the state into the two union territories of Jammu and Kashmir as well as Ladakh to allow for more effective administration and governance based on the individual needs of the territories.

The removal of Article 370 also allows for the application of laws focused on the rights of minorities and women in Jammu and Kashmir. The region's special status previously had allowed it to retain its own laws, many of which were discriminatory to women and minorities. For instance, if a woman from Jammu and Kashmir married a man from another state, she lost the right to own property there. The same did not apply to a male resident of the state who married someone from outside.

A well-known case is that of Charu WaliKhanna, a Kashmiri Hindu lawyer, who was forced to flee the state and later wanted to purchase a home there but couldn't because she was no longer a permanent resident and was married to a non-Kashmiri. Along with another Kashmiri woman who was a permanent resident but married to a non-resident, WaliKhanna filed petitions and challenged these laws in 2017 on the grounds that they were counter to India's inheritance laws, which grant women equal rights.

The Lockdown of Kashmir

With regard to the lockdown in Kashmir, a country like India with its largely benign and responsible image on the global stage will hardly risk damaging it with unnecessary actions. The crackdown was not conducted out of the blue, but

rather due to longstanding security risks in the state.

During a recent US congressional hearing on human rights, Alice Wells, the US assistant secretary of state for South and Central Asia, repeatedly used the word "terrorists" and mentioned how activities across the Line of Control — the boundary separating Indian-controlled and Pakistani-controlled Kashmir — have fermented violence and destabilization, thereby emphasizing that cross-border terrorism has been central to Kashmir. Wells used language that big global media outlets like the BBC, Al Jazeera and The New York Times do not use in the Indian context. Historically, they often refrain from using the term "terrorists" when attacks occur in India, including Mumbai in 2008. Instead, these outlets describe attackers as "militants" and/or "fighters."

Although the lockdown and curfew have been gradually lifted, it is primarily the internet clampdown that is still ongoing. This is due to the risk of Pakistani terrorist groups and Kashmiri militants weaponizing the internet to mobilize people and foment unrest.

That the internet can be easily mobilized, manipulated and misused in the hands of the wrong people hardly needs a mention. In 2016, after militant Burhan Wani, commander of Hizb-ul Mujahideen, was killed in an encounter with Indian security forces, the exploitation of social media by online groups to capitalize on the situation led to one of the most violent periods in the history of Kashmir.

As Parjanya Bhatt of the Observer Research Foundation writes, "[S]ocial media strategies in Kashmir have been morphed into a tradition where false narratives create heroes out of fallen terrorists and radicalise new recruits as icons."

State-Sponsored Terror

But even as India attempts to normalize the situation in Kashmir, militancy is a threat and people are refraining from venturing out and opening their shops due to intimidation. International media outlets consistently focus on

the thousands of Indian troops that are deployed in the region, making it the most militarized zone in the world.

Yet the news media rarely focus on India as the principal victim of Pakistani state-sponsored terrorism. The primary reason for the presence of these soldiers is the constant threat of Pakistani terrorists infiltrating and killing civilians in India. Terrorists, some of whom have been neutralized by Indian forces, have killed numerous civilians, including apple traders and migrant laborers. There have also been disturbing reports of Pakistani attempts to smuggle hundreds of terrorists into Kashmir and that, despite the communications lockdown, Pakistan has devised innovative ways of connecting with terrorist groups.

Anyone who understands the nature of the Pakistani state, including its capability for state-sponsored terrorism its policy to “bleed India with a thousand cuts,” knows that the security risk to India will likely persist. Veronica Ekelund, an analyst at the Amsterdam-based think tank EFSAS, has heavily criticized a report by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on Jammu and Kashmir for its omission of Pakistani state-sponsored terrorism and its consequences, and for “narrowing the conflict to a two-year period, starting with Burhan Wani’s death in 2016.”

American scholar Christine Fair who has spent decades studying the region has repeatedly pointed out that unless Pakistan cracks down on terrorists operating within its borders, it is impossible for India to sort out its Kashmir problem. The fact that Prime Minister Khan’s ascent to leadership has been engineered by the Pakistan army — the very entity that harbors jihadists against India as part of its decades-long proxy war — does not help.

Transnational Terrorism

Hizb-ul Mujahideen, Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad are just some of the groups sponsored by Pakistan that operate in the Kashmir Valley. Besides these, there is also the

infiltration of transnational terrorist organizations like al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (IS) through their affiliates, such as Ansar Ghazwat-ul Hind and al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent.

Rather than azadi (freedom) for Kashmir, these groups want an establish an Islamic caliphate governed by sharia law.

Mohammed Sinan Siyech, a research analyst at the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, explains how these ideologies could become more entrenched in Kashmir. In fact, Burhan Wani, the militant that acquired celebrity status after being killed by Indian armed forces in 2016, did not want the state to accede to either India or Pakistan. Instead, his aim, like that of so many other youngsters in Kashmir, was an IS-style caliphate.

In May, IS announced its new province in Kashmir called “Wilayah of Hind.” James M. Dorsey explains how Kashmir is becoming a battleground for Middle Eastern rivals Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Siddharthya Roy, in an article for *The Diplomat*, mentions the emergence of the new Islamic State brand of terrorism in Kashmir. This raises questions of the kind of state an independent Kashmir could be. It is clear why India does not want the risk of an Islamic caliphate on its doorstep.

Political Corruption

As if all this was not enough, there have been serious governance issues in Jammu and Kashmir, including endemic corruption by political classes.

A study carried out by researcher Ayjaz Wani of the Observer Research Foundation found that for nearly 64% of people in the Kashmir Valley, a lack of governance has been a huge factor that has led to instability and revolts. In a separate article, Wani mentions that “the state witnessed an unending spell of arrested development owing to a sluggish, inefficient and corrupt administration,” which “created pervasive anguish and frustration among the masses, especially the Valley’s youth.”

In August, Home Minister Amit Shah said that 14,255 rupees (\$200) per capita was allocated to Jammu and Kashmir compared to over 3,681 rupees per capita for the national average, most of which ended up in the pockets of corrupt, local politicians.

The special status granted to the state by Article 370 exacerbated these problems. As Kashmiri scholar Aijaz Ashraf Wani states, the “governance-deficit has [spurred] the conflict and the conflict has fuelled the governance-deficit.” Whether the detainment of local politicians was necessary certainly warrants questions. But the very least the international media can do is explain the preexisting situation in the state.

Old approaches have not achieved results in Jammu and Kashmir. However questionable its actions may be, India is using a fresh approach to deal with the Kashmir issue by attempting to rid the state of extremist influence and usher in an era of peace and development. The removal of Article 370 allows Indians from other states to invest in Jammu and Kashmir. It also eliminates hindrances that did not allow the region to integrate with the rest of India and instead pushed it into the arms of extremists.

Any reportage on this highly-complex situation without devoting adequate attention to the volatile, preexisting conditions provides a misleading and incomplete picture of India’s actions. News requires context, and stories that detail what is happening but do not pay enough attention to why it is happening is bound to give a skewed view of events.

International media coverage has done exactly this: It has failed to contextualize the Kashmir issue and provide a more nuanced and deeper understanding of the situation.

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Arise King Boris, Father of Brexit and Foe of Brussels

Atul Singh

December 17, 2019

The landslide Conservative victory will transform the UK, threaten the EU and influence the US significantly.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has given Jeremy Corbyn a good old-fashioned thumping. The Conservatives won 365 seats out of 650 in Parliament, gaining 47. They smashed the “red wall” of solid Labour seats in northern England. The Johnson-led Conservatives achieved the highest vote swing since World War II. In a typical British irony, old mining towns reposed their trust in an Old Etonian over a dyed-in-wool socialist.

On December 10, this author took the view that the Tories would be back in power because they seemed to have the most loyal flock. That view has been vindicated resoundingly.

The Labour Party is in complete disarray. Corbyn has been weighed, measured and found wanting. While he has promised to step down, he has failed to resign unlike his predecessors. In defeat, a full-scale civil war has broken out in the Labour Party. In the words of Ian Murray, the only Labour MP from Scotland, “This party must listen and this party must respond or this party will die.”

From New Labour to the Left

To be fair, Labour has problems that go beyond Corbyn. The New Labour that Tony Blair and Gordon Brown created lost its sheen with the Iraq War of 2003 and the global financial crisis of 2007-08. Both Blair and Brown were Margaret Thatcher’s political children. One of them emulated her Falklands adventure by taking the UK into intervention in Kosovo, Sierra Leone and Iraq. The other followed the Iron Lady’s “Big Bang” reforms with “light touch” regulation

of the City of London. Both Iraq and light touch ended up in disasters.

Many in the Labour Party were deeply uncomfortable with Blair's imperial militarism and Brown's financial capitalism. They saw both these leaders making a Faustian pact with Mephistopheles for the proverbial kiss with Helen. They were both seduced by power and reneged on principles that Labour once held dear. Once Brown lost in 2010, the old guard mounted a comeback. First, Ed Miliband beat his Blairite brother, David, to become the party leader. Then, Corbyn won the Labour leadership election in 2015, marking a major lurch to the left.

Corbyn was an unlikely leader of the Labour Party. In the Blair and Brown years, Labour had turned staunchly European. Yet it is important to remember that Labour campaigned against joining the European Economic Community (EEC) in the 1975 referendum. Thanks to the Maastricht Treaty, the EEC became the European Union in 1993. Corbyn was a part of that Labour campaign even as Thatcher and the Tories argued to join the EEC. It took Neil Kinnock to modernize Labour and turn it into a pro-European party.

Yet euroskeptic elements remained. Corbyn was one of them. Suspicions abound that he remains opposed to the EU and is a closet Brexiteer. Corbyn certainly did not campaign to "remain" in the European Union with much energy or enthusiasm in 2016. In the general election on December 12, 2019, his position on Brexit was a fudge that tried to reconcile the tension between Blairites who have sworn an oath of fealty to the EU and working-class supporters who voted for Brexit. Faced with the crystal clarity of Johnson's message "get Brexit done," Corbyn's fudge melted spectacularly.

Corbyn's authoritarian leadership style, lack of nimbleness and terrible public speaking ensured that he was not seen as prime ministerial material. Accusations of anti-Semitism dogged the Labour Party under his tenure. Corbyn's front bench lacked both experience and talent. Even traditional Labour voters lost faith in their party's

leadership and switched sides to the once-hated Tories. Unless the Labour Party elects a charismatic leader who unifies warring factions and crafts a modern message, it will spend a decade or more in opposition.

The Rest of the Opposition

The Liberal Democrats cast off with great hopes during the election. Unfortunately, their ship has rammed into the rocks. Young leader Jo Swinson lost her own seat and promptly resigned. She lacked the intellectual ballast or silver tongue to be a match for Johnson, and her claim to be a prime ministerial candidate smacked of hubris. Swinson's bet on opposing Brexit and reversing the result of the 2016 referendum did not cut ice with voters. The Liberal Democrats did split the vote and helped the Tories achieve victory. This led columnist Simon Jenkins to argue that the party is "an anachronistic political spoiler" that "should disband." On current trends, the Liberal Democrats are destined to stay in the doldrums for the next few years.

This election was also notable for the reduced relevance of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and Nigel Farage's Brexit Party. The Conservatives no longer need the former in the House of Commons and have sucked oxygen from Farage's mob. The DUP's loss to unionists and republicans has long-term implications. A majority in Northern Ireland has voted for parties that favor union with Ireland, putting the unity of the UK at risk.

In fact, television programs and numerous pundits are pontificating about the break-up of the UK. The Scottish National Party (SNP) won 48 of the 59 seats in Scotland. If Johnson has the mandate in England, Nicola Sturgeon has the backing of Scotland. During the 2014 Scottish independence referendum, the UK was part of the EU. During the Brexit referendum, Scots voted to remain in the EU. Sturgeon is making a credible argument that Scotland "cannot be imprisoned" in the UK "against its will." She has sounded the clarion call for another independence referendum by declaring that "the will of the Scottish people

cannot be ignored.” The union of England and Scotland of 1707 vintage is certainly at risk.

And the Tories?

What is not at risk is the future of the Conservative Party. The natural party of power has reinvented itself yet again. Some members of Johnson’s team are bullish about life outside the EU. They are already plotting to attract the insurance market from Hong Kong to London as the Asian metropolis suffers from incessant protests that are making business onerous if not impossible. They want London to be a Singapore-style safe haven for capital from around the world unconstrained by EU rules.

Like Singapore, they want the UK to invest in public infrastructure, state schools and the National Health Service (NHS). Apart from a supply-side boost, there is a demand-side policy too. Brexit will enable Tories to ease pressure on public services and scarce resources by curbing immigration. Dominic Cummings, the Svengali figure in Johnson’s team, is now the dominant intellectual force in British politics. After shifting politics to the right, he plans to shift economic policy to the left and steal Labour’s clothes, leaving the opposition naked for the next election or two.

Andrew Sullivan, a former president of the Oxford Union who knew Johnson in those days, recently wrote an article on the prime minister’s blundering brilliance. The Pied Piper has managed to “engage and co-opt rather than dismiss and demonize” the Brexit discontent. In a little-watched video, Cummings spoke about the strategy the Tories followed to do so. As per Johnson’s strategist, the EU-project was “driving the growth of extremism” and Brexit will “drain the poison of a lot of political debates.” All four of Cummings’s grandparents served in World War II. For all his faults, this shadowy figure genuinely cares about schools, hospitals and the working class.

Johnson might be a cavalier but, as Sullivan observes, he can connect with people from other backgrounds. He was successful as mayor of

London and won a second term in a city with a natural Labour majority. Unlike David Cameron and George Osborne, Johnson never believed in austerity and opposed “Kosovo-style social cleansing” of the poor in London. As prime minister, he is promising higher public spending and lower taxes while acting tough on crime, terrorism and immigration. In fact, Cummings and Johnson might be about to move the Tories and the UK away from its Thatcherite roots. If they do so successfully, the UK might have a good shot at staying united.

What Happens to the EU?

Make no mistake, Johnson’s emphatic victory is terrible news for the European Union. The eurozone economy is in trouble. It is experiencing anemic growth and high unemployment. Productivity is stubbornly refusing to rise. In fact, the contradictions of a single currency are threatening to derail the entire European project. There is a strong argument to be made that Greece and Germany should not have the same currency. They are far too different from one another. The same monetary policy for the two countries does both of them a disservice, exacerbating existing imbalances.

Even as the euro currency creates new tensions, the sovereign debt crisis is straining common bonds. The Europeans and the International Monetary Fund might have bailed out Greece with its economy a little over \$300 billion. Italy with its economy of about \$2 trillion and a debt-GDP ratio of more than 130% is too big for anyone to bail out. German taxpayers are going to balk at the bill.

Instead of honestly tackling its financial crisis, Europe has elected to take the “extend and pretend” approach of prolonging payment timetables and believing in the fiction that countries like Greece or Italy will pay back their debts. Instead, Europe has been practicing “socialism for the financial sector and austerity for everyone else.” Naturally, this is causing resentment. In Italy, Matteo Salvini rose to power on the basis of public anger against Brussels.

Countries such as Poland and Hungary are also rocking the EU boat. Even in France and Germany, euroskeptical parties are on the rise. The democratic deficit in Brussels does not help. Neither does the red tape. While some European officials are outstanding, many are utterly inefficient if not corrupt. Brussels is simply too removed from Marseille or Munich and Europeans still do not feel an emotional connection with it.

If Johnson and Cummings pull off a successful Brexit, centrifugal tendencies in Europe will increase. Italy might join the UK in opting to leave the EU and so might other countries. If that happens, Johnson would be a modern-day Henry VIII. He would have taken back control from Brussels just as the portly 16-century king threw off the yoke of Rome. Brexit might seem like yet another case of British pluck, foresight and cunning.

Of course, Europeans could come together to form a closer union. A fiscal union might emerge to complement its monetary union. Structural reforms might resolve its contradictions. Yet that seems unlikely. In the short run at least, the EU will suffer.

What Happens to the US?

In the US, commentators often compare Johnson to President Donald Trump. Johnson's victory has sent shivers down liberals and enthused conservatives. Both are drawing their own lessons. Roger Cohen sounded the bugle in *The New York Times* and warned that Trump could win in 2020. In a rambling piece, he called Brexit "a national tragedy" and asserted that the triumph of emotion over reason in the age of Facebook queers the pitch for the likes of Johnson and Trump. Cohen's comparison is superficial and does Johnson a disservice. Johnson may be a lying scoundrel, but he is no Trump. Jon Sopel of the BBC also got in on the act. He warned Democrats against choosing Bernie Sanders or Elizabeth Warren who might be American counterparts of Corbyn. He pointed out that Blair won a third term despite voters seeing him as

"smarmy, George W. Bush's poodle, in the pocket of big business – and a war criminal."

Corbyn lost despite promising more money for NHS, nationalization of key industries and free broadband for everyone. The fact that working-class workers turned their backs on Labour in a class-divided society is a key lesson for Democrats. The Green New Deal and the Medicare for All plan might smack of socialism. Bigger government and higher taxes are not easy sells in Anglo-Saxon lands. In the US, socialism is a dirty word and Democrats could gift the election to Trump by flirting with it.

On Fox News, Cal Thomas argued that Johnson's victory is similar to Thatcher's triumph in 1979. It presages a second term for Trump just as the "Iron Lady" paved the path for Ronald Reagan. The news headlines, social media chatter and liberal outrage will be trumped by a booming economy, soaring stock markets and healthy job numbers. In 2016, the vote for Brexit was followed by a mandate for Trump.

The 2020 presidential election is some way off and these commentators might be premature in their predictions. The immediate item on the agenda for both countries is a US-UK trade deal. Johnson and Cummings plan to wrap up trade deals around the world and strengthen their hand against the EU. They will be bending their backs to get a trade deal done by next year.

They might have an ally in the White House. Trump is embroiled in impeachment proceedings. He has been a vocal supporter of Brexit and an opponent of the European project. A trade deal with the UK will take away attention from the proceedings and spite EU bigwigs. In an election year, it would make for good political theater. Waving a "great trade deal" around might bolster Trump's image in the eyes of his supporters. Anglo-Saxon democracies have much in common and Johnson's victory will inevitably affect politics across the pond.

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Have We Seen the Eternal Return of Fascism?

Hans-Georg Betz
December 23, 2019

Unlike yesterday's fascists, today's radical right-wing leaders propagate neither territorial expansion nor anything close to the racial laws of the 1930s.

Björn Höcke is public enemy number one in present-day Germany. At least that's what German media suggest. Höcke is a leading exponent of the "völkisch" wing of Alternative for Germany (AfD), the country's radical right-wing populist party. And Höcke is a fascist. That's what a German provincial court ruled a couple of months ago. Yet this did not prevent voters in Thuringia, Höcke's home state, from supporting the AfD in this fall's regional election.

Höcke is hardly an exceptional case. In early 2018, an article on Medium claimed that US Vice President Mike Pence was the poster child of "Christian fascism," which, according to that author, was on the rise in America. A few years prior, a prominent left-wing politician attacked Marine Le Pen, the leader of the Front National, asking why France was the only country that wanted to have a "fascist" heading its government. The same charge was brought against Matteo Salvini, the leader of La Lega in Italy, which, ironically, ever since its rise in the 1990s had been vigorously opposed to fascism.

Making Italy Great

Under the circumstances, it might be appropriate to recall what fascism was all about and why equating the likes of Höcke and Salvini with fascism amounts to nothing less than trivializing the ideology. Fascism, at least in its Italian version, was a revolutionary movement, originating on the radical left. Benito Mussolini, fascism's strongman, started out as a committed Marxist. For a time, he was the editor of *Avanti*,

the Italian Socialist Party newspaper, at a time when socialists were still radical and believed in a global revolution.

Mussolini's dedication to socialist internationalism abruptly ended with the beginning of World War I. This was hardly surprising. Before the war, European socialists had vigorously opposed militarism. Once hostilities started in 1914, however, virtually all of the socialist parties of the major powers — from Germany to Great Britain — supported their respective countries' war efforts. The lesson to be drawn from this experience was that international solidarity was a losing proposition. It was nationalism that mobilized and rallied the masses. The nationalist turn meant subordinating class to the national cause. This proved to be a fatal choice, ultimately contributing to the split between socialists/social democrats and communists, which would haunt the socialist movements for decades to come.

In Italy, it led to a third left-wing movement: Mussolini's National Fascist Party. Etymologically, fascism is derived from two words: the Italian *fascio* and the Latin *fascēs*. *Fascio* stands for "bundle" — a group of likeminded individuals closely tied together, similar to Vladimir Lenin's notion of dedicated revolutionaries. *Fascēs* is a plural word that connotes the bundle of wooden sticks/rods carried by the *lictors*, who served as bodyguards for ancient Roman magistrates. The *fascēs* symbolized the magistrate's authority and jurisdiction — i.e., the power of the state.

Fascism is a combination of *fascio* and *fascēs* — a group of dedicated individuals committed to building a strong "totalitarian" state in the name of the primacy of the nation. Mussolini made it entirely clear that he intended "to destroy the old Italy of decadent liberalism and democracy and give birth to a young, virile, new Italy." Having abandoned the idea of social revolution, he fully embraced the notion of national revolution aimed at upending the international status quo.

This was behind the notion propagated by the fascists that Italy was a "proletarian nation" — a

relatively backward country subordinate to the great European “plutocratic” nations (most notably Great Britain), which prevented Italy from realizing its economic potential and status as a great power. The ensuing conflict was one between the core and periphery. This notion was later adopted by Latin American economists, such as Raul Prebisch, the first secretary-general of the UN Conference on Trade and Development, to explain Latin America’s relative “backwardness.” Thus, it is hardly surprising that prominent Latin American populist leaders such as Juan Perón and, to a limited degree, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán were impressed by fascism, even if the latter considered Mussolini a “ridiculous” figure.

Mussolini’s goal was for Italy to catch up economically and militarily and to turn the country into a major world power. This was reflected in fascist economic policy, centered upon central planning, heavy regulation and protectionism. Given fascism’s ideational roots, it was hardly surprising that it was profoundly hostile to economic individualism, laissez-faire liberalism and capitalism, even if Mussolini was forced to make compromises on the economic front.

In general, fascist economic policy was pure socialism, as was its promotion of social welfare. As Sheri Berman puts it, fascism in the 1930s “spoke to the social and psychological needs of citizens to be protected from the ravages of capitalism at a time when other political actors were offering little help.” Fascism proposed a “national socialist” solution to the hardship experienced by ordinary citizens — a solution that was hardly original. The French Boulangist deputy and prominent writer Maurice Barrès had advanced a similar program as early as the 1890s in an attempt to appeal to working-class voters in his electoral district, the town of Nancy in Lorraine.

Defending the Race

In contemporary parlance, fascism is used as a generic term referring to a range of phenomena,

from right-wing extremism to neo-Nazism — both inextricably linked to xenophobia and racism. Historically, the epitome of xenophobia and racism more often than not was anti-Semitism, which was exemplified by the Dreyfus affair in late 19th-century France. Ironically, at least at its beginnings, fascism was anything but anti-Semitic. This was hardly surprising, given Mussolini’s long-time affair with Margherita Sarfatti, who was not only his lover but the individual “who crafted the ideological and philosophical basis of fascism between 1913 and 1919.”

Until the late 1930s, anti-Semitism had no place in fascist doctrine. In fact, Franklin Hugh Adler maintains that until 1938 — when the fascist regime introduced racial legislation — “Italy could only be considered philosemitic.” Italian Jews, a tiny minority of roughly 44,000, were allowed to join the National Fascist Party, and they did so. A number of Jews held prominent positions in the movement, most prominently Guido Jung, who served as minister of finance from 1932 to 1935. Mussolini himself had nothing but disdain for Adolf Hitler’s anti-Semitism. This all changed with the beginning of World War II in 1939 when Mussolini decided to throw in his lot with Hitler. This proved to be a fatal error that ultimately ended with Mussolini’s corpse being hung from a gas station in Milan.

Mussolini believed that the fascist “doctrinal postulates” had “a universal character.” He was even convinced that fascism would “come to fill the present century [i.e., 20th century] with itself even as Liberalism filled the nineteenth century.” In 1932, the party newspaper predicted that within the next 10 years, Europe would be fascist or at least “fascicized.”

Mussolini was not entirely wrong. In the postwar period, central planning, state intervention in the economy, the expansion of the welfare state and Keynesian economics came to rule the day throughout Western Europe. He was wrong, however, in believing that fascism would be able to fundamentally transform human nature, create a new fascist man — hard like

granite (the gioventù granitica lampooned in Federico Fellini's "Amarcord"), domineering and aggressive, prepared to sacrifice himself for the greater good of the nation and thus capable of reviving the glory of the Roman Empire.

Creating the new fascist man meant erasing the image of Italians as "short and dark singing simpletons," if not worse. (In the US, Italian immigrants were the target of racially-inspired stereotypes, with cartoons depicting them as rats armed with knives and pistols.) In doing so, this would have meant "reconfiguring" Italians as a vital part of the "Aryan race."

This was the gist of the infamous Manifesto of Race from 1938. It not only sought to establish the Aryan roots of Italians, but also that Italian Jews did not belong to the "Italian race." Italian Jews, as the manifesto insisted, had never assimilated, and this for good reason: Jews constituted a "non-European element" that was fundamentally different from the Aryan elements that stood at the origins of the Italians. Racism was thus indispensable for the realization of Mussolini's ludicrous expansionist/imperialist dreams, which ultimately ended in disaster.

Today's Fascists

Central to fascism is the notion that the individual counts for nothing and the national community for everything. Sacrificing one's life for the greater good of the national community is the epitome of virtue. This is nothing new. Those familiar with Latin might recall Horace's famous line, "dulce et decorum est pro patria mori," which the English poet Wilfred Owen in his well-known eponymous poem dismissed as the "old Lie."

In contemporary Western consumer societies, the notion that it is somehow "sweet and noble to die for the fatherland" sounds like a rather ludicrous proposition. In our globalized world, the large majority of highly-trained specialists have no home, and the vast majority of ordinary people have better things to do than indulge in nationalist fantasy.

To be sure, the radical right of the 21st century are highly xenophobic and, more often than not, also racist. Yet unlike yesterday's fascists, today's radical right-wing leaders — from Marine Le Pen to Matteo Salvini — propagate neither territorial expansion nor anything close to the racial laws of the 1930s, which marked the beginning of a policy of mass murder. There is a distinction between yesterday's fascism and today's radical right-wing populism. Calling the likes of Björn Höcke a "fascist" cannot but dilute the meaning of fascism, which is a slippery slope.

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Climate Change: One Step Forward, While Standing Still

Arek Sinanian
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What will the outcome be of the latest UN Climate Change Conference in Madrid?

Have you ever tried walking on a traveller? You know, those moving platforms at airports that help you get to your destination when you are in a hurry or tired, or have a lot of baggage to carry. Have you also tried to walk in the wrong direction on it? Depending on your own pace and the speed of the traveller, you could either make slow progress, or no progress at all, or go backward.

This is the image I have of the last few Conferences of the Parties (COP) of the United Nations. To keep the analogy going, let's think of the traveller as climate change, which seems unstoppable and is, in fact, getting faster.

The COP Summits

At the COP summits, representatives of almost 200 countries get together over a week or so. They discuss the latest data on climate change,

global greenhouse gas emissions and then negotiate on the required actions to address climate change — move forward on the traveller — and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, assist developing countries in achieving emissions reductions and adapt to a changing climate.

But it hasn't been easy, and it never was going to be easy. As I explain in my book, "A Climate for Denial," climate change is classified as a wicked problem — one that is complex, ever-changing, difficult to define and involving multi-disciplinary aspects, constraints and solutions. But it is also one that must be addressed and solved.

So, these COP summits are organized to see what, if anything, can be done. But these meetings and negotiations are often bogged down in detail and lack of agreement even on fundamental issues. These include how to account for greenhouse gas emissions and how to allow developing countries to develop economically without penalizing them, while developed countries defend their right to maintain their high dependency on energy usage and economic prosperity.

Due to the huge discrepancies between developed, developing and underdeveloped countries in their emissions profiles, economic development, and technical and economic capabilities, negotiations can rarely get past first base. A fundamental roadblock preventing progress has been because of the complexities of allowing developing countries to catch up with developed countries while reducing global emissions of greenhouse gases.

That's why the 2015 Paris accord relies on a vague agreement to keep global warming to within 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. When that agreement was signed in 2016, every country was asked to determine its own target and pledge to meet it, which would supposedly achieve the overall 1.5-degree goal. The Paris accord is a vague agreement mainly because it's not legally binding and, therefore, doesn't guarantee its intended achievement. The

end result speaks for itself: emissions continue to rise and global warming is not stopping.

The whole idea of voluntary action on an extremely complex issue such as the reduction of global emissions is therefore fraught with manipulation, loopholes and lack of urgency due to national priorities and interests ahead of global interests. A great example of this is Australia's insistence to use the 1997 Kyoto Protocol's "left-over" credits to meet its Paris targets. This clearly is against the spirit of the Paris Agreement as it tried to be forward-looking, having drawn "a line in the sand" on where emissions were in 2015-16 and where they needed to be in the future. It's equivalent to telling someone that they need to lose weight for their health, and then the person saying they've lost weight over the past few years.

One of the greatest challenges in these negotiations and agreements has been the huge discrepancies in the emissions profiles, energy requirements and economic development between countries. On the one hand, we have nations that have still to provide electricity to large areas of their population and, on the other, developed countries that rely primarily on fossil fuels and emit proportionally large amounts of greenhouse gases per capita.

COP25 in Madrid

So, what was COP25 meant to achieve — which took place in Madrid earlier this month — and what did it actually achieve? The main aims of the climate conference were to finalize the rules by which the Paris targets are achieved and begin the processes by which the commitments made in December 2015 could be systematically raised. There were also a host of technical matters related to carbon markets, as well as details on how poorer countries would be compensated for climate-related damage.

The achievements of the COP25 summit could only be classified as decisions, not achievements. They were mainly to do with initiatives to foster mitigation and adaptation relating to oceans and land; funding for the repair of damage and loss to

help poor countries that are suffering from the effects of climate change — although there was no allocation of new funds to do so; periodic review of the long-term 2-degree target starting in 2020; and establishing a few rules to do with carbon markets.

But many questions and issues remained unanswered, unresolved and left for future meetings. The agenda for the next conference (COP26) in November 2020, to be hosted by the UK in partnership with Italy, will once again be filled with ambition and promise, and circular discussions.

I know this is going to sound somewhat cynical, maybe very cynical to some, but my summary of the COP processes, so far, can be summarized as follows:

***Meeting 1:** Let's all get together and talk about this problem of global warming and climate change.*

many meetings later

***Meeting...:** Different countries seem to have different viewpoints and problems, so these meetings are really useful to get some consensus.*

Meeting...: Let's agree to do something positive.

a few meetings later

***Meeting...:** We're getting somewhere, why don't developed countries help developing countries and get credit for doing this (Kyoto).*

a few meetings later

***Meeting...:** Time is running out, this is getting serious, really serious!*

Don't get me wrong, there has been considerable progress made all around the world on the installation of large, renewable energy generation systems, and this has meant some improvement in balancing economic development of countries

that are still catching up with the highly-industrialized nations. But, in reality, such progress hasn't been adequate.

So, back to our analogy. While the traveller continues to take the world backward in terms of emissions reductions, global action is limited to meetings, targets and pledges.

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