

Make Sense

of 2019



Fair Observer^o

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Fair Observer

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CONTENTS

About Fair Observer	10
Share Your Perspective	11
What Happened in 2019?	12
Atul Singh	

AFRICA

Hostility Still Looms in Ivory Coast and Liberia	13
Maja Bovcon	
Nigeria: Are We Really and Truly One Country?	15
Oyepeju Abioye	
Africa's Long Road to Democracy	16
Swaleh Ochieng	
Is South Africa Heading for a Storm?	22
Stephen Chan	
For Nigeria's Women, the Threat of Sexual Violence Is Never Far Away	23
Oyepeju Abioye	

ASIA PACIFIC

The Military Writes the Rules in Thailand's Election	25
Natchapol Praditpetchara	
Making Sense of the Christchurch Terror Attack	27
Hans-Georg Betz	
Can Technology Help China Rebuild Social Trust?	29
Elizabeth Van Wie Davis	

It's Time for Hong Kong to Get Real	35
Rupert Hodder	
Is China's Belt and Road Initiative Strategic Genius or Arrogant Overreach?	37
Atul Singh	
CENTRAL & SOUTH ASIA	
<hr/>	
Sri Lanka's Persecuted Muslims Are Turning Radical	44
Deedar Khudaidad	
Whether You Like It or Not, Narendra Modi Is Here to Stay	47
Ankita Mukhopadhyay	
Without Fundamental Reforms to the Education System, Indians Will Not Innovate	49
Akash Pallath, Ansh Joshi & Deepak Dhariwal	
What Lies Behind India's Bold Bet on Kashmir?	53
Atul Singh & Manu Sharma	
Mumbai Needs To Come Together to Prevent Annual Flooding	59
Karan Kapoor	
EUROPE	
<hr/>	
Will Zelensky Deliver Much Needed Reform for Ukraine?	60
Alona Anokhina, Kateryna Parkhomei & Ivan Farias Pelcastre	
Boris Johnson: Bumbling Buffoon, Pied Piper or Churchillian Statesman?	63
Atul Singh	
What Is Behind Football's Persistent Racism?	65
Ellis Cashmore	
Has Macron Given NATO a Much Needed Wake-Up Call?	66
Guillaume Lasconjarias	

Can Anything Unite the United Kingdom?	68
Peter Isackson	
LATIN AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN	
In What Seems Like an Endless Nightmare, Maduro Clings on to Power	73
Lenin Cavalcanti Guerra	
The Puerto Rico Crisis: A Reflection of a Flawed US Democracy	75
Carlos Figueroa	
Putting Out the Fires in the Amazon	79
Niyanta Spelman	
Chile Protests and the Rise of Political Risk in Latin America	81
German Peinado Delgado & Glenn Ojeda Vega	
What Is Driving the Protests in Latin America?	83
Leonardo Vivas	
MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA	
The End of the Iran Nuclear Deal	88
Gary Grappo	
A War With US Will Destroy Iran's Reformist Movement	90
Maryam Nouri	
Who Are Turkey's Long-Term Allies?	93
Nathaniel Handy	
Another Middle East War Is Internationalized	95
Gary Grappo	
As Iraq Burns, World Leaders Stay Silent	97
Amin Farhad	

NORTH AMERICA

The Right Green New Deal	99
Steve Westly	
Leaving the INF Treaty Wasn't the Problem — It's How We Did It	101
Cole A. Baker	
Is Trump's Impeachment Bound to Backfire?	102
S. Suresh	
The World's Love Affair With Justin Trudeau Is Over	104
Ramsha Zafar	
Why Democrats Should Vote for a Moderate	106
Neil Kapoor	

BUSINESS

UAE Attracts AI Investment Due to Flexibility	108
Dina Al-Shibeeb	
What Sotheby's Tells Us About the Art Market	110
Vanessa Stevens	
The Hidden Gems of Morocco	112
Sarita Mehta	
Google and Our Collective AI Future	114
Daniel Wagner	
Are Electric Vehicles About to Take Off in India?	115
Atul Singh & Manu Sharma	

ECONOMICS

Will India's Unemployment Crisis Cost Modi His Job?	118
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Ravi Tripathi

Macri Walks on Thin Ice in Argentina 119

Pablo Nemina

Italy Must Leave the Eurozone 121

Isidoros Karderinis

Can Japan Maintain Its Economic Fortunes? 122

Craig Willy

The Path to Growth Is Industrialization, Not Exports 124

Atul Singh

CULTURE

When Will India Address Its Student Suicide Crisis? 129

Ankita Mukhopadhyay

Burning Man and Auroville: Understanding the Human Condition 131

William Softky

The Decision Against Caster Semenya Plunges Sport into a Moral Maelstrom 136

Ellis Cashmore

What If Michael Jackson Had Lived? 138

Ellis Cashmore

Romance Novels Are a Weapon Against Misogyny 141

Hans-Georg Betz

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

Peace in the Central African Republic Requires Patience 144

Alexandra Lamarche

The Collision Course in the Asia Pacific	146
Karola Klatt	
For Iran, Options Are Few and Prospects Are Grim	147
Gary Grappo	
Is Europe Ready to Do More on Security Matters?	150
Orsolya Raczova	
We May Be Better Off Without a Clear Definition of Terrorism	152
Cole A. Baker	

ENVIRONMENT

There's a Rock Heading for Earth	153
Arek Sinanian	
No Blue Skies for Beijing	155
Rachael Willis	
Climate Emergency: Rise of a Civil Disobedience Movement	157
Vasundhara Saravade	
The Amazon Rainforest Fires Are Worse Than You Think	159
Luiz Cesar Pimentel	
A Gen Zer's Perspective on Climate Change Reform	160
Neil Kapoor	

ABOUT FAIR OBSERVER

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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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What Happened in 2019?

Atul Singh

December 28, 2019

In 2019, forest fires and terrible storms raged across the world even as political divisions, trade wars, economic slowdown, protests and populism stayed strong through the year.

The drama that began in the US with the election of Donald Trump as president entered another act. On December 18, the House of Representatives voted to impeach Trump on charges of abuse of power and obstruction of Congress, joining Andrew Jackson and Bill Clinton to become the third president to be impeached.

In American politics, this has been the most fractious year in recent memory. The year began with the longest government shutdown. Republicans and Democrats hurled epithets at each other. Trump called four congresswomen “the squad” and accused Nancy Pelosi of a “meltdown.” Pelosi, the leader of the House, accused Trump of the same.

Robert Mueller’s investigation found that the Russian government had interfered in the 2016 elections “in sweeping and systematic fashion,” though it did not find evidence of the Trump campaign colluding with Moscow. Trump claimed “total exoneration,” but the Democrats were not convinced.

Even as bitter feuds engulfed American politics, Washington, and Beijing spent the year locked in a bitter trade battle. China believes that the US is determined to stem its rise as a global power. The US believes that China does not play by the rules, has abused American trust and must finally be held to account.

The trade war had its effect on the global economy, which, according to the International Monetary Fund, “is in a synchronized slowdown.” It grew by a mere 3% in 2019. Manufacturing activity and global trade deteriorated sharply. Higher tariffs and prolonged

trade policy uncertainty damaged investment and demand for capital goods. Geopolitical tensions did not help.

The economic slowdown in 2019 might have contributed to demonstrations around the world. In Hong Kong, protests have been persistent. They have blocked roads, stormed shopping malls and staged sit-ins even at the ultramodern Hong Kong International Airport. In Chile, protests forced the UN Climate Change Conference (COP25) to relocate to Spain.

In Iran, rising gasoline prices made thousands take to the streets. The government responded by blocking the internet, locking up hundreds and cracking down brutally. In Lebanon, protesters have brought the country to a standstill and “placed its political class in the dock.” Many other parts of the world such as Iraq, Canada, Bolivia, France and India have all seen mass protests. It is little surprise that The Washington Post called 2019 “the year of the street protester.” It is not only protests that have broken out across the world but also forest fires. In Australia, over 5 million hectares have been reduced to ashes. Higher temperatures, a record-breaking drought and the lowest rainfall on record have caused havoc on an unprecedented scale. In 2019, fires also broke out in Chile, California and the Amazon.

The fires in Amazon were perhaps the most alarming of the year. The world’s largest rainforest in the world is a vital carbon store that slows down global warming. In August, more than 30,000 individual fires broke out in the Brazilian rainforest alone, thrice the number for the last year. Farmers and loggers were suspected of starting these fires to clear the land for crops.

Even as forests burned, storms surged. In April, Cyclone Kenneth battered Mozambique. It was the strongest tropical cyclone to make landfall in the country since records began. It also hit the Comoro Islands and Tanzania. In August, Hurricane Dorian became the most intense tropical cyclone on record to strike the Bahamas with winds peaking at 295 kilometers per hour and leaving 70,000 homeless. In Venice, St

Mark's Basilica was flooded only for the sixth time in 1,200 years. The highest tide in 50 years caused catastrophic flooding, leaving the city "on its knees." The mayor blamed climate change, but his words had little effect on COP25, which ended with platitudes and pabulum.

COP25 might have ended in a whimper, but two elections resulted in a bang. Boris Johnson and Narendra Modi won thumping majorities in the UK and India respectively. Johnson's victory now makes Brexit inevitable and will change the arc of history. Modi's election has similarly led to radical new policies on Kashmir and citizenship. The populist tide that surged in 2016 continued strong in 2019. We live in interesting times.

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

AFRICA

Hostility Still Looms in Ivory Coast and Liberia

Maja Bovcon
January 25, 2019

After the ICC acquitted Laurent Gbagbo of crimes against humanity, the fear of renewed violence in Ivory Coast is growing.

The roads to peace in Ivory Coast and Liberia have been quite similar. In both cases, external forces and the arrest of political figures responsible for the escalation of violence have played a pivotal role in the return to normalcy after years of civil war.

In its Global Findings, the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) 2018 laudably addresses the peaceful development in both West African countries: "While violence has dramatically escalated in Syria or Yemen, also good post-conflict management in Côte d'Ivoire or Liberia can be recorded, further away from and possibly less noticed by Europe." But now at

least, the successful Ivorian path toward peace is in danger as the International Criminal Court in The Hague failed to prosecute for war crimes and acquitted former President Laurent Gbagbo on January 15.

External peacekeeping intervention in both West African countries comprised three key players. These included a Western power with close historical links to the country — France in Ivory Coast and the United States in Liberia — as well as regional and international peacekeeping missions.

"Neocolonial" Intervention

France was the first to intervene in Ivory Coast following a coup attempt in September 2002, when rebels tried to topple President Gbagbo, who came to power after a disputed election two years earlier. The country is the economic engine in Francophone West Africa and its collapse would likely have had repercussions well beyond its borders. Facilitated by the ongoing presence of a French military base and bilateral defense accords, France was keen to stop fighting through rapid intervention in one of its most important former colonies by creating a buffer zone between the rebel-held north and the government-controlled south.

France provided a rapid reaction force and logistical, human and financial support to the peacekeeping force of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and UN peacekeeping missions. It also helped the rebels and the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) to forcibly remove Gbagbo from power in April 2011, after he had refused to admit his electoral defeat in late 2010.

Similarly, the US played a significant role in bringing the devastating civil war in Liberia to an end. It managed to force President Charles Taylor, a former warlord, to resign and go into exile in Nigeria in August 2003. Taylor's resignation was the precondition for the US deployment of a joint task force to Liberia, which helped ECOWAS forces to defeat the rebel

group, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy, and end fighting.

The Bush administration is also thought to have pressured Nigeria to return Taylor to Liberia in March 2006, where he was apprehended and handed over to the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL). Apart from fighting in Liberia, Taylor was heavily implicated between 1996 and 2002 in the civil war in neighboring Sierra Leone.

Despite all their shortcomings, regional ECOWAS peacekeeping operations — ECOMOG in Liberia and ECOMICI in Ivory Coast — granted legitimacy to the external intervention. For instance, Gbagbo's supporters criticized France's "neocolonialist" interventionism and demanded "an African solution to an African problem."

Meanwhile, the UN peacekeeping missions — UNMIL in Liberia and UNOCI in Ivory Coast — stayed in the two countries well beyond the end of the conflict to prevent the resumption of fighting. After several extensions, UNOCI's mandate ended in June 2017, while UNMIL extended its presence in Liberia until March 2018.

In May 2012, the SCSL sentenced Taylor to 50 years in prison for crimes against humanity and war crimes committed during the civil war in Sierra Leone. In January 2016, the International Criminal Court opened a trial against Gbagbo and his right-hand man and militia leader, Charles Blé Goudé, whose xenophobic "Ivoirité" policies precipitated the country's descent into a civil conflict.

The removal of Taylor and Gbagbo from the domestic political scene has doubtlessly helped to pacify the two countries and allowed them to conduct free and fair elections. Liberia is one step ahead of Ivory Coast as it witnessed in December 2017 the first change of power since the end of the civil war. Former professional footballer George Weah of the Congress for Democratic Change defeated Joseph Boakai of the Unity Party. Such a test still awaits Ivory Coast in 2020, when President Alassane Ouattara's second and last presidential mandate expires. If Gbagbo and

Blé Goudé return to Ivory Coast and take part in the presidential election, it is likely that old enmities will flare up.

Simmering Tensions Still Undermine Peace

As the BTI country reports for Ivory Coast and Liberia rightly contend, reconciliation has been incomplete and ethnic tensions and cleavages between the "indigenous population" and immigrants, which were driving the conflict, persist in both countries. In Ivory Coast, many southerners still perceive northerners, including Ouattara, as foreign. This is because northerners share ethnic and religious affiliations with numerous immigrants from neighboring countries, especially Burkina Faso, Mali and Guinea, who had come to Ivory Coast during the economic boom after independence.

Gbagbo's supporters also resent that the judiciary has applied "victor's justice" by overwhelmingly prosecuting only those close to the former president for crimes committed during the civil conflict. As for Liberia, the fact that former warlord Prince Johnson is now a senator and ran for president in the 2011 vote underscores the ineffectiveness of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Johnson was Taylor's ally in the early stages of the civil war and was responsible for the abduction and torturing to death of President Samuel Doe in 1990.

However, Liberia has been somewhat successful in taming ethnic tensions by more inclusive recruitment to civil service positions, whereas in Ivory Coast, Gbagbo's allies have been practically absent from the political and public spheres. In addition, Ouattara's insistence on a unified Rally of Houphouetists for Democracy and Peace (RHDP) party has prompted the Democratic Party of Ivory Coast (PDCI) — his Rally of Republicans' (RDR) main partner in the ruling coalition — to exit the RHDP, exacerbating ethno-political divisions.

Unless these simmering identity cleavages are properly addressed, the risk of violence returning will remain. This is particularly the case in Ivory

Coast, where the forthcoming presidential election is already stoking tensions and Gbagbo is now free to return to the political sphere. However, the likely intervention of external players in the event of an escalation of violence will most probably prevent the situation from spiraling out of control.

***Maja Bovcon** is a senior analyst at Verisk Maplecroft

Nigeria: Are We Really and Truly One Country?

Oyepeju Abioye
April 25, 2019

In Nigeria, there is no sense of belonging to a nation.

“**N**o one lays claim to Nigeria.” It was a statement made casually by my boss at work, yet it carried such weight in my young mind. Perhaps this is the worst sin of all that we leisurely walk through our country like it doesn’t belong to us, casually engaging in tribalism and nepotism as we drift along.

We need to be reminded that in the history of Nigeria as a colonial construct, some 250 ethnic groups made up of people who speak over 500 indigenous languages were pooled together to make a country, in the hope that, eventually, they would all be molded into a nation state.

We would recall that as far back as 1939, Sir Bernard Henry Bourdillon, the British colonial governor of Uganda and Nigeria, initiated Nigerian federalism by dividing the country along the three major ethnic groups — Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa — into regional councils and provinces. However, over the next four years, he was unable to complete the development of a federal structure before his departure from Nigeria.

The resultant effect was a separation of the southern provinces into eastern and western

Nigeria, leaving the north largely untouched. Nonetheless, the seed of federalism was sown and, by the 1950s, there was a clear ethnic structural template of division into northern, western and eastern regions. With this restructuring came an overwhelming consciousness of ethnicity, and it would become the basis on which politics, administration and economic policies would be formed.

Deleting History

Ethnicity to the average Nigerian is a way of forging ahead in the midst of competition, scoring points rather than actual applicable knowledge. We hardly have the bonds to forge a country. Rather, we are loyal to our families and, at most, our ethnic groups. Is this a by-product of deleting history from our school curricula?

Those born after 1980 would scarcely be aware of the Biafran War and the scar it left on the country, pitting regions against one another. How do we heal when we barely know who we are in the context of other people, with surnames just as difficult as ours, if only of a different origin? People who look just like us, but with whom we are afraid to engage because the tribe is a sharp divide between us?

We have chosen for so long to exclude the teaching of history from our nationwide curricula. It is little wonder that when the average 15 to 30-year-old is asked about basic knowledge of the country, such as when Nigeria was declared a nation, we stumble over these supposedly simple facts and then uncomfortably change the topic of conversation. We should be livid with rage.

We would choose people from other cultures — non-Nigerians over our own people — any day and time. We would choose to marry them, engage in businesses with outsiders, proudly showing them off as our allies and friends. We show to foreigners a level of respect that those with whom share a nationality can never dream of receiving from us — of us giving it to them. Could it be that we readily embrace the culture of

those other nationalities because we identify with it?

Are we really and truly one country? In the words of Tafawa Balewa, the country's first prime minister, Nigeria has existed as one country only on paper since 1914, when the northern and southern provinces were amalgamated. In reality, there is no sense of belonging to the nation state.

It seems like there has been a calculated attempt to wipe any remnant knowledge of what Nigeria should represent from our minds, and we are all left wandering in a wilderness of sorts. Religion has become a form of escapism for some, and this perhaps works for the older generation. But the younger generation, exposed to newer realities and practices, pushes back continually against these societal constructs. Not even the love of God, which we are all eager to identify with, will keep us from asking these hard questions.

What has this done to us? For one, an average Nigerian child and a Nigerian-American kid living in the US sail in the same shallow waters when it comes to navigating Nigerian history. We are well acquainted with the history of black Americans. Our own we know nothing of.

Many of the children of the elite, and not so elite, are encouraged, when faced with the decision whether to stay in the country or leave, to build a life elsewhere, to emigrate. Nigerian media is rife with news about the minister of labor stating that there are enough doctors in Nigeria and, as such, the current trend in emigration of medical practitioners can continue. As we emigrate, and some make the bold decision of staying behind, we are left in a wake of fear, because not one of us has really charted a course for the nation. At best, we chart courses for ourselves, within or without the nation.

The concern is this: With the current trend of emigration, what happens to the country? Will these emigrants be inspired to return home? We could take a cue from countries — where the better-off left to acquire an education, to gain exposure and experience, but later returned to

their home country to rebuild it — by unraveling the underlying motivation behind their return.

There has to be something to bind us to our country if there is hope of a mass homecoming ever happening. We would need a strong dose of loyalty, a sense of belonging and duty to our homeland — otherwise we would be leaving the country to remain a struggling nation, without any hope of structural civilization.

Writing about Nigeria's national identity may not directly elicit change, but it might awaken something in us, spark a conversation we all need to be having about our obligation to love the country of our birth. This is something we were not necessarily brought up to do, but have to train ourselves to do nonetheless. We lay no claim to that which we have no remembrance of. If this narrative is ever to change, then it must begin with us knowing the history we call our own.

We would have to gently remind one another that Nigeria is a nation state and not a nation, in the sense that a group of people that form the country aren't of the same tribe, language and religion. It is logical that going forward, we should focus on establishing equity amongst members of this nation state instead of clamoring for equality that isn't feasible in a country so diverse in ethnicity and cultural values.

***Oyepaju Abioye** is a doctor by day and a writer by night.

Africa's Long Road to Democracy

Swaleh Ochieng

July 18, 2019

Across Africa, politics has been turned into a do-or-die trial, accomplished in a vacuum of democracy amidst rampant human rights violations.

The violation of human rights across the African continent began as a struggle for self-rule in the mid-20th century. Except

for Liberia, which European countries assumed was an American colony, and Ethiopia, which was never colonized due to Haile Selassie's resistance to Italian invasion, Africans waged bloody guerrilla warfare against the colonial powers scrambling to keep control.

Africans yearned for self-rule in order to be free to practice their local religions, take control of their land and live under their own leaders. By the end of the 20th century, all the countries that had been colonized had attained freedom and established republics across the continent. Africans were suddenly left in an experimental phase where they were left to administer for themselves.

Yet this brief moment of liberation and hope was quickly overshadowed by the emergence of Africa's own colonizers — totalitarian leaders like Mobutu Sese Seko, living lives of opulence at the expense their citizens. Mobutu has been accused of massive plunder during his reign as the ruler of what was then Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of Congo. According to *The New York Times*, he is alleged to have embezzled up to \$5 billion during his rule. Mobutu is said to have chartered private jets to go shopping in Paris, accompanied by his friends and family.

Mobutu, who seized power through a bloodless coup in 1960, was behind the execution of his predecessor, Patrice Lumumba, in 1961. According to *Executed Today*, in 1966 four members of his cabinet, including Prime Minister Evariste Kimba, were executed before 100,000 people for plotting against the president.

The Ghosts Keep Coming Back

Another leader who rose to power at the early days of Africa's transformation was Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe, a freedom fighter-turned-tyrant who introduced drastic land policies that saw white settlers lose their land to his cronies. Leaders of Zimbabwe's ruling party, Zanu-PF, routinely raped female guerilla fighters during the Chimurenga Wars. Entire families and

communities were also subjected to rape as punishment for disloyalty in the 1980s.

During Mugabe's rule, which lasted nearly four decades, from 1980 to 2017, when he was ousted by the military in favor of his former aide, friend and vice president, Emmerson Mnangangwa. Zimbabwe's agriculture-based economy never recovered after the shock of land reforms followed by isolation from the international community caused by Mugabe's poor relations with most Western leaders. This led to economic sanctions being imposed on Zimbabwe in 2001 and 2002 by the European Union due to concerns over human rights violations, restrictions on the media and political violence.

At the same time, the United States sanctioned Zimbabwe for its involvement in the Congo conflict and violent land takeovers from the white settlers. The country's currency became weak and almost useless due to poor economic policies, corruption and uncontrolled printing of money.

Inflation rates had risen from 17% in 1990, 48% in 1991 231,000,000% in 2008, meaning a banknote of 10,000,000 Zimbabwean dollars could buy no more than basic commodities like bread. The introduction of multiple denominations of the currency meant people had to carry bags of cash just to buy food.

In East Africa, Ugandans had to put up with a bellicose Idi Amin Dada Oumee, whose eight-year rule between 1971 and 1979 rivaled the colonial abuses. According to reports from numerous international human rights groups, by the time Idi Amin went into exile in Saudi Arabia in 1978, he had caused the death of close to 300,000 people Uganda.

According to *The New York Times*, Amin used death squads and the military police force of about 18,000 men to murder shopkeepers, clerks, farmers and students who were either shot dead or forced to cudgel each other to death as police watched. These henchmen were mostly recruited from Idi Amin's home region near the border with Sudan that is dominated by the Kakwas ethnic group.

The 1972 failed coup attempt by supporters of the first president of Uganda exiled in Tanzania, Milton Obote, was met with a retaliatory massacre. It later emerged that civilian lives had been lost, including many disappearances. Among those killed by Amin's army included religious leaders, members of other ethnic groups, journalists, artists, bureaucrats, judges, students, lawyers, intellectuals, foreign nationals and petty criminals. When Amin died in July 2003 in Saudi Arabia, where he had been exiled since being deposited in January 1979, no charges had been brought against him.

Follow the Footsteps

Most African countries have since gotten rid of their founding fathers like Omar Bongo of Gabon, who led the country for four decades until 2009, when he died in office, and Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso, who was overthrown in 2015.

It is natural to expect Africa to have made strides and learned from these past political missteps, but that has not been the case. Most current African leaders have followed in the footsteps of leaders who came before them in suppressing the rights of their constituents in line with the famous phrase in East Africa, “fwata nyayo” — follow the footsteps — coined by Kenya's second president, Daniel Arap Moi, who vowed to follow in the footsteps of founding president, Jomo Kenyatta.

According to Kenyan economist Martin Oduor's biography of Moi, “Beyond The Shadows Of My Dream,” his presidency almost brought Kenyan economy to its knees, thanks to massive looting and corruption in his government and poor international relations. A “dream team” consisting of six professionals in the fields of economics, tourism and finance had to be formed with supervision of the World Bank in 1999 to repair Kenya's damaged human rights image and the economy.

Unfortunately, the team never achieved its goals due to sabotage from President Moi's inner

circle whose interests were threatened by its activity.

As most of the African countries are marking half a century since attaining self-rule, political opponents continue to die or disappear. Across Africa, a rise to power has been turned into a do-or-die trial, accomplished in a vacuum of democracy amidst rampant human rights violations. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit's 2017 Democracy Index, Mauritius is the only country in Africa with a full democracy. The country has managed to put up strong democratic structural governance through observation of a parliamentary democracy.

However, just Cape Verde, Botswana, South Africa, Senegal and Ghana are considered to have a flawed democracy, while the rest of the countries are split between so-called “hybrid regimes,” like Mali and Kenya, or outright authoritarian rule, like the DRC and the Central African Republic.

These democratic flaws are manifest across the continent, often in violent ways. Just weeks before the 2017 general election in Kenya, the director of the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission's (IEBC), Christopher Chege Msando, went missing. Msando, who was mandated with overseeing the electronic transmission of the polls, was later found dead, his body dumped in a thicket in Kikuyu, 22 kilometers outside the capital Nairobi. According to Kenya's chief government pathologist, Johassen Oduor, Msando died from strangulation.

The country had resorted to electronic voting process following disputes in previous polls following widespread voter fraud, denying citizens their democratic right to free and fair elections. Msando's murder added tension to an already highly contested election. Speaking on national television hours before his disappearance, Msando had assured the country that the system was a 100% temper-proof. At his funeral, former Kenyan Prime Minister Raila Odinga alleged that Msando was killed because he refused to surrender the password that was used to rig the elections.

Unfortunately, he was not the last to die during this election period. Many lives were lost following the announcement of the results by the IEBC chairman, Wafula Chebukati, on August 10. According to the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights, 37 were killed due to excessive use of force by police during the quelling of protests against Uhuru Kenyatta's reelection.

Among those killed were two children. Six-months-old baby Pendo was beaten on the head with a baton when the police raided a house in the opposition stronghold city of Kisumu, few hours after the announcement of the election results. In Nairobi's Mathare slum, 9-year-old Stephanie Moraa was killed while playing on the balcony of her parent's apartment. Moraa was killed by a stray bullet fired by anti-riot police following run-ins between the police and opposition party supporters.

This was not the first time Kenya was experiencing election violence. According to Human Rights Watch, over 1,000 people died and 500,000 were displaced following a two months-long political crisis during the 2007-08 election.

Kenya has had a high record of disappearances and murder dating back to the earlier days of self-rule following independence from Britain in 1963. The most notable was the murder of Kenyan Tom Mboya — trade unionist, educator, pan-Africanist, author and independence activist — who was murdered on July 5, 1969, in broad daylight in Nairobi's business district.

Confusion and Uncertainty

On February 15, when Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) pushed forward the general elections citing logistical difficulties, a large part of the electorate was affectively denied its constitutional right to vote. People had to reschedule their travel plans as one is only eligible to vote at the polling station within his/her registration location. Owing to the high level of poverty in Africa's largest

democracy, most couldn't afford to either stay the week or return a week later.

When the elections finally came, they turned bloody. According to civil society organizations, at least 35 Nigerians were killed in the violence that was inflamed by politicians and their aides inciting supporters. The elections, which were won by the incumbent president, Muhammad Buhari, left citizens divided along regional, ethnic and religious lines.

Suspicious have also circulated that attacks by the armed group Boko Haram could be politically motivated due to their alignment to some politicians and political parties who have funded the Islamist militia's activities. Speaking during a press conference on January 6, Alhaji Mohammed Imam, who lost in the February polls after running for the Borno state governorship, said that there was an urgent need to set up an inquiry into the attacks. Following President Buhari's inauguration on May 29, the government is yet to follow up on claims of Boko Haram's interference in the February elections.

Boko Haram is not the only militia on the continent with political connections. In April 2015, the Somali terrorist group al-Shabaab carried out its attack on the Garissa University in northeastern Kenya that killed 148 and left at least 70 students injured. Aden Duale, National Assembly majority leader, warned that he was going to reveal the names of politicians and powerful people in Kenya who fund or sympathize with the group — a promise which four years down the line Kenyans are still waiting for. The al-Qaeda-affiliated group has been terrorizing Kenya since its forces deployed as part of the African Union Mission to Somalia in a bid to flush out al-Shabaab.

From Bad to Worse

Since the government of president Abdel Fattah el-Sisi took power in Egypt after overthrowing the democratically-elected President Mohamed Morsi in 2013 after just two years in office, the North African country has been hostile to press freedom and put in place strict internet

editorial rules. Morsi died in court on June 17, provoking an outcry against his alleged mistreatment in prison and denial of medical care.

On December 20, 2016, an Egyptian national and journalist for the Qatari network Al Jazeera, Mohammed Hussein, was arrested when he returned to Egypt for his annual leave. Hussein, who remains detained to this day without trial, was accused by Egypt's interior ministry of "disseminating false news and receiving monetary funds from foreign authorities in order to defame the state's reputation." Despite a court order for his release being upheld in May, Egyptian authorities have opened a new investigation against him.

On February 18, an American journalist, David Kirkpatrick, was held for seven hours without food or water before being sent back on a flight to London. According to Al Jazeera, Kirkpatrick, the former New York Times Cairo bureau chief, was held at the airport where his mobile phone was confiscated. The government is yet to offer any explanation on the grounds of his blocked entry.

Since coming to power, Sisi instituted a regime with an even more appalling human rights record than that of Morsi's predecessor, Hosni Mubarak, who ruled Egypt from 1981 to 2011, before becoming one of the most prominent leaders to fall in the Arab Spring.

Sisi's government has been accused of detaining at least 60,000 political prisoners either without a fair trial or no trial at all. According to Human Rights Watch, the president has used counterterrorism laws to prosecute peaceful dissidents, while the police and the national security agency have systematically used torture and enforced disappearances.

On April 20, Egyptians voted in a referendum to amend the country's constitution that will allow Sisi to stay in power until 2030 if he wins the next elections in 2024. The amendments, approved by the electoral body on April 23, also give the military vast powers to intervene in the political process without being accused of

overstepping its role, as well as giving the president powers over judicial appointments.

In a country with extensive censorship restrictions on social media and independent news sites being shut down for criticizing the government, many see these amendments as paving the way for outright dictatorship.

Crop of New Visionaries

Young Africans who have yearned for change or showed signs of rebellion have been met with a robust response. In 2017, when 37-year-old Rwandan businesswoman and women's rights activist Diane Shima Rwigyira announced that she would be running for office against veteran politician and current president, Paul Kagame, she was arrested alongside her mother and sister. Rwigyira and her mother were charged with forgery and tax evasion.

Rwigyira, a fierce critic of Kagame, was earlier barred by the Rwandan electoral authorities citing her use of names of deceased people on her list of signatures as well as the names of others who belong to a rival political party. She was unlawfully detained along with her mother for over a year and charged with treason, facing 20 years in prison had the court found her guilty.

Her story could well be related to that of Ugandan pop star-turned-politician Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu, better known as Bobi Wine. The ardent critic of long-serving President Yoweri Museveni, who has been in power since 1986, was detained following a political campaign in the northwestern town of Arua last August. Ugandan authorities said Wine was among the group who threw stones at the president's convoy, charging him with treason. Upon his release, Wine, who visibly struggled to walk during his court hearing and alleged he was tortured in detention, had to seek medical treatment in the United States.

Wine was again arrested on April 29 and held for three days in a maximum-security prison. He was charged with incitement and leading anti-government protests, which the court said he

committed in July 2018. But Wine is popular among the youth and has just announced he will be running for president in the elections due in 2021.

Uganda is one of many African countries where demonstrations are often met with the use of teargas, water cannon, rubber bullets and, in some cases, live bullets to disperse crowds despite most of the countries' constitutions allowing for peaceful protest. The Ugandan government has also gone as far as tracking down social media activists who use the internet to advocate for change. Despite continued public outcry and pressure from the international community, there are no signs political detentions across Africa will be stopping any time soon.

Not Enough

In March this year, Congo's newly elected president, Felix Tshisekedi, freed 700 political prisoners who were detained by his predecessor, Joseph Kabila. In Sudan, former President Omar al-Bashir ordered, on International Women's Day, the release of women political prisoners detained during protests that have rocked Sudan since December 2018.

That was not enough to quell public unrest as protest continued. Giving into pressure, the military suspended the constitution and arrested al-Bashir on April 11. But talks between the opposition and the military stalled after the two parties failed to reach an agreement on the transition to civilian rule. The opposition has accused Egypt, United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia of interfering.

On May 13, Sudan's prosecutor announced that Omar al-Bashir had been charged with the killing of protestors. This came few weeks after the prosecutor had ordered al-Bashir to be interrogated for money laundering and financing terrorism. Al-Bashir is also wanted by the International Criminal Court for genocide and war crimes and genocide in Darfur, where some 300,000 were killed.

June 3 marked the worst violence in the crisis as the country's infamous Rapid Support Forces

— formerly the Janjaweed militia that brutalized Darfur — attacked and burned down the protesters' camp, killing at least 30. As a result, the African Union suspended Sudan's membership, but condemnations of violence by the United Nations, Britain, Norway and the US seem to have fallen on deaf ears in Khartoum. While the ruling military council and the opposition did sign a deal on July 17 agreeing on a transitional period to full civilian rule, whether the army will relinquish its three-decade hold on power is still under question.

This all makes for a grim picture of human rights and African democracy. But people are becoming more empowered and positively aggressive, getting their voices back and ready to risk it all to keep the leaders in check. Across the continent, Africans — especially the younger generation — have united thanks to the use of internet and cross-border university enrollment, finding that they may be fighting the same cause.

With a youth population of 226 million, Africa seems to be headed in the right direction when it comes to political reform. The long wait for democracy could be nearing its goal in the next decades after almost a century of dangerous, hard work and resistance by previous generations.

Africa's young people can see that the old guard failed to make any meaningful changes to benefit the continent. Recently, youths in Algeria and France played a major role in ousting President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who had ruled for two decades and was planning to run for the presidency in the April elections before giving in to protests. It is now only a matter of time. In the next two decades, most of the long-serving "African presidents for life" will not be in power, driven out not by age but by demands for change and a brighter future by the youth. As witnessed in Uganda, Algeria and Sudan, among others, the continent is suddenly very alert.

For the first time in history, an African president, South Africa's Jacob Zuma, was forced to resign and is currently under official inquiry for corruption. Although there is still work to be

done for democracy across the continent, Africa is on its way.

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Is South Africa Heading for a Storm?

Stephen Chan

November 26, 2019

There is only so much a technocratic president can do to steer South Africa toward the dream of an equal rainbow nation in which all had a share.

Despite having a technocratic president in Cyril Ramaphosa, are the structural underpinnings of the economy so weak that South Africa's future is endangered? Allied to weak economic foundations are the questions of corruption and extremely poor public administration. The mismanagement at both the Electricity Supply Commission and South African Airways have raised eyebrows around the world. The constant lack of electricity not only means huge power outages for homes, but also constitutes a disincentive for industrial investors.

There is a huge concentration of population in the country's urban areas, but 29.1% of the working age population are unemployed, although some calculations put the number at 38.5%. Many of these join the resistance against immigrants who are seen as taking what jobs there are. They basically form an urban underclass of growing volatility and, of course, are drawn toward the deliberately inflammatory and mobilizing rhetoric of the likes of Julius Malema.

And, in fact, now that the Democratic Alliance (DA) has imploded, with its key black leaders like Mmusi Maimane having resigned from the party, Malema's Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) form the only real parliamentary and

populist opposition to Ramaphosa's African National Congress (ANC) government.

There is a tiny but extremely wealthy elite who are seen by ANC members and non-ANC members alike as commandeering all levers of wealth. Ramaphosa is himself among these. But he presides over a system of elite accumulation that is viewed widely as corrupt or, at best, non-transparent. Transparency International listed South Africa 43 out of 100 in its 2018 Corruption Perceptions Index.

But if Ramaphosa is no longer able to be seen as a man of the people, can he at least lay down plans for economic change? The answer is probably no. Not only is far too large a segment of the population both non-productive and dependent, but the issue of national debt is beginning to loom large over the country. Official figures from 2018 suggest that debt accounts for some 55.8% of GNP, but even South Africa's own projections suggest it will reach 70% by 2022 and 80% within 10 years.

All this is amidst an economy that grew by 3.1% in the quarter ending June 2019, but in the face of inflation at 4.5% the overall prognosis is of an economy without sufficient capacity to service growing debt, deliver increasing benefits, reestablish working infrastructure, like electricity, and offer a results-led alternative to Malema's populist demands and simplistic remedies for the future.

The rise of crime requires now only the addition of quality armaments to criminal gangs before a form of urban warfare is foreseeable. Corrupt entry into military arsenals could facilitate that. Only it won't be gang-on-gang warfare as in the past. The era of insurrection may be looming in South Africa as national unrest contemplates militarization.

What this means is that government fears of an Arab Spring scenario, involving protesting students, as in the "Fees Must Fall" campaign, is misplaced. The students have not joined the EFF in any great numbers and have failed to form alliances outside the universities. What the

government is perhaps underestimating is militancy that becomes militarized.

Is this a doomsday scenario? Hopefully it really will be just a scenario that never becomes reality. But the economic conditions of South Africa allow for such doomsday scenarios. At this time, there are no plausible scenarios that are positive and which betoken a planned and financed brighter future. There is only so much a technocratic president can do to steer South Africa toward the dream of an equal rainbow nation in which all had a share. It is a nation facing a looming storm cloud.

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For Nigeria's Women, the Threat of Sexual Violence Is Never Far Away

Oyepeju Abioye

November 29, 2019

Nigeria's rape culture is effectuated by religious and cultural traditions of male supremacy and dominance.

Few things unite Nigerians like the numerous stories of sexual abuse, entrenched in tradition and scattered across tribes and cultures, and perpetrated mostly against women. So endemic is this culture of sexual violence against women that it is woven into the very fabric of our existence. It cuts across all segments of society: the home, the education system, the workplace, the nation's armed services, hospitals and even places of worship — places that over 40% of the nation's populace consider a second home where many seek refuge. There is overwhelming statistical evidence to back up these claims.

Nothing exposes the backwardness of a country more than this prevalent rape culture,

backed by religious and cultural sentiments of male supremacy and dominance.

The 2014 National Survey on Violence Against Children in Nigeria found that one in four women have experienced sexual violence in childhood, with over 70% of them reporting more than one incident. Of the 24.8% of women aged 18 to 24 who have experienced sexual abuse before the age of 18, a dismal 5% sought help, and just 3.5% received any assistance.

Nigeria's Criminal Code recommends life imprisonment for those convicted of rape and 14 years for attempted rape. Given that as few as two out of 40 rape cases are reported in Nigeria, it is difficult to estimate the number of rapes committed each year. Yet it is quite shocking that in the legal history of Nigeria, fewer than 20 persons have been convicted of the crime.

One major reason for this might be the fact that most rape perpetrators are known to the victim, and might even be family members. As Nigeria's culture dictates protecting the family at all cost, the burden is left for the victim to bear, often causing major life-long trauma without any hope for justice. To understand why this is so, we have to delve into the cultural and religious factors that have enabled this menace to continue for so long, uncorrected, all across Nigeria.

Context of Rape

The Nigerian woman knows the possibility of rape is always high. She is reminded at every turn that, as a woman, any man who is physically strong enough can decide to demonstrate his supremacy by way of sexual violence.

In places of worship, whether mosques or churches, she is taught to keep her head bowed down and her voice low or, even better, inaudible, to not "distract the men" from going about their business of searching for God. A woman is, in short, a distraction strategically positioned to bring down a man.

This religious and cultural bias against women in Nigeria has a wide scope of consequences. The region most hardly hit, northern Nigeria, has female illiteracy rates of over 80%, with only 3%

of women completing secondary education. (It is here that the #ArewaMeToo hashtag originated in response to the global #MeToo movement, arewa being the Hausa word for “north.”) Almost half of Nigerian girls become mothers before the age of 20 and, with a maternal mortality rate of 917 per 100,000 women compared to an average of 11 per 100,000 in high-income countries, there are significant health statistics stacked against the Nigerian woman.

In some parts of the country, women are denied legal rights to own property. Only 4% of the country’s land in northeastern Nigeria is owned by women, 10% in the southeast and the south. Certain customary laws state that only men can own land, and the only way a woman can get access to land is through marriage. This fosters a culture where women are desperate to marry, not for the sake of the marital union, but because of what she stands to gain from being joined to a male partner, further lending credence to a culture of male supremacy.

This view of women as mere addenda to the men increases a perception that she should be treated as lesser human beings and spikes an increased tolerance for sexual abuse by men who wield power over them. It also makes the people — men and women alike — generally uncomfortable with a single, successful woman without a husband. It is seen as an anomaly for a woman to achieve prominence without the mentorship and guidance of a strong male figure such as a husband, behind whose prowess she takes cover.

This cultural and religious context may be the underlying reason behind the societal pressure to remain silent and the strong element of shame around rape and rape victims. Spousal rape has absolutely no value at all, and the country’s penal code allows husbands to beat their wives — provided it does not lead to serious injury.

While it is true that male rape is also a problem, it won’t be solved by deemphasizing violence against women. When we shift the spotlight from the women who bring up the subject of rape and instead concentrate on what is

often referred to as “rarely discussed male rape,” we end up propagating rape culture, alongside attitudes like victim blaming and slut shaming. As a matter of fact, male rape gains more credence when we are open about female rape and the physical and mental damage it inflicts on women of all ages, influencing their attitudes and actions toward the men in their lives.

Women Owning Their Voices

Recently, women have been speaking out more freely about incidences of rape and sexual assault. The stories of policemen raping alleged prostitutes in the nation’s capital, Abuja, received media coverage. When a prominent pastor was accused by a former church member of rape, it sparked a conversation on social media, leading to more allegations against him and other figures of authority. The ensuing #ChurchToo movement protest saw the pastor step down from his pulpit. The victim went on to seek legal recourse, while other victims spoke out openly about similar experiences, owning their voices and their stories.

This is the first time Nigeria experienced such an open discussion about the subject of rape. Although the victims were faced with long-suppressed feelings of shame, anger and rage, the public acknowledgement of fact that there is a massive rape problem in Nigeria is the first step toward building a responsible society that protects its women.

However, much of the rape still goes unreported, especially among those who cannot speak up, like the child brides of northern Nigeria against whom statutory rape is being committed on a daily basis. Because women occupy few positions in the country’s public sector, and even fewer positions at the top where major decision-making occurs, the representation of those worst hit is still at an all-time low.

One thing is certain: Few men are aware of the immense power they have to influence and shape the lives of women, and very few of them truly understand the magnitude of the crime of sexual assault or rape on the victims. While male education and advocacy against rape is picking

up momentum, it is still far from being adequate. For this reason, the need for women to take up positions of power and authority has never been as essential as it is now. There simply has to be a stronger representation of women in politics and policymaking if anything is to change.

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ASIA PACIFIC

The Military Writes the Rules in Thailand's Election

Natchapol Praditpetchara
February 7, 2019

Thailand will never be a fully democratic country as long as the military continues to intervene in politics.

Although Thailand will officially hold its first general election in five years on March 24, 2019, the notion that the country will become fully democratic as a result is naive at best and dangerous at worst.

The fact is that after the election, Thailand will remain just as undemocratic and most likely governed by an undemocratic administration that has seized and held onto power through undemocratic means. It is absolutely imperative that the international community is aware of this and continues to apply pressure on the Thai government to undergo genuine democratic reforms.

The current leader, General Prayuth Gen-ocha, became prime minister of Thailand in May 2014 after engineering a coup following months of street protests against the government of Yingluck Shinawatra. It was Thailand's 12th coup d'état since the abolishment of absolute monarchy in 1932. Since then, General Prayuth has ruled with an iron grip through essentially unlimited powers that he has granted himself in the 2014 interim constitution. He has arrested

hundreds who have dared to criticize the junta and has gone out of his way to stifle both online and offline political discourse.

The upcoming general election in March is almost certainly not going to change the status quo, as General Prayuth is effectively locked in to retain his premiership, courtesy of shrewd electoral and parliamentary engineering. The deliberately designed mechanism of this election ensures the entrenchment and the prolonging of military rule for many years to come.

From the beginning, it was clear that the military government was going to play a major part in the election. After writing the interim charter in 2014, the military government formed the committee to draft a new permanent constitution, which included provisions heavily favorable to itself before organizing a sham referendum to approve the constitution in 2016. The government essentially outlawed opposition campaigning and arrested over 100 people for campaigning against the draft. Furthermore, the referendum used heavily leading questions to sway voters.

The government's rubber-stamp parliament then passed the laws governing the selection of senators and the election of MP's with very little public participation. Through these laws, the constitution and other arbitrary orders, the government has meticulously shaped the rules of engagement well before the first ballots are cast. It has also shamelessly departed from several long-held democratic norms that ensure a peaceful transition of power. And these are just the methods that are known, with surely countless more hidden from the public eye.

The Handpicked Senate

Thailand's Constitution allows the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) — the current government — handpick all 250 senators for the next parliament. Crucially, these appointed senators will join the 500 elected MPs in choosing the next prime minister. This means that General Prayuth may only need the votes from 126 MPs to go along with the 250 senators

that the NCPO selected in order to hold onto power. Yes, the next election can result in a government that controls just over a quarter of the seats in the house of representatives. Other prime ministerial candidates, meanwhile, will most likely need 376 votes from MPs — a herculean task given the new electoral rules that disfavor large existing parties.

The constitution also conveniently allows the hand-picked senators to stay in power for five years. This means that they can take part in selecting the prime minister for the next two election cycles, thus giving General Prayuth a potential of eight more years at the helm — a total of 13 years in charge. This would make Prayuth the longest serving prime minister since Plaek Phibunsongkhram in the 1950s.

As mentioned earlier, the new electoral system largely disfavors large existing parties. It has been expertly designed in such a way that will dilute the votes for the larger parties by also taking into account the votes for candidates who do not win their district elections. Such electoral engineering ensures that it is highly unlikely that any party will win enough seats on its own to choose a prime minister without the votes from the senators who are almost certainly going to support General Prayuth.

Moreover, new election laws also indicate that the prime minister does not need to be an MP. This then clears the way for a majority in parliament to appoint General Prayuth to be the next head of state without him needing to campaign for any votes himself or represent any constituency. This is a remarkable step away from the traditional principles of parliamentary politics where the prime minister is usually also an MP in the lower house.

Furthermore, the new electoral rules also allow for candidates of the same political party to have different numbers for each district. This again is unprecedented in recent Thai politics and will cause great confusion among voters. It is likely a deliberate attempt to dilute the importance of existing political parties.

Political Obstacles

Through the junta's ban on political activities, political parties not affiliated with the military government have faced paralyzing obstacles and restrictions to all their activities, including, but not limited to, making speeches, holding rallies, raising funds, announcing their policies and even holding party meetings. These restrictions have been partially lifted in December. On the other hand, the government has been *de facto* campaigning across the country in recent months through so-called mobile cabinet trips as well as announcing a swathe of populist policies and handouts it has criticized politicians for.

In addition to a myriad of restrictions on political parties, the government has also held off on announcing the new election districts and election date until just a few months before the event. This has given political parties a very difficult task of preparing in time for such a consequential election, while the government and its affiliated parties have been busy campaigning for months ahead.

It is widely reported that the government resorted to bribery and extrajudicial legal remedies to “poach” over 80 former MPs and high-profile national and local politicians to Phalang Pracharat Party (“Phalang” means power while “Pracharat” is the name of the junta's development policy which emphasizes the collaboration between the state and the people but is effectively just a platitude), the new pro-military bloc seen as a vehicle for General Prayuth to prolong his power.

Such methods to attract high-profile politicians are legally questionable and can have massive implications for the outcome of the upcoming elections. Many of these “poached” politicians face pending corruption investigations and, curiously, many of these probes have been mysteriously dropped after the politicians declared their support for Phalang Pracharat.

The new districts that have been redrawn by the election commission in November 2018 are highly contentious. Many of the new districts did not undergo public hearings and have very

unusual shapes and alterations from the previously-drawn districts. Such blatant gerrymandering seems to favor many candidates in the military-backed Phalang Pracharath. There is ample evidence that the government has intervened in the redrawing of these electoral maps.

Absolute Power

In yet another stark departure from democratic parliamentary norms, the military government has steadfastly refused to dissolve parliament and install a caretaker government in the run-up to the general election. This has previously been done in order to ensure a level playing field by limiting the government's powers during the campaign season. Citing powers granted to him by the constitution, General Prayuth has also ruled out ending the use of his absolute executive power, granted to him after the 2014 coup d'état. Hence, his government can use this power to curry favors to voters and gain an unfair advantage over other parties. In fact, he has already done that through various populist policies as previously mentioned.

Now, some people who have read up to this point may accuse this author of being a supporter of Thaksin and Yingluck Shinawatra, the two former prime ministers who were dethroned by military coups in 2006 and 2014 respectively. However, that is not the case — supporting the Shinawatras would mean condoning a dictatorial style of leadership, mired in conflicts of interest and rampant corruption. But having elected unscrupulous politicians in the past does not give us the green light to now turn to dictatorship. We must strive toward democracy, even if times are as testing as ever.

Upon the conclusion of the upcoming elections, Thailand will transition from a military state to a flimsy, military-guided quasi-democracy. Thailand will never be a fully democratic country as long as the military continues to intervene in politics. Recent reports of countries preparing to normalize relations with post-election Thailand are a serious worry. The

onus is of course on Thais to protect our democracy, but we need the help of our international friends.

The international community must refrain from recognizing the legitimacy of the upcoming elections and continue to pressure Thailand for a new constitution that is fairer and more democratic, as well as call for a new general election carried out on a level playing field. The current military government craves the legitimacy on the international stage that politicians enjoy. It needs the recognition from the international community to survive in the long term. This is precisely why the international community can make a difference in denying the regime the credibility it does not deserve.

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Making Sense of the Christchurch Terror Attack

Hans-Georg Betz

March 18, 2019

For terrorists like Brenton Tarrant, acting in the name of “racial survival,” human life has no value unless it is the life of their own ethnic group.

Very few people probably still remember William Luther Pierce. Even in the United States, he is largely forgotten, except perhaps on the fringes of the American extreme right — and among their detractors. Yet he continues to be one of the most influential points of reference for the ultra-racist right, largely because of his 1978 novel, *The Turner Diaries*. The book is available for download on numerous sites, including — nomen est omen — “Wrath of the Awakened Saxon.” And for good reason. The novel describes the (ultimately successful) attempt of a secret organization to provoke a race war that leads to the takeover of

the US by white nationalists, followed by an all-out war of extermination of all non-whites on a global scale.

It is unclear whether Brenton Tarrant, who killed 50 Muslim worshippers at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, has ever come across the book. Nothing in his “manifesto” indicates that he has. Yet his monstrous actions on March 15 sprung from the same obsessive, paranoid, dystopian spirit that infused *The Turner Diaries* — and which, sad to say, has increasingly come to infect the spiritual situation of our times in Europe, parts of North America and, apparently, the Antipodes.

European Radical Right

It is hardly coincidental that Tarrant entitled his manifesto “The Great Replacement,” the English translation of a French book by the extreme-right writer Renaud Camus, which has proved highly influential among the Western European radical right. The idea is hardly new. Already in the late 19th century, French intellectuals charged that the French nation was being suffused by “the foreign element” (Jews and, increasingly, migrant workers), which appeared “to force itself upon the indigenous element.”

In response, they advanced an ethno-nationalist creed (*nationalisme ethnique*), which made “belongingness” to the nation dependent on an individual’s “rootedness” in soil, lineage and shared history. With the rise of Jean-Marie Le Pen’s Front National in France, “rootedness” (*enracinement*) and, particularly, its opposite “uprootedness” (*déracinement*) became central to the national populist discourse of the political radical right. And with it, the discursive creation of an antagonistic frontier opposing ordinary people who are conscious of, and close to, their roots and a “rootless” cosmopolitan elite.

All of these tropes, in one way or another, can be found in Tarrant’s manifesto. From this perspective, the Christchurch massacre follows a certain logic as the violent eruption — coldly calculated and executed — of an ideational doctrine pushed to its ultimate limit. In his

manifesto, Tarrant promotes himself as an ethno-nationalist, the massacre as the action of a “partisan” fighting against “an occupying force” of “invaders.”

Again, this is nothing new. The characterization of migrants as invaders intent on subverting and ultimately subjecting the host country to foreign rule has been a central trope in contemporary radical right-wing populist discourse for decades. What has given it new urgency are two developments of more recent past: the growing and increasingly visible presence of Muslim minorities in liberal democracies, and a growing awareness that the days of global white supremacy are inexorably coming to an end. Throw in stagnant if not declining birth rates throughout the West (reflected in the “white panic” in the US in the face of demographic shifts) — informed by, among other things, growing pessimism with respect to the future — and you come to appreciate the sense of malaise and moral panic that is, to a large extent, behind the widespread political disaffection that has infected Western liberal democracies.

Even a superficial perusal of the results of pertinent surveys reveals the depth of the malaise. In January, for instance, some 50% of respondents agreed that they feared that “our culture in Germany is getting lost,” that “the influence of Islam in Germany” was getting too strong” and that Germany was too rapidly changing.

Germany is hardly exceptional. Throughout Western Europe, a significant portion of the population feels threatened by the growing presence and visibility of Islam in their daily lives. In Switzerland, for instance, between 2004 and 2017, the number of respondents who said they felt threatened by the country’s Muslim community (400,000) increased from 16% to 38%.

Under the circumstances, the appeal of the radical populist right’s anti-Islamic message is hardly surprising. Promoted by nativist entrepreneurs such as the Dutch politician Geert

Wilders and Austria's Heinz-Christian Strache via catchy slogans like *Abendland* in *Christenhand* (the West must remain in the hands of Christians) and provocative posters, anti-Islamic rhetoric has spread throughout Western and central Europe and beyond.

Not a Delusional Madman

It is hardly a coincidence that it was a white, Anglo-Irish Australian to commit the worst mass murder in New Zealand history. After all, the return of Australian Senator Pauline Hanson onto the national political stage was, to a large extent, owed to her jumping onto the anti-Islamic nativist bandwagon. It was only logical that Hanson — draped in a burqa before the Australian Senate — would call for a “Muslim ban,” emulating her European allies who have called for numerous bans, ranging from the construction of mosques and the public display of burqas and niqabs to the Quran itself.

For the extreme right, the fact that none of these measures — with the notable exception of the burqa ban — has become national law is not owed to the fact that there are no majorities for them, but to the ill will of cosmopolitan elites conspiring to bring in as many immigrants as possible, for the simple reason that they despise the “native” population and have nothing but contempt for what “ordinary people” want (such as a dramatic limitation of immigration). It is telling that in his manifesto, Tarrant points to the defeat of Marine Le Pen in the second round of the French presidential election of 2017 as one of the events that convinced him that nothing could be expected from politics.

It would be a grave mistake to dismiss the Christchurch carnage as the act of a delusional madman. The history of Nazism has shown that even highly-educated academics — professors and medical doctors — are quite prepared to commit the most horrific crimes, all in the name of an apocalyptic ideology. It has been pointed out that Tarrant did not even spare children. Against the background of the Nazi experience, this should hardly come as a surprise. After all,

the Nazi butchers, many of them “ordinary Germans,” had no qualms to exterminate even Jewish babies, if only to prevent them from growing up to take revenge on their tormentors.

For terrorists like Tarrant, acting in the name of “racial survival,” human life has no value unless it is the life of their own ethnic group. Pushed to the brink for whatever reason, they will lash out, whether in the name of revenge or in the hope that their actions will trigger a violent response from the other side, leading to an all-out war between “natives” and “invaders.” One can only hope that the Christchurch massacre won't serve as an inspiration for emulation. Given the rather gloomy atmosphere in much of the West, I am skeptical.

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Can Technology Help China Rebuild Social Trust?

Elizabeth Van Wie Davis

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China sees social credit as a helpful means of disciplining negligent commercial entities in an era of rapid commercialization, economic growth and residual distrust.

The world's governments and peoples must decide how to address the increasing surveillance and data collection — and the resulting loss of privacy — that digital formats provide. In recent years, much of this attention has focused on the rapidly building surveillance and data aggregation in China in terms of the emerging social credit systems, which received strongly pessimistic coverage from the Western press in the past two years. At issue is the Chinese government's plan to “comprehensively move social credit system construction forward” by 2020.

According to the systems' founding document, the optimistic scheme should establish "the idea of a sincerity culture and carrying forward sincerity and traditional virtues." So why is there such a strong difference between the optimistic Chinese and pessimistic Western perceptions of social credit systems?

Many reasons contribute to this chasm between the Chinese and Western perceptions. First, the outcry may relate to the erroneous idea that this information is consolidated into a single file on individuals, combining financial data, purchasing patterns, travel records and facial recognition. Second, the Western perceptions are influenced both by suspicions of the Chinese government and by a Western failure to come to grips with their own domestic electronic collection. Finally, and uniquely, the social credit network mimics some elements and repairs other consequences of the 1966-76 Cultural Revolution in China.

Good Standing

The Chinese government is proposing a social credit network as a desirable way to measure and enhance "trust" nationwide and to build a culture of "sincerity" in a society still suffering from the shattered trust of the Cultural Revolution. The policy states: "It will forge a public opinion environment where keeping trust is glorious. It will strengthen sincerity in government affairs, commercial sincerity, social sincerity and the construction of judicial credibility."

There is no single social credit system in China. There is a wide spectrum of pilot systems, some commercial and some run by local governments that measure different elements related to social trust. Eventually, however, the National Development and Reform Commission, a powerful central body, will have vast amounts of data available. Striving to minimize the flaws of existing systems, "The government is responsible for formulating and implementing development plans, completing regulations and standards, fostering and supervising credit service markets. Focus on giving rein to the role of

market mechanisms, coordinate and optimize resource allocation, encourage and muster social forces, broaden participation, move forward together, shape joint forces for social credit system construction."

Specifically, the credit system wants to limit commercial swindles, sales of counterfeit products, tax evasion and fraudulent financial claims. Not only is there no overall system yet to monitor this fraud by commercial entities on citizens — or by citizens on other citizens — but also Chinese authorities are not creating a single social credit score that will determine every aspect of every citizen's life.

Of the pilot systems, most Chinese citizens — 80% of respondents — approve of both the commercial and the government-run systems. In one commercial program, now ended, the government allowed private companies to pilot systems and algorithms for social credit scores, including two widely covered projects: one by a partner of the social-network giant Tencent and developer of the messaging app WeChat, and another, by Sesame Credit, is run by the Ant Financial Services Group (AFSG), an affiliate company of Alibaba. These private systems appear to have ended in 2017.

Although the commercial pilot social credit programs have ended, commercial entities feature first and foremost in the systems of Chinese social credit. Commercial entities retain their good standing if they pay taxes on time and lose good standing for substandard or unsanitary products — a sore point for people across China due to frequent scams and food safety scandals. Chinese citizens see social credit systems as a reliable source of information on the trustworthiness of commercial entities, social organizations and individual service providers to such an extent that 76% of people queried responded that a general lack of trust in Chinese society is a problem.

Respondents see social credit as a helpful means of punishing polluters, reducing substandard products and otherwise disciplining negligent commercial entities in an era of rapid

commercialization, economic growth and residual distrust.

Signs of Abuse

In addition to monitoring the trustworthiness of commercial entities, the social credit network is meant to provide individual citizens with credit records. The more durable social credit pilots have been primarily piloted by local governments. In these local government schemes — there are approximately 43 cities running pilot programs — negative criminal infractions lead to deductions from the overall individual credit score. The government asserts that social credit systems are also a positive way to bring in those people left out of traditional credit systems, including low-income and rural households.

The negative and positive also extends to the overall systems, where the negative impacts of social distrust inculcated by the Cultural Revolution and adverse side effects of rapid economic expansion are intended to be balanced by the positive aspects of social credit systems that discourage scams and reward good citizenship.

These programs to monitor commercial entities and citizens — both civil servants and private citizens — are being developed simultaneously with video surveillance systems and rapidly developing facial recognition software. China is now rivaling the West and Japan in implementing a pervasive system of algorithmic surveillance as well as becoming a major distributor of surveillance equipment. While there are justifiable concerns that these closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras combined with facial recognition networks can be used for nefarious purposes in China and elsewhere, so far government-reported instances include boarding subways in Shanghai, catching shooters in the West, waking up drowsy workers in Japan, checking bus driver fitness in the UAE and finding elders with dementia in Singapore.

Again, it is vital to watch for signs of abuse from both governments and commercial entities in this rapidly expanding technology. Reported

cases of abuse include Uighur Muslims in Western China, where victims relate stories of being tracked by cell phones, facial recognition software attached to either CCTV or drones, and DNA testing.

According to official Chinese press, “The field of big data in cloud computing is slowly blossoming.” The surveillance of specific political or ethnic groups was designed, as the Western press quotes, to “apply the ideas of military cyber systems to civilian public security.” These cases — especially those targeting political opposition in Ecuador, Rwanda and Zimbabwe — are troubling at best.

With a 2020 goal to get systems in place — although the goal seems to be less a deadline and more the end of a planning period — the social credit network appears to be an ecosystem made up of various stratagems that are all run in different ways by cities, government ministries, online payment providers, neighborhoods, libraries and businesses, according to Chinese researchers who are designing the national scheme. Although many of these subsystems may be interconnected by a network of information, it will not be a unified platform where one can type in one’s ID and get a single score that will determine a citizen’s life.

This caricature of a unified system that doles out unique scores to 1.4 billion people — with around 46,000 born and some 19,000 dying each day — would come with nearly insurmountable technical and political obstacles. Politically, the Chinese government is not only trying to build trust for and within commercial entities and individual citizens, but also runs a terrible risk if it loses this same trust from those same commercial entities and citizens, as it has during the Cultural Revolution.

Western Perceptions

Western perceptions of Chinese social credit systems are pessimistic. This negative perception has at least two major parts. The first part is the horror of seeing a complex electronic network implemented over a few years with its resultant

loss of privacy and inevitable errors. Although the developing social credit systems are similar to the systems in the West, these Western systems emerged bit by bit and are rarely considered as a whole. The second part of negative perception is the fear that the Chinese government is not to be trusted with such data, especially given the history of that government with similar data during eras like the Cultural Revolution.

Westerners are often appalled by the Chinese social credit systems for many reasons, not the least of which is seeing the systems that have slowly accumulated in the West appear fully formed in China. Westerners have become accustomed to losing privacy in small bits — by private commercial entities like Amazon, Google and Experian — and have eagerly participated in rating other private entities based on their experiences, such as doctors, realtors and restaurants. With Uber and Lyft, riders rate the drivers, and the drivers rate the riders.

Entire podcasts exist just to rate movies, books and television series. Facebook automatically identifies people in photographs with facial recognition software and chooses advertisements based on account content. These rating systems that developed over decades become truly shocking when Westerners see it developed in a single leap, much as it is in China.

Governments in the West increasingly monitor their citizens with the resultant loss of privacy. The US National Security Agency (NSA) monitors phone calls, emails and locations, then uses that information to try to identify potential wrongdoers. The UK intelligence agency, GCHQ, with collaboration from the NSA, has been collecting millions of webcam images from guiltless Yahoo users. GCHQ files between 2008-12 state that a surveillance program, Optic Nerve, collected still images of Yahoo webcam chats in bulk and saved them to agency databases, regardless of whether individual users were an intelligence target or not. The collected data was used to experiment with facial recognition, to monitor existing targets and discover fresh ones.

The electronic systems in the West, and the loss of privacy, reached a tipping point over a decade ago. Richard James Thomas, who served as the UK information commissioner from 2002-09, says more and more personal data is being collected and stored, both by Western governments and commercial entities. He feared back in 2006 that “we are in fact waking up to a surveillance society that is already all around us.”

Moreover, Western electronic surveillance has a few known flaws. On the one hand, there is always the potential for false positives with algorithms. For instance, think of irrelevant advertisements popping up online based on some algorithm misinterpreting one’s interests. In another instance, false information is almost impossible to remove from FICO scores based on similar names or some other error.

On the other hand, the databases are being stretched. Alec Jeffreys, a pioneer of DNA profiling, said fingerprint, DNA and facial recognition databases originally created from criminal arrests or investigations are now running biometric network searches against massive state driver’s license data bases that are primarily made up of law-abiding Americans. The UK’s David Murakami Wood, from the Surveillance Studies Network, says that “The surveillance society has come about almost without us realizing.” Although the West has sleep walked into the massive collection of data and loss of privacy, the Chinese electronic systems have leapt nearly fully formed into view.

Suspicious of the Chinese Government

So, although the technologies and methodologies of electronic surveillance are similar in the West and in China, one big difference is that the Chinese government is viewed suspiciously. For instance, there is an outcry that China issues national ID cards at age 16; however, the German national ID card is also issued at 16. There is outrage at the Chinese use of facial recognition software, similar to the systems set up by the FBI and used extensively in Singapore. There is unhappiness concerning the Chinese

government's reading emails, texts and social media, which is done throughout the West, especially in the context of terrorism or to aid law enforcement or for visas, or even "inadvertently."

Complaints highlight the Chinese use of credit scores, like the US FICO score, and CCTV, which is used intensively in the UK. Especially ironic is the emphasis on China's viewing of shopping habits, which are so notoriously scrutinized in the US that shops knew women were pregnant based on what they purchased before their families did.

One basis of these concerns seems to be Western commentators' worries that this information will allow the Chinese government to target citizens' behavior and political beliefs. Of course targeting Western citizens' beliefs is rampant in the West in an age where the disclosure of Cambridge Analytica's massive voter data scoop — a database that combines government voter rolls with social media data such as lists of people who liked certain Facebook posts, commercial data from grocery chains and religious leanings based on church membership rolls — caused popular distress and government hearings.

Google street views can determine whether voters on that street are conservative or liberal based on the number of parked pickup trucks or Toyota Priuses. Moreover, most US states allow campaigns to obtain voter lists, including every registered voter, along with their name, addresses, party registration, voting frequency history, employer and job title.

Clearly, most Westerners give their governments the benefit of the doubt that this data will only be collected under specific constraints and for trustworthy purposes. The same benefit of the doubt is not conferred on the Chinese authorities. While the Chinese government may be seeking to develop domestic trust with the collection of data, internationally the trust seems to be waning rather than waxing. Some Western suspicions are likely based on the former Chinese *dangan* and *hukou* systems that

kept public records and encouraged neighbors and co-workers to check on each other.

These systems played an important role in the Cultural Revolution, and fears are that an electronic version is being created in an era of massive urbanization, where people have left their home villages to work in the cities and live side by side with people they do not know well.

Chinese citizens, however, do give their government the benefit of the doubt both that this data will be used responsibly and that the social credit system will help alleviate the massive lack of trust in Chinese society. Much of this lack of trust stems not only from the rapid industrialization and modernization, but also from the long-lasting and unprocessed effects of the Cultural Revolution.

It is not a coincidence that both China's first leader to grow up during the Cultural Revolution and the renewed assertion that local officials implement a "mass line" — that is, go among the people, talk to everyone and collect and distinguish correct and incorrect ideas — are occurring simultaneously with the creation of social credit systems. The social credit systems mimic some elements and repairs other consequences of China's Cultural Revolution.

The Cultural Revolution's massive discord saw citizens turn on citizens and destroy social trust, which is the main area that the social credit systems try to repair. An important study shows that the Cultural Revolution, in which more than a million have lost their lives, affected everyone in society. It affected not only citizens who were mistreated during the revolution, but also those who witnessed the untrustworthy behavior of their neighbors and friends even when these behaviors were not directed at them.

Another study also shows the continuing loss of social trust as a result of the culture of spying and snitching that the Chinese Communist Party fostered among the population. It is this loss of social trust that the social credit systems attempt to address.

Children of the Revolution

The Cultural Revolution was a formative time for Chinese President Xi Jinping and for his generation. The president's father, once a high-ranking official, was purged in the early days of the Cultural Revolution, and Xi Jinping — thus considered a “princeling” — was among millions of urban youth sent to rural areas to be reeducated by farmers and laborers. Some of President Xi's critics argue that his experiences during the Cultural Revolution support his authoritarian approach; that is, instead of turning against the party, government or leader, he revered strict order and abhorred challenges to hierarchy.

As the Cultural Revolution cooled, one of Xi Jinping's friends saw him choose to become “redder than red” — red symbolizing the Communist Party's ideology — to survive. If any of these observations are true, they certainly lend credence to a reliance on a government-run social credit network.

Xi Jinping, the leader creating and implementing the social credit score, took the trauma of the Cultural Revolution to move back into and up through the ranks of the Chinese government and party, but never throwing off its impact. In 1975, the 22-year-old Xi Jinping attended the esteemed Tsinghua University to study chemical engineering. By the time Xi graduated in 1979, he worked as secretary to the then-secretary general of the Central Military Commission, Geng Biao, until 1982. Twenty years later, Xi Jinping came last in the rankings of alternate members of the 15th Central Committee of the Communist Party in 1997.

Working his way up the party ranks, Xi served in several provinces, ending with a brief but prestigious stint in Shanghai, to be unexpectedly promoted in 2007 directly to the Standing Committee of the Politburo — China's most elite political body. His appointment just months later, in March 2008, as vice president signaled his rise to president and party general secretary in 2012.

Xi Jinping is a powerful leader, but it is an error to assume that the party is a monolithic

structure or that the success of policies like the social credit systems do not matter or that popular support for social credit networks do not matter. Xi's strength is clear: Not only was his political ideology written into the Chinese Constitution, but also a constitutional amendment was passed on March 11, 2018, after his first five-year term, that removed the country's 10-year presidential term limits.

In addition to his strength, however, Xi Jinping has many enemies and a formidable political opposition. Since Xi's removal of the two-term limit, murmurs of discontent have risen among academics, businesspeople and former officials despite censorship and the security police. So far, that discontent has not visibly extended to the creation of the social credit network.

So, while the party holds a monopoly on power, the party leadership is not a monolith. The current leadership and its programs not only reflect the trauma of the Cultural Revolution, but also must survive the political mechanisms. The political mechanisms center on two main political coalitions within the party that are often in tension with each other and promote different policy agendas. These coalitions have become dangerously antagonistic. The success and popularity of the social credit systems may be hostage to these political tensions.

21st-Century Mao Zedong

On one side is the elitist coalition, now led by Xi Jinping. Its supporters come from the families of the old-guard revolutionaries who held top posts upon the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Those revolutionaries mostly lived and worked together, coalescing into a tight social group, until the Cultural Revolution dispersed them. Officials with a direct lineage to those founders, who claim to be the republic's rightful heirs, have experienced a resurgence under Xi Jinping. The elitist coalition wants the party and the state to have more control in markets and corporations, and have an expansionist and nationalist position in

international trade and politics. They are the primary advocates of the social credit systems.

On the other side is the populist coalition headed first by the previous president, Hu Jintao, and now by China's premier, Li Keqiang. They drew their power base in part from the Communist Youth League, a gateway for young Chinese to achieve party membership that is often identified with populist positions. Populist coalition supporters are often without significant pre-1949 revolutionary credentials or family lineage. The populist coalition policies are more pro-market, perhaps because they consolidated power in the new socialist market economy and take a more subtle approach to international politics. They tend to represent the more disadvantaged groups in the rapidly modernizing society. The Communist Youth League has been attacked vigorously by Xi Jinping and his faction within the elitist coalition. The populist coalition's stance on the social credit systems is less clear.

The Xi Jinping faction — mainly Xi's subordinates when he served in the provinces and Shanghai, his home province of Shaanxi and graduates of Xi's alma mater Tsinghua University — initially targeted another faction within the elitist coalition, and then the populist coalition, with his anti-corruption campaign. It directed the campaign against the former president Jiang Zemin's business faction within the elitist coalition, destroying families and wealth and networks of many powerful people. The faction simultaneously consolidated power by filling top regional posts and the top leadership positions in most of China's 31 major administrative districts. The Xi faction within the elitist coalition is strong, but his base is small, at around 40,000 people, and he certainly has his domestic detractors. His admirers, reflecting back in part to the Cultural Revolution, like to call Xi Jinping "the Mao Zedong of the 21st Century." The opposition, however, is not hesitant in calling for Xi to moderate his policies.

The social credit systems, a major policy initiative, is clearly identified with Xi Jinping.

While he is powerful and the pilots are popular, the social credit network is secure. However, if the citizens find the social credit systems to be unduly burdensome or too reminiscent of the negative aspects of the Cultural Revolution, there are plenty of powerful people in China — both within the elitist coalition and in the rival populist coalition — willing to find Xi Jinping responsible and weaken him. While the Western fears of an all-pervasive, socially stifling social credit system are not impossible, Chinese domestic politics do provide something of a counterweight. Chinese citizens want to take the best from a social credit network: rebuild the trust destroyed by the Cultural Revolution and prevent the food scandals and general scams.

The development of Chinese social credit systems does provide an important opportunity for all countries using electronic surveillance to make important judgments regarding the boundaries of this new massive era of data collection. It is not very realistic to ask China to take the lead on this, especially given the wider Western experience, but China certainly should be part of emerging global standards on what is an acceptable loss of privacy by both governments and commercial entities.

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It's Time for Hong Kong to Get Real

Rupert Hodder

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A big-bang approach to integration is needed, but too many Hongkongers prefer the old, young and dispossessed to suffer for another 28 years.

It is easy to sympathize with anxieties over the extradition bill and worsening living standards that prompted the current eruption of protests in Hong Kong. But many people are

talking and behaving as if the territory will not be fully integrated with mainland China by 2047. This is fanciful. The question of who controls Hong Kong today was answered long before any of us were born. In these circumstances, sympathy for Hongkongers is no substitute for a good dose of reality, and sentimentality is likely to be dangerous.

The Last British Governor of Hong Kong

The present troubles are rooted in the snake oil peddled before 1997 by what is now, very largely, an English Conservative Party that was then in office. Like all British governments, they scattered appointments about like golden corn to clucking hens.

Chris Patten, the last governor of Hong Kong before the end of the British administration, was a parochial politician for one of the most parochial constituencies in England: Bath. He was no statesman. But he was good at presenting arguments clearly — and himself as thoughtful, intelligent, intellectual, self-deprecating and wise — irrespective of the truth. Patten ran in a successful general election for the Conservatives in 1992, though he lost his own seat in the UK Parliament. For this, he was rewarded and compensated with Hong Kong.

Once there, his thinking didn't change. He took the view that the Beijing leadership — responsible for the well-being of 1.16 billion people at the time and for lifting hundreds of millions from poverty — ought to make exceptions for an Englishman who still had his mind on home and what it would think of him after the handover of Hong Kong to Chinese authorities. Patten created the impression that he and the British cared about Hong Kong, and that Hongkongers (just like the good people of Bath) would control their own destiny through local democratic mechanisms that he would introduce. He advertised himself and his reforms shamelessly. It was an exhibition in self-delusion and sentimentality only now matched by Prime Minister Boris Johnson's desire for Brexit, no ifs, no buts.

True, Patten was dealt a poor hand. Although the colonial administration could be effective when its military-style simplicity and self-imposed limitations were at their best, Hong Kong never had good government, let alone democracy. The majority of people had always lived in cramped accommodation as they do today, struggling to make ends meet through work, work, work and still more work. There was corruption in the administration, in the universities, in the judiciary and in business. The police worked hand in glove with gangsters. Everyone from the poorest immigrant to the highest colonial officer had to pay their way somehow.

Those insulated by money or a passport to another world might have found life in Hong Kong to be an “experience,” exciting and even romantic. For the rest, it was a grubby, dog-eat-dog existence. But Patten made a bad situation worse by foisting on it the democratic pretensions of an English market town.

Consequently, Hong Kong was left with no tradition of good government and no pool of committed and effective public servants. There was just a collection of tycoons and merchants, intellectuals and professionals, only some of whom might conceivably oversee Hong Kong's gradual integration with China. The field was narrowed further after many of them — hooing and cooing at the world in what D.H. Lawrence called an “Oxford voice” or, worse still, a “would-be Oxford voice” — wrapped themselves in Patten's democratic cloak. They were the ones upholding democracy and defending the people's “unique” way of life.

So, don't blame them if they were incompetent; if they were unable to agree on anything or do anything; if they failed the people through maladministration and petty bickering; if they had no imagination or foresight or just did not care; or if they spent their time grandstanding while others scratched out a living in tiny rooms amongst the skyscrapers.

Blame the outsiders instead. Blame the day-trippers who pack the shops, stuff their wheelies

full of Gucci and Yves Saint Laurent, pour through the streets, clog up the trains and buses, fill the parking lots, push up prices and are generally “there” in too great a number. Blame the outsiders who are picking up jobs, buying up apartments, fouling up the bureaucracy and public services and who, in just about every other sense, are behaving rather badly. Just blame the outsiders.

For the last two decades, these writhing factions have preferred to engage in whatever shabby tactic is needed to get one up on their opponents. Having grown up in this morass, it is unsurprising that today’s politicians and “influencers,” professional dissenters and career activists (many of whom are still only in their 20s and 30s) are just as uncompromisingly bitter, ambitious and moralistic as their mentors. If things should go badly wrong in Hong Kong, well that will only give these careerists the profile they need and another entry for their résumé. They might even be able to scoop up a stipend as a “scholar” at a prestigious university overseas and write books about the crisis they saw coming.

The Mainland

The most critical problem confronting Hong Kong, and the source of the despondency eating away at its soul, is second-rate political leadership by Hongkongers, for Hongkongers. The solution lies just across the border. If absorbed by Shenzhen, Hongkongers would quickly see an improvement in their living standards. The high-quality government that the city so desperately needs would be forthcoming immediately, the political and physical constraints on the territory would be relieved, living spaces opened up, corruption expunged, businesses controlled and inequalities finally tackled as subventions are pushed toward those who need it most.

Beijing is certain to act positively because its long-term survival, just like that of any other leadership the world over, depends upon how well it looks after those it governs. Moreover, Beijing will want China to look good. And there

is the simple fact that the Shenzhen government really does know what it’s doing.

The solution might seem radical, even unthinkable in the present circumstances. Yet full integration by 2047 will take place come what may. I suspect it will be necessary sooner rather than later. At the moment, Hong Kong’s government probably has neither the will to make such a proposal, nor the ability to win enough support for it after 22 years of misrule.

The most likely scenario is that Beijing will increase pressure on Hong Kong’s tycoons to govern properly and look after its own people rather than just administer them. Equally likely, however, is that Hong Kong’s youth, seduced by that Oxford voice breathing gently and languishingly on the back of their necks, will cling to the hope that they can unmix Hong Kong from mainland China. Beijing will then have no choice but to conclude that the slow path to integration is taking Hong Kong over a cliff. Unity will come sooner rather than later but in a different and extremely unhelpful atmosphere — one, it will be said, that all along could have been avoided.

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Is China’s Belt and Road Initiative Strategic Genius, Arrogant Overreach or Something Else?

Atul Singh
September 4, 2019

The Belt and Road Initiative is China’s bold and risky response to internal tensions and external pressure, but it is not backed by an inspiring idea.

President Xi Jinping, the modern-day emperor of China, clearly has a deep sense of history. On September 8, 2013, he gave a speech at Nazarbayev University in Almaty at

the invitation of Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev. Xi quoted a Chinese saying — “[A] near neighbor is better than a distant relative” — and referred to Chinese envoy Zhang Qian.

Apparently, this legendary envoy of the Han dynasty came to Central Asia 2,100 years ago. In the words of Xi, Zhang’s “mission of peace and friendship” led to the “ancient Silk Road linking east and west, Asia and Europe.” Xi reminded the audience that his home province of Shaanxi was the starting point for this legendary trade route and Almaty was on it too. And he called for a modern reincarnation of the ancient Silk Road.

In what will go down as a historic speech, Xi promised to create an “economic belt along the Silk Road” that would benefit “the people of all countries along the route.” Thus was born the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Its five prongs included increased policy communication, improved connectivity across Asia, unimpeded trade, enhanced monetary circulation and better understanding among people of different countries.

Less than a month later, Xi gave another speech in Indonesia. Again, he invoked old ties going back to the Han dynasty. Importantly, he also invoked the 15th-century Chinese admiral Zheng He. This sailor from the era of the Ming dynasty made seven voyages and visited many key islands of Indonesia.

Replete with references to literature and shared memories of independence struggles, Xi quoted another of those proverbs for which his country is rightly famous: “[A] bosom friend afar brings a distant land near.” In a land still scarred by the shock therapy that the International Monetary Fund inflicted upon the country in 1997, Xi emphatically rejected the “one-size-fits-all development model,” reassuringly promising to respect the path Indonesia takes for its economy, politics and society. Instead of inflicting policy prescriptions like the IMF, President Xi promised China would “share opportunities for economic and social development with ASEAN, Asia and the world.”

What Is the BRI?

The Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) calls the BRI “the most ambitious infrastructure investment effort in history.” This effort involves “creating a vast network of railways, energy pipelines, highways, and streamlined border crossings, both westward—through the mountainous former Soviet republics—and southward, to Pakistan, India, and the rest of Southeast Asia.”

ChinaPower, an effort by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) to unpack the complexity of China’s rise, captures the stupendous figures involved. About 4.4 billion people live in countries that have signed up for the BRI. They comprise 62% of the world population. The GDP of these countries is \$23 trillion. Trade between BRI countries and China amounted to \$3 trillion between 2014 and 2016. In the first half of this year, as per Bloomberg, “Beijing signed about \$64 billion in new, mostly construction contracts, a jump of 33% from 2018.” What is this construction spree all about?

To understand China’s construction frenzy, it is important to remember that there are two prongs to BRI. One is rooted in China’s outreach to Central Asia. It aims to bring about a renaissance of the ancient Silk Route. The other is to build upon Zheng’s maritime voyages and create a network of ports that link China to the rest of the world. Asia and Africa are to be a particular focus. In addition to physical infrastructure, the Middle Kingdom will create 50 special economic zones à la Shenzhen, the first such zone established in 1980 as a result of Deng Xiaoping’s economic reforms of 1978.

Although a chemical engineer by training, Xi is a keen student of history. He remembers a time when China was the world’s largest economy in the world. Chinese silk, spices, jade, porcelain and other goods went West, while gold, silver, ivory, glass and various items came East. According to many analysts, the BRI seeks to create the infrastructure and system of trade that makes China top dog again.

Emulating their American counterparts, the Chinese speak of the BRI as benefiting everyone involved. If one is to believe Wang Yiwei of Renmin University, the Middle Kingdom seeks to “promote lasting peace, common security, common prosperity, openness and inclusiveness, and shared and sustainable development.” He argues that China would share “its development experience, but it will not interfere in the internal affairs of other countries.”

Wang claims the Chinese model “aims to promote a perfect combination between a functioning government and an efficient market, in which the visible and invisible hands both play their roles.” He asserts that ultimately the market would play a decisive role, but countries where the market economy has not developed would have an alternative to the failed free-market model peddled by the IMF, the US and the West.

Even as Wang reassures the world about the Belt and Road Initiative, many shudder in horror at its scale, scope and speed of the project. The CFR worries whether the BRI is “a plan to remake the global balance of power.” Could the BRI be “a Trojan horse for China-led regional development, military expansion, and Beijing-controlled institutions?”

So, what is the real story? Is the Belt and Road Initiative the benign win-win that Wang paints it to be, or is it a sinister plot for world domination by a secretive, authoritarian regime?

The Chinese Rise and the Americans Respond

Since 1978, China has experienced the biggest and fastest transformation in history. Its economy has grown exponentially. Deng’s experimentation with reforms has paid off handsomely. With its vast supply of labor, entrepreneurial energy and national ambition, China has come back with a bang on the world stage after two centuries in the shadows.

China’s economic rise is based on mass industrialization. Data from the World Bank tells us that exports went up from a mere 4.5% of GDP in 1978 to 36% in 1996. Since the glory days of 2006, Chinese exports have fallen to

19.5% of GDP as per 2018 figures, but even this diminished percentage tells us that much of the production of China’s factories is still shipped overseas. This export-led model has served the country well and, for the last few years, it has become the workshop of the world. This workshop has supplied the planet’s biggest market: the US. Access to this market has been critical to China’s rise.

So, why was the US happy to import from China? Part of the answer lies in the Cold War with the Soviet Union. American imports fueled the rise of South Korea, Taiwan and Japan after World War II. The free-trade order that Uncle Sam created locked its allies firmly into its own orbit. Countries that stayed out of the American solar system such as India, Vietnam and China remained poor.

When China took to reforms in 1978, the US was itching to wean the Middle Kingdom away from the Soviet Union’s bosom. In 1991, when the dysfunctional regime in Moscow completely collapsed, the US still saw benefits in incorporating China into its orbit. Uncle Sam was even willing to overlook the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests because its high priests bet that economic transformation would lead to political change in China’s timeworn land. Eventually, prosperity would make the Middle Kingdom more open, plural and democratic.

Thanks to this assumption, the US supported China’s entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001. There was another reason for getting the Chinese into the WTO. Importing from the Middle Kingdom improved Walmart’s bottom line because Chinese goods were inevitably cheaper. After all, wages in this country of over a billion were less than in the US. Not only shareholders of Walmart but also American consumers were happy. After all, who does not want to buy more for less?

Not everyone won because of this arrangement. Many American workers lost their jobs when production moved to China or Mexico. The wise men in charge of the US economy told them that their pain was short term. Broad, uplift

sunlands were just around the corner. Oracles like Bob Rubin and Larry Summers proclaimed that a more integrated world economy with freer movement of capital would lead to cheaper products, better paid jobs and a cleaner environment. In 1991, when Summers was at the World Bank, he proposed that many poorer countries were under polluted and toxic industries could move there from the first world.

When this memo was leaked in 1992, it caused a minor furor but most Americans bought into the gospel of trade. Even then there were some curmudgeons like Ross Perot, the populist 1992 presidential candidate. He inconveniently warned that wages would decline because of overseas competition. Even then, Americans were worried about fair and unfair competition. Perot saw “one-way trade deals” leading to a “giant sucking sound” of jobs going south.

Unsurprisingly, this Texan billionaire’s warning was pooh-poohed away by economists at places like Harvard, Yale and Chicago. Even as Perot made his comment in the pre-election debate, George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton proclaimed that trade was a win-win and smiled on.

Economists, the new temple priests of globalization, also said trade was a win-win. Clinton bought into this prophecy with the zeal of a new convert. In 1994, this Arkansas boy claimed trade would allow “all to reap the benefits of enhanced specialization, lower costs, greater choice, and an improved international climate for investment and innovation.” If greed was good in the era of Ronald Reagan, globalization was glorious in the age of Clinton.

In 2001, China’s entry into the WTO gave it an autobahn with no speed limit to zoom ahead. As the US got embroiled in Iraq, the Middle Kingdom dutifully followed Deng’s maxim: “[H]ide your strength, bide your time.” It industrialized much as the US did in the 19th century, by stealing industrial secrets, protecting key sectors and providing manufacturing with steroids such as massive infrastructure spending and cheap credit.

Eventually, China’s growth started making Americans nervous. Some started to worry about rising US current account deficits. Inevitably, the top dog was bound to push back and it duly did. After years of negotiations, Barack Obama signed the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) in 2016, shutting out China from a gargantuan trade deal. Through the TPP, the US sought to seduce the Asian giant’s troubled neighbors away from its sinewy arms. This trade deal was a part of the Obama doctrine, which envisaged the US pivoting to Asia from the Middle East. Naturally, it caused China much concern.

If Obama chose jujitsu, President Donald Trump has opted for a bar fight. As this author observed in 2018, Trump has declared economic war on China. Under his administration, the mood in Washington has turned sharply against the Middle Kingdom. Thomas Friedman, the celebrity columnist of The New York Times, has declared that China deserves Trump.

Now, China is no longer just making “toys, T-shirts, tennis shoes, machine tools and solar panels.” It is competing with the US in “supercomputing, [artificial intelligence], new materials, 3-D printing, facial-recognition software, robotics, electric cars, autonomous vehicles, 5G wireless and advanced microchips.”

In brief, Friedman agrees with Trump that China is now a rival. Its “subsidies, protectionism, cheating on trade rules, forced technology transfers and stealing of intellectual property since the 1970s [have become] a much greater threat.”

In the old days, Friedman argues it did not matter if the Chinese were “Communists, Maoists, socialists — or cheats” but, now that it is a competitor, “values matter, differences in values matters, a modicum of trust matters and the rule of law matters.” Tellingly, a Democrat trumpeter is giving a clarion call for a new Cold War unleashed by a much-despised Republican president. To modify the words of a Nobel laureate, the times indeed are a-changin’.

Chinese Counter Response

Even as the US has struck to chop down the Chinese tall poppy, the Middle Kingdom has played its own set of cards. To counter Obama's China containment policy, Xi did two big things. First, he launched Belt and Road Initiative in 2013. Second, his administration formulated a new "Made in China 2025" industrial policy in 2015. Seeking to avoid the middle-income trap and just make toys or tennis shoes for Friedman's grandchildren, the Chinese decided to embrace high-tech manufacturing. Their policy sets out 10 high-tech industries as a national focus, including electric cars, advanced robotics and artificial intelligence.

In an earlier article, this author pointed out how high-tech manufacturing in brainbelts was putting the US and Europe back on the map. China seems to be aware of this trend. Hence, it is making sure that it does not get stuck in low value-added, low wage manufacturing. China has set targets, is providing subsidies and making foreign acquisitions to close the gap with the West. Its government has also forced foreign companies operating in China to share their intellectual property and intellectual know-how. Tellingly, intellectual and industrial espionage remains part of the Middle Kingdom's modernization toolkit.

The Middle Kingdom still has a long way to go. People often forget that China's per capita annual income is still a measly \$8,000, much below the US figure of \$56,000. China may have grown dramatically in the last four decades, but it is still markedly poorer than the US. And for years, this poor country has lent the rich one money. Over the years, China has accumulated huge dollar reserves. In part, it has done so to depress its currency, keep exports cheap and its factories humming. Yet this imbalance was never sustainable.

A few months before the financial crisis of 2007-08, this author argued that Americans could not keep consuming on Chinese debt. The "Yankee Doodle and Dragon Dance" had to end. That end is nigh for three reasons. First,

American sanctions have dampened demand for Chinese goods. Second, high-tech smart manufacturing is making supply lines shorter and bringing back factories to the US. Third, an energy revolution has quietly transformed the US. It is the largest natural gas producer in the world with prices staying below \$3.00 per million British thermal unit (Btu) since 2015. Cheap energy costs mean that many energy-intensive industries can move back to America. The savings in labor costs are outweighed by cheap gas.

David Petraeus, a retired general and former spymaster, put this figure into context by pointing out that the price for natural gas for America's competitors is much higher. In 2014, he observed that the Japanese were paying \$16-17, the Chinese \$10-12 and the Europeans \$9-12 in contrast to the Americans who were then paying around \$3.70 to \$3.80 per million Btu for natural gas. Since then, prices have declined and the "extraordinary comparative advantage" of the US has only increased. Bit by bit, the US is going to produce more and import less. So, China has no alternative but to try something else.

With so much excess capacity, the Middle Kingdom has come out with its version of the Marshall Plan. It is trying to create an Afro-Eurasian economic and trading area to rival the US-dominated transatlantic one. China's big hope is that the BRI will create new markets for its goods. The country would be able to supply cement, steel and other goods as well as find useful activity for its high-speed rail firms. Just as British firms once built railways, roads and ports in Africa and India, Chinese ones are doing the same in Africa and Central Asia. These projects would remove infrastructural bottlenecks to trade and provide a big economic stimulus not only to China but to the wider region.

This investment is also a way to diversify China's assets. For too long the Middle Kingdom stockpiled gargantuan dollar reserves and got little in return for its investment. Now, the country is investing its foreign exchange reserves in projects with greater risk but potentially higher

return. It is choosing infrastructure because that is what it has the most experience with. After all, infrastructure investments worked in China. Why should they not work elsewhere?

There is another factor at play. Like Germany, China has contributed to what the Federal Reserve's former chairman, Ben Bernanke, has called a "global savings glut." Simply put, this means that desired saving exceeds the desired investment. China is using its excessive savings to stimulate domestic demand and invest abroad through the BRI.

China's Three Big Fears

A two-part Deutsche Welle documentary chronicles how the new Silk Road is moving across high mountains in Asia and other exotic locations right into the heart of Europe. It compares China's construction of roads, railways, bridges, tunnels and ports to Rome's imperial roads. If one was to believe the Germans, China is a supremely confident power with a vision and energy to become the preeminent global power as it was for most of its history.

The Chinese do not quite have the same view as the Germans. When this author speaks to Chinese friends, he finds anxiety inextricably intermingled with pride. They have three big fears. Importantly, Chinese fears are reminiscent of the Japanese before World War II, who had built up industrial might but did not have captive markets in the form of colonies or sources of energy at home unlike the British.

China's first fear is running short of energy. The Middle Kingdom might have coal, but it relies on the Middle East, Central Asia and Russia for oil and gas. The US Navy could block the Straits of Malacca in hours, bringing Chinese cars, trucks, trains and planes to a halt. Pipelines from Central Asia and Russia are plays to secure energy supplies. So are ports that China is building in Southeast Asia, South Asia and the Middle East. Centuries after Zheng He embarked on his legendary voyages, the Middle Kingdom is also belatedly investing in a modern navy. It has

no choice. China is now a major trading nation in much the same manner as the US.

China's second fear is unrest in Xinjiang. Throughout its history, the Middle Kingdom has experienced rebellions in restive regions and challenges to the unity of the country. It fears that the Muslim Uyghur minority might demand secession from the country and agitate for it. Therefore, Chinese authorities have launched a brutal crackdown and the region is under virtual lockdown. Approximately a million Uyghurs are estimated to be in reeducation camps.

Apart from the stick of repression, China is using the carrot of development to bring its restive region to heel. The BRI hopes to trigger economic growth in Central Asian countries such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan so that Xinjiang prospers as well. It also hopes that close ties with Central Asian countries will dampen separatist instincts. In the words of Suhasini Haidar, Xinjiang is "both at the heart of China's biggest worries and is one of its greatest hopes."

China's third fear is that the US and its European allies might put in glass ceilings to stop its rise. Meng Wangzou, a top executive in Huawei, was arrested in Canada at the behest of the US, giving proof to this thesis. Intelligence agencies in the US, Britain and elsewhere have warned against the potential security risk that Huawei and other Chinese companies pose. Chinese investment, once welcomed, now causes disquiet in Europe and the US. In the battle of narratives, China believes that the West has painted its face jet-black to stymie its progress.

Many Chinese genuinely believe that Western media and intelligence agencies are fomenting discord in Hong Kong and resentment in places like Kenya or Sri Lanka. They believe that the West resents their rise and will do what it takes to stop it. Some of this fear is paranoia but some of it is real. There is a new wind blowing across the US. Like Friedman, many Americans do want to rub Chinese noses in the dirt and some of them work in the highest echelons of government. By

investing in the BRI, the Chinese are taking out insurance against Western blowback.

In his own way, President Xi is trying to reassure not only the West but also the rest of the world. Even as Trump embraced protectionism, Xi's 2017 speech in Davos sang paeans to economic globalization. He also proclaimed it had to become "more inclusive and more sustainable." Xi sounded almost American when he spoke about "growing an open global economy to share opportunities and interests through opening-up and achieve win-win outcomes." He repeated this message four months later when the inaugural global BRI Forum gathered in Beijing.

For China, the Belt and Road Initiative is not only about economics but also geopolitics. The BRI is part of a strategy to engage more deeply with the outside world. It expands the arc of Chinese influence and counters the anti-Chinese measures of the US.

Rivals and Risks

China's BRI is causing unease not only in the West, but also in countries like Japan, Vietnam and India. All three have been involved in conflict with their larger neighbor. Just as China fears containment by the US with its bases in Japan, South Korea and across Southeast Asia, India is terrified of being encircled by China's "string of pearls." This term refers to the ports that China is building, which India suspects have not only a commercial but also a naval purpose.

Japan is taking the lead in countering the BRI. It has stepped in to replace the US with the collapse of the TPP. Japan has also teamed up with India to launch a \$200-billion infrastructure plan for the broader Indian Ocean area. Funding power plants, railways, roads and ports as well as flexing military muscle seems to be Japan's response to BRI.

Even in countries where China has invested big in BRI projects, there is resentment and, sometimes, backlash. In Pakistan, a suicide attack killed Chinese engineers in Baluchistan last year. In this allied country, the Chinese work and live

under police protection. In Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Kenya, Hungary and elsewhere, China almost invariably faces criticism for pricing projects too high, disregarding local laws and importing labor instead of boosting local employment. Allegations of "debt-trap diplomacy" refuse to go away. The Sri Lankan port of Hambantota is used as a classic example of this diplomacy. Apparently, China won a 99-year lease for writing off Sri Lankan debt.

Along with rivals and resentment, China has to deal with turf wars at home. Just as different agencies and departments squabble in Washington, reports of fighting between foreign, commerce and defense ministries are rife in Beijing. China's planning commission and provinces are also part of the fight club. Conflicts of interests are emerging between different companies involved in far-flung projects and the government. It might be fair to say that there is a certain incoherence to the sprawling efforts involved in the BRI.

Beijing is also having to balance divergent imperatives. One of the BRI's aims is to gain better returns on China's foreign exchange reserves. However, there are few profitable projects in Central Asia, Southeast Asia or Africa. Another aim is to plant the flag in key geostrategic locations. The Chinese have little experience in evaluating such locations. As a result, the BRI might be constructing too many white elephants with little economic or strategic value.

Yasheng Huang, a professor at the MIT Sloan School of Management, fears that the BRI has huge risks of debt default. Most countries do not have the cash to pay China back. They will ask for debt forgiveness and write-offs. China's already burdened savers will ultimately be left with the bill. Apparently, only 28% of BRI investments in the first half of 2018 came from private sources, down from 40% for the same period in 2017. The fall in private money for the BRI shows that China's policymakers, not business leaders, are making most big investment decisions, increasing risks to the taxpayer.

Like the former Soviet Union, communist China is still struggling to deal with religion. Most societies, democratic or authoritarian, accord a certain sanctity to religious belief. Some like Saudi Arabia use religion as soft power and profit enormously from being the custodian of holy sites. Every American politician invokes god in a supposedly secular country. The right to freedom of religion is enshrined in the constitutions of many countries such as Germany, South Africa and India. China's treatment of Buddhist Tibetans might gain an occasional mention or fire up Hollywood celebrities, but its persecution of Muslim Uyghurs is capturing more global attention.

In particular, it is making Muslims around the world unhappy. This author has met many Arab, Iranian and Indian Muslims who seethe at China's injustices against people who share their faith. Some of them talk of boycotting all Chinese goods. This creates tricky situations for China's allies. Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan might claim that he does not know "the exact situation of the Uyghurs," but Pakistani publications cover China's actions regularly. China's actions in Xinjiang might be increasing risks of attacks on its workers and engineers in Pakistan and elsewhere. Like the US, China might be able to work with elites, but it might lose public support in Muslim countries, weakening the intended impact of the BRI.

Even if Thomas Cavanna is right about the Belt and Road Initiative being "more coherent, potent, and resilient than many believe," China suffers a gigantic disadvantage. For instance, it is building ports, railways and roads in Kenya, but it has little impact on the country's culture. English is the language of government, people watch the English Premier League and most Kenyans pray to a white Jesus Christ. Despite one in three black men ending up in jail once in their lifetime, Kenyans dream of immigrating to the US, not China. This means that once the BRI projects are completed, the Chinese might vanish from Kenya like their medieval admiral Zheng He.

Finally, many Chinese themselves still look up to the West. Christian Dior and Christianity salve their bodies and souls. Xi's own daughter did her undergraduate degree at Harvard. Far too many Chinese are still desperate to emigrate for a better life. The rich still move heaven and earth to get their wealth out of the Middle Kingdom. In contrast, the US attracts talent and wealth from around the world.

The Belt and Road Initiative might have energy, ambition and even vision, but it is not backed by an inspiring idea. That is its biggest limitation.

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CENTRAL & SOUTH ASIA

Sri Lanka's Persecuted Muslims Are Turning Radical

Deedar Khudaidad

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After decades of persecution by the Sinhalese and Tamils, Sri Lanka's Muslims are abandoning local syncretic Islam and turning to a more radical version.

The Islamic State (IS) group claimed responsibility for the Easter Sunday attacks across Sri Lanka. This raises many questions about the existence of IS affiliates in the country, the rapid radicalization of young Muslims, and the threat that extremist Islamic groups pose to the island nation.

Suicide bombings have a long history in Sri Lanka. In their separatist war, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE or Tamil Tigers) conducted suicide attacks from the early 1980s to the mid-2000s. However, the bombings of April 21 are a new phenomenon that has not only rocked the country, but also shocked the whole world.

A History of Persecution

Commonly referred as the Moors, Sri Lankan Muslims are the third-largest ethnic group after the Sinhalese and the Tamils. Muslims comprise nearly 10% of the total population of 21 million. Most of them earn livelihoods through trade and business. Sri Lankan Muslims claim separate ethnicity from both the Sinhalese and the Tamils. Most trace their ancestry to the eighth-century Arab traders who settled in Sri Lanka. The majority of Sri Lankan Muslims are Sunni Shafii who speak Tamil, Sinhala and Arabic. Some of them are Malay Muslims and have their own language.

Muslims are widely distributed across Sri Lanka, with two-thirds living in the Sinhala Buddhist-majority region of Central, Southern and Western provinces, and the remaining one-third living in the Tamil-dominated coastal areas of north and east. Substantial Muslim communities live in Colombo, the Sri Lankan capital. The Muslim political leadership comes from the Western province. The reason is simple. This province is home to the Muslim mercantile class and its educated elite, while the Eastern province is inhabited by Muslims who are primarily farmers, fishermen and, to some extent, small traders.

In Sri Lanka as a whole, Muslims suffer from low literacy rates and systematic discrimination. As a result, only few Muslim politicians have managed to secure ministerial jobs or diplomatic positions. During the 26-year Sri Lankan Civil War, the Muslim community was “the target of discrimination, political violence, massacres and ethnic cleansing” by the rebel Tamil Tigers and the government-backed Sinhalese nationalists.

On August 3, 1990, LTTE gunmen entered the Meera Jumma mosque of the Muslim-majority town of Kattankudy, “locked the doors to prevent escape and began firing into the crowd” of 300 worshippers. Using automatic weapons, they killed more than 100 people. Additionally, the Tamil human rights group reported on the LTTE’s massacring of Eravur town, near Batticaloa, in which 120 were killed. The most

shocking part of this attack was the “cutting of a pregnant lady’s stomach [and the] baby is said to have been pulled out and stabbed.”

During the 1990s and 2000s, the LTTE killed 1,050 Muslims and forced 120,000 of them to leave their homes, lands, businesses and possessions behind in the north. The government has largely ignored the internally displaced Muslims, and there “has been no government inquiry into the LTTE’s massacres and expulsions of Muslims or meaningful apology.”

Sri Lankan Muslims also suffered from periodic attacks by government-backed Sinhalese mobs in the 1990s and 2000s. In February 1999, a Sinhalese mob attacked the Bairaha outlet, threw grenades at Muslim houses and burned down their shops. A member of parliament from the local ruling party, Jinadasa Nandasena, instructed the police not to be present in the area on that night. In another similar incident in April 2001, two Muslims died and hundreds of houses, shops and vehicles were destroyed by Sinhalese mobs. The clash began when some 2,000 Sinhalese attacked Muslims who were protesting against police inaction after three Sinhalese men assaulted a Muslim shopkeeper.

Riots have a long history in Sri Lanka. In 1915, fierce riots between Muslims and Sinhalese broke out over a Buddhist procession passing by a mosque. More recently, riots broke out in 2014 and 2018. These violent episodes over the years are not widely known to the outside world. Muslims claim they find it difficult to live and carry out their business in Sinhalese-dominated areas of south and western Sri Lanka. It is fair to say that many feel persecuted.

From Persecution to Radicalization

Following the increase in attacks on Muslims during the civil war of the 1990s, security became a top priority for the community. They began to arm and protect themselves from both the LTTE and the Sinhalese mobs. They got some weapons from security forces and purchased other armaments from the Karuna faction after its split with the Tamil Tigers.

The acquisition of weapons did not help much, though. Informal Muslim groups were ineffective in defending the community from Tamil Tigers or Sinhalese mobs. In fact, radical Muslim groups who acquired weapons engaged mostly in “intra-religious” disputes. They declared the Ahmadiyya sect as “un-Islamic” and opposed Sufi Muslims, who represent a more spiritual and ascetic form of Islam.

From the 1990s, Sufis have been undermined by the growth of Tablighi Jamaat, who began sending groups of preachers to mosques and other places of worship. They encouraged Muslims to observe religious rituals rigidly and act more devoutly. These radical Muslims insisted on strict dress codes for women by importing the use of the niqab (face veil), abaya (a long dress that covers the entire body of a woman) and jubba (a long flowing garment worn by Muslim men), which were unknown to ordinary Sri Lankans before the civil war.

After the defeat of the Tamil Tigers by the government in 2009, Sri Lankan Muslims gained some respite. However, they gradually replaced their indigenous Islamic practices with Middle Eastern ones. In doing so, Sri Lankan Muslims moved to more ultra-orthodox forms of Islam.

During this time, then-President Mahinda Rajapakse began to stoke Sinhala Buddhist triumphalism to increase his power. For him, Sinhala ethno-nationalism was a strategy to consolidate the majority voter base. His move further marginalized the Muslim community that emerged as a new enemy, creating fertile grounds for radicalization.

The 2014 Sinhala-Muslim riots increased the division between the two communities to its highest level. On June 12, 2014, due to confrontation between Muslims and Buddhist monks during a Buddhist cultural celebration, four Muslims were killed, 80 were injured and 8,000 Muslims were displaced. The attacks by Sinhalese mobs led to the emergence of the Islamic State group in Sri Lanka. It provided a perfect opportunity for radical Muslim clerics to disseminate the rhetoric of the persecution of

Muslims in Sri Lanka and in other parts of the world. These clerics started encouraging their followers to target non-Muslims and “kill them in the name of religion.” These speeches came from groups such as the National Thawheed Jamaat, Sri Lankan Thawheed Jamaat and other local Islamist outfits.

From late 2014 and early 2015, radical Islamists like Salafi groups from the Middle East became more visible. They promoted religious education, segregated spaces for the two genders, restricted women from public life and adopted a more rigid interpretation of Islam that was unknown to the history of indigenous Muslims in Sri Lanka. In 2016, four men were arrested for punishing a woman who was found guilty of having an affair with a man. The sentence of guilt was declared at a mosque instead of a court. Such practice violated Sri Lankan Muslim family law and imposed a narrow interpretation of Islam for the first time in the country.

Sri Lankan Muslims, once a peaceful and tolerant community, are now widely susceptible to religious extremism and radicalism. Even as the talk of “espousing jihadi practices” at home continued, Mohamed Muhsin Sharfaz Nilam became the first Sri Lankan Muslim to die in Syria in July 2015, putting in stark view the Islamic State’s outreach in this island nation.

Asking Questions

Following the Easter Sunday attacks, Sri Lankan authorities have been looking for at least 140 people linked with IS. Zahran Hashim, the suspect leader of the attacks, is said to have pledged allegiance to the Islamic State. Hashim was known to Sri Lankan intelligence for disseminating hatred and giving inflammatory speeches over the last few years. While Hashim is in the news for being the mastermind of the attacks, Sri Lanka faces more important questions.

How can the country prevent the rise of homegrown Islamic terrorism? How can it stop the expansion of ultra-orthodox Islamic ideology among young Muslims? How can it stop

communal division not only between Muslims and Sinhalese or Tamils, but also Muslims and Christians?

So far, the government has banned the niqab, expelled 200 Islamic preachers from the country, and launched a transnational investigation with the support of six foreign agencies. Even as it takes such actions, the government must protect innocent Muslims from the harassment of Buddhist nationalist groups. Their backlash will only give further fuel to radical Islamists and hurt the cause of peace in a once idyllic island nation.

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Whether You Like It or Not, Narendra Modi Is Here to Stay

Ankita Mukhopadhyay
May 23, 2019

As congratulatory messages for Modi pour in from all parts of the world, it is important to remember that the journey doesn't end at victory.

Narendra Modi, the god-like leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), appears to have won another landslide victory. Predicted to secure at least 300 of the 543 seats (347 with if you count its National Democratic Alliance, NDA, partners) in the lower house of India's Parliament, the Lok Sabha, Modi has decimated the opposition. With Rahul Gandhi's Congress party conceding defeat, the prime minister has inscribed himself in the collective conscience of more than a billion Indians. No leader has had such a magnetic effect on the country's electorate since Atal Behari Vajpayee, another BJP leader, in the late 1990s.

Assisted by his influential party president, Amit Shah, and some strategic victories — including one in the opposition party's stronghold of Amethi, in Uttar Pradesh — Modi has proved

that winning an election is possible despite espousing religious hatred and bigotry, and shutting down dissent. It is now probably safe to say that India is colored in saffron — the color of right-wing Hindu nationalists. Modi, who is the first prime minister to return to power with such a large mandate in five decades, is here to stay.

There have been significant success for the NDA in the past five years. Under Modi, India has emerged as one of the world's fastest growing economies and has taken a strong stance against terrorism. The government has also managed to avert a humanitarian catastrophe by evacuating over a million people within 24 hours in the state of Odisha before a devastating cyclone hit.

As India gears up for another round of BJP-led NDA rule and the possibility of a war with Pakistan, the future seems difficult to predict. As prime minister, Modi has continually maintained that economic reforms and job creation are his biggest goals, but statistics — which were duly suppressed by the government a few months back — show otherwise. The Indian economy has been weakened by the disastrous demonetization policy almost three years ago. Unemployment is at its highest in 45 years. Minorities continue to remain concerned about their future in a country that is relying on division along religious lines to further political agendas. There is a lot to fear for in the future, and no one around to disperse that fear.

At the Expense of the Opposition

As congratulatory messages for Modi pour in from all parts of the world, and India prepares to be part of a world order that is dangerously veering towards the right, it is important to remember that the journey doesn't end at victory. The NDA government has tall promises to live up to and has to steer away from impulsive decisions made by the prime minister if it wants to survive in a nation that has pinned its hopes on the alliance at the expense of the opposition.

Rahul Gandhi failed to garner public appreciation, despite much fanfare surrounding

his becoming the leader of the Congress party. The son of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was seen by his mother and some politicians within Congress as the torch bearer for a new generation. But as candidate, he failed to live up to expectations and ended up making a mockery of himself through terribly poor PR. Despite promising India policies such as the ambitious Nyuntam Aay Yojana, which pledged to provide 72,000 rupees (\$1,000) to the poorest 20% of the country, Gandhi failed to garner public interest, even in his home constituency of Amethi, where Congress last lost in 1998.

Despite gracefully accepting defeat by the NDA alliance, Gandhi has a tough road ahead. He has reportedly offered to resign as party president, and his political future looks bleak. Congress has always found it hard to survive without the Nehru-Gandhi family, which has held the party together since India won its independence in 1947. In the words of Ibn Khaldun, an Arab historian, dynasties become decadent by the time they reach the fifth generation. Rahul Gandhi, who is the fifth generation of the Nehru-Gandhi family, is showing signs of fatigue. He now needs to hand over to someone who has a better public image and is more adept at dealing with India's political quagmire.

Congress desperately needs an image makeover, and no Gandhi scion, even the sister of Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, can make that change happen. As candidate, Gandhi was utterly lost, not just at the national forum, but on the ground as well. In this election, he lost Amethi owing to pure neglect. While he heaped accusations on the BJP-led NDA and explored alliances with smaller political parties, the BJP's Smriti Irani swiftly laid out her base in Amethi and eventually won the contest there.

Don't Just Make Promises

Narendra Modi is facing immense responsibilities in the coming five years, the most important of which is maintaining a friendly alliance with neighboring countries, particularly Pakistan.

Supporters of the BJP are asking for an open boycott of Pakistan on social media and are requesting India exclude Pakistan from Modi's swearing-in ceremony.

The strategic release of a movie about a surgical strike conducted under Modi's aegis, along with a terrorist attack in Kashmir that killed at least 40 Indian paramilitary troopers shortly before the elections began, gave the prime minister the upper hand in advocating his anti-Pakistan agenda.

Giving into demands for an open boycott of Pakistan will have major ramifications for India's defense and public safety. Playing the Hindu religion card to antagonize Muslim-majority Pakistan will incite religious violence in India and can open up its borders to more terrorism. A war with Pakistan can be disastrous for India, particularly because New Delhi doesn't have the defense structure in place nor the funds to survive a war, even if it does manage to generate significant political will.

Modi's promise of "acche din" (good days) will be heavily scrutinized over the next five years, both by the public and the media. Despite much hype, the government's flagship Make in India program failed to take off, while the attempt to get rid the country of black money fell flat, crashing the job market and crushing lives instead. The benefits from the highly anticipated Goods and Services Tax, which was implemented haphazardly, are yet to reflect on the economy.

The successes of the last five years, such as India's improvement in the Ease of Doing Business ranking and the financial inclusion program, Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, will be expected to be replicated. But the announcement of more economic schemes needs to come with a conscience that development is for every Indian, irrespective of religion or caste.

A major development that remains to be seen is the verdict on the construction of a temple for Lord Ram on the ruins of the Babri Masjid, a 16th-century mosque that was demolished by right-wing Hindu nationalists in December 1992. Calls for "mandir banega" (the temple will be

built) are spreading all over Indian social media, making the issue even more dangerous and contentious than it already is.

First Things First

The first thing the re-elected prime minister needs to do is make it clear that he is here for all Indians and not representative of the religious majority. He should be open to criticism and urge his party's politicians to accept healthy debate instead of shutting down those who disagree with the government. Reducing funding for humanities research, beating up students at a national university and tolerating the murders of liberal thinkers and journalists is a sign of damaged democracy.

Prime Minister Modi also has a tiresome responsibility of creating more jobs in the manufacturing sector and protecting agriculture, which is the backbone of India's economy. He has already set a bad example in terms of governance by strong-arming the Reserve Bank of India and forcing its governor to step down after the bank asserted its autonomy by questioning the government's decision to waiver millions of bad loans from decaying state-owned banks.

Under the NDA government, public banks have lent to financial criminals and tried tirelessly to bail out failing companies such as Jet Airways, which is near bankruptcy. This needs to immediately stop if India doesn't want its economy to suffer a credit shock.

The road ahead for the BJP is a thorny one. Whether Narendra Modi decides to walk on these thorns by accepting their existence or steamrolls over them is a decision only he — and his soon-to-be appointed cabinet — can make.

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Without Fundamental Reforms to the Education System, Indians Will Not Innovate

Akash Pallath, Ansh Joshi & Deepak Dhariwal
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The education system, with terrible teaching that programs Indians to focus on tests, must change and put a focus on learning instead.

In 2018, Apple's co-founder, Steve Wozniak, visited India and made some fascinating observations on the country. He was humble enough to admit he knew little about India, but he remarked that he did not see "big advances in tech companies" in the country. He blamed the culture, which he saw as "one of success based upon academic excellence" and "having a good job."

Wozniak observed that Indians are a lot like Singaporeans in this regard. They study, work hard and get an MBA. They may buy a Mercedes, "but where is the creativity?" Wozniak takes the view that creativity gets lost when behavior becomes too predictable and structured.

His observation on India might be harsh, but it is not far from the truth. Hard figures back Wozniak's argument. In 2017, the UN's World Intellectual Property Indicators (WIPO) reported that foreign nationals dominated the patents granted in India. They accounted for more than 85% of the newly-filed ones. According to Oxford Economics, Indian startups lack technological innovation and mimic successful businesses that begin elsewhere. When it comes to big players, only one Indian company, Hindustan Unilever, notably a subsidiary of the London-based Unilever group, made it to the top 75 in the Forbes list of the World's Most Innovative Companies.

Just north of the Himalayas, another story is emerging. A country with more than a billion people is now at the forefront of cutting-edge technology. While China has built, perfected and scaled up its own high-speed rail technology,

India's high-speed version will run on 20th-century engines built through Japan's tech know-how and its financial generosity. While China is innovating in quantum communication and computing, India is taking symbolic baby steps by awarding paltry sums that are unlikely to lead to significant results. And while Chinese startups account for 26% percent of the world's unicorns, Indian startups form a mere 4%. Is this because Indians are less innovative than the Chinese?

The New Triangular Trade

In the US, Indians are considered incredibly innovative. A fifth of patents filed by foreigners in America are by people of Indian origin. Vinod Khosla, Vinod Dham, Ajay Bhatt, Sanjay Mehrotra and Sabeer Bhatia are among the thousands of great Indian innovators. A simple question arises: What do they have in common?

It turns out that most Indian innovators tend to pursue advanced graduate or business degrees from American schools before beginning their technological ventures. Indians are a key component of Silicon Valley success. They produce much of the intellectual property that produces wealth for the US.

In fact, a curious phenomenon is taking place these days. Talented Indians leave for the US to study. Then, they work for American companies or start something on their own. They tend to write software and design hardware. The software Indians write powers Chinese mass-manufactured hardware. The hardware they design is produced in the Middle Kingdom as well. Eventually, this software and hardware comes back to India in the form of OnePlus, Xiaomi, Huawei and even Apple phones.

This phenomenon is the modern-day equivalent of the infamous trans-Atlantic triangular trade of the past. For four centuries, colonial merchants purchased molasses, tobacco and cotton from plantations in the Americas. These products were produced by slaves. Then, they were shipped to Europe for factories to convert them into finished products. Ships took some of these goods to Africa where they were

exchanged for slaves. Then, they sailed off to the Americas with these Africans who slaved under the simmering sun to grow sugarcane, tobacco and cotton for factories in Europe.

Today, Indian professionals have taken the place of African slaves, computer chips have replaced molasses and smartphones are the new rum. In this 21st-century formula, India has taken the place of Africa, China of America and America of Europe. Importantly, many Indian professionals, such as Sundar Pichai of Google and Satya Nadella of Microsoft, are captains of American ships that power this triangular trade. If Indians are talented enough to run the new triangular trade, why can't they create new technologies and great businesses at home?

Nonstop Tests Produce Good Parrots

India is fixated with exams. There are easily over 400 entrance exams in India at undergraduate, graduate and professional levels for every field ranging from engineering to hospitality. In the vast majority of cases, entrance exams are the sole parameter for admission into prestigious institutions. The most famous example is the notorious Joint Entrance Examination (JEE) for the highly-selective Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT). Less than 1% make it through the JEE into IIT.

Getting in is a relentless rat race. Any experimenting or going off the beaten path can be fatal. Unlike Americans, Indians rarely get second chances. So, students have no incentive to go beyond the syllabus. Their relentless focus is to crack the entrance exam. A huge private coaching industry of ruthless cram schools has emerged to prepare students for success in JEE. Ironically, these private players prepare students to get into the taxpayer-funded IIT. In 2016, these cram schools were estimated to be worth \$40 billion. They are worsening India's already deep and wide class divide.

There is another phenomenon at play these days. Now, many creative Indian students are leaving the country for undergraduate degrees immediately after school. Unlike the Khoslas or

Pichais of yore, they are bypassing India's brutal entrance exams. The story of Malvika Raj Joshi has captured much public attention. A fantastic programmer, she was a three-time medal winner at the International Olympiad for Informatics. Yet she was not eligible for even the lowliest of IITs. Joshi had not taken the national school exams, a compulsory requirement for writing the JEE. While IIT was hung up on exams, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) swooped in and offered Joshi a scholarship.

Joshi's story is an exception. Most creative students are crushed by India's brutal exams. The nonstop testing environment that Indians grow up in stifles creativity or critical thinking. It rewards rote learning and conformity. As a result, Indians are very good at parroting what examiners want of them, but are unable to think for themselves.

Schools Kill Curiosity

In 2009, 15-year-old students from India participated in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) that evaluates reading, math and science abilities. Students from 73 countries participated and Indians were second from the bottom with Kyrgyzstan achieving last place. There is a catch, though. Indian students who took the test were from Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh, two states considered showpieces of education among India's 29 states and seven union territories. Unsurprisingly, India decided not to participate in PISA evaluations till 2021 to avoid losing more face.

Since 2009, the situation in India's government-run schools has turned worse. The data from the 2016 annual report on rural education shows that high school students of the eighth grade who could not do basic three-digit by one-digit division rose from 32% in 2010 to 57% in 2016. Such figures make a mockery of claims that "New India" will be an innovation hub.

China might lag behind the US in technological innovation, but its performance is much better than India. The Economist points out that more Indians might be attending school than

ever before, but they are not learning much. Part of the problem might be that the country has too many schools. "India has 35% more students than China," but it has four times the number of schools as China. India's terribly-drafted Right to Education Act mandates primary schools within a kilometer of every village. It has resulted in 5,000 schools having no pupils at all.

Unlike India, China has not relied on a token legalistic solution to education. Instead, it has nurtured academic talent and promoted research with iron political will. In the early years of the 21st century, India and China were comparable in terms of the number of top-ranked universities and gross enrollment ratio. Since then, China has left India trailing behind far in the distance. It has spent more on research, hired better teachers and improved access to education for most of its young people.

There are many reasons for India's pathetic educational record. It spends a paltry 2.7% of its GDP on school education, trailing behind other many developing countries, including dysfunctional ones such as Brazil. India spends this little money unwisely. And corruption is an ever-present phenomenon. Many become teachers through bribery and are utterly unqualified. A quarter do not even show up to teach. The Economist rightly argues that India's 70,000 teacher training institutes are nothing but "low-grade degree shops."

When teachers do turn up to teach, they invariably use outdated pedagogy. Rote-based learning is still the name of the game and tests determine cleverness. Few students observe animals or plants around them. Even fewer use their hands to build objects or create art. The government-run school system is so broken that even creative teachers are kneecapped by lack of funds. Primary school teachers get a measly 500 rupees (less than \$8) per year for teaching and learning material. So, they are forced to rely on school textbooks, which have multitudinous errors, are infrequently reviewed and are of poor print quality apart from being frequently understocked.

As mentioned earlier, teacher quality is terrible in India's government-run schools. Once they start collecting their salaries, they have little incentive to teach. No one holds them accountable. KPMG, a leading consulting firm, blames it on lack of output-based incentives or monitoring. The problem is deeper than that. Bureaucrats with no interest in or experience of education systems are in-charge of forming education policies. They leave the education departments in three years and have no long-term vision. The entire system is rotten.

Poor teacher quality and issues with textbooks also affect private schools. In fact, these schools invariably tend to pay teachers less than their public counterparts. Therefore, they attract low-quality teachers. Private schools are often better administered, though, and teachers do turn up to teach. Like the government-run system, the quality of teaching tends to be poor and students have no option but to rely on the parallel education industry to prepare for university entrance examinations.

The fact that Indian students attend both schools and cram schools means that they have little time left for themselves. This busy schedule leaves little space and time to think. This kills their creativity even further. The entire purpose of education is reduced to jumping through hoops in a Kafkaesque system instead of to learn, think or innovate.

Shattered Dreams and Broken Lives

The ills of the schooling system are amplified when students go to colleges, institutes and universities. More often than not, they choose schools and colleges based on popular social perception instead of genuine interest. Misinformation by cram schools often skews their judgment.

These authors, who have gained their Bachelor of Technology degrees from IIT Gandhinagar, can comment firsthand about the popular beliefs of the fabled IITs. "Ek crore ki naukri aur dher saari izzat" (a salary of 10 million and extraordinary prestige) is what many

students expect when they step foot in IIT. The fixation with placement, an Indian term for finding a job or getting placed, in a top company drives most students. It is the reason they choose computer science because it the gateway to Google. Subjects such as materials science or bioengineering are perceived as poor choices because they are unlikely to lead to high salaries. Similarly, electrical engineering is equated with power plants, chemical engineering with petroleum and civil engineering with toilsome road-building.

Too many students think of IIT colleges as mere launching pads for MBAs at the famous Indian Institutes of Management (IIM), the counterparts to the IITs. Some others prepare for the Indian Civil Services Examination that opens the door to elite bureaucratic positions. "Ek crore ki naukri nahi to ek crore ki dowry" (if not 10 million as salary, then 10 million as dowry) is the aim for many students as well as parents.

Sadly, such high salaries and dowries are a mirage for most students. Gargantuan salaries are scanty, jobs at Google are few and prospects after fashionable majors are not quite what they are made out to be. As the authors have seen firsthand, many students make wrong choices. Even when they realize their mistake, the Indian system makes it almost impossible to rectify their errors. Students are often stuck studying for degrees they have little interest in. However, due to parental and social pressure, they soldier on. This comes at the price of exploration, innovation and "risky" entrepreneurial pursuits. In the end, most people end up in a rat race for a high-paying job, which the perceptive Wozniak diagnosed as the major reason for a lack of creativity.

Fundamental Changes

India's system is so broken that it needs fundamental changes, not cosmetic reforms. The authors have three suggestions.

First, India must centralize and decentralize at the same time. Under the Indian Constitution, education is a concurrent responsibility of both the central and state governments. Schools are

affiliated with either central or state boards that determine curricula and conduct examinations. Both central and state governments run schools in similar locations. There are no common standards across India's many school boards and no accountability.

In contrast, in China the entire education system is run by the Ministry of Education, imposing common standards across the country. Federal and democratic India cannot adopt the Chinese system. Yet it can certainly bring in a creative reform. It can let state school boards decide curricula and conduct exams for subjects such as local languages, local history and local culture, while the Ministry of Human Resource Development at New Delhi that is currently responsible for central school boards takes over subjects such as math, physics, chemistry and English. This creative mix of centralization and decentralization might allow India to impose a common standard of education while preserving its rich diversity in culture.

Second, India must adopt a performance-based appraisal system for promoting teachers. There must be incentives for them to teach well and promote creativity. A good example for India is Ghana, another former British colony that is in West Africa. Notably, Ghana won its independence a decade after India. Its national teachers' standards lays down well-defined principles and metrics for evaluating teachers' progress. These metrics incorporate evidence such as lesson plans, evaluations, testimonials, research and participation in professional development programs. Unsurprisingly, Ghana's educational standards have risen over the last few years.

Third, Indian students must be able to make more informed choices when choosing their majors. To do so, schools must disseminate better information about various majors. Counseling must be an integral part of the educational experience. And the practice of admitting students into specific majors at the age of around 18 must go. Universities could allow students to choose their majors after a semester or year of

study. This choice could be based not only on exams, but on hands-on projects.

Lest we forget, recent education reforms in Delhi indicate that major changes are possible. The authors hope that fundamental reforms come soon so that the best Indian minds can innovate not only in foreign lands, but also at home. It is high time for the new triangular trade to end.

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What Lies Behind India's Bold Bet on Kashmir?

Atul Singh & Manu Sharma
Aug 10, 2019

A mix of political opportunism and aggressive strategy have led India to concentrate power in New Delhi, winning over Ladakh and Jammu while upsetting Kashmir and Pakistan.

On August 5, the press around the world noted that India had ended special status for Jammu and Kashmir. The media in the Muslim world such as Dawn and Al Jazeera shone the light only on Kashmir. So did the BBC and The New York Times. This is understandable. Given that India and Pakistan are both nuclear powers, Deutsche Welle has rightly called the conflict over Kashmir the most dangerous in the world.

Yet it makes sense to take a deep breath and examine key facts to make sense of what is going on. Many journalists forget that there is no state in India named Kashmir. The state of Jammu and Kashmir includes three distinct regions: Buddhist Ladakh, Hindu Jammu and Muslim Kashmir. These comprise 62.3%, 22.7% and 15% of the area of the state. This means that Kashmir is

merely 15% of the total area of the state. The tables are turned when it comes to demographics. Kashmir is most populous, comprising 53.9% of the state population with Jammu forming 43.7% and Ladakh a mere 2.3% share.

The statistics above reveal an important point that the Indian, Pakistani and international media almost invariably miss. Kashmir is just one of the three regions of a highly diverse state. Conflating Ladakh and Jammu with Kashmir is sloppy, inexact and misleading. So, why do most journalists do it? Ignorance rather than ill will is the most probable answer.

The Roots of Conflict

Like many a political entity, the modern state of Jammu and Kashmir is a historical accident. During the dying days of the Mughal Empire, the revolting Sikhs established their own short-lived empire. They first conquered Jammu and then expanded to Kashmir. Starting in 1834, Zorawar Singh Kahluria, the Dogra general of the Sikhs, led audacious campaigns in high altitude to conquer Buddhist Ladakh and Shia Baltistan. In 1841, Kahluria ended up with a lance in his chest when he attempted to conquer western Tibet, but the Dogras now controlled a swathe of territory, which is currently shared between India, Pakistan and China.

In the 1840s, the Sikh Empire disintegrated. The Dogras led by Gulab Singh seized their chance. In 1846, the Sikhs and the British came to recognize Dogra sovereignty and they became one of the 584 princely states of British India. Singh and his progeny ruled over a Muslim-majority kingdom while paying obeisance to the British. Hari Singh, the last Dogra ruler, was portly, extravagant and worthless. This former page boy to Lord Curzon was blackmailed by a Parisian prostitute for a princely sum of £300,000 in 1921, or \$16 million in today's terms. Needless to say, such debauchery did not enamor Singh to his subjects.

While most royal families joined newly independent India or Pakistan, Hari Singh had illusions and delusions of grandeur. He wanted to

rule a Himalayan Switzerland. Pakistan saw Muslim-majority Kashmir as a natural part of its nation-building project and dispatched Pashtun tribesmen to wrest it. In a panic, the Dogra ruler signed the Instrument of Accession on October 26, 1947, and Indian troops landed in Srinagar. Even as Indian troops were pushing back Pashtun tribesmen, Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister, took the matter to the United Nations on January 1, 1948.

Nearly four months later, the UN Security Council called for a plebiscite in Jammu and Kashmir. First, Pakistan was supposed to withdraw Pashtun tribesmen and its nationals. Second, India would then reduce its forces "progressively to the minimum strength required for the support of the civil power in the maintenance of law and order." Then, there would be a plebiscite that would decide where the state would go. The resolution remains stillborn till this date because neither party has followed it.

Instead of troops decreasing in Kashmir as per the resolution, they have only increased over the years. The reason is simple: Neither Pakistan nor India trust each other. Besides, for each of them, the Kashmir Valley is an essential part of its nation-building project. For Pakistan, Muslim-majority Kashmir must be a part of its territory. For multicultural India, Kashmir as a part of its nation proves this is home to diverse communities who are all part of an exquisite mosaic. Kashmir is an existential issue that is tied to the very identity of both nations.

Since independence, India and Pakistan have clashed repeatedly over Kashmir. The first war began in October 1947 and ended in January 1949. It led to the de facto division of the region along the so-called Line of Control (LoC), the unofficial borderline that has lasted until today. The two countries fought two full-scale wars in 1965 and 1971. The second of the wars led to the creation of Bangladesh. They also clashed over Siachen and Kargil in 1985 and 1999 respectively. There have been numerous other occasions when tensions have run high.

Today, the former Dogra state of Jammu and Kashmir is divided between India, Pakistan and China. Pakistan controls the northern special province of Gilgit-Baltistan and the sickle-shaped Azad Kashmir sub-region since 1949. It is well recorded that Pakistan with its tradition of military dictatorships has gradually changed the demography of both these regions. It has also ceded Shaksgam Valley to China in 1963 in an effort to seal an alliance with the Middle Kingdom in the aftermath of the 1962 Indo-China War.

After its resounding victory in 1962, China took control of Aksai Chin from India. Until then, this had been a part of Ladakh. Culturally, this part of India had deep relations with Tibet for centuries. China first invaded Tibet in 1950 and the Dalai Lama fled to India in 1959. In the dispute over the state of Jammu and Kashmir, China remains an oft-forgotten but integral member of a messy ménage à trois.

Ladakh, Jammu, Kashmir and India

India's policy on the state of Jammu and Kashmir is a lot more complex than the Indian, Pakistani or foreign press make it out to be. In the early days, there were close relations between Sheikh Abdullah, the Kashmiri leader campaigning against Dogra autocratic rule, and Nehru. Once the last Dogra ruler acceded to India, Abdullah took over as the elected leader of the state. His relations with Nehru soured soon.

Part of the reason was a visit by Adlai Stevenson, who had just lost the presidential election to Dwight Eisenhower. This Democrat met Abdullah twice and Indians suspected him of instigating Kashmiri independence. A newspaper reported that the US would give Kashmir a loan of \$15 million, at least 5,000 American families would stay in hotels or houseboats, Americans would buy Kashmiri crafts and help to electrify all villages within three years. Like Hari Singh before him, Abdullah was supposedly swayed by visions of being the big boss of the Switzerland of the Himalayas. As per rumors, he was planning to declare independence on August 21,

1953, the auspicious day of Eid. Instead, Abdullah was arrested on August 8 and Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed took charge.

In 1949, Nehru directed the drafters of the Constitution of India to give the state of Jammu and Kashmir special autonomy. They drafted Article 370 to govern India's relations with the state. Many declare that this provision is the basis of the state's entry into India. In fact, this article was in Part XXI titled, "Temporary, Transitional and Special Provisions." Louise Tillin maintains that "Article 370 was a temporary expediency designed to govern the state's relations with India before the military conflict over its status could be resolved."

Right from the outset, this article proved controversial. People in Jammu, Ladakh and the rest of the country bitterly opposed Article 370 while Kashmiris passionately supported it. The article allowed the state to have a separate constitution, a state flag and administrative autonomy. Only defense, foreign affairs and communications were to remain in New Delhi's hands. A constituent assembly was elected in 1951 and dissolved in 1956 that drafted a separate constitution for Jammu and Kashmir, a privilege not allowed to any other Indian state.

Even as Nehru threw Abdullah into jail, his government imposed only part of the constitution in Jammu and Kashmir. In particular, Nehru's government issued Article 35A into the constitution under a presidential order under Article 370. Article 35A gave the state government of Jammu and Kashmir the power to decide who can purchase land, vote, contest elections, get government employment, and avail educational or health care benefits. They decided to give these rights only to permanent residents of the state.

Kashmiris have feared that India would emulate Pakistan and change its demography. They were terrified of losing the demographic advantage in the state. So, they defined permanent residency very restrictively. Hindus and Sikhs who immigrated from modern-day Pakistan during or after the partition of 1947

were denied permanent residency and still do not have the right to vote in state elections. Women who married men from another state no longer qualified as permanent residents. Nor do their children.

Over the years, India whittled down provisions of Article 370, but Jammu and Kashmir's politicians retained more power than their counterparts in other states. Yet the state remained restive. Over the decades, many hoist the Pakistani flag, sing its anthem and, in recent years, wear its cricket jersey. In 2007, a poll found that 87% Kashmiris wanted independence while 90% Jammuites wanted to stay in India.

There is an argument to be made that New Delhi has erred egregiously in dealing with Kashmiris. In 1987, Rajiv Gandhi, Nehru's grandson, reportedly rigged the elections a bit too blatantly in favor of Farooq Abdullah, Sheikh Abdullah's son. The losers of that election formed the All Party Hurriyat Conference, which has been campaigning for self-determination since. More importantly, most analysts blame Gandhi's decision for the insurgency that broke out in 1989 and has lasted ever since.

For the last 30 years, India has thrown money and men to solve the problem. New Delhi gives Jammu and Kashmir 14,225 rupees (\$200) per capita as a central grant, as compared to the national average of 3,681 rupees (\$52). Most of this money has ended up in the pockets of corrupt dynasties of whom the Abdullachs are said to take pole position. Yet some of it certainly goes to Kashmiris who enjoy subsidized food, fuel and other benefits denied to other Indians. New Delhi hopes it can bribe them into being loyal Indians. At the same time, army, paramilitary and police swarm all over the tiny Kashmir Valley to keep insurgency in check.

The United Nations has concluded that both Indian and Pakistani forces have committed human rights violations on both sides of the border. Violations on the Indian side have been covered widely in The New York Times, Al Jazeera and other news organizations. What has not been covered is how the oppressed have

turned oppressors. Furious at the loyalty of Jammuites and Ladakhis to India, Kashmiris have systematically denied them money, marginalized them politically and neglected their infrastructure. They have also engaged in the ethnic cleansing of the minority Kashmiri Pandits. In 2016, the BBC reported that between 3,000 to 5,000 Pandits were left in Kashmir Valley, "a far cry from the 300,000 who used to live there."

The suffering of Buddhist Ladakhis has practically gone unchronicled. These simple mountain folk are kindred spirits to Tibetans. They have similar language, customs, cuisine, culture and way of life to the people of the Dalai Lama. Along with Sikkim, Ladakh is one of the two Buddhist enclaves left in the land of the Buddha. Terrified of what China has done to their brethren and what the Taliban did to Bamiyan, Ladakhis have yearned for protection from New Delhi for decades but have been treated like stepchildren. In India's rambunctious democracy, they have been too few in number to swing national elections and hence have been largely ignored.

In one of India's great parliamentary performances that has gone utterly unreported in the international press, Jamyang Namgyal, the 34-year-old MP representing Ladakh, welcomed the measure to repeal Article 370. His reasoning was simple: Kashmiris have discriminated against Ladakhis on all fronts. They force Ladakhis to learn Urdu. Their own language is not taught in schools. Urdu is a glorious language but is alien to Ladakhis and they find its Persian script daunting. When Ladakhis struggle in Urdu, Kashmiris mock them as unintelligent child-like people. When it comes to schools, hospitals, roads, drinking water or jobs, Ladakhis come last. Just as many Kashmiris want independence from India, most Ladakhis want freedom from Kashmir.

Why Has India Scrapped Article 370?

Prime Minister Narendra Modi was reelected earlier this year. His Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)

promised unambiguously that it would remove Article 370. It has done so for decades. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, the founder of the Bharatiya Jan Sangh — the first avatar of the BJP — died in a Kashmiri prison. Mukherjee had gone to Jammu and Kashmir to protest a law that prohibited Indian citizens from settling within the state and mandated that they carry visitor permits. Sheikh Abdullah arrested Mukherjee and, to this day, many suspect Nehru and Abdullah plotted his death. The fact that Nehru did not order an independent inquiry into Mukherjee's death feeds this suspicion.

For the BJP, removing Article 370 has long been a matter of faith. In contrast, the Congress manifesto held that dialogue was the only way forward. The party declared that it would reduce the number of security forces in Kashmir Valley, eschew muscular militarism, look for an innovative federal solution and hold talks with the people of Jammu and Kashmir without any preconditions. *Prima facie*, the Congress party's promises seem eminently reasonable, but it has long had a history of flip-flopping on Kashmir. It instituted Article 370 but then whittled it down. The Nehru dynasty flirted with the Abdullah clan but jilted them repeatedly. And many suspected Rahul Gandhi, the half-Italian fifth-generation scion of the Nehru clan, was sounding conciliatory to win seats in Kashmir and secure the Muslim vote.

Modi and Amit Shah, the current home minister, had no option but to deliver on one of their big promises. In January, the authors argued on *Fair Observer* that the Modi government's economic policies were failing. Investment, consumption and employment were all plummeting. In such a scenario, Modi and Shah needed to deliver on an issue Indians care deeply about. Kashmir was the obvious choice.

External factors may have precipitated this decision. First, US President Donald Trump offered to mediate in the dispute over Kashmir when Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan visited Washington, DC. As per the Shimla Agreement signed in 1972, India returned 90,000

prisoners of war and Pakistan agreed that Kashmir was henceforth a bilateral decision. Since then, Pakistan has tried to internationalize the Kashmir issue while India treats it as an internal matter. Trump's offer might have made India act speedily to snuff out the candle of any mediation offer.

Second, the US is in talks with the Taliban to pull out of Afghanistan. After the Soviet Union left Afghanistan and the Taliban took over, Pashtun tribesmen started showing up in Kashmir. Calling themselves mujahideen, they unleashed mayhem in the state. It was only the US-led intervention in Afghanistan after the 9/11 attacks that kept the Pashtuns fighting at home instead of coming over to Kashmir. With the Americans gone, India has decided to tighten its grip on Kashmir.

Third, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, the Indian foreign minister, is a retired diplomat and an astute strategist. According to sources within the government, he estimated the iron was hot enough to strike. India's timing could not be better. The US is busy with China and Iran as well as internal turmoil. China is targeting Uighurs in Xinjiang and crushing protests in Hong Kong. Pakistan has been begging both China and the International Monetary Fund for money. Besides, India has purchased S400 missiles from Russia for \$5.43 billion, Rafael jets from France for \$8.9 billion and signed contracts for military equipment from the US for \$17 billion. As a result, no major power is likely to oppose Indian action on Kashmir.

What Happens Now?

Modi has finally slayed the ghost of Nehru. Many Indians have blamed Nehru for the Kashmir problem and defeat against China. Nehru inaugurated a policy that focused on taking the moral high ground, not Himalayan heights. He rushed to the UN even when India had an overwhelming military advantage. Modi has already engaged in cross-border airstrikes earlier this year. He has stiffened India's spine and inaugurated a new era of muscular militarism.

For the first time, a state — the only one with a separate constitution — has been demoted to a union territory. Revoking Article 370 will allow Indians from other parts of the country to settle not only in Jammu and Kashmir but also in Ladakh. The demographic advantage of Kashmiri Muslims will decrease. In the short run, protests, disturbances and violence will increase. On August 9, Friday prayers were followed by an outpouring of emotion and mass demonstrations that led to Indian troops firing tear gas. Kashmiris are seething with rage with many promising to “pick up a gun.” India has moved 38,000 extra security forces in anticipation, locked up key leaders and blocked communications with the outside world. The stage is set for a rather tense Eid al-Adha, the Muslim festival that follows the hajj pilgrimage.

While discontent simmers in Kashmir, jubilation reigns in Jammu and Ladakh. The union territory of Jammu will certainly see immigrants from the rest of India pour in. Home to the hugely popular pilgrimage site of Vaishno Devi, Jammu has long been a destination for millions of Indians. Now, those who settle there will have full voting rights in the new union territory. If Kashmir remains violent while Jammu’s economy sees an uptick, then Jammu and Kashmir could be bifurcated into two different entities.

Ladakh is the real winner of this reorganization. Ladakhis see the removal of Article 370 and the achievement of union territory status as liberation. Ladakh will emerge as the preeminent Buddhist enclave of India. Tibetan refugees from the rest of the country and Indians seeking cleaner air or cooler climates will make it their home. A greater number of tourists, both Indian and foreign, will visit this barren but beautiful region. The fact that Ladakh is no longer within the map of Jammu and Kashmir will take away the fear factor of visiting the area. The new union territory will soon get visitors of another kind. Soldiers and engineers will start work in Ladakh as New Delhi builds more

military and economic infrastructure in this remote but strategic region.

Some analysts assert that the Indian judiciary might block the revocation of Article 370. That is almost impossible. The Modi government has relied on some rather clever legal advice to push this measure through. In the Rajya Sabha, the upper house of India’s Parliament, 125 MPs voted to remove Article 370 while 61 wanted to retain it. In the Lok Sabha, the lower house, the majority was overwhelming with 370 voting for the Modi government’s motion with only 70 opposing it. The government had the two-thirds majority required for a constitutional amendment in both houses even though this measure only required a simple, not special majority. In any democracy, judges keep their eyes on the electorate too and the Indian judiciary is not in a position to challenge parliamentary sovereignty or go against national fervor.

Like Kashmir, the Congress party has lost out too. Many of its leaders have broken ranks with Rahul Gandhi and Shashi Tharoor to support Modi. The chief whip of the Congress in the upper house of the parliament resigned in protest. Jyotiraditya Scindia, an influential political scion, has surprisingly supported Modi as have rustic socialists like Janardhan Dwivedi. This dynastic party is finally seeing dissension and will weaken further as a result.

Even as India has tightened the screws on Kashmir, Pakistan has turned apoplectic. It has rushed to the United Nations, expelled the Indian ambassador and broken off trade relations. Prime Minister Khan has called Indian action illegal and painted the specter of ethnic cleansing of fellow Muslims. Pakistani politicians have set out visions of fire and brimstone. They compare Kashmir to Palestine and many promise to fight to the bitter nuclear end. In this outpouring of competitive jingoism, emotions are running riot.

For decades now, Pakistan has been turning to Islamic extremism. It is home to many terrorist groups. Since the 1980s, it has followed a policy of bleeding India with a thousand cuts. It involves asymmetric warfare through proxy

terrorist or insurgent groups who attack Indian security forces, sensitive locations and civilian populations. There are charismatic clerics who regularly preach the gospel of jihad. Comments on Facebook and Twitter have been incendiary. People are shouting slogans on the street. Pakistan feels it has lost face and is itching to strike back.

Christophe Jaffrelot, a French political scientist, says there is no risk of a military operation at the moment. The authors disagree. Conflict is likely.

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Mumbai Needs To Come Together to Prevent Annual Flooding

Karan Kapoor

November 11, 2019

Every year, monsoon rains bring Mumbai to a halt and expose the crumbling urban infrastructure.

This year was an unusually wet one for Mumbai, the commercial capital of India. Until mid-September, the city received rainfall of 2,366 mm, which is 26% more than the usual average of 1,800 mm. This is an ominous trend of extreme weather events, a phenomenon the frequency of which is rising because of climate change, according to scientists. Global warming triggers intense bursts of rainfall because higher temperature increases the moisture-holding capacity of the atmosphere. In urban areas, where impervious materials cover much of the land surface and hence lower natural infiltration of rainwater into the ground, such a heavy and short-term rainfall leads to flooding.

This year, the southwestern monsoon that typically arrives in Mumbai in early June came in late, leaving the city relatively dry for a month.

But then the city received, within the span of two days, the same amount of rainfall it normally gets in the entire month of June. What's more, in early July, Mumbai was hit with the worst rains in 14 years, leaving thousands of people stranded across the city.

Indian news outlets were full of images of people wading through knee-deep water. Cars were marooned across the city, roads were jammed, flights were canceled, and schools and colleges were closed. Excess rains have added to the woes of the city that has the dubious distinction of having the worst traffic in the world, as reported in a study by the location technology firm TomTom earlier in the year.

Down the Drain

Mumbai's rains are a perennial torture. The city saw massive floods in 2005, in which around 5,000 people died, and the situation has only gotten worse since. Not surprisingly, people are embittered, and in the crosshairs of their anger is the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), the richest civic body in India with an annual revenue of 300 billion rupees (over \$4 billion) and over 750 billion rupees in accumulated reserves. The city's residents blame the corporation for failing to fulfil its promises.

The BMC has spent considerable time highlighting its efforts to improve the archaic drainage system in Mumbai. It spent 5 billion rupees this year alone on laying new drainage lines, augmenting the older lines, desilting sewers and cleaning gutters. So why have all these efforts literally gone down the drains during the monsoons? It would be interesting to flip the mirror and look at the other side.

During a routine clearing of the drains in Kurla, a suburb of Mumbai, in August, workers fished out a cupboard, a table, a bed and mattresses, among other objects, which were choking the drainage system. Kurla adjoins Dharavi, considered to be one of the world's largest slums, and has a population density of over 50,000 people per square kilometer. The area has several open drains besides the ironically

named Mithi (sweet) river — one of the four suburban rivers in Mumbai passing through it. Mithi originates in the Vihar and Powai lakes in north Mumbai and runs a distance of 17.8 kilometers before draining into the Arabian Sea at the Mahim Bay. In ideal conditions, it should serve as a crucial storm-water drain for Mumbai during excess rainfall, when the two lakes overflow. But in reality, the river is a putrid drain regularly used by residents as a dumping ground for waste.

Workers claim broken water pipes and bamboo pieces — besides the occasional large items of furniture — are regularly dumped by the residents. Not surprisingly, the river pushes out years' worth of garbage every time it rains. On August 4, the river flowed 4 meters high — almost half a meter above its danger mark — and the BMC had to evacuate over 400 people from the slum along the riverbank in Kurla among fears that homes would get submerged.

It Takes Two

Apathy to civic infrastructure is not restricted to slum-dwellers alone. In fact, littering and dumping garbage on the roads and footpaths is quite commonplace. Every day Mumbai dumps between 80 and 110 metric tons of plastic waste into drains and water channels, according to Vanashakti, an environment group. The BMC attempted to prevent people from tossing garbage into the open drains by covering some of them using polycarbonate sheets. But such methods restrict regular cleaning, and a similar covering of the suburban rivers such as the Mithi is neither practical nor allowed by the environmental regulations as that would affect marine life.

The attempt to control waste generation itself by banning single-use plastic and introducing steep fines for its use has also proved to be a futile exercise so far. One reason is that people prefer to buy fruits and vegetables from hawkers and roadside vendors who still use plastic bags. A change in habits — such as carrying a cloth bag — is proving difficult to achieve, despite multiple attempts to increase awareness of how plastic

waste clogs the city's drainage system besides causing long-term environmental damage.

Instead of playing the blame game, what Mumbai needs is for municipal corporations and citizens to take collective responsibility in keeping the city's drainage infrastructure clean and efficient. It is important for the BMC to educate and engage with residents, especially those living in slums along the major drains, many of whom may have never given a thought as to how their own actions create the very problem that plagues them. The BMC also needs to put in place efficient programs for debris management. Citizen groups, on their part, should come together to increase awareness of the ills of plastic bag usage and public littering.

Mumbai doesn't need to look far for inspiration. When Surat, a city 300 kilometers north of Mumbai in the state of Gujarat, was ranked as the fourth cleanest city in India in 2017, not many recalled it was once among the dirtiest and was even affected by the pneumonic plague in 1994. One should hope that Mumbai won't wait for the plague to turn things around.

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EUROPE

Will Zelensky Deliver Much Needed Reform for Ukraine?

Alona Anokhina, Kateryna Parkhomei & Ivan Farias Pelcastre

May 6, 2019

The election of an inexperienced politician to Ukraine's highest office should be taken as a signal that the country's patience is running thin.

On April 21, Ukrainians voted in the final round of the country's presidential elections. Its result was devastating for the incumbent, President Petro Poroshenko, who

ran for his second term in office but only managed to secure less than a quarter of the votes. Yulia Tymoshenko, Ukraine's former prime minister and second-time presidential hopeful, did not manage to get past the first round. Instead, Ukrainians overwhelmingly elected Volodymyr Zelensky, a 41-year-old actor, who just became the country's youngest ever — as well as the least experienced — president-elect.

Despite having never held public office or worked in public service, running as the only candidate for a political party that did not exist 18 months ago, Zelensky still managed to win more than 73% of the popular vote. His overwhelming victory is as unconventional as his rise to power: Prior to running for president, Zelensky's political experience was only a fictional one.

A lawyer by training and comedy writer, director and actor by profession, Zelensky's track record was limited to playing a president in the highly popular Ukrainian TV series *Servant of the People*. Zelensky character, Vasyl Petrovych Goloborodko, is a history teacher who is catapulted to the presidency after a video of his anti-corruption rant goes viral. With no previous experience in public service, Goloborodko relies on humor, naiveté, and “common guy” knowledge to make sense of his new — and very much unexpected — responsibilities as a head of state.

The fictional character's efforts at making government work for “the people,” however, are soon met with the harsh political and socio-economic realities of the country, which include the misuse of the law by public servants, the abuse of power by political leaders and a widespread corruption in the public administration. Rather than dissuading him, however, these challenges encourage Goloborodko to make good on his promise of reforming the country.

Stranger Than Fiction

The fact that fictional Goloborodko's and real-life Zelensky's careers are so successful, despite

their lack of experience, tells a lot about the disenchantment that Ukrainians feel about politics. More than five years after the Euromaidan revolution in February 2014, change in the country's political system and institutions has been snail-paced. Since the uprising ousted the pro-Moscow president, Viktor Yanukovich, Ukraine has been slowly pursuing a series of constitutional reforms, mainly aimed at curbing presidential powers, strengthening the role of the country's parliament, the Verkhovna Rada, and increasing the overall efficiency of the state.

According to some analysts, the undertaking of the reforms that Euromaidan — also called the “Revolution of Dignity” — protesters sought did in fact start in 2016, but slowed down soon after. Some of the reasons for the delay include the resistance to changes by oligarchs whose interests are prioritized by the government, the presence of pro-government members on the constitutional court, opposition and conflict within parliament itself, and the continued state of warfare in the country's eastern Donbas region following the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014.

Despite all these challenges, some of the reforms were successful. These included decentralization, the establishment of a public procurement system and making the economy less reliant on bureaucracy. Some of the tangible changes brought about by these reforms include a 2011 decision by parliament to simplify and/or abolish the requirements for the registration and licensing of small businesses. In 2012, the constitutional court, in response to a judicial challenge on whether the setting up of voting stations abroad at Ukraine's diplomatic missions was legal, decided to uphold the principles of equal voting right and equal public participation in the elections. Together these measures contributed to increasing the democratic legitimacy of the state.

Other reforms were not as successful. These include land reform, the privatization of large enterprises, the reform of security services and fiscal reform. Regardless of their success, it can be said that ordinary people in Ukraine have not

yet felt a significant positive change in government, expressing in a 2017 national survey that “they neither feel the change in the general state of affairs in the country nor on the everyday life level.” The poll, conducted by the Democratic Initiatives Foundation, showed that 42% of the respondents claimed to support government decentralization reform, but only 16% of them indicated that they felt a positive change as a result of its implementation. In contrast, more than half of the respondents (55%) indicated they felt no change at all.

According to the authorities, the main reason for the perception of failure is the time that the reforms will take to deliver visible results. Given that most of them require a long-term approach and changes, their effects will not be seen anytime soon. To determine whether these reforms will be a long-term success — or are already a failure — it is possible to look closer at what is happening in the education and health care sectors.

Health and Education

Firstly, public health financing is ineffective, since funds are paid to medical institutions rather than spent directly on the provision of medical care for patients. Despite the guaranteed free health care, state funding accounts only for half of the total amount of medical expenses. The rest is funded from the pockets of patients, and often such a fee is not officially registered or even considered. Families often complain that it is difficult for them to pay for medication and services.

To make up for these shortcomings, it is not uncommon to bribe medical doctors in order to secure better treatment than that which would be commonly provided. Under this practice, patients or their families encourage the general practitioner in charge to secure better and preferential treatment.

Currently, Ukraine is among the world’s worst countries in terms of equality of access to medical care and is one of five countries that do not have a specific policy aimed at providing

access to medical services for children. For instance, according to The Lancet’s Healthcare Access and Quality Index, Ukraine ranks second to last among Central and Eastern European countries, with only Russia scoring below. This is why health care reform is probably the one with the highest priority among them all.

Secondly, but not less importantly, the education reform’s implementation is of crucial importance to the country. The new law, which the Ministry of Education deputies and experts have been preparing for almost three years, will supersede the one that has been in force since 1991. The government has committed to at least 7% of GDP to be allocated for education every year from now on; comparatively, in 2016, this figure was about 5%. Although by Western European standards the amount allocated to education is substantial, these financial resources will only be sufficient to implement educational reform if the use of resources remains under continued scrutiny.

Moreover, one of the main changes brought about by the reform is the return to a 12-year education system, which prevails in other countries. Although by 1999 Ukraine had already switched to 12-year education, in 2010 the Ministry of Education implemented a return to the 11-year system. Now, the ministry is doing yet another U-turn as new teaching methods could not be “squeezed” into 11 years of study. This newest extension will enable schools to increase the duration of vocational training for one year, hence launching a full-fledged senior specialized school model, which will be closer to the Western European education models.

By other countries’ standards, the Ukrainian political system is a tricky one. It can be argued that, although the majority of the Ukrainian population is eager for change, various sectors of it are neither ready for, nor willing to pursue, such changes. Depending on which reform one talks about, opposition comes from either the rural communities, the older generations or even individuals involved in the so-called shadow economy. The question regarding whether the

implementation of these reforms will be successful remains therefore an open one.

The high levels of corruption prevalent in almost all sectors of the economy, the post-Soviet mentality and nostalgia held in certain strata of society, and the economic challenges involved in the redistribution and reallocation of material and human resources are still some of the major obstacles to the implementation of reforms in Ukraine. However, for various other groups and the younger generation, the immediate implementation of such reforms is crucial. Should the reforms slow down further or stop, they could bring back the dynamics of corruption that prevailed in previous decades.

The election of an inexperienced politician to Ukraine's highest office should be taken as a signal that the country's patience is running thin. All things considered, real-life Volodymyr Zelensky's political career and party might have emerged from a televised political satire. But his fictional alter ego still provides wise advice for the president-elect: "Stop it. You laughed, I laughed, we all had some fun. [But] a common guy can't become president in our country." Until he did.

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Boris Johnson: Bumbling Buffoon, Pied Piper or Churchillian Statesman?

Atul Singh
July 24, 2019

Boris Johnson, the most charismatic politician of his generation, takes over the United Kingdom despite his dodgy past and questionable character.

The history of England and indeed the United Kingdom can be summed up as a ding-dong battle between cavaliers and roundheads. Like Gordon Brown, Theresa May is a roundhead. Both are children of men of the church. They work hard, find it hard to delegate and are not exactly the life of the party. Like Tony Blair, Boris Johnson is a cavalier. Both went to public schools, are preternaturally confident and like the fine things in life. Yet again, a dashing cavalier is replacing a dour roundhead as prime minister.

The Favorable View

To those who support him, Johnson is witty, funny, charming, clever, insouciant, energetic and eloquent. At worst, they find this Old Etonian is a lovable Falstaffian rogue. Like Lord Flashheart, Johnson takes risks, flies high and admirably secures a decent number of "notches on [his] phallocratic phallus." Some love-crazed supporters even find him reminiscent of Henry VIII. Like the portly 16th-century king, he will lead the blessed green isle of England to freedom from Brussels, the Rome of our times.

It is indubitably true that Johnson is one of the most charismatic politicians worldwide. He brings extraordinary energy to the table, connects exquisitely with people and carries himself with the confidence of the "world king" that he once wanted to be. Many Tories tell this author that Johnson could be a better bet than micromanager May because he can delegate. The say nimble-footed Johnson was a terrific mayor of London, ran the 2012 Olympics splendidly well and will do a smashing job as prime minister.

Johnson thinks so too. He compares himself to Winston Churchill. In fact, he has written a biography of the great man — another journalist-turned-politician who came to power during dark times. John Kampfner called Johnson's biography of Churchill "self-serving but spirited." Even though Kampfner opposes Brexit and writes for The Guardian, he could not help but be seduced by Johnson's writing. This raises the question: Why?

Perhaps Johnson appeals to something subliminal in the British psyche. The new Tory leader's braggadocio is redolent of an era when Britannia did rule the waves, when a mere 6,000 British colonizers lorded it over 200 million Indians and when the pound was the undisputed currency of the world. If only the British could recover some of their mojo à la Johnson, then they would yet again saunter to the broad, sunlit uplands of their past.

The Not-So-Favorable View

To those who are appalled by him, Johnson has never had a fling, leave aside a relationship with the truth. He has repeatedly lied to his bosses, colleagues and the public. His housemaster concluded that Johnson "honestly believes it is churlish of us not to regard him as an exception – one who should be free of the network of obligations which binds everyone else. Boris is pretty impressive when success can be achieved by pure intelligence, unaccompanied by hard work." It is therefore no surprise that many regard Johnson as an insufferable toff with a sense of entitlement that he was born to rule.

Tory grandees such as John Major, Michael Heseltine and Kenneth Clarke find Johnson a touch ridiculous. Former colleagues such as Sir Alan Duncan, Philip Hammond, Anne Milton, David Gauke and Rory Stewart have refused to serve under the new Conservative Party leader. They will be hitting the backbenches in Parliament. Historian Lord Hennessy is anxious about Johnson because he seems to be a politician "who's inhaled his own legend before he's created it." The noted historian worries about Johnson's "personal and political narcissism." Sir Nicholas Soames, another Old Etonian, a friend of Johnson's and Churchill's grandson, fears the new prime minister "could bugger it up."

Soames is right to fear Johnson's premiership. This scholar boy from Eton and Balliol first made a name for himself as a prurient purveyor of salacious headlines from Brussels. Apparently, the bloody Europeans had nothing to do but interfere with British sausages, manure and even

condoms. Needless to say, some of Johnson's fellow journalists found him to be "fundamentally intellectually dishonest."

Furthermore, Johnson's affairs, offensive remarks and erratic behavior have earned him a reputation of a bumbling buffoon who skates through life by only doing the bare minimum. It is for this reason that Michael Howard packed him off to Liverpool to offer a groveling apology and sacked him for lying about an affair.

Not Really a Brexiteer

The biggest cloud that hangs over Boris Johnson is the fact that he is not really a Brexiteer. Before the 2016 referendum on the UK's membership to the European Union, Johnson told Soames that he was not an outer. Therefore, people rightly suspect him of leading the "leave" campaign out of shameless opportunism. Johnson calculated that he would lead a robust campaign, lose gallantly, win the support of Tory euroskeptics and emerge as Prime Minister David Cameron's successor. When the British unexpectedly voted for Brexit, Johnson's plan backfired. He suffered a meltdown and failed to seize the reins of power.

Now, three years later, a reenergized Johnson promises to deliver Brexit, unite the country and defeat the Labour Party's Jeremy Corbyn. This Pied Piper of London has thundered, "Dude, we are going to get Brexit done on October 31." No one yet quite knows how.

Like his hero, Winston Churchill, Johnson is taking charge at a perilous time. Yet there is one striking difference. A former military man, Churchill was a conviction politician who had railed against appeasement during his long, dark years in the wilderness. So far, Johnson has been a politician with no convictions except the unshakable belief that he was born for Number 10. With the Pied Piper of Brexit in charge, Great Britain may not be as great as before.

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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," as well as co-editor, with Kevin Dixon, of "Studying Football."

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.

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Can Anything Unite the United Kingdom?

Peter Isackson

December 11, 2019

Since 2016, the UK has found itself in a rivalry with the ineffable Donald Trump to see who could produce the most melodrama to dominate the political news cycle in the West.

For all its complexity, everyone understands what the US is. But what is the United Kingdom? Most people around the world have never quite understood what geographical and political unity is referred to in its name. Nor do they understand the question of where its boundaries are located.

The debate about the Irish backstop means that the British themselves are now unsure about the answer to that question. Even more mysterious to non-Brits is the question of how a declared “constitutional monarchy” with a high-profile royal family is governed. Many who wonder about what is united in the United Kingdom also ask themselves the question: What is great about Great Britain? The nation is on the fringes of Europe and about to drift out to sea, guided by its new and as yet unelected navigator, Prime Minister Boris Johnson. Can it really be called both great and united?

Never has the official name of a nation contained a more misleading description of its reality. It’s true that every so often — thanks to the mysterious and anonymous Electoral College that, in recent years, elected two luminous US presidents, George W. Bush and Donald Trump, who actually lost the popular vote — the world is reminded that the 50 states of the US have, from the point of view of pure democracy, never been formally united. But no one inside or outside the US entertains any doubts about the unified power and universal purpose of the nation, however chaotic its leadership and however contradictory its policies.

The Crisis of Authority

In contrast, the UK clearly lost both its sense of power and unique purpose with the dissolution of the British Empire following World War II. It has been struggling to find it ever since. After a decade of “angry young men” who appeared to be lost souls, The Beatles, Carnaby Street and Monty Python brought what was once remembered as “Merry England” back to life in terms of cultural impact in the second half of the 1960s. In the 1980s, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, embracing the sobriquet of the “Iron Lady,” profiting from the windfall of North Sea oil, endowed the nation with a form of ideological leadership that helped define the belief system of late 20th-century globalized capitalism.

But Thatcher couldn't have done it alone. She thrived in the shadow of US President Ronald Reagan. Whereas she earned her stripes and achieved her glory thanks to the skirmish called the Falklands War, Reagan stepped up in front of the microphones and TV cameras to lead the war against an "evil empire." Eventually (some people say) his policies defeated it because that empire imploded in 1989.

Thatcher nevertheless committed Britain to a position of relative strength in the expanding European Union largely because of her belief in the commercial value of the European single market. She never believed in the EU as a political entity. For a while, though, she felt there was a real possibility of achieving "Thatcherism on a European scale." The ambiguity of her attitude set the stage for the drama of Brexit that would unfold under David Cameron's premiership a quarter of a century after her departure from politics.

Following Thatcher by a decade, Tony Blair reconstructed Labour partly in Thatcher's image, profiting from the renewed prestige the Iron Lady had earned for the nation. Just as Thatcher's authority depended on her game of mirrors with Reagan in the White House, Blair prospered by becoming the accomplice of Bill Clinton and then, slightly less comprehensibly, George W. Bush. In contrast with other prime ministers, both Thatcher and Blair excelled at rhetorical leadership in the absence of global political power.

The Omelet and the Egg

Now, after nearly four years of Brexit melodrama, the lingering divide over "remain" versus "leave" has produced and prolonged an existential debate around the identity of a kingdom that is manifestly no longer united. To complicate things further, after the seemingly never-ending cliffhanger of Theresa May's negotiated EU withdrawal agreement, the nation is now in the throes of preparing for a general election on December 12 in the hope of achieving some form of closure. Unlike the straightforward

electoral battles of the past, this campaign puts on full display the visible, profound disunity of the two dominant parties, the Conservatives and Labour. Divided by Brexit, the internal wrangling of the parties has significantly contributed to the general, rudderless disunity of the nation.

The two parties are not only divided between "remain" and "leave," but the "leavers" themselves, especially among the Tories, are divided over a hard and soft Brexit. As if that wasn't enough, they are further divided over the personalities of their two leaders: Boris Johnson — an ambitious, mendacious and narcissistic upstart — and Jeremy Corbyn, apparently too puritanically socialist for the taste of some in his party (especially the Blairite loyalists who truly believe in the merits of capitalism).

Then there are the parties that actually know what they want — the Liberal Democrats, on one side, and the Brexit Party, on the other. But even those who agree with their relatively simple electoral credo ("remain" for the Lib Dems and "leave" for the Brexit Party) appear, according to recent polls, to be drifting away from parties that have no chance of governing and even less of bridging the growing divide if called upon to govern.

Adding to the confusion is the increasingly doubtful status of Northern Ireland and Scotland within a future version of the unified kingdom. In Johnson's new "acceptable" draft of a withdrawal treaty from the EU, Northern Ireland will effectively remain within the European customs and tariffs zone while remaining politically "united" with the UK government in London. At least during a period of transitioning to something else, it will retain a soft border with the Republic of Ireland and acquire a hard border with its own nation.

It required great British ingenuity to come up with that solution, much more than Lewis Carroll's seven maids with seven mops could have done when planning to clear the sand from a beach. At the same time, Scotland — a country but not a nation — whose population voted to remain within the EU, will most likely hold a

new referendum for independence, with the ambition of having its own place in Europe once the government in Westminster finalizes Brexit. That will give new life to Hadrian's Wall, possibly provoking a fit of jealousy on the part of Donald Trump who could well end up accusing the Roman emperor of stealing his ideas.

Can Gravity Restore Its Dissipating Force?

In short, the picture of the nation that emerges is that of a complex series of powerful centrifugal forces pushing away from the unified center, with no gravitational force to pull any of the elements back together. Unless, of course, we are to believe that the magnetic personality of Prime Minister Johnson can somehow provide that missing gravitational force. If toward the end of the 17th century the Englishman Isaac Newton could offer the world gravity — until then an unknown concept — a modern Englishman with a strong sense of mission, a charismatic personality and an unkempt mop of blond hair that demonstrates the ability to defy gravity might also find the resources to make it work for the political benefit of his people.

Until recently, the polls seemed to point to this hypothesis. If Johnson were to be elected with the resounding majority that some early polls indicated (366 seats to Labour's 199), perhaps the prime minister would find himself in a position of allowing him to play the dominant role he has so long coveted. He may even be dreaming that, with the requisite amount of power and influence, with the dissociation of the union, he could envisage abolishing the anachronistic name of the United Kingdom and calling it, say, "Johnsonia." And because even a megalomaniac like Johnson would quickly realize that what's left of the formerly united kingdom could hardly survive on its own after definitively cutting its ties with Europe, eventually the prime minister would have the option of applying for Johnsonia to become the 51st state of the "United States of Trumplandia," which some predict will be the fate of the US if President Trump wins a second term in 2020.

The absurdity of the reflections in the preceding paragraph serves only to demonstrate the degraded state of democracy today. The idea that impetuous, inveterate liars — including Trump, Johnson, Rodrigo Duterte and Jair Bolsonaro — have discovered the secret to winning elections in populous nations that play a significant role in geopolitics tells us something about the health of democratic institutions today. If democracy is only about who can mobilize the means to win elections and referendums, then it's time to admit that democracy isn't just imperfect but, in its current form, it has become perverse.

Democracy has never sat comfortably with an empire or even a monarchy, but until recently it has managed to maintain a certain stability. Today's crisis in the UK, which illustrates the general problem, boils down to two contrasting interpretations of the workings of democracy: in the words of Blair, commenting on today's crisis, the conflict lies "between a parliamentary democracy and direct democracy."

The parliamentary model has failed to produce any solution. The 2016 Brexit referendum — an example of direct democracy — reached a simple decision without defining the terms of the choice given to the people. Whereas the meaning of "remain" didn't require a great deal of thought, no one had any clear or even unclear idea of the meaning of "leave." What the British population has now discovered is that no authority exists who can provide that meaning. This means that, without a second Brexit referendum, in which the meaning will be seriously debated and presumably understood by the voting population, chaos is likely to ensue for a long time to come. Even if there is a second referendum, nothing ensures that chaos will not ensue anyway.

Lewis Carroll's Insight into Brexit

The suspense of the last four years has for many people become addictive. Britain has assumed a new identity of being permanently on the brink. On the brink of what? Brexit? A newly-motivated Europe that will welcome back its straying member? Being gobbled up by the US? Forging a

new empire to take over from a declining Pax Americana?

Perhaps Lewis Carroll, whose poem cited above, the “Walrus and the Carpenter,” from his book, “Alice in Wonderland,” can offer some insight. Carroll’s poem offers an oblique critique of the methods of empire in the second half of 19th-century Britain. Although commentators on the poem often insist that it’s just nonsensical entertainment for children, Carroll offers hints right from the start that he is thinking all along about the British geopolitical system and has identified features that are present even today, more than 150 years after its publication.

The poem begins with an implicit reference to a cliché that had been circulating for decades before Carroll wrote his poem, “The sun never sets on the British empire”:

*“The sun was shining on the sea,
Shining with all his might:
He did his very best to make
The billows smooth and bright –
And this was odd, because it was
The middle of the night.”*

The first line reminds us that Britain “rules the waves,” but the comic idea of daring to shine in the middle of the night points directly to the cliché about the sun never setting on the empire, something the moon justifiably objects to in the following stanza (the sun “had got no business to be there after the day was done”).

The story of the poem concerns a pair of Englishmen who stroll on the beach and then befriend a bed of oysters. They incite the mollusks to exert themselves in a walk upon the beach before mobilizing their superior knowledge of “ships and sails and sealing wax, of cabbages and kings” to lull their victims into a state in which they have no choice but to become the two Englishmen’s lunch.

The Walrus appears as the overfed, self-satisfied pontificating and profiteering Englishman wandering upon foreign shores who believes his command of culture gives him the

power to manage the world, physically, economically and socially. Even before discovering the oysters on the beach, the two Englishmen speculate on the methods that would allow them to engage in the meritorious exercise of clearing the beach of its sand, presumably to make the environment resemble his idea of an organized, civilized world: “‘If this were only cleared away,’ They said, ‘it would be grand!’”

The carpenter plays the role of the engineer or colonial administrator who will put the Walrus’ plans into action. He has no personality, only technical savvy and theoretical knowledge of what’s possible and not possible. He is a realist who employs materialistic logic to solve problems. To the Walrus’ wish for a solution to clear the beach involving maids with mops, he replies, “I doubt it,” showing he recognizes the gap between the conquering Englishman’s ambition to reorganize the world and the more resistant physical reality of that world. The fact that the Carpenter sheds a bitter tear tells us two things: that, despite his realism, he identifies with the Walrus’ imperial logic and he regrets his powerlessness to change some features of the environment according to their desire.

The story of the oysters, which begins immediately after the failed plan to clear the beach, provides a perfect example of the psychological methods employed by the roving agents of the British Empire. They first establish contact with the rulers of the societies they wish to reorganize and exploit for their own purposes. In this case, the eldest, wisest oyster suspects a foul motive and declines the offer of a “pleasant walk, a pleasant talk” on the beach. Four unwary younger oysters, ambitious to profit from the solicitations of the visitors turn out to be all “eager for the treat.” These are the unsuspecting locals the British can appeal to for their profit, which in this case takes the form of eating them for their lunch after a leisurely chat.

Naturally, leaders of traditional societies tend to resist the blandishments of the European masters who came to enlighten them by sharing with them their advanced wisdom. The

Englishmen state that they can only accompany four at a time. But when the eldest oyster resists, they extend their offer to the masses, seeking to identify those who are “eager” to take advantage of what appears to be the generous offer of the rich invader. It’s the world of Gunga Din, where the natives can hope to be gainfully employed by the tenors of an advanced civilization.

When he sees the potential for profit, the Walrus has no objection to breaking his own rule of “only four” and accepting the hordes of oysters who will follow the two men to their feasting place, a rock that’s “conveniently low.”

The rest of the story demonstrates another Victorian idea, a colonial variation on Charles Darwin’s scientific notion of “survival of the fittest.” The Walrus and the Carpenter must eat to survive. The “convenience” of stuffing themselves on the oysters who had trotted after them was too great to forgo.

In short, the poem offers a comically absurd view of British colonialism. It reflects on the discourse and strategies of seduction that include pseudo-scientific expertise that convey the aura of superiority of the British over the natives. From the practical work of clearing beaches to speculating on the attributes of pigs, the British represent the finesse of evolved civilization.

The final outcome — devouring the oysters — reflects the fundamental racism that accompanies the British imperial project. The two interlopers initially treat the oysters as if they were equals, proposing to cooperate, share and collaborate. The Walrus and Carpenter control the conversation and propose the topics. They include production and management of resources (cabbages), government (kings), industrial production (shoes, ships, sealing wax) and intellectual matters in the form of abstract scientific research and logical thinking (“why the sea is boiling hot ... whether pigs have wings”). The Walrus and Carpenter set the agenda and never consider listening to the oysters.

The oysters are literally exploited to the death, in this case by being eaten. The British had no qualms about devouring the lives of the

populations they conquered, not by eating them but by manipulating them in all sorts of “scientific” ways as they demonstrated their skills at social engineering. The final irony concerns the emotional hypocrisy with which imperial conquest was carried out. Just before eating them, the Walrus takes the opportunity to reaffirm his public commitment to the human values of civilization. He regrets his act at the very moment of completing it: “‘It seems a shame,’ the Walrus said, ‘To play them such a trick.’” He adds, “I weep for you... I deeply sympathize” and immediately stuffs himself on the delicious oysters.

After the recital of the poem, the discussion of its impact and meaning between Alice and the Tweedle twins brings us forward to the world of today’s politics:

“‘I like the Walrus best,’ said Alice: ‘because you see he was a little sorry for the poor oysters.’ He ate more than the Carpenter, though,” said Tweedledee. ‘You see he held his handkerchief in front, so that the Carpenter couldn’t count how many he took: contrariwise.’

‘That was mean!’ Alice said indignantly. ‘Then I like the Carpenter best — if he didn’t eat so many as the Walrus.’ ‘But he ate as many as he could get,’ said Tweedledum.

This was a puzzler. After a pause, Alice began, ‘Well! They were both very unpleasant characters.’”

Alice reacts in the way the British population would have been expected to at the time. She tries to decide whom she likes best between the Walrus and the Carpenter. A choice similar to “leave” or “remain” or between Johnson and Corbyn.

Applying Carroll’s Wisdom Today

The moral problem (Carroll calls it the “puzzler”) is reduced to a personality contest, meaning that any reflection on how and why the observed injustice occurred — its systemic causes — is banished. Carroll presents his implicit criticism of a political system that offers no other choices than between two “unpleasant characters.” This

observation is ironically underlined by the fact that this dialogue is led by none other than the utterly interchangeable Tweedle twins.

Which brings us back to today's politics leading up to the UK general election. Just like Alice, British voters must make what is essentially a new binary choice between the portly Walrus (Johnson?), who tells lies and takes as much as possible for himself, and the lithe Carpenter (Corbyn?), who refuses to comment on the crucial issue the Walrus mentions — the shame of playing “them such a trick” expresses: “The Carpenter said nothing but ‘The butter’s spread too thick!’”

To some extent, the parties today reflect the situation Lewis Carroll described a century and a half ago. Inspired by the lessons from the poem, Labour would be wise to raise the moral question Alice struggled with. They might suggest voters ask themselves: Which of the two characters do they think would be more inclined to lie about his intentions and eat as many oysters as possible? Contrariwise (as Carroll would say), the question Tories may hope the voters will seek an answer to would be this: Which of the two characters has the greater ability to successfully plan and execute the “trick” that will reduce the population of unwanted oysters on the beach?

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LATIN AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN

In What Seems Like an Endless Nightmare, Maduro Clings on to Power

Lenin Cavalcanti Guerra
May 10, 2019

Many analysts agreed that once the military withdrew support for the flailing regime in Caracas, the fall of Bolivarian socialism would

be unavoidable, perhaps a matter of days or weeks.

Political analysts have been expecting Nicolás Maduro's imminent downfall for quite some time now. Nonetheless, after years of massive waves of protest and more than three months of international recognition of opposition leader Juan Guaidó as interim president, Maduro remains in power in Caracas.

The Venezuelan crisis seems to be endless. Since its escalation in 2017, the news became almost apocalyptic: prolonged nationwide blackouts, people abandoning their pets and eating spoiled meat to survive, burying dead relatives in the backyard and even leaving newborns at orphanages, unable to care for them. According to a survey by the country's three biggest universities, 90% of the population was living in poverty in 2017. On average, Venezuelans lost 11 kilograms in a year on the so-called Maduro diet. Some 60% of the interviewed have reported waking up hungry, and about 25% said they ate two meals or fewer a day.

This end-of-the-world scenario has forced some 3.4 million people to leave Venezuela, as per the latest figures by the United Nations Refugee Agency. This number could reach 5.9 at the end of 2019, as almost 5,000 people flee to neighboring Colombia every day. To make matters worse, about 13,000 doctors have also left the country in the last four years. The health system has collapsed, doubling cases of malaria and tripling incidences of HIV/AIDS, making up a “triple threat” with tuberculosis. But Maduro has refused all offers of humanitarian help, insisting that Venezuelans are not “beggars.”

A Hope Named Guaidó

Nicolás Maduro's resistance is based in two main factors: support by the Venezuelan army, as well as Russia and China — the country's biggest military supplier. When it comes to the military in Venezuela, there is a close relation with Maduro's predecessor, Hugo Chávez. Under the

former president — himself a career military officer — the army has grown in number as well as political prestige. The army began to occupy official positions and participate in the country's strategic decisions. In 2017, 10 of the 32 cabinet members were active-duty, and two were retired military officers. Today, the armed forces still manage some of the country's key industries, including the national oil company, PDVSA. This way, the regime has created a belt of protection for itself, ensuring military support.

Nonetheless, with the country plunging deeper into crisis, the conditions, especially for the military's lower and middle ranks, have worsened. Maduro's high command has created special units to stamp out anti-regime activities in the forces. Since then, hundreds of arrests and incidents of torture of soldiers and their relatives were registered.

In January, Juan Guaidó, a deputy elected in 2015 and president of the national assembly, declared himself interim president on the basis that Nicolás Maduro disrespected three articles of Venezuela's constitution, which was drafted under Chávez. In the following days, more than 50 countries, including the United States and most of the European Union, recognized Guaidó as interim president, putting pressure on Maduro to step down. In South America, Colombia, Perú, Argentina and Venezuela's biggest neighbor, Brazil, have recognized Guaidó.

Many analysts agreed that once the military withdrew support for the flailing regime, the fall of Bolivarian socialism would be unavoidable, perhaps a matter of days or weeks. Following international recognition of Guaidó as interim leader, over 300 members of the Venezuelan armed forces have deserted in a matter of days, many fleeing to Colombia and Brazil. It is not clear if there is a conflict between lower and upper ranks of the armed forces, but the desertions indicate that dissatisfaction among the officers is growing.

However, not everything was lost: Maduro found support from allies like Cuba, an old friend of chavismo, as well as Turkey, China and Russia

endorsing the regime. In a demonstration of solidarity, Russia has sent military support in a clear message that an intervention from the United States would have consequences.

A Coup that Wasn't

On April 30, Guaidó posted a video on Twitter of him surrounded by the military. The group, formed by dozens of unidentified soldiers, has also liberated Leopoldo López, a prominent opposition leader held under house arrest for the past two years. "Operation Freedom" has taken thousands to the streets, and the images of tanks trampling protesters have spread to the world.

However, it has not been enough to topple Maduro. At a parade organized "to reaffirm the absolute loyalty of the armed forces," the embattled dictator talked directly to the military about loyalty. The fact that López was allowed to escape, however, shows that there are strong divisions in the armed forces. Guaidó admitted that the operation had failed, as most of the armed forces stayed loyal to Maduro, who still occupies his official residence at Miraflores Palace. Juan Guaidó is now considering asking for a US military intervention.

Since Guaidó's international recognition, Maduro has decided against arresting him, as the regime has done with other opposition leaders. In this game of political chess, a direct action against Guaidó could mean a signal to military action from the international community. But, on the morning of May 9, Venezuelan intelligence agents arrested Edgar Zambrano, the national assembly's vice president and Juan Guaidó's right arm.

At this point it seems unlikely that the United States, Russia and China would enter into a proxy conflict in Venezuela, but a belligerent outcome cannot be brushed away. As a result, Maduro could either be deposed immediately, or following a lengthy conflict. It is important to highlight that the country has the world's biggest oil reserves, attracting many interests.

Russia, for example, has invested around \$17 billion in Venezuela since 2005, especially

through the state oil company Rosneft, in PDVSA. Maduro's fall could represent difficulties in retrieving that investment. For Washington, a change of government in Caracas would be convenient for returning to cordial political relations with its main oil supplier. More than that, such a change would suit the United States politically, since Chávez and Maduro have been always aligned with Iran, Russia and China.

But Maduro could remain in the charge despite a lack of popular support internally while suffering external pressure, as he has done in the last few years. While it is difficult to imagine a continuation of the status quo, it is a feasible scenario. Another possibility is that the regime loses power and collapses, which seems more likely at this point given the international political pressure as well as a new set of US sanctions imposed earlier this year, intent on starving the regime. Guaidó has confirmed that the opposition has been meeting clandestinely with the army high command. Leopoldo López sees Maduro's weakness as "a crack that will become a bigger crack ... that will end up breaking the dam." Meanwhile, the Venezuelan nightmare seems to have no end.

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The Puerto Rico Crisis: A Reflection of a Flawed US Democracy

Carlos Figueroa
August 27, 2019

The recent resignation of Governor Rosselló should be understood within the larger framework of a flawed US democratic state that continues its economic stranglehold over Puerto Rico.

On August 2, Puerto Rico Governor Ricardo Rosselló of the New Progressive Party (NPP) — nominally affiliated with

the Democrats, although once linked to the Republicans under Governor Luis Ferré Aguayo — finally resigned. The decision came after weeks of mass protests over the island's fiscal instability, alleged political corruption and most recent scandalous chats on the Telegram messaging app.

His resignation will go down as one of the most important in Puerto Rico's political history because it signified a victory for the island's varied and creative activist community. Even some Puerto Rican celebrities, including singer-songwriter Ricky Martin and actor Benicio Del Toro, joined the mass protests against Rosselló and his administration.

Yet Puerto Rico's problems are closely aligned to its colonial relationship with a supposed US democratic state. In 1950-52, the US established the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico/Free Associated State of Puerto Rico. Since this political-constitutional arrangement, many US citizens in Puerto Rico expected to fare much better than its Caribbean neighbors that would later experience their own postcolonial and political-economic transitions. These expectations for a thriving social, political and economic life were based on Puerto Rico's relative autonomy under an expansive US federal constitutional system or what others may call American imperialism that dates back to 1898.

Puerto Rico was supposed to thrive under the protection of the US Constitution and its underlying liberal democratic ethos. However, the reality has been that Puerto Rico's autonomy is more than ever before inextricably captured by the colonial tentacles of a US democratic system recently deemed dysfunctional or flawed.

In other words, Puerto Rico's social and political problems are rooted in the territorial government's dependency on the economic policies of the US federal government. These economic ties between the US and Puerto Rico are reflected in the more recent corrupt politics on the island and the befallen Governor Rosselló, as well as the subsequent politics of succession to power that followed his resignation.

Dependent Puerto Rico

Most people forget, or perhaps do not know, that Puerto Rico is not an independent country but rather an unincorporated territory under the plenary power of the US Congress. This fact alone should place doubts on the minds of those who maintain the position that the US is a democratic state. Nevertheless, all the major news outlets, some online sites, and even elected officials and well-intentioned political and social activists often treat Puerto Rico as a sovereign entity that is solely to blame for its social, political and economic problems.

There may be some truth to this claim, considering the recent revelations made public by the leaked Telegram chats surrounding Rosselló's regime. Still, as an unincorporated territory, and although considered "autonomous," Puerto Rico is under the absolute sovereign control of the US federal government for its financial and economic viability, which directly affects its political and social life.

Most recently, the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), in its annual review of countries adhering to democratic values around the world, found US democracy to be flawed even without considering its vast overseas territorial possessions. The review shows that most Americans — this author would include those US citizens in Puerto Rico — have lost "confidence in the functioning of public institutions." Mistrust in US political institutions extends to not only Congress and President Donald Trump, but also to the federal agencies responsible for post-hurricane recovery efforts.

For example, between mid-September and early October 2017, the category 4 Hurricane Maria devastated Puerto Rico, which at that time was recovering from Hurricane Irma. As this author previously argued, the policy response of the Trump administration after Maria hit was wrongheaded, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) efforts were ineffective at the time. Yet these two major storms revealed much about the disorganized and corrupt nature of Puerto Rican politics, alongside

the flawed US federal system as both inappropriately dealt with these national disasters.

Post-Hurricane Maria

Post-Hurricane Maria brought out the best and the worst in the US and Puerto Rico. The politics of blame took center stage, especially on Twitter. US President Donald Trump stated that Governor Rosselló's administration was solely to blame for the lack of leadership in mismanaging, quite ineptly, the so-called humanitarian aid provided by both FEMA and, later, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), among others after both Hurricanes Irma and Maria. More recently, Trump tweeted that "Congress foolishly gave 92 Billion Dollars for hurricane relief, much of which was squandered away or wasted, never to be seen again ... much of their leadership is corrupt, & robbing the U.S. Government blind!"

Rosselló, in turn, claimed the federal government under Trump failed to uphold its constitutional and ethical responsibilities to US citizens in Puerto Rico. The governor expected the US government to allocate comparable resources similar to what it had already provided Texas and Florida after their own hurricane disasters, and not allow for questionable contracts to be handed out to inexperienced construction companies.

Both Trump and Rosselló were, nevertheless, complicit for allowing thousands of fellow US citizens in Puerto Rico to perish — as this author has previously stated — amid social scandals, political corruption and overall incompetence. This public blaming between two equally ineffective political administrations shows the deep-rooted colonial ties between Puerto Rico and the supposed US democratic government.

The US Jones Act of 1920

Another example of a flawed U.S. democracy is the enduring Jones Act (or Merchant Marine Act) of 1920. This is a federal law regulating maritime commerce in the US, including its non-

contiguous and unincorporated territories such as Puerto Rico. This measure says that any goods shipped between US ports are supposed to be transported by US-built, owned and operated ships. Although President Trump temporarily waived these requirements several weeks after Hurricane Maria for supposed short-term relief, retaining and reapplying this law to the island's ports places long-term burdens on Puerto Rico's economy.

Even the conservative Cato Institute recognizes the antiquated and undemocratic nature of the Jones Act and its negative impact upon Puerto Rico's economy:

"Puerto Rico's recovery in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria has reinvigorated debate about a relatively unknown law that has hampered its recovery efforts and bogged down its economy. Since 1920, maritime commerce between Puerto Rico and the rest of the United States has been governed by the Jones Act, a law that mandates that vessels transporting goods domestically be U.S.-crewed, U.S.-flagged, U.S.-owned, and U.S.-built. While defenders of the law have argued that the Jones Act provides reliable shipping services from the mainland to Puerto Rico, critics have pointed out that such restrictions significantly raise the cost of domestic imports, placing an added burden on the already economically struggling island."

This law fundamentally serves as a stranglehold over Puerto Rico's economy in the long- and short-runs, leading to other undemocratic alternative approaches for dealing with present and future financial instabilities on the island. As Nelson A. Denis recently reported, two "University of Puerto Rico economists found that the Jones Act caused a \$17 billion loss to the island's economy from 1990 through 2010. Other studies have estimated the Jones Act's damage to Puerto Rico, Hawaii and Alaska to be \$2.8 billion to \$9.8 billion per year."

Congress Controls Puerto Rico's Debt Crisis

In 2016, then-US President Barack Obama signed into law the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management,

and Economic Stability Act (PROMESA), a measure responsible for "restructuring [the island's] debt, and [expediting] procedures for approving critical infrastructure projects" in Puerto Rico. Ironically, or perhaps euphemistically, the word *promesa* in Spanish means promise. In this case, the US federal government expected Puerto Rico to keep its promise of paying "back" its loans on time and with interest. Unfortunately, Rosselló's government defaulted on about \$2 million, exacerbating further the spiraling fiscal instability of the island.

Prior to these climate change-induced hurricane disasters, Puerto Rico had been in the midst of a long-time financial crisis (see the "Krueger Report" that pre-dates Rosselló's regime). This led the much-maligned Governor Rosselló to announce the privatization of the Commonwealth-owned Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority (PREPA), which is one of the largest public power suppliers in the US.

However, the federal Fiscal Oversight and Management Board for Puerto Rico established by PROMESA devised its own fiscal plan to deal with the crisis. The board's plan was vehemently opposed by the governor because it recommended "steep cuts in government spending and pensions." This has been a long-running dispute between the US territorial government and the US-controlled Fiscal Board. For instance, Rosselló, in May 2017, filed for what amounts to federal bankruptcy protection in order to "restructure about \$120 billion of debt and pension obligations," despite opposition within and outside his own party.

In April 2018, the Professors Self-Assembled in Solidarity Resistance (PAREs) group put out a clear statement against these types of top-down plans to dealing with the fiscal crisis impacting the island's political and social life. The statement read: "[The] Financial Oversight and Management Board, an unelected body pushing for the privatization of electricity and schools, increased costs of basic services, massive cuts in public education, pensions, vacation time, and

other rights — all in order to pay bondholders a \$73 billion debt that was patently unpayable, illegal and illegitimate. The net result was to leave the majority of people in Puerto Rico without a hopeful future, and that was all before Hurricane Maria hit our shores.”

There were other related protests after Hurricanes Irma and Maria, as well as debt crisis management struggles that have been ignored by the US mainstream media. For instance, the Puerto Rico Teachers Union had been fighting against the closure of hundreds of public schools and the privatization of education for years.

Governor Rosselló’s Telegram Chats

What turned the tide, where the beleaguered governor was forced to step down, was the leaked offensive Telegram chats that were made public by the Centro de Periodismo Investigativo (CPI) in Puerto Rico, an organization that should be recognized more often for its superb, independent, investigative reporting. CPI revealed almost 900 pages of vulgar email exchanges between high-ranking NPP members, including Rosselló himself showing misogynistic, homophobic and immoral statements about political opponents, the Puerto Rican LGBTQ+ community, and victims of Hurricanes Irma and Maria.

The mostly, if not exclusively, male-dominated Telegram chats also reveal how out of touch Rosselló’s administration and the larger NPP have been with the various social and political movements, such as the anti-harassment #MeToo collective. Rosselló’s actions are similar to the kinds of insalubrious and hateful mocking President Trump has engaged in for years over social media.

As Rosselló stepped down in defeat, he appointed Pedro Pierluisi as secretary of state and thus next in line for the governorship. Pierluisi previously served as Puerto Rico’s non-voting resident commissioner in the US Congress, among other positions for the NPP. His eventual swearing-in as the new governor also came under fire because of his potential conflicts of interest.

He is currently employed with the law firm O’Neill & Borges (San Juan), which represents the Fiscal Oversight and Management Board.

Pierluisi’s appointment was immediately challenged by the Puerto Rico Senate. At the forefront was Rosselló’s rival, Senate President Thomas Rivera Schatz — acting president of the NPP and long-time party operative dating back to Governor Pedro Rosselló Gonzalez, Ricardo’s father — although the House had approved the governor’s decision. Rivera Schatz, who in the past expressed interest in the governorship, asked the Puerto Rico Supreme Court to intercede in this constitutional crisis, which it did, overturning the appointment on August 7 with a unanimous 9-0 vote. The Supreme Court declared the swearing-in of Pierluisi unconstitutional since he had not been confirmed by both chambers of the Puerto Rico legislature, as required by the island’s constitution.

Subsequently, Puerto Rico Justice Secretary Wanda Vázquez — also of the pro-statehood New Progressive Party — was sworn in on August 7 as a replacement for both Rosselló and Pierluisi. She has become only the second woman to serve as governor in the island’s history.

Yet Vázquez is sitting under a cloud of suspicion as well because of her clashes with various feminist groups over women’s rights, her own history of alleged corrupt activities, numerous fund mismanagements post-Hurricane Maria and her long-term strained relationship with Rivera Schatz. These rapid transitions are a consequence of the century-long colonial relationship between a supposed US democratic state and its pseudo-autonomous territory where the US Congress maintains economic sovereignty, leading to a never-ending cycle of corruption and political instability in Puerto Rico.

To be clear: This author is not suggesting that Rosselló and his ilk are not corrupt and incompetent, something they have repeatedly demonstrated over several years. Rather, that the larger and structural problems (especially the political and social ones) in Puerto Rico stem from the problematic constitutional arrangement

and deep-rooted economic dependency the island has with the US despite its increased autonomy since 1952.

The Stranglehold Over Puerto Rico

There are at least two reasons Puerto Rico's political problems persist. First, the so-called PROMESA Act of 2016, the anti-democratic austerity measure signed by Democratic President Barack Obama to oversee Puerto Rico's debt crisis, basically dictates what the US territorial government can and cannot do. Second, the 2017 post-Hurricane Maria devastation and lack-luster recovery efforts under Republican President Donald Trump and the equally complicit Governor Rosselló eventually resulted in at least 2,950 casualties, as per a George Washington University study, or more according to other reports.

Thus, the recent resignation of Governor Rosselló based on his corrupt and degenerate behavior — as exposed by the leaked Telegram chats — should be understood within the larger framework of a flawed US democratic state that continues its economic stranglehold over Puerto Rico. This dual dependency must end for the sake of ever achieving any kind of real democratic future in either Puerto Rico or the US.

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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 contrôlée 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 Pataxó 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

Chile Protests and the Rise of Political Risk in Latin America

German Peinado Delgado & Glenn Ojeda Vega
November 11, 2019

The working and middle classes of Chile were ripe for a social uprising, unbeknownst to the country's economic elite, political class and foreign creditors.

Just as it seemed that the leftist "pink tide" had finally receded across Latin America, a wave of social movements are shaking market-friendly governments in the region. While

certainly a reflection of the polarized political climate on a global scale, the recent convulsions across the continent deal a strong blow against the region's maturing democratic institutions and serve as a reminder to foreign investors of the political risk that hangs over this attractive emerging market.

In recent weeks, the Chilean government has suffered the raucous consequences of announcing unpopular economic measures intended to rein in government debt and spending by increasing the cost of public services. In what has become a regional trend, protests in the capital Santiago began with a relatively small metro fare hike in early October. But the movement has since morphed into a widespread upheaval against neoliberal economic policies and social inequality in South America's most prosperous nation.

Festering Grievances

Protests are nothing new for the Chilean people, and the grievances being revendedicated — such as the lack of accessible basic social services, the discrimination against indigenous peoples and growing inequality — are legitimate. However, the level of coordination amongst some of the fringe elements and the main instigators of the last few weeks has left many wondering how truly spontaneous this movement is. Whether orchestrated, organic or both, the socioeconomic frustration felt by many Chileans has been accumulating for years as two presidents, Sebastian Pinera and Michelle Bachelet, alternated over four terms while dismantling much of the welfare state in order to attract foreign investment and positive credit ratings.

The seemingly excessive liberalization of the Chilean state economy has not been an issue as long as all social classes have shared, for the most part, in the country's prosperity and growth. However, feeling increasingly burdened and unfairly taxed, the working and middle classes of Chile were ripe for a social uprising, unbeknownst to the country's economic elite, political class and foreign creditors.

Amid mass protests, the government of Sebastian Pinera was forced to decree a state of emergency, which translated to curfews and martial law in several regions of the country. Perhaps a political miscalculation, for many Chileans who lived through the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet the state of emergency only fired up their desire to protest.

Santiago has been the epicenter of demonstrations, including one that attracted more than a million people on October 25. Moreover, the protests have not been limited to the capital but have spread across other major cities such as Concepcion, Temuco, La Serena and Valparaiso. According to the United Nations, at least 20 have been killed and around 1,600 injured in the violence so far.

Like a Wildfire

Due to the sustained nature of the demonstrations, the national economy has begun to feel their effects. In that sense, international gatherings, such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit and the UN climate meeting, as well as cultural and sporting events, have either been canceled or relocated away from Chile. Similarly, domestic consumption, private business and public government infrastructure have all been dealt a severe blow by the unrelenting nature of this social wave.

Chile has not seen protests or public order mobilizations of this magnitude since the end of the Pinochet dictatorship in 1990. Moreover, given the country's high level of institutional and socioeconomic development, the events of the last several weeks are even more shocking, having prompted calls for a UN human rights verification mission to be sent to Chile. Ironically, the UN's current high commissioner for human rights is the former Chilean president, Michelle Bachelet.

While it would be unwise of global investors to flee from one of the world's most attractive emerging markets, it would also be foolish of international capital not to protect itself against this regional tide of political risk. Instead of

skyrocketing premiums, international brokers should seek to expand the pool by making political risk insurance more accessible and commonplace.

Political risk underwriters should be smarter as to the inputs that they consider when quantifying risk. For instance, a key consideration throughout Latin American should be the GINI coefficient, which indicates wealth inequality in a country, and the average increase in the standard of living of the middle and working classes over the last five years, particularly as these correlate to the impact on the middle and working classes of new economic policies and reforms.

With the possibility of a global economic slowdown on the horizon and the need to reduce high levels of public debt, right-wing governments throughout Latin America are implementing economic policies that hit the working and middle classes hardest, such as cutting subsidies, increasing the costs of public services and rolling back social welfare. For a region where the bulk of the population has seen an increase in its standard of living over the last two decades due to a commodities boom and the excessive spending by left-wing governments, any policy that threatens to worsen the average lifestyle of the population will meet fierce resistance.

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What Is Driving the Protests in Latin America?

Leonardo Vivas
November 13, 2019

When addressing the recent protests in Latin America, it is important to resist the spell of common myths about the region.

The first thing to bear in mind when looking at the recent violent demonstrations that have occurred in Latin American countries like Chile, Ecuador, Haiti and Bolivia is to resist the spell of common myths about the region. Latin America is a vast territory composed of 20 countries, from Mexico on the US border to Argentina and Chile in the confines of Antarctica. So when upheaval occurs in a number of small-to-middle-size countries, why should one immediately attribute such events to an alleged sub-continental momentum?

After all, there are powerful reasons for social disturbance in larger countries like Brazil, Argentina or Peru, not to speak of Venezuela, but so far none of them show signs of deep social unrest. This is not to say that the protests are unimportant or that one should ignore regional waves, such as the turn to the left in Latin American politics at the beginning of the century. After all, Latin America has been historically prone to cyclical trends that have spread throughout the entire region in the past. This doesn't seem to be the case today. Rather, the protests should be assessed for their individual value, one case at a time.

A second temptation is to identify protests with a common motive. A cherished topic in Latin America is the resistance to cold-hearted neoliberalism, where the continent's version of the wretched of the earth regain their spirit in the face of powerful — and often foreign — economic interests, or falling prey to conspiracy theories like arguing that behind the protests in most right-leaning countries is the dark hand of the Maduro regime, or even Russia.

A grain of truth can exist in some of these speculations, and they may certainly capture the interest of the mainstream international media, but we should know better. So, what's been happening?

Ecuador

The initial protests took place in Ecuador in early October after the administration of President Lenin Moreno decreed a hike in fuel prices. The response was angry, violent and widespread — including a strike from transportation organizations nationwide and mobs carrying out destruction, mainly in the capital, Quito. The government responded with a twofold strategy. On the one hand, it sought to negotiate with transport organizations to stop the strike; on the other, it brought the army to the streets.

Despite the stick-and-carrot approach, violence spread, especially in Quito, where government buildings were set on fire. The protests reached a peak when the powerful Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities put its weight behind the protests. Bear in mind that this organization, known as CONAIE, was instrumental in bringing down several governments at the turn of the 21st century.

The protests rapidly gained a political angle in the highly politicized climate of Ecuador. In the last few years, President Moreno applied himself to dismantling the tight political network built in the last decade by his predecessor, Rafael Correa, through control over most state institutions. The former president was investigated on corruption charges amounting to between \$30 and \$70 billion during the time he was head of state. In the past few days, a local court ratified an indictment against him for “alleged bribery, racketeering, and peddling of political favors.”

Correa rapidly became the main culprit of the country's many woes. There is a high probability that he seized the opportunity to mobilize his weakened forces, perhaps with international help — allegedly from Venezuelan pro-Maduro organizations — to bring down the government and promote a restoration that would allow him a

political comeback. But to what extent this is true has not been substantiated so far.

Despite the transport strike coming to a halt and President Moreno reconsidering the fuel prices measures, leading the CONAIE to call for a truce and accept conversations with the government, the protests continued with increased violence. The seat of government had to be moved to Guayaquil, the largest commercial city on the coast. But after a spell of violence that lasted several weeks and claimed eight lives, the country returned to normal.

Chile

As protests were waning in Ecuador, violence erupted in Chile, spreading from the capital Santiago to other cities like Valparaiso and Concepcion. Similar to Ecuador, protests began when the authorities augmented the rates of the Santiago subway system by a few percentage points. Also similar to Ecuador, the protests that ensued were highly violent, with buses set on fire, metro stations, banks, supermarkets and even the offices of an electrical utility company destroyed. But, different to earlier protests taking place a decade ago throughout the country, these were not exclusively student-led and involve a wider social spectrum, including workers, part of the middle class and urban mobs.

Protests in Chile caught everyone in the country and elsewhere by surprise. After all, Chile has seen a steady growth record and the most impressive social and economic gains, except for inequality, in the region. In 2010, the country was admitted to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development club of rich nations and was getting ready to host a meeting of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum in November and the United Nations' COP25 climate summit in December. Understandably, the government declined to host both events. But it is probably the timing and violence of the protests that still has most analysts on their toes.

Initially, Sebastian Pinera, a businessman-turned-politician now in his second term as

president, responded aggressively, declaring a state of emergency and calling on the army to contain the protests, which brought back dark memories of the Pinochet dictatorship. But instead of curbing what had now become a mass movement, it only heightened the clashes, bringing a string of 23 deaths and losses near to \$1.4 billion. The violence has been particularly ferocious, including the most recent setting on fire of a private university and even the looting of churches.

Facing what could evolve into an insoluble crisis, Pinera rapidly moderated his tone, recognizing the government's fault and promising wide policy changes. Currently, the country is in the process of digesting the impact of the protests. President Pinera has offered a change in the constitution that could perhaps contribute to the ruling elite — including both the conservatives and the moderate left parties — regaining its footing over the future of the political system.

Haiti

“We are in misery and we are starving,” protester Claude Jean told Reuters. “We cannot stand it anymore.” These two phrases summarize the ultimate rationale behind the most recent protests that exploded in Haiti and have continued to this day. Starting in September, day after day and week after week, people from all walks of life have taken to the streets en masse to protest against a deadly combination of an enduring social drama — including fuel shortages, spiraling inflation, a lack of safe drinking water and food scarcities — and rampant corruption. So far, severe clashes have wrought havoc, with at least 18 dead, but compared to the protests in Chile, Ecuador and Bolivia, sheer violence and destruction have not been the predominant note.

Unrest in Haiti is as chronic as the accumulation of social distress. But over the past year, it acquired a new tone when allegations of corruption within the government of President Jovenel Moise regarding the misuse of resources from Petrocaribe, Venezuela's flagship

international economic aid program, came into the open. The protests rapidly took a stronger political bent, pointing directly to Moïse and demanding his resignation.

In the background is also the deep dissatisfaction among a majority of Haitians with the meager impact of the massive amount of economic aid that entered Haiti after the devastating 2010 earthquake, which failed to translate into infrastructure, schools or even sanitation improvement. Also, different to the chronic social malaise, on this occasion the middle class, especially intellectuals and professionals, has also taken to the streets, providing a stronger voice to the demands of the population.

Bolivia

The image couldn't be more gruesome: Patricia Arce, the mayor of Vinto, with her hair cut and her body covered in red paint, was dragged through the streets after violence erupted in the city. She is a member of Evo Morales' Movement for Socialism (MAS) party and, after the city hall of her town was set in fire, she was captured by a mob. The scene reflects the level of violence achieved by the political confrontation taking place in Bolivia in the aftermath of the recent presidential election where the opposition and independent observers alleged fraud on the part of the Morales-dominated electoral authorities.

In 2016, Evo Morales was defeated in a referendum that put to a national vote his decision to run for reelection for a fourth time, in an attempt to redraw the constitution that set a limit of two presidential terms. After his defeat, Morales brought the issue to the constitutional court, which in 2017 decided that his "human rights" had been demoted, even if he had called for the referendum himself. Another presidential election was scheduled for October 20, 2019. After the official results contradicted the initial count, the opposition refused to recognize his triumph and took to the streets, first rejecting the result and later calling for his resignation.

Different to Ecuador, Chile and Haiti, where social dissatisfaction is the prime mover, in Bolivia the protests were 100% political. So far, the balance of Evo Morales' decade-long social and economic policies has been favorable, including stable growth with low inflation, a drastic reduction of poverty and a historic recognition of indigenous communities as part of a plurinational state. But his attempts to remain in power at any cost seemed, to a growing portion of Bolivians, increasingly akin to the likes of Nicolas Maduro, the standard bearer of the new dictatorial trend in the region.

When the crisis erupted, the signs of a drastic evolution toward stark authoritarian rule were still in the making and nowhere near the current levels of the Venezuelan tragedy. But, if one were to judge by precedents like Nicaragua, the future looked gloomy. On this occasion, however, and different to earlier electoral confrontations, the opposition forces were more disciplined and after the first electoral round presented a united front, disputing the electoral results legally and openly in the streets.

The demise of Evo Morales, who resigned on November 10 after a string of violent protests nationwide, echoes Gabriel Garcia Marquez's novel, "A Chronicle of a Death Foretold." Morales could have retained his stature had he not run for president again or accepted defeat in the October 20 election. But he bet on his popularity to push for a fourth term in office.

Before election day, all opinion polls showed Morales leading, but with less than the necessary 10-point difference to avoid a runoff. After the election took place, the trends very closely replicated the predictions. Even the first bulletins released by the supreme electoral tribunal pointed in that direction.

Then, the count was suspended for a day, after which the next bulletin claimed Morales had passed the finish line with slightly more votes than he needed to avoid a second round. Then, all hell broke loose. His close contender and former president, Carlos Mesa, accused Morales and the vice president of fraud. Soon after, the company

contracted by the electoral authority to make an audit of the election results stated it was full of inconsistencies and refused to grant a legitimate result.

The president's tone was defiant. He declared himself the winner and challenged his opponents to a rebuttal. As a result, protests in several provinces became more violent, with the burning of MAS officials' houses, while the president's supporters burned down buildings in other provinces. Overall, however, the protests were peaceful. But by Saturday, November 9, discontent had reached the police forces, with rank and file in some cases defending the protesters and joining the demonstrations.

By Sunday, once the Organization of American States observation group also declared foul play and called for new elections, Morales went public, agreeing to a new vote. But it was too late. He had lost control. Shortly after, the head of the armed forces asked the president for his resignation. The situation remains unclear, with the succession line in the absence of the president interrupted by a string of resignations. To date, Bolivia's constitutional court has approved a senator from the opposition, Jeanine Anez, for the post of interim president.

In the end, the demotion of Morales and the violence spearheaded by his manipulation of the electoral process were a reflection of a significant portion of the nation feeling cornered into a growingly personal and authoritarian rule. On Monday, November 11, Morales was granted asylum and escorted to Mexico City.

Making Sense of the Protests

The current wave of protests is not the first in a region which, for a couple of decades since the mid-1990s until a few years ago, seemed to have overcome a century-long string of economic failures and social upheaval. During those years, a combination of significant, though by no means flamboyant, economic growth combined with a vast process of democratization took place in most countries in the region. When a wave of protests erupted in Chile in 2009-10 and Brazil in

2012-13, observers were rattled. The two countries symbolized by far the best of two worlds: robust democracy and prosperity.

Chile had experienced the stronger and more prolonged economic performance of the region, while Brazil's path out of the doldrums of high debt and inflation, together with an assertive social policy, brought some 60 million Brazilians out of poverty. Moreover, public opinion surveys held since late 20th century showed high support for democracy.

Then, again, just before the 2016 Olympic Games held in Brazil, a massive wave of peaceful protests erupted, bringing millions of people to the streets, complaining against vastly inefficient public services and other public investment, combined with massive corruption scandals that incriminated the top of the political hierarchy, both in congress and in the executive. Why host the Olympics if hospitals didn't work or infrastructure was collapsing?

In Chile, the protests were far more limited, essentially an awakening of the student movement demanding better education and protesting against a skewed system where the most affluent always obtained the best places in the best public schools. The protest movement lasted for a long time — until the wind of reform proved strong enough, forcing an initial transformation of the system.

Expectations Revolution

What was apparently taking place in both Brazil and Chile was an expectations revolution. As more people were leaving the ranks of poverty behind and joining the middle class, they no longer conformed to the status quo of bad services and poor education. Thus, the peaceful protests pushed against a lack of progress and corruption, especially in Brazil, where the Carwash and the Odebrecht corruption scandals were undermining the credibility of the political class. Corruption charges reached the top of government and led to the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff in April 2016.

The expectations revolution may have been taking place in Bolivia as well. Paradoxically, Evo Morales' success might have worked as a backlash. Bolivia, as well as Chile, had high growth rates for more than a decade, and millions of Bolivians have been brought out of poverty. Having achieved better living standards, a part of those entering the middle class may have joined those demanding more from the political system and from the president himself. And, most probably, this change of mind was not in President Morales' calculations.

Overall, the situation in the region today is different to those golden times in several respects. There has been a clear backlash against democratic rule while economic performance has been meager, even if it has not faltered altogether as it has elsewhere. A combination of factors seems to have propelled the more violent protests.

First, the overall perceptions about democracy vs. authoritarian rule have shifted. According to Latinobarometro, the overall preference for democracy as a political system has dropped from 79% in 2013 to 65% in 2018 in the region as a whole, while it dropped to 68% in Ecuador, 66% in Bolivia and 65% in Chile. In turn, the number of people calling the regimes in their countries undemocratic went up from 9% in 2013 to 14% in 2018. At the same time, the younger segments of the population have a lower preference for democracy (44% between the ages of 16 and 25) as compared to the older (52% for those over 61), while the preference for authoritarian rule is higher for the young (16%) compared to the old (13%).

Second, the perception that the political system works in favor of a few powerful groups has increased consistently from a minimum of 61% in 2009 to the current 79% — a massive 18 percentage points — with numbers as high as 60% in Bolivia, 74% in Chile and 81% in Ecuador. What these numbers are saying is that no matter the advances in economic terms, the overall perception is that the system is skewed against you.

Third, except for Bolivia, where political parties seemingly continue to be the main vehicle for representation, in most other countries this essential feature of political stability has weakened over the years. Even in Chile, a country with strong political party traditions and a clear distinction between the left and the right, the overall representation of political parties has become lackluster. This may explain why protests gave way to sheer violence.

Clearly, the worst case is Haiti, where traditionally political parties have been either weak or non-existent. In Ecuador, weak parties are a typical feature of the political system. It was only during the Correa era when his newly created party, despite accommodating to the needs of the populist leader, was able to overcome the traditional solitude of Ecuadorian rulers. But the recent friction between Lenin Moreno and Rafael Correa has brought weakness back as a defining part of Ecuador's political life.

What Now?

Christopher Sabatini and Anar Bata, writing in Foreign Affairs, argue forcefully that protests don't seem to be leading anywhere and that it is highly likely they won't deliver the type of change they were intended for. This is clearly not the case in Bolivia. Evo Morales was forced to resign, and, in the aftermath, members of the electoral tribunal were imprisoned for orchestrating an electoral sham. Having inherited a highly polarized country — mostly of his own making — it would seem that the times of prosperity and overall peace that Morales granted Bolivia are over. What will come now is unclear — a full return to democracy or continued unrest and unstable governments.

In the rest of cases discussed here, things may not turn out as desired by those staging the revolt. Haiti will continue to suffer its chronic disease of political instability and the utter impossibility of finding even a modest path to overcoming its tragic drama of poverty and destitution.

In Chile, there might be some reshuffling of how policies are designed and put in practice, but

given the representation crisis the country has been suffering for quite some time, it is unlikely that the channels for smooth democratic politics will be restored and people's feedback will be given greater credence. Despite President Pinera's call for a new constitution, if Martians were to descend in Chile today, they would be astonished to see how the current political landscape has changed so little from the times of Salvador Allende.

Finally, after the era of strong leadership and concentration of power under Rafael Correa, Ecuador is in a difficult transition to greater political openness and transparency, which may succeed if Ecuadorians give Lenin Moreno a new opportunity. Judging by the recent upheaval, it would seem that microeconomics beats attempts at re-democratization. In addition, his efforts to dismantle the populist edifice Correa built with such care might inevitably open the door to the ghosts of instability and uncertainty.

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MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA

The End of the Iran Nuclear Deal

Gary Grappo
May 10, 2019

Iran's economy is set to plunge and the much strained JCPOA with it. But the Islamic Republic will likely remain defiant.

Iran's announcement on May 8 that it will "partially" withdraw from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) — aka the Iran nuclear deal concluded in 2015 between the Iranians and the P5+1 group — marks yet another step in the landmark accord's slow death. The demise became inevitable a year ago when President Donald Trump pulled the US

out of the agreement and re-imposed onerous sanctions on Iran and its economy.

In announcing his government's action, President Hassan Rouhani said Iran will cease its sales of enriched uranium, meaning its stocks will begin to exceed set JCPOA limits. He also warned that if the other still-compliant signatories — clearly signaling the Europeans — don't come up with a mechanism for Iran to recapture the economic benefits of the JCPOA in 60 days, then Tehran will resume production of highly-enriched uranium — likely above the 3.67% level permitted under the accord.

Desperate Gambit to Fight "King Dollar"

Throwing the future of the deal at the feet of the Europeans illustrates the desperation of Iran's leadership and its economy. Iranian hardliners had always maintained that the JCPOA was a Western plot to undermine the Islamic Revolution, which was all but confirmed by the US withdrawal in 2018. Moderates are at whit's end to prove them wrong. Bereft of options short of caving to the Americans, they are effectively beseeching, if not begging, the Europeans to save them and the JCPOA.

American sanctions have begun to bite deep into Iran's economy with oil exports halved even before the May expiration of US waivers — from a high of 3.8 million barrels per day (bpd) at the start of 2018 to 1.1 million bpd by in March 2019. The waivers had been granted to major economic partners and allies of the US still importing Iranian oil, including China, India, South Korea, Japan, Italy, Turkey and others. With the expiration of those waivers, oil exports could now plummet by as much as another 50%. Losses to Iran already reach well into the tens of billions of dollars. Trump's announcement also on May 8 to impose sanctions on Iran's mining and minerals sectors, including copper, steel and others, will exact further pain on the country.

Iran's leadership realizes the futility of fighting "king dollar," the all-powerful currency in which most of the world's financial and trade transactions take place. The facts are

incontrovertible. The US dollar makes up nearly 62% of all known central bank foreign exchange reserves, making it the de facto global currency. According to SWIFT, the payment services company, in 2018, the dollar accounted for 90% of global trade based on the value of letters of credit issued, up from 81% three years earlier. (Even the European Union pays for 80% of its energy imports in dollars.) Any nation, financial institution or company doing business in dollars or with the US risks an effective death sentence in defying American sanctions.

But Iran's gambit of dumping the problem on the Europeans effectively amounts to blackmail: You fix this or we're gone. Read: we are helpless and you must help us or else. Yet the Europeans have already sought financial work-arounds to US sanctions — China made a futile attempt as well — but to little effect. Supplanting the dollar, which has been the global currency since the end of World War II, may be possible, but it would take extraordinary efforts and much time. Iran's economy, now in a steep nosedive — from negative 3.9% last year to an estimated minus 6% in 2019 — doesn't have time.

Iran's Own Doing

The European signatories of the JCPOA — Britain, France, Germany and the EU — quickly rejected Iran's hapless "ultimatum." First, Europe recognizes the Islamic Republic's vain attempt to drive a wider wedge between themselves and the US. Europe's economic and strategic ties to the US, frayed though they may be in the era of Donald Trump, are simply too strong. Second, despite the Trump administration's ill-considered withdrawal from the agreement, many of its justifications for doing so ring true.

Iran's continued testing of intermediate-range ballistic missiles, backing for terrorist organizations like Hezbollah and Hamas, support for the brutal Syrian regime and the Houthi rebels in Yemen, interference in the internal affairs of regional nations like Iraq and Lebanon, threatening harangues against Israel and Saudi Arabia, and abysmal human rights record are all

self-inflicted wounds, which the Europeans recognize and cannot fix. Only Iran's ruling clique of clerics and toady henchmen, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, can right these and other wrongs.

Trump's decisions — driven by hardliner Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and uber-hardliner National Security Adviser John Bolton — unfortunately play right into the hands of those same Iranian hardliners who complained all along of the JCPOA sell-out to the West. They and their master, the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, have no intention of reversing the course of the revolution. They would rather see the economy tank first and with it the enormous potential and aspirations of the Middle East's most capable population.

Exit JCPOA but Not the Islamic Revolution

Nevertheless, the capacity of Iranians for suffering, undergirded by Shia Islam's martyr ethos, will suffer through this, just as they did for the 35 years prior to the JCPOA. And just as it did during that time, the leadership will blame all the woes of its own theocratic mismanagement and corruption on the "Great Satan," aka the US. It will likely work again, sadly.

Iran may hold on to the JCPOA till 2020 in a false hope of change in US policy following the presidential election. But President Trump's defeat is not assured — certainly not in the glow of America's vibrant economy and low unemployment rate, two drivers in any election. Moreover, even a winning Democratic candidate would be loath to re-enter the JCPOA without changes. Such a candidate would wisely seek to avoid the division sparked by Barack Obama's acceptance of the accord in the face of fierce resistance not only from the Republicans, but also many Democrats. A Democratic president would insist on Iran meeting conditions substantially higher than the current JCPOA stipulates before signing back on.

The JCPOA was always about the US and Iran. Including the other global economic powers was a solid strategy. But, in the end, it was

always about the US and the long reach of its economic power embodied in the dollar. So, without the US, the JCPOA withers. Iran and the rest of the world revert to the pre-comprehensive sanctions period preceding 2007. History repeats itself and Iranians ultimately pay the price. The Islamic Revolution, crippled as it may be, blunders on.

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A War With US Will Destroy Iran's Reformist Movement

Maryam Nouri
June 4, 2019

The portrayal of the United States as a hostile adversary has helped hard-line conservatives to maintain their position within Iran's political system over the past 40 years.

In the first week of May, the Trump administration accelerated the deployment of an aircraft carrier strike group to the Persian Gulf, based on what it called “troubling and escalatory indications and warnings” regarding Iranian threats toward US allies and military personnel in the region. This move has been perceived as a threat by the Iranian side, prompting it to allegedly start mobilizing forces in response. These recent developments have caused widespread concern regarding an imminent war between the two countries.

Despite these recent escalations, however, the Trump administration has publicly announced that its campaign of “maximum pressure” aims to promote a change of behavior from the Iranian regime, and that the United States is not pursuing a full-fledged war against the Islamic Republic. With the memory of the Iraq War still vivid for many Americans, coupled with Iran's obvious military superiority compared to Iraq under

Saddam Hussein, it is unlikely that Washington would initiate a full-scale invasion of Iran. The Trump administration is also facing international skepticism regarding the accuracy of its recent allegations against Iran, and international powers have called for self-restraint on both sides.

Although currently chances of a full-fledged war between the two countries might be low, the increasing presence of the US military in the Persian Gulf and the mobilization by Iran in response does serve to heighten the possibility of a dangerous confrontation. Such a confrontation might be limited, and not necessarily a doorway to annihilation. However, even a small-scale conflict between the two countries would not only negate any possible behavior change from Iran, but would also give Iranian hard-liners a chance to further pursue an anti-American agenda and establish political dominance over the country's reformist government. This will threaten short-term American interests in the region and put the two countries on an irreversible course toward more bloodshed, endangering the stability of the region for years, or even decades, to come.

Shadows of a Bitter Past

To understand the current state of affairs, one must note how Iranian conservatives frame their animosity toward the United States, to the point that it constitutes a *raison d'être*. This hostile relationship could be traced back to the 1953 CIA-led coup d'état, in which the democratically elected prime minister, Mohammad Mosaddegh, was overthrown right after he attempted the nationalization of Iran's oil industry. After the Islamic Revolution in 1979, anti-American sentiment was further aggravated when the Carter administration agreed to allow the overthrown shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, into the United States for medical treatment. The fact that the US had refused to extradite the shah to the newly established Islamic Republic motivated an angry mob to attack the US Embassy in Tehran, holding American diplomats hostage for over a year.

It is important to note that in contemporary conservative dialogue in Iran, the memory of the American-led coup is used to rationalize the fear of future American meddling in order to crush the Islamic regime, and the hostage crisis is justified as a heroic act of saving the revolution. The hostages were finally released after 444 days, but the relationship between the two countries never recovered. As William Beeman mentions in his book, *The “Great Satan” vs. the “Mad Mullahs,”* “in a myopic, almost dogged manner, the United States persisted in digging into a ready-made villain’s role within the symbolic structure of Iranian society.”

Conservative rhetoric that pictures the US as the “Great Satan” finds another defining factor for anti-American sentiment during the Iran-Iraq War. Conservatives blame America not only for financially supporting Saddam Hussein, but also for providing Iraq with intelligence and weapons that were used to kill Iranians. Once again, the fact that the actual adversary was the Iraqi regime, in the eyes of the conservatives in Tehran Saddam was merely a puppet, and it was actually America that Iran was fighting. This view was solidified when the United States shot down an Iranian passenger plane in July 1988, killing 290 civilians on board. Consequently, when Iran finally managed to take back its occupied territories from Iraq the same year, it was also cheered as a victory against the United States.

This image of the US as a hostile adversary has helped the conservatives to maintain their position within Iran’s political system over the past 40 years. The state-supported right-wing media has also contributed to the cementing of this narrative by using religious symbolism and emphasizing the sacrifices made by millions of Iranian people in their fight against the evils of the United States.

A Breeze of Change

However, with the end of the Iran-Iraq War in 1988, and after a period of reconstruction and stabilization in Iran, a new political movement emerged. It aimed to reform the political and

social status quo and bring change by expanding individual freedoms and renovating the country’s strict social structure. Iranians welcomed this ideology and, in 1997, Mohammad Khatami became Iran’s first reformist president. Khatami supported and implemented relatively progressive changes within the traditional structure of the country that caused backlash from the conservative political figures. Internationally, President Khatami’s greatest legacy was his attempt to revive Iran’s position in the international community. In a speech at the UN General Assembly in October 1998, Khatami emphasized the need for “dialogue among civilizations” as an anti-thesis to avoid a “clash of civilizations.”

Although far from perfect, especially considering Iran’s involvement in regional conflicts, the ideology of avoiding war through negotiation has become the most defining aspect of the reformist movement in Iran, even more characteristic than its initial steps toward expanding social and individual freedoms. The reformist coalition lost the 2005 and 2009 elections to the conservative Mahmud Ahmadinejad, during whose administration Tehran took a hard-line position against the international community regarding its concerns about Iran’s nuclear program. Iran’s non-compromising attitude not only caused a set of crippling UN sanctions on the country’s oil-dependent economy, but also heightened the risks of confrontation between Iran and the US, with American officials threatening that “all the options are on the table.”

However, in 2013, amidst escalating tensions, the Iranians used their ballots as a way to prove to themselves and the outside world that they wanted negotiations, not war, by electing the moderate reformist Hassan Rouhani as president and supporting his parliamentary coalition known as the Fraction of Hope. Through the work of President Rouhani and his team, Iran managed to come to an agreement regarding its nuclear activity and sign the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), commonly known as Iran

nuclear deal, in 2015 to ensure a better and safer future.

The nuclear deal was also a way to counter the hard-line conservative narrative of history, which portrayed the United States as an enemy that cannot be trusted. It would revive the Iranian people's hope toward a future without the fear of war with the US. It could also revitalize the country's economy and bring back prosperity to everyday life in Iran. At least that is what President Rouhani and other reformist figures emphasized vigorously during and after the negotiations.

This political performance altered the relationship between the Iranian reformists and conservatives in an odd way. Conservatives were skeptical about any profitable outcome from the very beginning of the nuclear negotiations, and believed the United States to be untrustworthy. They were convinced that the country's economic problems can only be solved from within the country and not with the help of the West, which in their view had only betrayed Iran, shed Iranian blood and destabilized the Middle East. In other words, during the nuclear talks between Iran and the 5+1 countries, an obvious political polarization occurred that would focus solely on the country's behavior toward the United States.

Miscalculations and Misunderstandings

Whilst by signing the JCPOA President Rouhani and his administration scored a win for the reformist narrative, they were not given the opportunity to celebrate their achievements. President Donald Trump's hostile actions regarding the Islamic Republic, especially his move to unilaterally withdraw the US from the agreement, has helped Iran's conservatives to regain their already lost popularity. It is important to notice how Trump's decision is fully in line with the conservative's view of America as untrustworthy. The conservatives used this chance to attack the reformist administration as harshly as they could, blatantly turning every shortcoming in the country into attack on reformist ideology. This strategy, coupled with

the current economic difficulties, which are also heavily affected by the Trump administration's decision to reimpose economic sanctions on Iran, has caused a decline in the reformist movement's popularity.

On the other hand, the conservative forces in Iran have pursued the Shia crescent policy, expanding their sphere of influence in countries with large Shia Muslim populations. Iran's involvement in Iraq to fight the Islamic State and its support for Bashar al-Assad in Syria are significant cases in which the Iranian military directly participates in regional conflicts to maintain and further expand Tehran's influence. Iran also provides financial support for Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Palestine and the Houthi rebels in Yemen.

Such regional interventions are also widely supported by the conservative political forces in Iran. Once again, the conservative narrative depicts alarmed regional rivals such as Israel, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates as mere minions of the "Great Satan" and emphasizes the need to confront these evils. Iranian conservative newspapers and state-run television use the exact rhetoric that was in place during the 1980-1988 war with Iraq. By magnifying the lives lost in the wars in Iraq or Syria, for example, Iran's conservatives focus on the concept of martyrdom in Shia ideology to picture the country's meddling as a holy task.

Consequently, the victory against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria is salvaged as a sign to show that an agenda of "resistance" has been successful. At the same time, conservatives marginalize their reformist counterparts as naïve and gullible for attempting to keep Iran in compliance with an already dead deal, which has further heightened tensions between Iran and the West.

Holy Cause

In the current political atmosphere in Iran, even a small confrontation with the US would give the conservatives an excellent opportunity to divert the public's attention from the devastating

economic situation and the rampant abuse of human rights in the country. This is already visible in a set of nonsensical and sometimes even contradictory statements made by Iranian conservative figures and disseminated by their followers on social media. On the one hand, the conservatives are promoting the idea of a strong Iran in terms of military superiority and the country's ties with international superpowers, which in their view would scare the Americans off. However, a second argument exaggerates Iran's victory against "American puppets" in Iraq, Syria and Yemen. Based on this view point, war with America is an inevitable destiny for the country and will eventually lead to Iran's glorious victory, considering the fact that the loss of life does not necessarily work as a deterrent for those who support the war.

Moreover, conservatives would use any such bloodshed to manufacture a holy cause against the Americans, and through their own framing of the situation play the role of heroes who are defending the victimhood of the Shia ideology. Therefore, just as the Iran-Iraq War is framed as a blessing that helped unify the country against foreign adversaries, a confrontation with the United States would also consolidate a polarized political atmosphere inside Iran.

On the reformist side, however, even a small confrontation with the US would have irreversible consequences on the reputation and the popularity of the reformist narration. With the extreme polarization of policy regarding the relationship with the United States, the Iranian reformists promoted dialogue, negotiation and cooperation as an instrument to avoid war and boost the country's economy. A goal that was briefly achieved by the Iran nuclear deal once again seems out of reach following the US withdrawal and the reimposition of economic sanctions.

As has been suggested by the former US Secretary of State John Kerry, the Iranian reformists are desperately trying to wait Trump out, and hope for a better relationship with the next president of America. This dramatic hope,

however, would wane if war, even in the form of relatively minor clashes, breaks out. This would provide hard-line Iranian conservatives with the necessary momentum to wipe out not only the reformist movement itself, but also the ideology of change and reform within Iran.

From a short-term viewpoint, a show of power through limited military campaigns might appear to be an option to force "behavioral change" on the Iranian regime. In the long run, however, due to the fundamental ideological hostility toward the West among Iran's hard-liners, military confrontation would possibly lead to a more serious clash between Iran and the United States.

If America is truly hoping for change in Iran, it should let its people follow the same path of electing relatively West-friendly reformists, and wait for the change to come gradually while trying to control Iranian intervention in the region through diplomatic channels. Any kind of confrontation between the Iranian and US troops would likely further discredit the reformists' viewpoint toward Washington and its intentions, and help an anti-American hard-line narrative to solidify its dominance in Iran. This would be, without a doubt, the end of hope for the Iranian people.

*The author would like to remain anonymous and has used a pseudonym.

Who Are Turkey's Long-Term Allies?

Nathaniel Handy
August 6, 2019

As President Erdogan mulls over swapping the US for another arms dealer, Turkey's partners are becoming harder to spot.

It is becoming harder and harder to ascertain who exactly are Turkey's long-term allies. On July 26, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan threatened that Turkey would simply look

elsewhere for fighter jets if frozen out of the US F-35 program, of which it has been an integral part.

It came with the news that Turkey's new Russian S-400 missile defense system is expected to be operational by 2020. Such news might appear on the surface to place Turkey thoroughly in the Russian orbit, but Turkish foreign policy is far more complex these days.

If Turkey were now a Russian satrap, it would be assumed that it would mirror Moscow's foreign policy. But it most certainly does not. Turkey and Russia are on opposing sides in pretty much every Middle Eastern dispute, despite the Kremlin's favored line that it is a neutral player in the region.

In Syria, Turkey has fought for the rebel opposition against the Russian-backed regime. While Russian President Vladimir Putin has been keen to foster ties with Egyptian strongman Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, Turkey's President Erdogan is a vocal foe of the military leader who ousted the democratically-elected Muslim Brotherhood president, Mohammed Morsi, in 2013. In Libya, where the dynamics of Egyptian and wider Middle Eastern politics are playing out, Russia backs rebel General Khalifa Haftar, while Turkey supports and arms the UN-recognized Government of National Accord in the capital, Tripoli.

Only in terms of their relations with the Saudis and the Iranians do Russia and Turkey appear to both play similar roles. They are friendly where it is advantageous to be, especially in areas where the US is perceived to have vacated space and created a potential power vacuum.

No More Mr. Nice Guy

It has been several years now since President Erdogan began dismantling the foreign policy of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), which had promoted cordial relations with near neighbors and major powers, such as the US and the European Union.

In that time, the spats with the US have been unceasing if often rather petty. They have involved the sanctioning of diplomats on both sides, the arrest of a US pastor and the latest threat to find arms dealers outside America. It has been mirrored in Europe by the freezing of Turkey's long-running accession process to the EU, along with a similar series of spats with European nations over Turkey's treatment of its Kurdish minority, the question of Syrian refugees and issues around Erdogan's attempts to woo Turkish voters in Europe.

President Erdogan's position is nearly always combative and appears to stem from a deep antipathy to Western powers, and yet there is now an irony at work here, too. US President Donald Trump is a leader with many of the same characteristics as Erdogan. The same could be said of the UK, with Prime Minister Boris Johnson at the helm.

As a result, Erdogan is often railing against states, the leader of which he can often relate to far more than previous, more liberal incumbents. If the goal — like the one most media suggest that Vladimir Putin of Russia and Xi Jinping of China are pursuing — is a more illiberal and autocratic world order, then things may appear on track.

But to return to our original question, where does that leave Turkish foreign policy? Who are Turkey's long-term allies? A more illiberal and autocratic world order is one thing, but a state still needs friends.

Turkey's relationship with Russia has oscillated wildly during Erdogan's tenure. Moreover, there is little indication from the Russian side that it is a relationship Turkey can rely upon for the long term. Turkey is convenient to Russia, particularly due to its role in NATO, which Moscow hopes to destabilize. Yet any long-term reading of geopolitics in the region will conclude that Russia and Turkey are ultimately rivals, and Ankara is decidedly the junior partner in any partnership.

Widening the Net

President Erdogan has also flirted with alignment to the rising Chinese state, such as when he suggested Turkey would like to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Turkey currently has dialogue partner status and was granted the chairmanship of the SCO energy club in 2016. Yet a Chinese clampdown on the Uighur community in Xinjiang province — an ethnically Turkic people — has put Beijing on a collision course with Turkey, which harbors many exiled dissidents from the region. It is clear it will be hard for China and Turkey to become enduring allies beyond economic pragmatism.

In South America, Erdogan has been friendly to the revolutionary Venezuelan state, chiefly due to its enmity to the US. Yet the fragile nature of Venezuela makes any long-term alliance weak. There have also been large Turkish inroads into Africa — particularly East African states such as Somalia and Sudan. Turkish investment would certainly suggest it aims to consolidate long-term alliances in the region. However, these are alliances where Turkey is the benefactor, providing it with much leverage within these states. But these are weak, poor states that do not provide much geopolitical cover on a global stage.

Perhaps the most conspicuous of Turkey's alliances has been that with the Gulf state of Qatar, which has been embargoed by surrounding Arab countries since 2017. Turkey has been the chief ally providing vital economic and military assistance to Qatar, founded upon a shared vision of a role for political Islam in the Middle East. Here, Turkey has formed an alliance that appears strong and enduring, though it is an alliance with a small state that is currently encircled by hostile neighbors intent on fundamental policy change, if not regime change.

The broad picture of Turkish foreign policy under President Erdogan is conflicting and seemingly bereft of strong, long-term allies. Of course, a change of leadership in Turkey might change all that.

The world is certainly becoming less ordered and less secure. That may well mean that old

alliances break down. But it is a brave middleweight country indeed that would attempt to go it alone in such a volatile region as Turkey's without the support of states and systems larger and stronger than its own.

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Another Middle East War Is Internationalized

Gary Grappo
September 18, 2019

The attack on oil facilities in Saudi Arabia, the consequent impact on oil markets and the effect on the global economy mark the third Middle East conflict to become internationalized in the last decade.

“If we don't go to the Middle East, the Middle East will come to us.” That prophetic comment was once shared with me by an American general defending US policy — now questioned by many in the country, including President Donald Trump — to remain actively engaged actively in the Middle East not only to defend and pursue US interests, but also keep in check the region's many tensions. To be sure, it has been a costly policy in terms of American and Arab lives, resources and the United States' image, and it has not always been successful.

The general's comment comes to mind with the recent drone — perhaps cruise missiles as well, according to reports — attack on two major oil facilities in the heart of Saudi Arabia's oil-producing area in the eastern part of the country. Houthi rebels have been engaged in a four-year-plus civil war in Yemen, in which Saudi Arabia has played a major role. The latter's airstrikes have been blamed for a fair portion of the death toll of 100,000. The Saudis and Houthis as well

as other participants — the United Arab Emirates, Yemeni government forces and al-Qaeda — have also been blamed for human rights abuses by the UN Human Rights Council.

Negotiations to end the conflict have been fitful and the most recent ceasefire fell apart months ago, just as did previous agreements to stop fighting.

Which brings us to the latest attacks on September 14. The Houthis claimed responsibility for the attacks, but the US is pointing the finger at Iran, though definitive evidence for their claims remains lacking. Nevertheless, their accusations have a certain ring of truth since it is unlikely that the technology to carry out such a long-range attack from Yemen could be obtained by the Houthis without Iranian assistance. The Saudis assert that the drones and cruise missiles were actually Iranian.

Moreover, the Saudis also now contend, as did Secretary Pompeo shortly after the attacks, that they did not originate in Yemen. Predictably, Iran denies all allegations of responsibility for the attacks.

The World Feels Yemen's Pain

Regardless of the specifics of the attacks in Saudi Arabia, which remain important, the incident marks the third Middle East civil war — after Libya and Syria — that has been internationalized. With the prior two, it was the mass exodus of refugees, first to surrounding countries but then to Europe that sparked blowbacks in the European Union, the US and elsewhere against immigration. The immigration debate doubtlessly played a major role in Britain's decision in 2016 to withdraw from the EU.

Yemen presents a major challenge to would-be refugees. It is surrounded by one of the world's most inhospitable deserts — mostly in Saudi Arabia where these refugees are hardly welcome — and by an equally perilous Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. Instead, the allegedly Houthi attacks on two large oil facilities — Abqaiq, one

of the world's biggest that is capable of processing seven million barrels of oil per day — caused tumult in the global oil market, sparking the largest one-day rise in prices in recent memory. The two facilities — Khurais is the other — account for almost 10% of the global oil supply. The Saudis are now expected to bring a significant portion of the oil processed at these two installations back online fairly soon, though not immediately.

Nevertheless, markets remain roiled. A relatively simple weapon, a drone, has rendered the world's largest oil exporter's oil-producing infrastructure seemingly defenseless. Recall, also, that Saudi Arabia is the third-highest defense spender in the world after the US and China. Oil buyers are now likely to add an additional risk premium to world oil prices as a result. So, prices seen at the close of business the day before the attacks, around \$60 per barrel, may not return for some time unless OPEC producers, Russia, the US and others ramp up production. The OPEC-plus countries — OPEC and Russia — have been reluctant to do that to date in order to maintain a floor price for their exports.

Is Yemen a Factor?

The larger issue, however, is what actions the international community is prepared to take to end this conflict. Judging from its predecessors in Libya and Syria, probably not much. There seems to be no will. That's especially true of the US, which, under both Barack Obama and Donald Trump, has supplied the Saudis with the weapons used in its aerial bombardment campaign in Yemen. And under Trump, the US voice for ending the conflict has been largely muted.

In fact, since the attacks, it has been the US and Saudi Arabia against Iran. Yemen appears to be barely a second thought, its millions of people all suffering but forgotten in the swirl of accusations and counter-accusations between these three powers. So, the civil war will continue and oil consumers around the world will pay a price for their leaders' inability to end it — just

like Libya and Syria, whose civil wars rage on too.

Other questions surround the attack on Saudi Arabia's oil facilities. How could such an attack occur in the heart of the world's largest oil exporter who, despite its outsized defense spending, was unable to protect its most critical asset? While Iran undoubtedly played a role, did it play a direct one?

It is difficult to believe that such an attack by the Houthis, who have received Iranian support over the course of much of the war, on its foe's most vital strategic facility could have taken place without the knowledge and likely approval of Tehran. And, as the two facilities are some 500 miles from Yemen, is it possible for them to have launched these attacks from that country or might they have originated elsewhere, including Iran or from within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia itself?

These are hardly academic questions. Their answers will determine the next moves by the US and Saudi Arabia. President Trump has announced stepped-up sanctions on Iran, whose economy is already reeling from existing sanctions imposed after the US withdrew from the nuclear accord in May 2018.

Confrontation, Escalation and Diplomacy

One question on the minds of many is that of military confrontation. On that, two considerations must be taken into account. First, Donald Trump campaigned in 2016 against US involvement in "wasteful, never-ending" US wars in the Middle East. That would pretty much describe a US-Iran conflict.

Perhaps an even more important consideration, however, is that no American lives were lost — no Saudis were killed either — and no US assets were touched in the attacks. So, in the minds of most Americans and probably in that of Trump, where's the casus belli? Why should Americans risk their lives for a Saudi oil facility, especially when US reliance on imported oil from anywhere outside Canada and Mexico is minimal?

That leaves the Saudi response. Riyadh will certainly respond with reprisal attacks against Yemen, though locating the responsible Houthis will be problematic. Depending on the actual Iranian role and what can be proved, it might decide to launch airstrikes against Iran's equally vulnerable Gulf-based oil facilities. But that would set both countries on a treacherous path of escalation whose end is unknown.

Such an attack by the Saudis is unlikely without American assent, given the ramifications and likelihood of an Iranian reaction. No one — not the US, Saudi Arabia, Iran, the other Gulf states or the international community — wants or can afford a major war in the Middle East. With the religious overtones (Shia versus Wahhabi Sunni), rocket arsenals of both sides making populations in both countries dangerously exposed, and the critical importance of the Gulf to global oil flows and the global economy, such a conflict ought to be unthinkable. So, why would Iran permit such an attack at all knowing the predictable reaction?

Diplomacy might seem the preferred course now. Indeed, Trump has offered to meet Iran's President Hassan Rouhani. One possibility might have been at next week's UN General Assembly, which both leaders are expected to attend. That is probably off the table now.

Nevertheless, some quiet and purposeful diplomacy has never been more necessary. And the place to start may be Yemen's civil war.

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As Iraq Burns, World Leaders Stay Silent

Amin Farhad
November 20, 2019

By not responding to the brutal quelling of protests, the US and its allies are giving a

green light to Iran and silently sealing Iraq's fate.

The wave of unrest that has swept through Iraq has gone from protest to violence, creating tension in the region. The demonstrations, which were initially motivated by discontent over the country's economic stagnation and rampant government corruption, quickly devolved into chaos. Since their start in October, hundreds of thousands have taken to the streets, burning down several political party buildings.

The security forces and the militias backing the government, some linked to Iran, responded with sniper fire, tear gas and firing live ammunition at the protesters. To date, over 300 people have been killed and thousands more injured — a sign of the repressive turn the current regime has taken.

Though the smaller issues at the heart of the protests are local, the presence of the anti-government wave itself is important on the global stage due to Iraq's regional positioning. Following the US invasion and the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2003, the government remains largely ineffective and rife with corruption. However, it is still an important strategic point for the US, which has an ongoing military presence in the country, and has become a key part of Iran's regional aspirations.

This divide also highlights the gamut of responses ranging from condemnation to quiet support, but it ignores the fact that while politicizing seems to be par for the course, there is more that should be said. Indeed, the world should turn its eye on Iraq and truly question, a decade and a half after Hussein's overthrow, if the current political elite is equipped to lead the country back to stability.

Protecting Government Interests

The protesters are, first of all, fighting against endless corruption: Transparency International ranks Iraq 168 out of 180 countries. The people of Iraq are also frustrated with a lack of public

services and inability to find jobs. According to the World Bank, the current unemployment rate is 9.9%, while youth unemployment is at 25%. A large portion of the population lives below the poverty line, spending less than \$2.2 a day.

To add fuel to the fire, Iran's influence in the country continues to provoke public anger. Iran's aim is to keep Iraq aligned with Iranian interests and, by essentially having unrestricted access to key state institutions as well as playing a significant role in decision-making, Tehran has been successful so far. However, many believe that Iran's presence is suffocating Iraq, and protesters are demanding that Iran leave Iraq alone and stop using violence to suppress the demonstrations.

The government struggled for days to quell the unrest, even going as far as suggesting sweeping changes, such as a reshuffling of Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi's cabinet, land distribution and expanding welfare programs. However, these were shot down by protesters due to the government's inability to tackle the root cause of the problem — corruption — that distorts the development and economic prosperity of the country.

Although Abdul Mahdi did not directly order the militias to suppress protests — indeed, the militias are not technically affiliated with the government — they were acting to protect his position and that of the current Shia bloc in power, which is made up of two coalitions, Al-Islah, led by Muqtada al-Sadr's Sairoon, and Binaa, led by Hadi al-Amiri's Fatah. This coalition is problematic because while Sadr's bloc is against Iran's involvement in the country, the Fatah bloc is pro-Iran, making parliamentary decision-making difficult and often leading to deadlocks.

Because the Iraqi government has been heavily influenced by Iran and riddled with corruption for as long as memory can reach, the demands put forward by the protesters are difficult to implement. The ensuing bloodshed was described by Abdul Mahdi as a “bitter medicine” necessary to stop ongoing unrest,

although he did not condemn the violence outright.

The World Reacts

The protests — and especially the violence that followed — have brought condemnation from some familiar actors. The UN was swift in its rebuke of the Iraqi government's response, with the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq casting serious accusations. The mission claimed that Iraqi authorities committed severe human rights violations in their efforts to quell protests, including mass arrests and multiple reports of the use of excessive force. Amnesty International followed up with several calls for authorities to stop mass arrests and censorship, which included cutting off the nation's access to the internet.

However, as the country's government slides back into repressive tactics reminiscent of Saddam Hussein's regime, the governments of the world must be more forceful in their response, albeit careful in their actions. Iraqis have reacted strongly against what they perceive to be political meddling from Iran.

The current Shia majority government, which has strong backing from Iran, must not be left blameless for the administration's unnecessary and lethal reaction. Even Shia figures in Iraq have spoken out against the government, with Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani urging authorities to give in to protesters' demands or face escalating tensions. Shia opposition parties have called for the government to be dissolved and for elections to be called.

So far, the US expressed concern over the situation, urging restraint from the Iraqi government. However, if Washington wants to maintain presence in the region, it is important that it takes appropriate actions to preserve its interests.

Lack of a broader response from world powers shows an unwillingness to enter the quagmire created by constant interventions by foreign powers in Iraq over the past decade. The European Union released a statement in early October that called for restraint while at the same

time praising Abdul Mahdi's actions at that point, which included proclaiming his support for freedom of expression, but remained noncommittal.

If the US and its allies wish to see Iraq remain a point of strategic relevance, their responses must be more forceful while being respectful of Iraq's sovereignty. The current regime inherited a complex combination of politics and instability, but has done little to improve it, pushing protesters to call for the formation of a new government. The violent and repressive response hints at the potential future for Iraq should attacks on democracy continue in the face of silence from world leaders.

The governing coalition has proven that it is either unwilling or unable to fix the situation — either case raises serious questions about the future. By not responding to the brutal quelling of protests, the US and its allies are giving a green light to Iran and silently sealing Iraq's fate.

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NORTH AMERICA

The Right Green New Deal

Steve Westly
May 8, 2019

The Green New Deal as proposed makes the right diagnosis, but the wrong prescription for government action on renewable energy.

Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Senator Ed Markey's Green New Deal has sparked an important and overdue debate about America's energy future. The core message of the controversial bill is correct: America needs an all-hands-on-deck effort to combat climate change. The last five years have been the five hottest years in recorded history. The consequences of climate change — from unprecedented wildfires in California to the recent flooding in the Midwest — are threats to

Americans' security and well-being. The government needs to act. The Green New Deal as proposed makes the right diagnosis, but the wrong prescription.

Unfortunately, the Green New Deal doesn't lay out a clear or realistic transition to renewable energy; it's a grab-bag of wide-ranging economic and social policy proposals. The bill puts forward changes to the law to reduce poverty, provide universal health care, break up monopolies and provide a job for every American. These may be worthy goals, but their exorbitant costs make it less likely that the bill will see the light of day. A better Green New Deal would be laser-focused on transitioning the country to 100% sustainable energy as quickly as possible. A serious bill would start by setting and meeting three ambitious but achievable goals.

First, Congress should require state regulators to move energy utilities toward a nationwide balance of 50% renewable energy by 2040. California has already shown us how to get there. The state set goals to have utilities to get 20% of their energy from renewable sources by 2010 and 33% from renewables by 2020. It met both goals ahead of schedule. California is now on track to reach 50% sustainable energy by 2030.

The United States can generate 100% renewable energy, but it needs a clear and realistic nationwide goal tied to a legislative mandate. Hitting 100% renewable energy in 10 years, as the Green New Deal proposes, is not realistic. A more realistic, but still ambitious goal would be to require utilities across the country to get 50% of their energy from renewable sources by 2040. The next Congress should set it as a nationwide mandate.

Second, Congress should set a goal of banning the sales of internal combustion vehicles by 2040. This sounds like a bold proclamation, but 11 countries — including England, France, Israel, India, and Taiwan — have already done it. China is likely to do the same within two years. The good news is that electric vehicles (EV's) will soon be priced on par with gas-powered cars, and

every automaker in the world is tooling up to go electric.

Offering a \$2,500 refundable federal tax credit to buy an EV is a smart transition strategy. Those incentives could phase out as the cost of lithium ion batteries goes down. The United States and China are fighting for leadership in global EV production. We should be leaning forward, not backward, when it comes to producing emission-free vehicles.

Third, Congress should set a target of increasing building energy efficiency substantially by 2030. Buildings use 40% of the nation's energy. Setting higher standards for energy efficient buildings creates green jobs and saves energy. And while a substantial increase in efficiency is ambitious, it is realistic: Already in 2018, over 40% of buildings in the top 30 United States markets met silver, gold or platinum Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards.

Still, we can do more. European countries like Norway have developed "powerhouse" buildings that are "energy positive," which means they generate more energy than they use. We should follow Europe's lead and use a series of carrots and sticks to make sure that 70% of our buildings meet gold or platinum LEED energy efficiency standards by 2030.

A Green New Deal is essential for the planet, and it's a winning campaign message. Adding a massive restructuring of the American economy and health-care system is admirable goal, but dooms any major movement on environmental issues to failure. We need a clear plan with aggressive milestones to get there, using the template that California and Western European countries have shown us. If you care about passing a Green New Deal, keep it 100% green!

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Leaving the INF Treaty Wasn't the Problem — It's How We Did It

Cole A. Baker
May 22, 2019

While the United States was motivated to pull out of the agreement because of Russia's noncompliance, it should also be noted that the INF Treaty had significant flaws.

On February 1, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced that, due to the Russian development of an intermediate-range cruise missile system, the United States was immediately suspending its obligations to the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force (INF) Treaty, planning a full withdrawal from the agreement within six months. This move has been widely opposed, most recently by the House Appropriations Committee. The committee released a budget report on May 20, stating its intent not to fund any research or development systems that would violate the restrictions of the INF Treaty.

However, this opposition may be misplaced, as the Trump administration's choice to withdraw from the treaty was justified. What is concerning, however, is how they did it.

The INF Explained

The INF Treaty, signed by the United States and Russia in 1987, eliminated both countries' arsenals of short and intermediate-range missiles, highlighting its importance as key bilateral agreement between the biggest nuclear powers. Due to the treaty's importance, many critics of the withdrawal contend that the United States is actively endangering global nuclear stability and arms control efforts. However, these critics are disregarding one fact: Russia has been cheating.

The United States has known that Russia was developing intermediate-range missiles prohibited by the INF Treaty since 2013. The Obama administration actively pursued diplomatic means to return Russia to compliance,

including a 2014 public acknowledgment that Russia was in violation of the INF Treaty. These diplomatic efforts continued through 2018, to no avail.

While the United States was motivated to pull out of the agreement because of Russia's noncompliance, it should also be noted that the INF Treaty had significant flaws. As the treaty was bilateral, it only addressed Russian and American intermediate-range land missiles, but had no authority over other nuclear powers. While China was happy with that arrangement, the rest of the world had every reason not to be.

Yet even in the context of this flaw and Russia's noncompliance, critics still contend that a broken treaty is better than no treaty, which is simply not true. By allowing Russia to remain party to a treaty that it was blatantly disregarding, the United States was implicitly suggesting that signing the correct agreements is more important than following those agreements. Such a message jeopardizes international stability far more than the withdrawal from an individual treaty.

For instance, the United States and Russia are party to the New START treaty, which limits the number of deployed strategic warheads held by either country. Prior to the United States pulling out of the INF Treaty, it was plausible that Russia believed it could also violate the New START treaty without suffering repercussions. Unfortunately, the opportunity to communicate this narrative was not seized upon by the Trump administration.

As Brookings' author Frank A. Rose recently noted, when the United States withdrew from the INF Treaty, its ultimate objective should have been to place the blame for the failed treaty firmly on Russia. A strategic approach, similar to the US denouncement of Russian violations in 2014, should have preceded any talk of withdrawing from the treaty. This messaging would have focused the attention of the international community on Russian violations, ultimately making the withdrawal announcement a seemingly rational final step.

Moreover, the United States' allies should have been at the very least informed of the administration's intentions before any announcement was made. Not only is that a common courtesy, but it would also have provided those allies the opportunity to prepare unified statements denouncing Russian actions. Instead, President Donald Trump, after a campaign rally in Nevada in October 2018, spoke publicly about his plan to withdraw from the INF Treaty without first notifying America's allies. International attention then immediately focused on how the United States was going to end the treaty rather than why it was going to end.

By not laying the proper groundwork, the United States lost control of the narrative. To many, controlling the narrative may seem inconsequential given that the treaty was between the United States and Russia. Russia now understands that violating a treaty with the United States has consequences. But despite this understanding, the perspective of the international community matters.

In the 21st century, interstate competition is most commonly found in the gray zone between diplomatic interactions and direct military conflict. According to US Navy Captain (ret) Philip Kapusta's white paper, "The Gray Zone," this competition is characterized by challenges that are aggressive, ambiguous and perspective-dependent. Due to these characteristics, effective operations in the gray zone often require actors to construct favorable narratives. The stronger the narrative, the greater the ability to dictate international and local support, direct public outrage and define the very conflict itself.

Controlling the narrative not only applies to the nuclear political paradigm, but it has also become equally as important as the decision-making pertaining to the treaties themselves. Inherent in the ability to construct new treaties and maneuver other nuclear powers into entering those treaties is the ability to control international opinion.

If the United States wants to continue providing the benchmark for global nuclear

stability, then it must embrace two points of understanding — namely, that there exist repercussions for not only violating treaties, but also for not controlling the narrative.

***Cole A. Baker** is the 2019 security and defense fellow at Young Professionals in Foreign Policy.

Is Trump's Impeachment Bound to Backfire?

S. Suresh
September 27, 2019

Could Trump become the first ever president to be impeached and go on to win a second term?

After months of grappling with the issue of whether US President Donald Trump should be impeached, on September 24, House Majority Leader Nancy Pelosi formally launched an impeachment inquiry. Pelosi had stayed clear of impeachment talks even after earlier this March Special Counsel Robert Mueller released the results of his investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 US presidential election.

Mueller's report concluded that his probe did not find sufficient evidence that the Trump campaign colluded with the Russian government on election meddling. Furthermore, the report also did not find sufficient evidence that Trump committed obstruction of justice, but it stopped short of exonerating him completely. For Pelosi, the political implications of launching impeachment proceedings without conclusive evidence on either aspect of the Mueller inquiry was a risk not worth taking.

All that changed dramatically this week when President Trump's phone conversation with the newly elected president of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky, came to light. In his July call with Zelensky, Trump specifically asked for his help in investigating Hunter Biden, the son of his

possible 2020 Democratic opponent, Joe Biden, while alleging wrongdoings by the former vice president himself. Trump repeatedly mentioned that he would like his lawyer, Rudy Giuliani, and Attorney General William Barr to call the Ukrainian president in order to get to the bottom of some issues.

The issues that the president of United States of America felt compelled to discuss were the business dealings of Biden's son and the hacking of the Democratic National Congress servers in 2016. The full transcript of the conversation released by the White House shows how uninspiring and pathetically pedestrian Trump can be, even as Zelensky tries to shamelessly humor him and massage his ego.

Blowing the Whistle

The crucial question that legal pundits will be debating is whether there was any explicit quid pro quo in the conversation. A careful reading of the transcript will show Trump asking for favors from Zelensky and vice-versa. Even as someone who is not a trained legal expert, I can see nothing incriminating in the conversation. In fact, the conversation was very much akin to two juveniles gossiping, Trump complaining about German Chancellor Angela Merkel and the former US Ambassador to Ukraine, Marie Yovanovitch, with Zelensky echoing those complaints to score a brownie point or two with Trump.

The president's veiled suggestions to look into the Bidens' activities comes dangerously close to soliciting a foreign leader's help against a political opponent, but there was no direct mention of aid being withheld until the favors he asked for were granted. (Trump did admit to reporters earlier this week that he did in fact withhold aid to Ukraine, but did so because of concerns of US overspending compared to other European nations.) The US president did, however, fail to demonstrate any respect or pride in the nation he leads when he trash-talked Mueller, Yovanovitch and Biden during the conversation.

Following this ill-fated call, in August, a whistleblower complaint was lodged against President Trump. The House Intelligence Committee released the seven-page document, wherein the whistleblower — whose identity has not been revealed, but who some have suggested was an officer in the intelligence services — accuses Trump of using his presidential powers to pressure foreign leaders to meddle in the 2020 elections, posing a risk to US national security.

Most of the information contained in the complaint is not the whistleblower's first-hand knowledge. Rather, it is conjecture based on various information he gleaned as a non-White House official privy to sensitive information during his interactions with several US government officials. The material contained is definitely damning to Trump's lawyer Giuliani, but not the president directly. Unlike the transcript of Trump's telephone call with Zelensky, which is easy to read and make sense of, the whistleblower complaint is involved and needs to be investigated further in order to determine who acted with impropriety. If it is Giuliani, he will likely get thrown under the bus by Trump in much the same way as his former lawyer and fixer, Michael Cohen.

That Pelosi succumbed to the growing pressure to impeach Trump based on his phone call with Zelensky and the material contained in the whistleblower report looks like a tactical error. Removing Trump from the Oval Office is a long, drawn out process that seems farfetched at this time. Following the initial impeachment inquiry announced by Pelosi, the House Judiciary Committee chaired by Congressman Jerrold Nadler will lead the effort of overseeing the ongoing investigations of the six House committees. At the end, if the committee does decide to pursue impeachment, it will draft the articles of impeachment that will be voted in the House. It requires but a simple majority in the House to impeach him.

If Trump is indeed impeached, he will then be tried in the Senate, with Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts presiding, and the members

of the Senate acting as the jury. A two-third majority in the Senate is needed to convict and remove Trump from office — a practical impossibility in the Republican-controlled Senate under Majority Leader Mitch McConnell.

Impeachment Imminent?

Trump is an unethical businessman who knows how to navigate the thin line between legality and committing a crime. He would never have won the election in 2016 should good ethics, morality, respect for women, regard for all human beings irrespective of their race, color, ethnicity or country of origin were mandatory requirements to be president of United States. He garnered 62 million votes in 2016 with all his character flaws. It would require a lot more than the appearance of impropriety in a conversation with a foreign political leader advancing his personal agenda to sway the opinion of Trump's voter base.

It is insufficient to have only Democrats talk about impeachment. It is imperative that the House impeachment be a bi-partisan effort with significant number of Republican Congress members sharing the view that Trump did cross a line in his dealings with the Ukrainian president. For that to happen, incontrovertible proof from thorough investigations of the whistleblower complaint will be needed to make GOP Congress members vote against their party's president.

Proceeding along partisan lines, even if the House succeeds in impeaching Trump based on the questionable evidence seen in the whistleblower complaint, without Republican voters willing to turn away from this corrupt man in the White House, the Senate is sure to acquit him. Should that happen, Trump will remain on the 2020 ballot, and an angry Republican base will propel him to a win, making him the first ever president to be impeached and go on to win a second term.

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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.

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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BUSINESS

UAE Attracts AI Investment Due to Flexibility

Dina Al-Shibeeb
June 18, 2019

As the AI industry develops, it is without a doubt that the United Arab Emirates will continue to make tech headlines.

Pragmatic countries eyeing long-term economic sustainability know they must invest in technology amid an expected

explosion of artificial intelligence (AI). According to a report by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), AI adoption will account for 45% of the world economy's total gains by 2030. The "greatest economic gains" from AI will be in China, estimated at a 26% boost to GDP, and North America with about 14.5%. PwC says this is the "equivalent to a total of \$10.7 trillion and accounting for almost 70% of the global economic impact."

There is a sense of competition between cities around the world. At Collision, one of North America's biggest startup conferences on tech that took place in May, venture capitalists (VC) discussed where is the best place to invest. The event took place in Toronto for the first time, yet another sign of how the Canadian city is becoming a key player in this highly competitive sector.

At one session I attended, bosses from top tech cities such as San Francisco, New York, London, Amsterdam or even countries like Israel pitched their localities as the places to be. The main criteria revolved around concentration of talents, the proper ecosystems backed by education institutes or simply quality of life.

As a journalist who has lived in both the United Arab Emirates and Canada, I believe it's worth taking a look at both countries to compare the industry.

AI in the Middle East

Apart from Israel, there is not much mention of any other Middle Eastern country as a key place to invest in. This is due to the low level of patents in a region that excels in pushing its talent abroad due to conflicts, political suppression and among other factors needed for economic development.

What's interesting is that, in March, Emirati media outlets reported that Dubai is ranked first globally in attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) for AI and robots, citing figures from the Dubai Technology Entrepreneurship Campus (Dtec), a tech hub by the Dubai Silicon Oasis Authority (DSOA). It was also prepared in collaboration with ArabNet and startAD. The

former is a Beirut-based organization focused on tech business and innovation in the Middle East and North Africa, and the latter is the innovation and entrepreneurship platform anchored at NYU Abu Dhabi.

As reported by the Khaleej Times, Dubai attracted \$21.6-billion worth of FDI in high-end technology transfers — AI and robotics — between 2015 and 2018. Most of this came from the member states of the European Union and the United States, \$5.7 billion and \$3.9 billion respectively. The authors of the article mention that — with AI expected to account for 45% of the global economy’s gains by 2030 — the projected annual growth of AI to the UAE is 33.5%. This is followed by Saudi Arabia at 31.3%, the rest of the Arabian Peninsula at 28.8% and Egypt at 25.5%.

The Canadian Tech Industry

When compared to Ontario, the Canadian province has raised nearly \$1 billion by AI companies from 2015 to 2018, according to figures supplied by the Canadian Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. These investments refer to all types of private and public capital, including VC funds, grants, mergers and acquisitions, and other types of private investments.

Yet Toronto absolutely wins over Dubai in terms of its diverse talent, solid tech ecosystem, innovation and, most importantly, its political stability backed by its Canadian culture and values. These are not only attractive for skilled migrants, but even for Americans who are escaping the populist President Donald Trump — the latter point was evidently made at the Collision conference.

Since 2016, Google, Uber, Adobe, Autodesk, Samsung, LG, Fujitsu, Huawei, Accenture and Etsy have all opened an AI research and development lab in Toronto. Suburbs in the Greater Toronto Area, especially Markham, have also managed to attract big names such as IBM. In 2018, GM opened a technical center in the same suburb. York Region, which Markham

belongs to, already has the “highest concentration” of tech companies in Canada.

Flying Taxis in Dubai

But one thing Dubai is probably doing that’s garnering the attention of foreign investment is the ease of experimentation, less regulation and the government’s willingness to amend regulations once it sees opportunity. For example, in 2017, Dubai tested an unmanned two-seater drone designed to transport people autonomously. The Autonomous Air Taxi (AAT), which the UAE claimed would be the world’s first “self-flying taxi service,” is by a specialist German manufacturer called Volocopter that has Daimler and Intel as investors. At the time, the Roads and Transport Authority of Dubai expected the trial run — in tandem with issuing legislation required to operate the unmanned flying vehicles — to take place in about five years. But with Volocopter hungry to unleash its first air taxi by the end of 2019, it announced on May 23 that it had entered a partnership with the UK-based vertiport owner and operator Skyports, with plans to complete the first-ever Volo-Port in Singapore by the end of this year.

While Singapore, the first state in Asia to release a framework on ethical use of AI, seems to be stealing Dubai’s thunder in having the world’s flying taxi make its actual debut, the UAE continues to be relentless. In April, the UAE cabinet launched a national strategy for artificial intelligence. As usual, the overly ambitious UAE is planning to position itself as a global leader in AI by 2031, according to the government.

Also, as diplomatic tensions continue between the West and China over Huawei, a leading Chinese tech company that has faced accusations of being a security threat, the UAE is inching closer to take the lead for the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative. The OBOR is a trade strategy by Beijing to revive the countries that line the ancient Silk Road. To take advantage of what China’s plan has to offer, the UAE has axed visa requirements for Chinese nationals and wants its

share from a \$15-billion Chinese tech fund announced last year.

In Canada, where startups are in need of venture capital, there are some impressive companies, including the Canadian-Israeli firm SkyX that uses long-range drones backed with AI sensors to check oil pipelines. Based in Markham, SkyX founder Didi Horn is a former Israeli fighter pilot, and Canada has managed to snap him.

Most importantly, the country's first publicly-owned Drone Delivery Canada (DDC) in the field has tested its equipment in remote areas. Ron Struthers, a specialist on drone stocks, has described DDC's drone as "leaping ahead of any competition [such as Google and Amazon, who are both developing their own drones] with a new long range and heavy pay load drone." But after welcoming new Canadian regulations on drones in January, DDC asked for more regulatory "flexibility," giving a glimpse of how Canada has succeeded in attracting the likes of Horn but not Volocopter.

UAE Will Attract Big AI Firms

Although Dubai was unable to keep hold of Volocopter for it to make the global debut in the United Arab Emirates, its vision and flexibility will at least enable it to arrive in the Middle East. Indeed, it is without a doubt that the UAE will continue to make international headlines.

In fact, the Dubai-based ride-hailing firm Careem, which uses AI technology, is in the process of being acquired by industry giant Uber for \$3.1 billion, with \$1.7 billion being in convertible notes and \$1.4 billion in cash. The UAE, the first in the world to create a ministry for AI, is also pushing forward with gusto to create a solid AI ecosystem at home, which will bring in the big names over the long-run. In March, the country put forward \$408 million to build "new generation" Emirati schools. These schools will include design and robotics labs as well as AI facilities. This could be part of the national investment in AI, which has reached

\$2.5 billion in the past decade, according to a recent report by Microsoft and Ernst and Young.

As the United Arab Emirates takes the lead in the Middle East and bolsters its base, its chances in bringing the world's leading AI firms will surely increase.

***Dina Al-Shibeeb** has more than a decade of experience as a journalist, covering a variety of stories from business to bomb blasts in Syria to human interest features on Iraq while living abroad in Dubai.

What Sotheby's Tells Us About the Art Market

Vanessa Stevens

Jul 15, 2019

Recent revelations pertaining to the interplay between auction houses, galleries and art dealers provide a rare glimpse into an opaque world where almost everything is allowed.

Sotheby's, the world-famous auction house, is feeling the reverberations of its \$3.7 billion sale to a French-Israeli investor in mid-June, as organizational changes take shape. The acquisition has caused waves throughout the art world because it is synonymous with the company's privatization. As a private entity, Sotheby's can dispense with the public sector's stringent financial reporting and regulatory compliance requirements — a telling move in an industry already under fire for its opacity and blatant lack of regulation.

The privatization is surely a boon to the company's profit maximization goals as much as it is setback for the market and genuine lovers of art. The art sector is one of the most manipulated ones in the world. The glitz surrounding the artists, the sellers and buyers of their work, belies the art market's dark side of greed and murkiness.

The Case of Yves Bouvier

It is little wonder why the sector's players prefer keeping a low profile. Yet the deliberately quiet art world was recently dragged into the limelight through the global feud between Swiss art dealer Yves Bouvier and his then-client Dmitry Rybolovlev, a Russian billionaire businessman. The feud revolves around Bouvier selling 38 artworks to Rybolovlev at illicit markups worth as much as \$1 billion over several years.

Sotheby's was involved in 14 of these sales, including that of Leonardo da Vinci's "Salvator Mundi," where the company provided an appraisal of the painting's value per Bouvier's request. Bouvier sold it to the Russian for \$127.5 million in 2013, less than 24 hours after having acquired it from art dealers Simon and Parrish for \$80 million via Sotheby's.

Rybolovlev sued Sotheby's for having "materially assisted" Bouvier in his fraud. Newly declassified correspondence between Bouvier and Sotheby's senior director and vice-chairman for private sales, Samuel Valette, reveal that the art dealer flipped it to the billionaire for a 54% markup. The other famous artworks sold by Bouvier in a similar way — with Sotheby's involvement — included Gustave Klimt's "Water Snakes II" and Amedeo Modigliani's "Nude on a Blue Cushion," as well as Picasso's "Man Sitting at the Glass."

The court recently ruled that the \$380-million lawsuit will continue in New York, despite Sotheby's objections. Perhaps Sotheby's was afraid that being exposed on its home turf would put a limelight on the wider connections between auction houses and the local art market infrastructure — the one that contributes to Sotheby's "aiding and abetting" with dealmakers like Bouvier.

Out of the Authorities' Reach

While the scale of the fraud puts it among the biggest in art history, the fact that it was even possible demonstrates how far the sector is removed from the oversight of the authorities. In the words of Sharon Cohen Levin, chief of the

asset forfeiture unit of the US attorney's office in Manhattan, "you can have a transaction where the seller is listed as 'private collection' and the buyer is listed as 'private collection.'" Nowhere else would anyone "be able to get away with this."

Consequently, practices that are illegal in every other economic sector are pervasive — first and foremost price-fixing. It begins with the fact that an artwork's sales price and the names of any participating parties are usually unknown, to the extent that it is often impossible for the non-initiated to tell if any transactions have taken place at all — an issue only exacerbated by the fact that transaction registers are wholly absent. As a consequence, insider trading is the rule, especially since the art market's rapid growth has turned art from a form of pleasure to a fully commodified industry.

Unethical Practices

Recall the great price-fixing scandal of 2002, when both Sotheby's and its rival Christie's were revealed to have formed a cartel throughout the 1990s. For years, both firms had coordinated their seller's commission rates, effectively making them identical and non-negotiable. The European Commission fined Sotheby's \$20 million and its former chairman, Alfred Taubman, was jailed after Christie's obtained a plea-bargain, handing over evidence in the process. Considering that the fine represented a measly 6% of Sotheby's global turnover at that time, it is right to say the company got away with murder.

Neither did it have any effect on the way the market operates, nor the way prices are set. As it turns out, the big auction houses are merely the tip of the iceberg in terms of determining a painting's value. Since the monetary value of a painting is subjective — only the paint and canvas can be associated with a hard cost — matters of taste and simple supply-and-demand dynamics determine a price, one that is often arbitrary and influenced by galleries and auction houses. The art industry has developed an

intricate signaling process “where the approval of a handful of galleries, collectors and museums, determines what is good and valuable,” writes Allison Schrager.

In other words, galleries manipulate the secondary market, where auctions and owners are selling their artworks, to not only raise the prices at auctions but to keep them high as well. Given that higher prices result in higher commissions, auction houses like Sotheby’s and Christie’s have a vested interest in achieving high prices for the art they sell. Auction houses, in effect, willingly allow themselves to be manipulated into pushing for higher prices at auctions.

A Regulated Art Market?

Needless to say, the current slew of scandals being revealed is only bringing the art market further into notorious disrepute. It is high time for a serious push for regulations, be it to protect the public from fraudulent and illicit activities or even to elevate art as a legitimate asset class. An easy start would be increased transparency of brokerage fees, where any person representing a seller or buyer needs to provide all documentation detailing prices paid and fees received.

Interestingly, the proliferation of auctioning platforms on the internet and other forms of internet commerce has led to an increase in traceable paper trails in art transactions. For secrecy purposes, actors in the art market have traditionally been reluctant to leave too many documents. However, with ever more activity moving online, stricter rules may become unavoidable.

It is in the art world’s own interest to clean up its act. Otherwise, Sotheby’s and others will face an increasingly unsustainable art market.

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The Hidden Gems of Morocco

Sarita Mehta

July 19, 2019

How cooperatives may be the key factor in social and economic empowerment in the Middle East and North Africa.

For many people, July 6 marked the passing of just another Saturday. But to over 1 billion people, it was of tremendous significance as it was the 25th UN International Day of Cooperatives.

Over 12% of humanity contribute to one of the 3 million cooperatives on the planet. Cooperatives not only stimulate local economies, but also act as a vehicle for bringing opportunity and profit to people worldwide, who otherwise would not be actors in the formal sector of the economy. This tangible empowerment is perhaps best embodied by the Cooperative Aboghlo Women of Ourika in Morocco.

Cooperative Aboghlo

Just a 30-minute drive outside of Marrakech to Tnine Ourika in the Al Haouz province, situated across the street from a furniture retailer is a deceptively unremarkable storefront. Peering through the glass display case you will find packages of couscous and dried herbs sitting alongside bowls overflowing with chocolate, pistachio, almond and walnut cookies. All of which is made from local Moroccan ingredients.

But this is not the real gem found inside the Cooperative Aboghlo. The true beauty is hidden away on the second floor of the co-op, where 23 women sit in circles and talk back and forth. They are not making casual conversation. Instead, they are debating various aspects of the internal and external marketing for their cooperative enterprise. For hours, these women engage in conversations about how to better spread the word about their product, how to enforce the timeliness of each respective worker, and how to resolve problems of communication

and organization — issues every business must grapple with.

This in itself is remarkable, but it is even more so when one is reminded of the context. The discrepancy in opportunities and education of women compared to men is widely experienced throughout the world. This creates an uneven playing field for women. From the time they are little girls, females are not given the same support as their male counterparts.

The consequences are crippling. Unemployment rates among young women in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) are 80% higher than that of young men. This is compared to the average gender differential of 20% worldwide, according to Brookings. Most women in Cooperative Aboghlo could not read or write, but now they are taking literacy classes at the co-op and are able to write their names and read street signs.

When considering these astonishing circumstances, it is obvious these women, who are successfully managing their own well-established cooperative, are extraordinary exceptions. But that should not be the case. It is just and right to commend the women of this enterprise, but the ladies of the Cooperative Aboghlo are a much-needed reminder not only of what is possible but of what should be.

The cooperative started in October 2016 with 10 women from one village. Now, there are 33 women from five different villages actively participating. In addition to selling various products from their brick-and-mortar site, the co-op exports directly to internationally-recognized cosmetic companies. These women set an example of what is possible when given education and opportunity.

Women's active participation in the labor force can have a tremendous, positive impact on the developing economies of Morocco and other MENA states. In 2015, McKinsey Global Institute found that supporting women's economic advancement could add \$12 trillion to global GDP by 2025 and grow the MENA region's economy by 85%. Closing the gap

between men and women in hours worked per day could lead to a 47% increase in the annual GDP of the Middle East and North Africa.

The root of the issue of female participation in the workforce lies in cultural obstacles. Family opposition and traditional gender roles create rigid barriers for women. This is especially the case in rural regions, where their domain is often confined to that of domestic life.

However, globalization and increased pushes for equality have ushered in a new wave of changes. Moudawana, the Moroccan family code, addresses gender equality and rights by raising the minimum legal age of marriage and limiting divorce and polygamy terms, thus giving back the innate rights of women that have long been forgone. Morocco has reduced the barriers to entry for cooperatives, further encouraging women's involvement in the economy. This is a huge step forward for Morocco in addressing the systemic inequalities that are so deeply integrated.

This progress, though commendable and remarkable, is just the first step. The path to sustainable development and equality is one that is not easily achieved. Through its partnership with the High Atlas Foundation, a Moroccan nongovernmental organization, Cooperative Aboghlo was given a platform and the skills training necessary to grow tremendously. The cooperative embodies what is possible with this support and facilitation of development.

The time for these changes is long overdue. The time for these changes is most certainly now. It starts with the simplest action. It starts with the women of Cooperative Aboghlo Women of Ourika taking initiative and, most importantly, with the education of marginalized people.

The future should not be a mere continuation of the past. It takes a single lifetime of empowered women to spurn generations of empowered girls.

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Google and Our Collective AI Future

Daniel Wagner

July 19, 2019

Artificial intelligence is already a fact of life and its potential will grow exponentially, along with its applicability and impact.

The pace of change in the artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning arena is already breathtaking, and it promises to continue to upend conventional wisdom and surpass some of our wildest expectations as it proceeds on what appears at times to be an unalterable and pre-ordained course. Along the way, much of what we now consider to be “normal” or “acceptable” will change. Some technology companies are already envisioning what our collective AI future will look like and just how far the boundaries of normality and acceptability can be stretched.

In 2016, for example, Google produced a video that provided a stunningly ambitious and unsettling look at how some people within the company envision using the information it collects in the future. Shared internally at the time within Google, the video imagines a future of total data collection, where Google subtly nudge users into alignment with the company’s own objectives, custom-prints personalized devices to collect more data, and even guides the behavior of entire populations to help solve global challenges such as poverty and disease.

Entitled “The Selfish Ledger,” the nine-minute film maintained that the way we use our smartphones creates a constantly evolving representation of who we are, which it terms a “ledger,” positing that these data profiles can be built up, used to modify behaviors and transferred from one user to another. This ledger of our device use — the data on our actions, decisions, preferences, movements and relationships — is something that can be passed on to other users, much as genetic information is passed on through the generations.

Building on the ledger notion, the video presents a conceptual Resolutions by Google system in which Google prompts users to select a life goal and then guides them toward it in every interaction they have with their phone. The ledger’s requirement for ever more data and the presumption that billions of individuals would be just fine with a Google-governed world are unnerving. The video envisions a future in which goal-driven automated ledgers become widely accepted. It is the ledger, rather than an end user, that makes decisions about what might be good for the user, seeking to fill gaps in its knowledge in a “Black Mirror”-type utopian reality.

Like other firms who are leading the pack in AI, Google is increasingly inquisitive about its users, assertive in how it wishes to interact them, and pressing existing limits about what is considered an acceptable level of intrusion into their lives. Much of this may be welcomed, based on how we have already been “programmed” to accept the company’s unsolicited overtures and now consider them to be perfectly normal and acceptable.

As the ethical deployment of emerging technologies — and AI specifically — continue to be subjects of public discourse, Google appears to be unfazed by the potential ethical implications of its current products, practices and vision of the future, or whether it is overstepping its bounds by proceeding apace to implement its vision. Google wants to understand and control the future before it occurs by, in essence, creating it and using AI and machine learning to help interpret and manage it. That is both an welcome and chilling proposition, but the truth is that our collective technological future is unfolding at lightning speed, and no single government or company can control it.

So, is Google to be commended for attempting to contain and craft the future, or should it be feared and resisted at every turn? Is there a middle ground? Will the fact that most consumers do not know the difference, or necessarily care, enable organizations like Google to basically do whatever they want? Is

our great leap into the AI unknown meant to be purely exhilarating, or should we be intuitively cautious and approach it with care? The truth is that there is no single answer to these questions, nor is there one that is necessarily a right or wrong answer.

Artificial Intelligence Is Here

Artificial intelligence is already a fact of life and its potential will grow exponentially, along with its applicability and impact. Just as manned flight could only have occurred once combustion engines technically enabled it, the use of graphics cards, creation of custom hardware, the rise of cloud computing and the growth in computing capabilities — all occurring at the same time — have made AI a force to be reckoned with. Being able to rent cloud space or outsource computational resources means relative costs have come down to earth and will continue to do so. The widespread use of open-source, internet-based tools and the explosive growth in data generation have also made a big difference.

So much data is now generated on a daily basis globally that only gigantic infusions of data are likely to make a difference in the growth of artificial intelligence going forward. That implies that only the largest, most technically sophisticated firms with the capability to consumer and process such volumes of data will benefit from it in a meaningful way in the future.

Attempting to govern AI will not be an easy or pretty process, for there are overlapping frames of reference and many of the sectors in which AI will have the most impact are already heavily regulated. It will take a long time to work through the various questions that are being raised. Many are straightforward questions about technology, but many others are about what kind of societies we want to live in and what type of values we wish to adopt in the future.

If AI forces us to look ourselves in the mirror and tackle such questions with vigor, transparency and honesty, then its rise will be doing us a great favor. History would suggest, however, that the things that should really matter

will either get lost in translation or be left by the side of the road in the process.

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Are Electric Vehicles About to Take Off in India?

Atul Singh & Manu Sharma

August 21, 2019

India turns to electric vehicles despite lacking both technology and minerals to produce them, risking the specter of Chinese domination in the process.

In April, Reuters reported that automakers are investing heavily in electric vehicles despite still-low demand. They are releasing “a flurry of new electric vehicle models” because governments are raising regulatory requirements for emissions around the world. Automakers are being pushed into invest in electric vehicle technology as fears of climate change and global warming force their hand.

At the beginning of 2018, Ford decided to double its electric vehicle spending to \$11 billion. This led Reuters to declare that it was “part of an investment tsunami in batteries and electric cars by global automakers.” Reuters estimated that figure to be more than \$90 billion. Analysts said that \$19 billion was invested in the US, \$21 billion in China and \$52 billion in Germany. These investments have only grown since.

In January 2018, electric vehicle sales were less than 1% of the 90 million vehicles sold every year. In 2017, the dominant player in the American market was Tesla with sales of 100,000 vehicles. Globally, Nissan Leaf is the top-selling electric vehicle and China is the biggest electric vehicle market. In the first half of 2018, more than 420,000 electric vehicles were sold in the Middle Kingdom. Most estimate the sales in 2019 to have increased significantly. Suffice to say,

sales of electric vehicles are growing fast, especially in China.

On June 13, 2019, two dramatic pieces of news hit the wires. First, a Chinese company “announced a massive \$23 billion investment in the production [of] 1 million electric cars and 500 GWh of batteries per year.” Second, Toyota’s sleekly designed ultra-compact electric vehicle caught attention. More than its sleekness, analysts hailed the vehicle’s new batteries. Apparently, they eliminate the liquid electrolyte in batteries. This means that batteries lose bulk, last longer and become less likely to catch fire. It seems the battery revolution is on in full sway and Japan is leading the way.

India’s Rambo Response

Given that most countries in the world are adopting electric vehicles, India has belatedly made a push for them. It has promulgated a FAME-India policy, an acronym for the Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of (Hybrid and) Electric Vehicles Scheme. This policy measure seeks to foster greater demand as well as promote a greater supply of electric vehicles.

Launched first in 2015, FAME-India has achieved little to write home about. It turns out that about 90% of the vehicles produced from April 1, 2015, to March 31, 2019, as a result of this policy were electric scooters. Manufacturers indulged in gross abuse of incentives and more than 95% of these scooters used antiquated lead-acid batteries instead of modern lithium-ion ones.

As a result of small enterprises gaming the incentives and large ones ignoring them, Indian policymakers hit back through a pincer move. Its Bharat Stage standards regulate the emission of air pollutants from motor vehicles. On April 1, 2017, the Indian government had made Bharat Stage-IV standards compulsory. The failure of its FAME-India policy made the government leapfrog Stage-V and move straight to Stage-VI emission standards last year. The Indian Supreme Court upheld the government’s Bharat Stage-VI decision that comes into effect on April 1, 2020.

This might dampen demand for petrol or diesel automobiles going forward.

While the first jaw of the pincer was raising emission standards, the second jaw was a reconstituted FAME-India policy that most refer to as FAME-II. This policy aims to have more than 30% of India’s vehicles powered by a lithium-ion battery in another 10 years. The Indian government has decided to drop support for mild hybrids and vehicles based on legacy battery technologies.

What Happens Now?

Like any policy, FAME-II will lead to winners and losers. The Japanese have bet big on hybrids. The likes of Suzuki, Honda and Toyota favor the gradual approach and prioritize hybrids over pure electric vehicles. Hyundai and local automaker Mahindra are gunning for the pure electric approach.

The Indian context is unique. Nowhere in the world is the population pressure so intense and urban congestion quite so bad. Traffic in India is terrible and leads to low fuel efficiency because vehicles crawl at low speed on poor roads in chaotic conditions. This means that vehicles invariably have high emissions and low fuel efficiency. New Delhi is now the most polluted city in the world. Its thick, gray smog has achieved legendary status as air pollution in the city surges to “emergency levels.”

With air pollution choking its people, the Indian government had no option but to act. However, it faces a big challenge in adopting electric vehicle technology. When the petroleum revolution occurred, India neither possessed the combustion engine technology nor any oil reserves. Till today, Indians drive cars with Japanese technology and Middle Eastern oil. In fact, the Indian economy yo-yos as per the price of oil because it imports around 1.5 billion barrels each year. It turns out that not only does India not have oil, but it also lacks cobalt and lithium, two key metals for new battery technologies.

The Indian government estimates its cobalt reserves to be 44.9 million tons. However, the government admits that “there is no production of cobalt in the country from indigenous ores.” In fact, production of cobalt declined in the early part of this decade from around 1,187 tons in 2010 to 1,300 tons in 2011 to 580 tons in 2012. India imported the ore to refine this cobalt and then imported more cobalt in refined form to meet domestic demand.

The top cobalt producers include both China and Japan. They have been savvy in acquiring mines in different parts of the world and developing global supply chains. With its tiny diplomacy, lethargic bureaucracy and election-obsessed politicians, India has only belatedly woken up to its cobalt and lithium shortage. The government has finally instructed three state-owned companies to team up for a new venture. This venture will scout and acquire strategic mineral assets abroad.

It is not only the lack of strategic minerals but also India’s weak industrial ecosystem that is a matter of concern. For decades after independence, Indians had to rely on antiquated Ambassadors and fusty Fiats to get around. Finally, Suzuki arrived in India in the form of Maruti and, after 1991, there has been a deluge of foreign brands in the country. Importantly, these automakers have relied on imports for both critical and non-critical components. They have also dumped older models in India with outdated technology and lower safety standards. Until recently, Toyota was importing steel despite the availability of high-quality steel in India. Manufacturing domestic electric vehicles is not going to be easy.

Feisty startups, such as eMotion Motors that has developed an e-bike called Surge, are hampered by risk aversion from investors, preference for software over hardware opportunities and short-term time horizons of venture capitalists. There is a cultural factor at play too. Because of the country’s caste-based social hierarchy that assigns a low status to manual work, Indians shy away from

manufacturing and top talent rarely ends up making stuff. The few intrepid souls who enter manufacturing find it heavy going in a society that values status, not work.

Chinese Cars After Chinese Smartphones

One of the authors has repeatedly remarked on the continuity of cultural traditions in India and China. There is a reason India conceived of the number zero while China came up with paper. It might be a factor in making India the land of software and China the workshop of the world. In 2016, CNBC reported that India had the fastest-growing smartphone market in the world. In 2018, VentureBeat reported that Chinese smartphone makers were winning in India. Indians are notoriously price-sensitive and one of the authors preferred a no-nonsense Xiaomi to a fancy, expensive iPhone.

Just as the Chinese dominate the smartphone market, they could be the big winners in the electric vehicle market. So far, Suzuki has maintained its early mover advantage in India. Entering India in 1981, it has the brand recognition and the distribution network to remain top dog. Culturally, no foreign automaker knows India as well as Suzuki. Yet it is under pressure because of the new emission norms. In April, it decided to stop selling diesel-powered vehicles because the norms make them uneconomical.

Suzuki has also entered into an alliance with Toyota, a global giant but a minnow in the Indian market. The companies calculate that this partnership will enable them to compete better in India. Even as the Japanese are collaborating with each other, Indian companies are taking the foreign acquisition route to gain new technologies. Tata bought Jaguar and Land Rover, acquiring new technologies in the process. Yet this most reputed of Indian companies failed miserably when it launched Nano.

China’s SAIC Motor Corporation already has a foothold in the Indian market through its British subsidiary, MG Motor. Reportedly, it is planning a \$350 million investment in India. This involves

producing an electric car by the end of this year. The Japanese, market leaders in the Indian market, are yet to do so. Even Nissan Leaf is not to be seen in India, though one can find it in landlocked Bhutan. The situation is reminiscent of the 1990s when the Japanese lost their market domination to the Koreans because of underinvestment, low-risk appetite and slow rollout of the latest technology in the Indian market. This time, the Chinese threaten to upstage the Japanese.

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ECONOMICS

Will India's Unemployment Crisis Cost Modi His Job?

Ravi Tripathi
January 15, 2019

The challenge of fixing India's job crisis is an unachievable task for any one-term government.

India is the world's fastest-growing major economy. It is also home to the highest number of unemployed in the world. More than half of India's 1.2-billion population is under the age of 25. These predominantly youthful voters cheered Prime Minister Narendra Modi to a historic electoral victory in 2014. As Modi's term comes to an end this April, little change has come to these voters' lives. This poorly educated and mostly unskilled workforce seems restless and vengeful.

To be fair, while Modi could not fix India's job crisis, he wasn't the one to create it. High unemployment and sluggish employment growth have been a historical reality of the country's labor market. India's jobless growth since the 1990s only made it worse. More than half of India's population depends on the agriculture

sector for work. The economic growth in the last two decades failed to create opportunities for gainful employment. Last year, the OECD Economic Survey found that over 30% of the Indian young people aged 15-29 are neither employed nor in education or training.

Conditions within India's labor market further worsened under the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government that won power in 2004. Amid a jobless growth, nearly 20 million women lost their jobs between 2004 and 2012. The GDP growth failed to trickle down in the lower segments of the economy as inequality expanded. As per the 2018 World Inequality Report, the top 10% income share in India is now one of the highest in the world.

More than 90% of the Indian labor market remains informal, undermining socio-economic mobility. Just around 2.3% of the workforce has undergone formal skills training, compared to 75% in Germany and 30% in China. A majority of university graduates is unemployable and lacks basic work skills, leading to serious skills imbalance between demand and supply in the labor market. This skills gap and technological illiteracy make it difficult for firms to find desired workers. Unemployability evolved into a bigger problem than unemployment itself.

This growing skills/jobs mismatch forces millions of job-hunters to take work that doesn't match their qualifications. Many youths turn to irregular jobs like private tuition or the mushrooming call-center scam industry. India's unemployment crisis remains largely hidden by petty self-employment of half of its labor force.

Bleak Outlook

Prime Minister Modi came to power with a promise to create millions of new jobs. But employment generation remains weak. The latest report by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, a think tank, argues that nearly 11 million jobs were lost in 2018. Ambitious schemes like Skill India fell victim to the country's bureaucratic red tape. Slowing exports are bad news for more than 10 million youths

entering the workforce every year. Growth in non-farm employment is largely contributed by low-pay and precarious jobs in construction, transport (thanks to e-commerce growth) and tourism.

The manufacturing sector has long been suffering from slow job generation. It was this realization that motivated Modi to launch the Make in India initiative in 2014 with a goal to transform the country into a global manufacturing hub like China and East Asia. The country's huge domestic market can help boost such an industrial push. India's phenomenal mobile manufacturing boom is a case in point.

Facing elections this summer, the Modi administration has decided to opt for decorative measures like mass hiring in government-run railways and statistical maneuvering of the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation data. A recent study published by the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council claiming the creation of over 12 million jobs in 2017 has been criticized for painting a rosy employment picture. India's finance minister has put his bets on the "wave of self-employment" to defend the failure to create enough jobs.

Following a recent defeat in three state assembly elections, Modi has unleashed populism by announcing 10% reservation in government jobs and higher education to members of economically weaker sections, including the upper castes, covering over 80% of India's population. Meanwhile, millions of formal positions in hospitals, law enforcement and schools remain vacant. This is the aftermath of the recent pay revision in government salary, meaning 8% of India's GDP is now spent on the salaries of government employees.

Growth Without Jobs

India's growth creates fewer jobs than before. Fixing India's job crisis is impossible unless the government decides to increase investment in public services, education and health. Together these sectors can compensate for the bulk of the work demand in India. For an economy

dominated by a disproportionate share of microenterprises, India needs to revive its regional polytechnics while developing a robust network between academia, industry and government.

The challenge of fixing India's job crisis is an unachievable task for any one-term government. The country's private sector has done well in battling the unemployment challenge so far, and improving the ease of doing business is a step in the right direction. The focus on rural electrification is bound to have a ripple effect on improving the digital competency of the future labor force.

There is no single strategy for fixing a job crisis in an economy as large and poor as India's. Only a careful blend of consumption, investment and export-led growth can lead to the twin objectives of employment-intensive growth and poverty reduction. But for India's young and burgeoning workforce the current situation remains bleak. Will the voters be patient and put their trust in Narendra Modi again? Predicting this is more difficult than predicting their future.

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Macri Walks on Thin Ice in Argentina

Pablo Nemina
February 26, 2019

To receive further financial aid from the IMF, the Argentine government has to enforce drastic and unpopular measures ahead of the October elections.

The International Monetary Fund recently approved the second review of Argentina's three-year stand-by agreement. In doing so, \$7.6 billion was made available for the country. The institution's

disbursements reached \$28.3 billion in 2018, almost half of the \$57 billion agreed in the largest conditional agreement in the IMF's history.

In Argentina, the combination of a bad harvest, persistent inflation and the abrupt closure of international financial markets triggered an exchange rate crisis during the second quarter of last year. The former poster child of the international debt markets found itself being dismissed by investment funds. Therefore, the pro-market government of President Mauricio Macri asked the IMF for a financial agreement, despite the fund recalling the traumatic crisis of 2001.

But international tensions arising from the increased interest rates and the trade dispute between the US and China have led to added financial uncertainty, which worsened Argentine economic indicators. According to JPMorgan, the country risk soared to 837 points in late December 2018, the currency was devalued by 50% against the US dollar and inflation accelerated sharply. In order to strengthen financial investors' confidence, the IMF tightened the fiscal adjustment required and advanced disbursements to meet external debt payments until the end of 2019, when President Macri will revalidate his mandate at the polls.

Far-Reaching Conditions

The revised program established a classic severe fiscal and monetary adjustment in order to stabilize the economy and reduce the current account deficit. In the second review, the IMF noted the currency stabilization — the nominal exchange rate remained almost flat in the last quarter — and the incipient inflation deceleration, which in any case will end the year above 45%.

Committed to the orthodox program, the government complied with all scheduled conditionalities, including a strict fiscal adjustment (focused on the reduction of transfers to the provinces, public investment and wages), the maintenance of an international reserves minimum limit, the elimination of central bank

financing to the treasury and the approval of a zero-deficit budget for next year. Argentina also maintains the highest interest rate in the world (today at 60%) and a zero growth of monetary aggregates.

Facing the virtual closure of private international financing, the program achieved the objective of adjusting the current account, but at the cost of a collapse in imports due to a deep activity decline. The combined effect of devaluation, a 13% annual decrease in the average real salary according to the Statistical Workers Institute, and a soaring interest rate is a deep recession.

The IMF predicts a 2.8% GDP decline for this year, affecting mainly manufacturing and retail, and estimates that growth would resume only in 2020, expected to be driven by exports and investment. Not surprisingly, the economic and social indicators seem to have strongly deteriorated. According to official data, investment and private consumption fell by 11.2 and 4.5 percentage points year-on-year respectively, and poverty reached 27.3% of the population (an annual increase of 6.2%). Notably, the inclusion in the program of some safeguards to maintain social spending moderated the worsening of social conditions.

The IMF has stressed the need for structural reforms in 2019. The fund has long insisted on the need to deepen the deregulation of the labor market in order to facilitate the reduction in hiring costs, eliminate what it considers to be distortions in the tax system and reformulate the pension system.

According to the IMF, these measures seek to stimulate investment and productivity, increase employment for women, young people and low-income workers, and strengthen the institutional policy framework. In this sense, as a structural condition for the next review, the IMF has demanded sending to congress a reform of the central bank charter to ensure its operational autonomy, strengthen its monetary policy mandate, enhance decision-making structures, and promote transparency and accountability.

The third review, scheduled for March, looks like a politically challenging event for the Argentine government. In an election year and in full recession, it must send an unpopular bill without a majority in the chambers, meet the zero deficit and make progress in the technical preparations of structural reforms. The government will not be able to appeal to discretionary transfers to boost public morale.

What this means has already been foreseen in last year's Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) country report: "If the government does not give in to trade union demands during wage bargaining rounds, the government could face destabilizing protests." However, if the government does, the IMF might curtail its support. This dilemma will be difficult to resolve.

The disbursement of \$10.8 billion depends on the approval of the next IMF review, which comprises almost 50% of the disbursements contemplated for this year. A delay could increase the political and financial uncertainty, which has already been affected by the support shown for the Peronist candidate — and former president — Cristina Fernández de Kirchner. According to a recent poll, she would attract 36.7% of the votes against 34.5% for Macri. A turbulent year lies ahead in Argentina.

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Italy Must Leave the Eurozone

Isidoros Karderinis

May 20, 2019

Italy must return to the lira because joining the euro has been disastrous and sticking with it would be suicidal.

Italy joined the eurozone in 1999 under the leadership of Prime Minister Massimo D'Alema of the Democratic Left party. This fateful participation, which entailed the complete loss of independent monetary policy, is

undoubtedly the main cause of the disappointing performance of the Italian economy.

Italy's GDP currently stands at \$1.94 trillion and its growth rate is extremely anemic. In January, the country's central bank estimated that the economy would grow just 0.6% this year. Between 1969 and 1998, Italy's real GDP per capita increased by 104%. During this time, Italy had domestic monetary policy autonomy thanks to the lira, which it devalued frequently.

Since joining the euro, the devaluation option has been off the table. Italy's monetary policy is set by the European Central Bank. From 1999 to 2016, Italy's real GDP per capita fell by 0.75%. During the same period, Germany's real GDP per capita grew by 26.1%. While Italians have lost out, Germans have gained since the launch of the euro.

Even as the Italian economy has shrunk, its debt has grown. It now has the third largest state debt in the world after the US and Japan. The debt mountain of \$2.7 trillion at 132% of GDP is far too high. The rescue of the Italian economy is impossible, as it exceeds the capabilities of European states.

Since 1999, the Italian economy has gone steeply downhill in all aspects. Fiat has ceased to dominate the European car market and the country has lost its leading position as a producer of white household appliances. Many factories shut down and several large businesses have relocated to other countries.

Labor market problems; low public and private investment in research and development; a large and inefficient bureaucracy; a dysfunctional, costly and slow-moving justice system; and high levels of corruption and tax evasion are among some of Italy's intractable problems. With devaluation no longer an option, Italians have been unable to put their house in order and kickstart their economy.

Unemployment is at about 11%, the fourth highest in the European Union after Greece, Spain and Cyprus. At the same time, unemployment among young people aged between 15 and 24 amounts to an alarming

30.8%. Poverty has risen to its highest level since 2005. The latest figures reveal 5 million people living in absolute poverty as of 2017. The figure includes 6.9% of Italian households.

As a result, a deep economic and social crisis is sweeping through this Mediterranean country like a hurricane.

Even as debt, unemployment and poverty rise, Italy has the maximum bank branches per inhabitant in Europe. These branches survive mainly by giving interest and corporate loans, a poor and short-sighted business model. Given that interest rates in the eurozone are zero, banks are making losses. Their liabilities are reaching \$290 billion, about 15% of Italian GDP. Italian banks are in deep trouble, spelling more trouble for the economy ahead.

The Italian economy is the third largest in eurozone. In this badly designed monetary union, it is like a tired horse, loaded with bad debts, that is finding it difficult to breathe as it marches uphill on the stones and puddles of an incredibly rigid eurozone system.

The Euro Is Adding to the Mess

The eurozone today is nothing else but a combination of conflicting interests among member states. What is of great interest to Italy is not of interest to Germany. What is of value to France does not matter to Greece. And the reconciliation of interests in the era of the common currency has proved to be impossible. This is because Germany, the dominant economic power of the eurozone, has managed to rule and dominate. It is using the euro for its benefit, while other countries, instead of resisting or objecting, are bowing and obeying.

The time has come for Italy to leave the eurozone. So far, Italian politicians have feared short-term negative effects of such an exit. Yet the cost of delaying Italy's exit from the eurozone will ultimately prove to be far greater than the cost of rupture because of an imminent and impending economic crisis.

The first decision by the coalition government of the Five Star Movement and the Lega to

submit a 2019 budget with a deficit of 2.4% defying Brussels was clearly in the right direction. Italian policymakers need to reinforce the economy by strengthening domestic demand and safeguarding the prosperity of the people. In a crisis, they cannot follow Brussels' strict fiscal regulations that have been authored by Germany.

Italy must at last cease to dance to Berlin's commands and bid adieu to the euro. By returning to the lira, Italy will regain its political, economic and institutional sovereignty. Despite current problems, Italy still has the second largest industrial capability after Germany in the eurozone at 19% of GDP. The country produces aircraft, cars, weapons, electronic systems, perfumes, shoes and clothes. Its export potential still remains high.

There is another reason to leave the euro. Italy needs energy in the form of cheap oil and gas. By leaving the euro, it could get oil from Libya and gas from Gazprom. This would lower its production costs. Combine that with a flexible national currency and the Italian economy would become extremely competitive.

To sum up, Italy is sailing into the turbulent eurozone sea where powerful winds will sink it. However, if its political leadership decides to change course and return to its national coin, Italy could still save itself.

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Can Japan Maintain Its Economic Fortunes?

Craig Willy
June 24, 2019

Japan is set up for a stint in the international spotlight, hosting the G20 summit at the end of June and the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

It will be a busy few years for Japan, which hosts the G20 summit on June 28-29 followed by the Tokyo Olympics in 2020. The

international attention sparks questions concerning how durable its economic success will be.

Prime Minister Shinzō Abe, in office since 2012, has been able to put his stamp on the country's economic development, above all with his heterodox economic package known as "Abenomics." This three-pronged approach has entailed loose monetary policy, fiscal stimulus (read: more debt) and modest structural reforms. Japan's macroeconomic approach has been the exact opposite of that of another major world economy: the eurozone.

While the news concerning the Japanese economy is often gloomy, the truth is that the country has reasonable growth given its demographics, and it has succeeded in providing a high standard of living for its citizens. Japan's per capita growth has been in line with that of the United States or the European Union. But, despite its success stories, which include an enviable unemployment rate of just 2.5%, all is not rosy.

Cracks

The Bertelsmann Foundation's Sustainable Governance Indicators report for Japan highlights some cracks in its solid credentials. "Disposable incomes have risen little in recent years, and real consumption per capita has been flat. In a country that was once hailed as the epitome of equitable growth, a new precariat has emerged," the report says, adding that structural reforms are essential to secure the nation's stability.

Indeed, there are worrying signs that the Japanese model of inclusive growth is beginning to come apart. Japan has seen low but steadily rising income inequality since the 1980s. In the past, the limited disparity in earnings was primarily achieved via a kind of social consensus on wages rather than, as in many other countries, through redistribution.

However, a deepening divide between protected and "non-regular" jobs means that more and more people, in particular the young, are in precarious employment. Now, some 40% of

workers have such "non-regular" jobs, often women working part-time. Furthermore, low pensions mean that poverty has been spreading among the elderly, now reaching the level of southern Europe. These days the earnings gap is more or less at the level seen in the UK.

Piles of Debt

There are also questions concerning the sustainability of Japan's deficit-spending, which continues unabated. Japan's government debt comes up to over 250% of gross domestic product (GDP), an incredible figure. So far, this has not affected the stability of the Japanese economy or, for the most part, the confidence of creditors. Perhaps this is because around 90% of this debt is held by Japanese individuals and institutions, preventing the kind of financial runs that have plagued other economies, whether in southern Europe, Latin America or Southeast Asia.

In the long term, we can provocatively ask whether Japan will have its place in the G20 at all, unless things change. Put simply: the Japanese are disappearing. According to demographic forecasts, Japan's population of 126 million could shrink to a mere 85 million by 2100.

The Japanese government has taken measures to address this, notably by improving childcare provision, extending parental leave and opening up childcare for 2-year-olds. However, so far the results have been modest. Another option would be to increase highly-skilled immigration. By the end of 2018, there were 2.7 million foreign residents in Japan and the country has opened up temporary residence for skilled foreign nurses. However, Japanese society remains largely hostile to mass migration.

Japanese fertility has recovered somewhat since the low point of 1.26 per women in 2005, reaching 1.43 in 2017. Yet it is still a far cry from the government's goal of 1.8, let alone the population replacement level of 2.1. Progress seems clearly possible here. In northern Europe, in particular, comparable economic performance

has been tied with generous provisions for parents and ambitious measures to increase work-life balance, particularly for working mothers. Comparable measures in Japan could conceivably both increase the currently low workforce participation of women and increase the birth rate.

Losing Its Frontrunner Role in Tech

Japan is rightly famous for its accomplishments in the fields of science and technology. The country has a world-class education system and invests some 3.3% of GDP in research and development, one of the highest levels in the world. However, the SGI report notes that “Japan’s strong position among the world’s top technology nations is slowly declining, based on various indicators, including the often-used Nature Index.” The government has sought to increase Japan’s top-tier human capital with a “green card for highly skilled professionals.”

Signaling how Japan may need step up its bid to future-proof its economy, the country had a weak track record on how effective its economic policy has been in providing a reliable economic framework and fostering international competitiveness. On this key question, Japan scored just four out of a possible 10 points, leaving it third from last in the SGI sample of 41 industrialized nations.

Japan will, of course, remain a major economic and scientific pole for the foreseeable future. The country has made special efforts to cultivate strong economic ties with other countries. Shinzō Abe has sought to maintain good relations with the US, has implemented a free trade agreement with the EU, and has signed the Comprehensive Progress Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPATPP) with Canada, Japan, Singapore and other Pacific economies. Abe has even suggested that the UK — should it ever leave the European Union — would be welcome to join the Pacific deal.

With the right policies, Japan is well-equipped to maintain position as a factor for stability,

prosperity and scientific innovation in our sometimes turbulent world order.

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The Path to Growth Is Industrialization, Not Exports

Atul Singh

August 8, 2019

Historically, industrialization has driven rapid growth in developing countries who will need unorthodox policies to attain or accelerate it.

On the seventh anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, Dani Rodrik posed a controversial question: “Is Export Led Growth Passé?” Writing on September 11, 2008, this famous Harvard professor argued that advanced economies were unlikely to run large current account deficits and import as they did in the past. Export markets would shrink and long-term success for developing countries would depend “on what happens at home rather than abroad.”

In 2016, Rodrik gave a key lecture at the University of Sussex in the UK developing this argument further. He argued that the “East Asia style growth miracles are less likely in the future.” Furthermore, if growth miracles happen, they would no longer be based on exports alone. Rodrik also made the case that growth in emerging markets has been unsustainably high in the last decade and will come down by a couple of percentage points.

In this day and age, it is common sense for most economists to hold a notion of convergence. As per this idea, Third World countries can grow fast and achieve standards of living similar to advanced economies in a matter of decades or less. As latecomers, these countries, also referred to as developing economies or emerging markets, have access to the latest thinking, new

technologies, First World capital and global markets. This access should allow these poorer countries to converge with richer ones in a matter of decades or less.

Rodrik distinguishes between conditional and unconditional convergence. Most development economists hold the view that convergence is not inevitable but conditional. To achieve it, poorer countries must build up their economic and political institutions, develop human and physical capital, and employ sound economic stabilization policies that rein in fiscal deficits and curb inflation. These conditions are akin to the “Washington consensus” first coined by British economist John Williamson. Since 1989, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have faithfully preached this sermon to poorer countries ad infinitum.

Forget Institutions, Focus on Industrialization

As per the Washington consensus, convergence with richer economies is conditional on poorer ones instituting market-based critical reforms. The faster poorer economies bring in reform, the quicker they will catch up with richer ones. While the prescription for rapid growth and thus convergence to the First-World living standards is straightforward, the trouble with it is that there is no example of a single economy that has grown and converged following the dictums of free markets, improvement of institutions and all the other recommendations.

Rodrik examines data from 1950 to 2012 to find just two examples of convergence. The first example is the solid three-decade-long growth of countries in the European periphery after World War II. The second is the spectacular growth of countries in East Asia. The so-called East Asian miracle allowed the East Asians to catch up dramatically with the West.

In the words of Lewis Preston, the president of the World Bank from 1991 to 1995, Asian economies achieved “rapid and equitable growth, often in the context of activist public policies,” raising “complex questions about the relationship between [the] government, the private sector, and

the market.” The late Preston attributed this “extraordinary growth” to “the superior accumulation of physical and human capital.” He also argued that “these economies were also better able than most to allocate physical and human resources to highly productive investments and to acquire and master technology.”

Rodrik gives a simpler explanation than Preston for the East Asian miracle. He attributes it to rapid industrialization. After World War II, Japan was a one-party democracy, South Korea was a military dictatorship and Hong Kong was ruled by the British. None of them followed the Washington consensus. The common feature for all the economies that enjoyed spectacular growth over many decades is that they industrialized with a vengeance.

It turns out that industrialization, not institutional reforms, matter most in growing the economy at higher levels and allowing it to converge faster. Rodrik labels this as unconditional convergence. The agricultural sector does not allow for a dramatic increase in productivity. Services do not do so either. Rodrik points out that high-productivity services are skill-intensive and employ few people. Low-productivity services employ more people but do not drive growth. Industrialization seems to be the only way forward for increased productivity, high growth and economic transformation.

In the case of East Asia, both supply and demand side factors came together simultaneously to cause the miracle. Governments in places like South Korea, Taiwan and Japan bet big on domestic manufacturing. They protected infant industries, subsidized exports, kept their currencies low, developed special investment zones and put in massive resources to boost manufacturing. At the same time, the US developed a taste for cheap products and American demand fueled Asian exports. It is this demand that enabled the likes of Sony, Toyota, Samsung and LG to emerge on the global stage.

The success of East Asian economies has led many developing countries to assume that the export-led growth model is the only path to rapid economic development. This view misses the forest for the trees. The export-led growth model of East Asia is more an example of rapid industrialization than of exports per se. Exports just provided markets for its industries that were the primary driver of the economy.

Lessons From the 19th Century

To understand the impact of industrialization, it is instructive to study three countries: the UK, the US and Germany. The Industrial Revolution began in the United Kingdom. Innovations like the flying shuttle, the spinning jenny, the water frame and the power loom increased cloth production dramatically. Fewer people could produce much more in less time than individual spinners, weavers and dyers. This revolution was fueled by cheap energy from coal.

The revolution in iron and steel manufacturing soon led to the development of railroads and steamships. Better roads and a canal network developed speedily to distribute the products of British industries. The first commercial telegraphy system emerged as did stock exchanges, banks and industrial financiers. Even as industrialization gathered speed in the early 19th century, the UK proceeded to conquer an increasing share of the planet. By now, present-day Bangladesh and much of India was already a colony and a captive market. After 1757, in the words of Horace Walpole, the UK was also “a sink of Indian wealth.” It might be fair to say that the First Industrial Revolution did not occur because of adherence to the Washington consensus.

The Second Industrial Revolution is purported to have begun in 1793 when an English immigrant called Samuel Slater opened a textile mill in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. He immigrated to the US in defiance of British laws prohibiting the emigration of textile workers, earning the epithet of the “Father of the American Revolution” in the process. The US then

proceeded to industrialize rapidly by liberally borrowing British innovations, which really meant intellectual piracy for which the US now damns China.

Just as the British conquered much of the world, Anglo-Saxons in the US expanded from the original 13 colonies to gobble up more Native American land. They believed in “manifest destiny,” the inevitability of the continuous expansion of US territory to the Pacific and beyond. None other than Founding Father Alexander Hamilton took the view that political independence was meaningless without economic independence.

This legendary American whose statue still stands outside the Treasury building argued that the US would never be free from Britain or any other foreign oppressor as long as it depended on foreign manufacturers. The first major act passed by Congress was the Tariff Act of July 4, 1789, and laid the grounds for protecting the infant industries that would otherwise be ruined by British competition. Unknown to most, the US pioneered industrial policy that many other countries have emulated since.

In fact, protectionism played a key part in triggering the Civil War. Most Americans do not know this fact. They look back at the Civil War with rose-tinted eyes where a virtuous patriot from the North took on the sinful slave owners of the South, paying for the liberty of the enslaved with his life. It turns out that the 1846 abolition Corn Laws in the UK and the 1857 uprising in India might have played a key role in triggering the American Civil War.

After 1846, the UK embarked on a trajectory of free trade. Now, the UK imported food for its urban working classes from around the world. The US emulated the UK, but this led to economic discontent in the industrial North. As a result, the newly formed Republican Party emphasized protective tariffs in its 1860 platform. The agrarian South was not too pleased. Protectionism meant that it had to sell cotton to Yankee buyers instead of British ones and earn less.

Not only did the South miss out on the 1846 British bonanza, but also the windfall from the rise in the price of cotton thanks to the 1857 upheaval in India that disrupted global cotton supply. The North's triumph in the Civil War ensured that protectionism remained standard American policy well into the 20th century. Even Woodrow Wilson's call for a removal "of all economic barriers" fell on deaf ears as the Tariff Acts of 1922 and 1930 demonstrated. Only after World War II did the US emerge as a free-trade champion with its industries intact and growing while its competitors such as Germany, Japan and the UK had been conveniently bombed to smithereens.

If the British and the Americans pushed forth industrialization through a mix of private entrepreneurship and public policy, so did the Germans. Prince Otto von Bismarck consciously promoted trade and industry in unified Germany. A mercantilist policy of tariffs aimed to make the new German Empire "a self-sufficing economic community." Lacking the resources of the US or the British Empire, Germany focused on developing its human capital. It established a superb education system, embedded engineering in its university education instead of leaving it to tinkerers as in Britain, and instituted a system of vocational training that remains the envy of the world.

The Mittelstand, the small and medium-sized industries that drive the German economy, emerged during this Bismarckian era. They benefited from favorable policies of the Iron Chancellor who funneled money not only into the Mittelstand, but also into heavy industry such as steel, railways and chemicals. Unlike his Anglo-Saxon counterparts, Bismarck instituted accident and old-age insurance and created the world's first and most comprehensive welfare state. Historical evidence suggests that the German economic miracle was a result of intentional industrial policy, much like the East Asian one a few decades later.

Back to the Future Again

In 2016, this author observed that world trade was slowing down as anti-trade sentiments were rising in Europe and the US. For years, American business leaders and politicians argued that trade was a win-win. That was not entirely true. Trade resulted, results and will always result in winners and losers. CEOs and shareholders benefited from moving factories overseas, but workers in the US suffered. Many of these workers voted for Donald Trump.

Trump's election as president marks the end of the postwar American consensus on trade. It certainly marks the end of the frenzied era of trade liberalization after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The US was protectionist for more than a century and a half since its independence. It only turned to free trade after World War II when it had an unprecedented edge over the rest of the globe. Now that Americans are suffering from the ravages of free trade, protectionism is back in fashion. There is no reason to assume that it will die after Trump.

If protectionism is back in fashion, it follows that American demand for imports is not likely to increase as rapidly as it has in the past. So far, this demand has powered the industrialization of East Asia. In particular, it has enabled Chinese factories to become the workshop of the world. There is more than an element of truth in the claim that Walmart fueled the rise of Shenzhen. Under Trump, the US is no longer willing to fuel China's rise, and even Thomas Friedman, a lifelong Democrat, is acting as a cheerleader. He has argued in the anti-Trump *The New York Times* that China deserves Trump.

Friedman has a problem with Chinese President Xi Jinping's "Made in China 2025" modernization plan that aims to make companies in the Middle Kingdom "the world leaders in supercomputing, Artificial intelligence, new materials, 3-D printing, facial-recognition software, robotics, electric cars, autonomous vehicles, 5G wireless and advanced microchips." Sadly for China, "all these new industries compete directly with America's best companies." Therefore, the US cannot allow the

Middle Kingdom to “continue operating by the same formula” that propelled its rise.

As a patron saint of the American establishment, Friedman uses the “trade is a win-win” trope, but the condition for it is simple. China must let Google and Amazon compete freely and fairly with Alibaba and Tencent. However, Friedman laments that China cheats. Its diabolical military stole the plans for Lockheed Martin’s F-35 stealth fighter, avoiding all the R&D costs. Huawei’s 5G equipment can serve as an espionage platform. To top it all, China is militarizing islands in the South China Sea to push the US out. The great defender of democracy cannot countenance such impudence and ipso facto cannot continue to import wantonly from China.

In this brave new world, it is “America First” yet again. Trump has declared economic war not only on China, but also on neighbors like Mexico and Canada as well as allies like Japan and South Korea. On the demand-side, this new American protectionism marks the death knell of the export-oriented growth model that many trumpet.

As if changes on the demand-side were not enough, a quiet transformation is occurring on the supply-side. In a previous article, this author chronicled how smart manufacturing using new materials, additive manufacturing, a combination of hardware with software and the Internet of Things is leading to the Fourth Industrial Revolution. This is bringing back manufacturing to the US and even to Europe. No longer does Asia have the cost advantage. The labor arbitrage is ending and industrial production is returning to the West. It goes without saying the export-led model is now as dead as a dodo.

In the light of the new zeitgeist, what economic policy should developing countries follow? It seems industrialization with a focus on domestic markets is the only sensible option. Instead, many of them have gone into what Rodrik calls “premature de-industrialization.” In advanced economies such as the UK, Sweden and Japan, manufacturing reached a peak of about 30% of GDP in the 1960s and 1970s before

giving way to services. In countries like Ghana, India and Brazil, manufacturing never reached the same level as in the advanced economies and services have taken over. This means they have de-industrialized prematurely and missed out on the productivity gains through manufacturing that richer countries achieved.

Bringing Prosperity

To bring prosperity to their people, developing countries need to industrialize and, at times, reindustrialize. To do so, they need to foster good macroeconomic fundamentals through reasonably stable fiscal and monetary policies as well as business-friendly policy regimes. More importantly, they must invest in human capital in the form of better schools, universities and, most crucially, vocational training. Good electricians, decent plumbers and competent mechanics enable a country to meet its tryst with prosperity.

Apart from getting macroeconomic fundamentals right, developing countries need sensible industrial policies that support manufacturing through both orthodox and unorthodox measures. Such measures require judgment, which in turn depends on the quality of a country’s politics, its governance standards and the visions of its leadership. Those countries that are dysfunctional, divided and dishonest are unlikely to do well. They might well become de facto colonies of old and new industrial powers.

Since domestic instead of global trends now drive growth, developing countries are likely to show significant heterogeneity in long-term performance. Therefore, they have absolutely no option but to get their industrial policies right.

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When Will India Address Its Student Suicide Crisis?

Ankita Mukhopadhyay
February 25, 2019

Every hour, a student commits suicide in India.

On February 1, a student of the prestigious Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) killed himself by jumping off his hostel building in Hyderabad. In early January, a 27-year-old medical student killed herself because she was unable to handle exam stress. December 2018 saw three suicides in four days in the city of Kota, in Rajasthan. According to latest available data from the National Crime Records Bureau, a student commits suicide every hour in India.

India, the world's second most populous country of over 1 billion, has one of the highest suicide rates among those aged 15 to 29 and accounts for over a third of global suicides among women each year. Academic stress is a major reason for suicides among both female and male students in India, and the pressure continues beyond college. Stories of successful students securing high salaries make the headlines and play a significant role in parents pushing their children to earn the same.

It's not uncommon to see students stressed, anxious and under pressure in a society that believes in keeping students in check by pushing them beyond their limits toward higher achievements. Young high school students are forced to enroll in coaching factories, where they cram for exams to get into prestigious schools like the IIT. Students follow draconian rules and study schedules that leave them feeling depleted and depressed.

Many students are forced to take just one holiday a year, follow a 14-hour study schedule and sit exams on Sundays. Those who fail to follow the demanding study schedules feel

responsible for disappointing their parents and falling behind their peers. Many students who eventually pass the entrance exams feel even more pressure to excel at university, often taking their own lives when it all becomes too much.

It is, therefore, fairly common for Indian students to have experienced suicide in their lifetime. The writer of this article has witnessed three to date; the writer's brother was a witness to a student's suicide attempt at IIT Delhi last year.

Disturbing Trend

Many people in India argue that caste-based discrimination lies at the root of student suicides in India. In 2007, the Thorat Committee, which was set up to investigate allegations of harassment against students that belong to the scheduled castes and tribes at India's top medical school, the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), found rampant discrimination against students, many of whom claimed that they were segregated and asked about their caste during examinations.

It's not uncommon to see students from lower caste backgrounds complain about the lack of institutional support and infrastructure. In 2017, Milind Awad, an assistant professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University, pointed out that Indian universities were inept at dealing with nervous breakdowns among students despite claiming to be egalitarian spaces.

The suicides begin in school, continue in college and into the late 20s — among both upper and lower caste students — pointing to a problem within the system itself. Student suicides can be easily averted, but merely setting up training and sensitization sessions for teachers, increasing the role of counseling services and setting up expert committees to review suicide cases in schools won't do the trick.

Mental health issues such as anxiety and depression need to be addressed without stigma in schools and colleges, and parents should be encouraged to inculcate and foster feelings of sensitivity toward their children. According to Dr. Harish Shetty, a psychiatrist at Dr. L. H.

Hiranandani Hospital, an inability to cope with small frustrations, failure and loss, often coupled with social alienation, creates a critical situation for many students. In March 2018, Neerja Birla, the founder and chairperson of Mpower, an organization that provides holistic care for those suffering from mental illness, rightly pointed out that when it comes to mental health, Indian parents need to stop going into denial mode and issuing defensive statements like, My child has no such problems!

According to a survey by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, about 4 in 10 students in India have experienced bouts of depression in the last few years. The issue of mental health among students was also addressed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who urged for “expression of depression instead of its suppression” in his radio address.

In 2015, filmmaker Abhay Kumar made an acclaimed documentary, *Placebo*, about the prestigious All India Institute of Medical Sciences, which exposed the rampant depression among its students, showcasing the impact social expectations and academic rigor played in motivating students to take the drastic step of ending their lives. Admission to AIIMS is more competitive than those of America’s top schools like MIT and Harvard, which have acceptance rates of 9% and 7% respectively; AIIMS has an acceptance rate of below 0.1%.

Placebo is one of the first documentaries to explore the problem of student suicides in India at an institute for the academic elite — something that has only been casually addressed in India’s popular culture. Kumar says that he was motivated to make the film after his brother Sahil, a student at AIIMS, punched through glass with his right hand in a fit of rage, sadness and confusion. Sahil had complete nerve damage, lost motor control, and skin from his thigh had to be grafted onto his hand.

Fierce Competition

The Indian education system fosters a competitive environment, and students who don’t

secure admission to top institutes are viewed as failures. An onus on education as a medium for success needs to become a thing of the past. Until then, schools and colleges need to foster a culture of understanding and trust, where students feel free and safe to talk about issues like bullying and anxiety. Highly competitive institutes such as the AIIMS and IIT can look for solutions like allowing volatile students to take a gap year or starting courses for parents to help them understand the importance of being more receptive to their children’s needs.

Another move that should urgently be taken is to stop allowing universities to advertise placements and salaries. All major Indian schools have a placement process, where companies offer entry-level jobs to students on campus. Salaries can range from 200,000 rupees (\$2,800) to 10 million rupees (\$142,000). In India, job security is viewed as an integral addition to a good education, which leads colleges to heavily advertise their placements to garner good reviews and get more students to enroll. This creates pressure on students who feel a sense of personal failure when they do not secure the best job during placement season.

The government should also carry out reform in the job market by asking the private sector to rethink criteria while hiring mid-career employees. Many young Indians find it difficult to switch jobs owing to their low grades in college or the prestige level of their alma mater, which are the main criteria for many companies in India. Grades and colleges should stop being viewed as the only criteria for securing a “good job.” India can try adopting the system followed by some US states where asking a candidate’s past salary history or even grades is illegal. Such systems increase transparency and reduce anxiety among candidates in the early stages of their career, who should be judged on the basis of their skills, not external competencies.

On the Political Sidelines

Student suicides should not be sidelined over political issues, nor should they be made into a

political issue. Farmer suicides take precedence in news reporting owing to their political nature, as farmers are a major voting sector during the election season. News of students committing suicide is not taken with the seriousness it deserves. Rohith Vemula, a PhD student at the University of Hyderabad, started a political wave with his suicide, as it exposed rampant discrimination against lower-caste Dalits on campus. But even his death couldn't bring the problem to the fore: More than his caste, the issue of student suicides as a whole should have been addressed by politicians, which unfortunately didn't happen.

The government needs to take affirmative action before several issues such as rising unemployment begin to further threaten the mental health of countless students across India, who face a bleak future if they don't secure a job upon graduation. According to data from the National Sample Survey Office, which was promptly declared unverified by the government, India's unemployment rate is 6.1% — the highest in 45 years. In a country where more than 50% of the population is below the age of 25, this is a startling statistic.

Student suicides can be expected to increase if the job market remains highly competitive and the education system offers no solace to those getting college degrees. India is already known to produce labor that does not meet international standards because of a broken higher education system. The lack of jobs and failure to create skills among the country's youth will simply increase the frustration among students, forcing them to take the drastic step of ending their lives.

India needs change, and it needs it now. The lives of students are not dependent on a change in government, but on affirmative action, which every political party, given the status quo, does not have the capability to carry out.

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Burning Man and Auroville: Understanding the Human Condition

William Softky

April 28, 2019

Burning Man and Auroville offer a glimpse into the souls of the US and India respectively, and a better understanding of the human condition.

Since the fall from the real garden of Eden, what some scientists call Paleo Paradise, humans have had trouble living together in peace. So, we dream of ideal societies and try to construct them on purpose. Such utopias take two forms, depending on how long they're expected to last.

At the temporary end are escapes like parties and festivals, and at the long-term end "intentional communities" like kibbutzim and communes. A well-known example of the first is the annual week-long psychedelic party in Nevada's bleak Black Rock desert, the sex-drugs-rock-n-roll-machinery-art festival known as Burning Man. The most successful long-term example is Auroville in South India, over 50 years old, inspired by a Gandhi-like guru named Sri Aurobindo, blessed unanimously by the United Nations and reforested from scratch on a barren patch of red dirt. I'm lucky to have visited both Burning Man and Auroville, and would like to share the flavor of each, along with what does and doesn't work, and why.

Similar Places, Different Locations

The failure modes of utopias, but especially their successes, matter a lot to humankind right now. Worldwide, depression and suicide are up. The more technology presses in, the more get-away-from-it-all escapes can help make sense of life. Burning Man aims at a peak resonance experience, a big bang; Auroville at continuous, ongoing resonance, a steady thrum. Both succeed, both are becoming corrupted by money, both have immediate potential to transform the

world, and both are sponsored, in part, by billionaires who want to make a difference. Utopia might seem silly to some, but getting it right is the best and maybe only chance we have left. It helps to study any utopias that almost work.

My own perspective matters here. I grew up in Silicon Valley, the land of cults and startups. Like other inhabitants of the valley, I made the pilgrimage to Burning Man, where I've "burned" seven times. This year, I made my way to India to visit family and to fulfil two more motivations: receive authentic advice on Ayurvedic medicine and visit Svaram in Auroville, the world center of vibrational healing. Visiting Svaram and meeting its founder, Aurelio, was important to me because the focus of my biophysics research is vibrational healing. I certainly didn't come to Auroville thinking of Burning Man.

But from the outset, the physical similarities between Burning Man and Auroville were immediately obvious. Both are laid out in circles with diameters of 3 kilometers, their perimeter guarded and fenced, their wide-open central circles filled with celebration, bonfires and worship focused on a massive, artistic structures built dead-center of both circles. Additionally, both are flat, hot and dry, unpaved, dusty, crisscrossed by bikes and noisy smoking vehicles. Outside the central common area, habitats are divided into quirky self-governing communes, called "theme camps" at Burning Man and "settlements" in Auroville, each shaded and decorated by geometric fabric tarps, awnings and artworks — all visually countercultural. In both places, here and there viewing towers rise above the flats.

The people living in both Auroville and Burning Man are generous and kind, and prone to wearing practical, desert-wear like dust masks, headscarves and flowing cotton drapes. Many go by unusual single names, honorifics given specially for the place. Both locations offer far too many healthy daily activities for any one person to consume: yoga, dance, discussions, myriad hippie-style workshops such as dancing,

breathing, massaging, meditating, "healing," chanting and relating.

Both places are hard to get into and, as a result, are filled with enthusiastic people who pay money and work hard to be there. They are both full of like-minded souls who want to be around each other. Burning Man and Auroville "work" as real-world utopias, but that's where the resemblance ends.

The American Essence of Burning Man

Burning Man is a giant party, as temporary and unsustainable as can be. It is a raucous art-and-noise festival on a desert lakebed, caked with antiseptic lye-laced dust, which is rinsed clean by rain each winter and blown into opaque yellow clouds each summer by hurricane-force winds and dust-storms every afternoon. Burning Man is named after the huge ceremonial burning effigy of "the Man," an abstract wooden human form 25-meters tall that visually anchors the center of Black Rock City, day and night.

Apart from the Man, the Burning Man festival also burns much of its garbage, such as paper plates and most large wooden structures, instead of taking them apart and dragging them home. Taking things back home is inconvenient and, besides, burning them is fun. And Burning Man burns literally tons of fossil fuel in vehicles to get to and from the desert, and generators to fuel sound, light, art and parties, day and night, all taking far more energy than simply staying home. At its peak, Burning Man is filled with 70,000 close-packed partygoers, making it a blasted, giant, over-lit refugee camp — Mad Max meets Las Vegas.

The difficulty of getting in and living there is part of the point. Commerce "on-playa" isn't allowed. You have to bring everything yourself, food and water included, everything except portable latrines, the only thing provided. And you have to carry out all your trash, down to every scrap of lint. The injunction "leave no trace" is taken religiously. There are no garbage cans, on purpose, to enforce personal responsibility for trash. That eco-consciousness is

ironic when set against the overall indulgence and wastefulness of the festival as a whole.

A group of would-be “burners” needs weeks or months of preparation to assemble and haul enough food, water, shade-structure, generators, fuel, decorations and, especially, party supplies to not only survive, but also thrive. Burners need provisions on a flat, harsh, hostile plain to survive and to make their camp attractive enough to pull in fellow souls. Entertaining others is the goal of almost everyone.

Apart from logistical barriers, the \$500 entry tickets keep out riff-raff. By rigorously checking tickets, the security station keeps out anyone without tickets. With its hours-long wait, invasive vehicle searches for stowaways, and ever-spinning radar and night-vision coverage of the surrounding open plain that is capable of spotting jackrabbits miles away, those without tickets have little chance of sneaking in. Getting into Burning Man is an all-or-nothing affair and the whole thing reeks of Checkpoint Charlie. Yet once inside you’re free to do practically anything, the ultimate dream of the American West, ironically made possible by enforcement emulated from the Eastern Block.

Go naked. Get drunk. Make noise. Do drugs. Burn your stuff. Create giant fireballs, with permission of course, so that people don’t get hurt. Drive or be driven in giant rolling structures —“art cars” whose purpose is to look nothing like vehicles — or even ride your bike. The roads, or rather the portions of hardened dust marked off with sticks and signs that pretend-play at roads, form a regular radial grid: concentric circular ring-roads labeled A through K or so, and spokes named in 30-minute, clock-face increments. This leads to weird-sounding appointments, such as “I’ll see you at 4:30 and F at 6:00.” It also leads to cognitive dissonance if you return in subsequent years, because the streets remains the same while the locations of landmark camps shift.

The regular road infrastructure and the banks of portable toilets every few hundred meters is all that your \$500 ticket buys. That fierce, capital-

intensive individualism, an American specialty, drives Burning Man. It is home-built entertainment to the extreme. Groups build and bring giant art, climbing structures, roller-discos and dance domes. Hundreds of homemade bars enthusiastically serve free drinks all day and night. During the day, one might roam by bike across the wide-open center, stumbling across unexpected weird constructions, or friends you didn’t expect to see. At night, the roads are choked with dust, kicked up by people wearing elaborate furry, fuzzy, blinky costumes and their decorated bikes. Burning Man is the ultimate privatized party with everyone dedicated to grabbing each other’s attention.

The density, flashiness and amplified sound ramp up all week to a pinnacle on Saturday night, when The Man burns in a frenzy of fire-dance, whooping and hollering. This is the week-long party at its craziest, even as Black Rock City starts disassembling itself for the long drive home. Burning Man is so temporary, it celebrates its own demise.

While many burners are spiritual people, only one place on the playa is built for spirituality: the Temple. This is an ornate walk-in sculpture, different each year, half a kilometer beyond the Man in the wide open desert. People move reverently in the Temple, pinning pictures of departed loved ones or scrawling messages to them on its walls, sighing and crying in escape from the overstimulation all around. When the Temple burns the Sunday after, roaring and crackling as its embers soar upwards, one hears no whoops and hollers, only hush.

The Indian Spirit of Auroville

The Temple offers spiritual solace in Burning Man, but it is banished both physically and psychologically to the periphery. In Auroville, quiet spirituality radiates from its center and has kept it alive for 50 years.

Auroville is named after Sri Aurobindo, an Indian sage who celebrated human unity. He was a contemporary of Gandhi, a fellow revolutionary who was jailed by the British. A disciple of his, a

Frenchwoman now revered the as the Mother, proposed a pan-human city in his name. Newly-independent India provided 20 square kilometers of hot eroded dirt, and the United Nations did the cheerleading. Several hundred altruistic volunteers began reforesting the place by hand, living on the shadeless, waterless plain not just for weeks as in Burning Man, but for years. Now the millions of trees they planted cool the place, and machines dispense free drinking water. Cookware isn't burnable plastic and paper, but indestructible stainless steel.

Entry into Auroville is free to visitors, but not to their vehicles. Only local motorbikes and tuk-tuks, locally known as autos, ply Auroville's dusty roads, which are allegedly arrayed in regular spirals like a galaxy. In practice, these roads curve almost randomly, making the place difficult for newcomers to navigate, but also making it seem larger and more mysterious than it is. Few signs show where you are, and none show distances. With fewer straight sightlines than Burning Man, 20-fold fewer people and lots of trees, Auroville's residential portions are a mix of modest mansions. Modernist concrete structures and quaint creative communes lie semi-hidden in a scrubby forest as sprawling estates of faded luxury.

Auroville's reputation for environmental technology has grown alongside its forests. It now leads the way in permaculture, water management, solar energy and similar conservation techniques. The stream of tourists, housed and fed, provide steady revenue. Tourists also buy — and Auroville exports — fancy clothes, soaps, oils, incense, handicrafts and (my favorite) sonic instruments. The Aurovillian settlement called Svaram invents and deploys the most beautiful and beautiful-sounding chimes, bells, gongs and rattles used in the therapy called “sound healing.”

Svaram was why I came to Auroville: to understand its most potent products, techniques and philosophy. Long discussions with Svaram founder Aurelio confirmed my professional instincts about why sound healing works. In a

simple neuromechanical view, the body is a big wad of jelly, whose jiggles the brain wants to control minutely. But tuning a jiggle-managing brain needs pure vibrations as reference signals, just like tuning a violin needs a pure pitch. Svaram makes pure sources of three-dimensional vibrations to stimulate the entire body, not just the ears: continuous thrums like singing bowls for pure centerless pitch, chimes and rattles for sudden spots in spacetime. When people relax into such a sonic soup, letting the sound wash over them, their nervous systems recalibrate. At least that's what biophysics predicts, and what people say.

Back to Auroville. More than half the people in Auroville at any given time are Europeans, mostly speaking French. After all, it was a French colony till 1954. During four days, my wife and I heard only one American voice besides our own. The rest of the people are Indians, mostly servants, and mostly living outside Auroville. Although there is a place called “African Pavilion,” I didn't see a single African. I did, however, meet a native Aurovillian, a man about my age, born in Auroville in 1968. Nothing else proves sustainability like happy second-generation natives.

South India is a conservative place. There is not only no nudity, but there are barely bared shoulders, leaving the clothing a mix of saris, buttoned shirts and flowing hippie cotton. Among the Europeans, thin, middle-aged women dominate, often in pairs, a natural demographic for the myriad yoga workshops, other spiritual activities and organic meals. The food is safe to eat, but, unlike on the Playa, the dust is not safe to breathe, since it contains pulverized fecal matter from cows and dogs. I almost died from pneumonia caused by dust like that before, so I know the dust-masks people wear are health precautions.

Auroville has no bars at all, little if any alcohol or drugs, not many lights and barely any music. The place is dead at night, except for quiet workshops here and there, and even those are difficult to find in the dark. Auroville is quiet on

purpose, and it even has signs asking people to be silent or speak slowly.

Auroville does have one especially attractive kind of drug. But it can't be bought with money, only with the common human currencies of planning, time and effort. This "drug" involves not chemicals, but human proximity. I've tasted it three times. They call it "the divine"; I call it human resonance. A modest form can happen when a few dozen people in a quiet room, led by an expert choir-master, sing or hum a simple, meaningless tone in unison or harmony. In such acoustic synchrony, the vibrations of an individual's vocal chords synch with those of the chest, spine and ears, and then with those of others nearby, and thereby with their bodies too. Without the distractions of words, a whole group of people can fall into sympathetic vibration, spontaneously and organically. It feels amazing.

Silence and the Senses

Auroville's most potent form of resonance takes place in the central meditation (aka "concentration") space, and entry is by reservation only. That circular room, inside the enormous 24k gold-covered ball called the Matrimandir, is luminously white, open carpet encircled by tall marble walls and columns, centered on a huge glass sphere, skewered and illuminated by a vertical shaft of sunlight from above. It is a central, physical, geometrical image of divine perfection. Everyone sitting sees the same view and hears the same silence, cherishing the kind of togetherness that can only be spoiled by words. Fifteen minutes of that silence feels like eternity. No wonder people go back, and back again, to sip from the divine.

That silent experience involves the same neuromechanical mechanisms as Svaram's sound healing, except in this case the resonating sources are not gongs but fellow humans, engaging frequencies from infrasonic to ultrasonic. These are not too far off from the potent silences shared at the Temple at Burning Man, silences that also move people to tears. Harnessing those silences will be the key to reinvigorating these utopias.

Auroville, of course, could reduce ambient engine noise toward electric levels and below, and could limit distracting mobile phones, the most anti-spiritual form of technology in existence, by far. At the other extreme, noisy Burning Man would be improved in proportion to how it protects and enlarges zones of dark and silence, twin foundations of any paleo sensory diet. At present, Burning Man's attention-grabbing economy and amplification-heavy technology drive native desert silence into hiding, leaving quiet human togetherness off the table. I fantasize about "Quiet Man," with the motto "Leave No Trace, Nor Sound Nor Light."

Burning Man and Auroville were both founded on principles and practices of human togetherness and autonomy. Both goals are being undermined, inexorably, by technologies that come between humans. In the case of Burning Man, these are technologies of blaring sound and hyper-flickering, hyper-colored LED displays. In Auroville's case, wireless interruptions and miscommunications are fracturing live human connection. The good news is that once leaders and sponsors in these places come to understand how humans really interact, they'll rewrite rules around solid neuromechanical principles, and make the utopian experience really sing.

In fact, all of India might follow the same track. Over three weeks, I focused my neuromechanical lens on all kinds of experiences between Chennai and Puducherry. The Aurvedic self-massage prescribed for me using slippery thick oils turned out to be an ultimately delicious and transformative experience, even without the sleep and diet tricks. The high-speed, high-stakes traffic dance of interweaving buses, cabs and motorbikes; the throngs of chattering schoolchildren; the high-fiving strangers; the sight of friends walking and laughing close by, hand on shoulder or arm in arm; and rich ladies lunching in a fancy fashion café are abiding vignettes in my memory.

Those high-bandwidth sensorimotor interactions are what the human species needs everywhere — not just in India. And they are

what is missing from the Western world. If India could just ignore the receding mirage of software wealth and refocus on its ancient core of human vibration, it might yet set the example the world needs: more of Auroville.

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The Decision Against Caster Semenya Plunges Sport into a Moral Maelstrom

Ellis Cashmore
May 1, 2019

The significance of the CAS ruling in the Caster Semenya case will be felt across the world of sport for years to come.

“**F**or me, she is not a woman. ... It is useless to compete with this, and it is not fair,” Italian athlete Elisa Cusma Piccione told reporters, pointing toward the winner of the women’s 800-meter race at the World Athletics Championships in 2009. She was referring to Caster Semenya, a formidable looking South African athlete, 5 foot 10 inches tall, broad-shouldered and muscular. In the early 20th century, they would have called Semenya “mannish” — having the bearing and characteristics of a man.

Officials reacted by demanding that Semenya undergo unspecified sex testing. After reportedly determining she was “intersex” — possessing both male and female characteristics — the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) declared her ineligible. Semenya was excluded from competition for the rest of 2009 and 2010, then reinstated without explanation. In 2011, the IAAF instituted new standards, establishing a testosterone limit below the normal male range of 7 to 30 nanomoles per liter of blood (nanomoles are chemical units of

measurement). Testosterone is the androgen responsible for strength and muscular development.

Since then, Semenya has been object of scrutiny. Her body has been pored over, but, more intrusively, her levels of testosterone have been tested and questioned. There were reports that Semenya had been allowed to compete, but only on the condition that she took approved drugs. Her form suffered, and she took only silver at the 2012 Olympics in London. Semenya was upgraded to gold in 2017 when the winner, Mariya Savinova, of Russia, was stripped of the title after a doping violation.

No one suspects that Semenya has taken dope — though many athletes from many sports have taken synthetic forms of testosterone, of course — but the presumed fact remains: Semenya’s natural secretions of testosterone are above the normal parameters for women, a condition known as hyperandrogenism. This has led many, especially her track rivals, to claim she has an unfair advantage. Semenya’s reply was simple and to the point: “I am a woman and I am fast.”

By Men, For Men

Olympic sport was created by men, for men. Its founder, Pierre de Coubertin, announced in 1894 that the Olympic spectacle was an “exultation of male athleticism ... with female applause as a reward.” There was no place for female competitors in de Coubertin’s vision: “No matter how toughened a sportswoman may be, her organism is not cut out to sustain shocks.”

The modern Olympics started in 1896, but didn’t allow women to compete properly until 1928 and, even then, only in a limited number of their own events. And so started a separation of males and females that has remained in place ever since. Not that a strict division based on the then-novel sexual binary was without problems. Hormones were not discovered until 1902, and up to that point there was no scientific way of explaining scientifically why women were different to men.

Over the years, doubts have been raised about several women who appeared to have mannish qualities. They included Stella Walsh, of Poland, who was shot dead (the suspects were never identified) and later revealed to have ambiguous genitalia. Many athletes faced humiliating visual examinations, which were superseded by cheek swab tests, which were not as humiliating, but dehumanizing nevertheless. At least two athletes were known to have been disqualified after such tests, which were designed to detect the inactive X chromosome that typically presents in females. This test was dropped by the IAAF in 1991 and by the International Olympic Committee in 1999, after protests that it did not account for some rare conditions.

The hormone standard introduced in 2011 was challenged by Indian sprinter Dutee Chand. The case was heard in 2015 by the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS), which requested more unequivocal evidence that higher levels of testosterone equate to a competitive advantage across the spectrum of sports. Interestingly, no sport psychologists offered the kind of proof they typically use to justify their livelihood: that excellence in sports depends as much, if not more, on psychological as physical factors like emotional intelligence, goal orientation, mental toughness, motivational climate, self-concept — the list is near-endless.

The IAAF was forced to lift its hyperandrogenism policy, which enabled Semenya to run without taking hormone-reducing drugs. She went on to win gold at the 2016 Rio Olympics. But last year, the IAAF reintroduced its policy for some events, specifically women's distances between 400 and 1,500 meters, basing the decision on research that claimed that testosterone confers significant advantage. "We have seen in a decade and more of research that 7.1 in every 1000 elite female athletes in our sport have elevated testosterone levels, the majority are in the restricted events covered by these regulations," stated the head of the IAAF's Health and Science Department, Stephane Bermon.

Semenya has been made to take drugs, which would otherwise get her banned from competition (we presume), that reduce her testosterone level. Understandably, she resented this and appealed to CAS. Armed with a force of experts on testosterone and its effects, she challenged the IAAF and wanted to be allowed to compete drugs-free.

Fluidity and Inclusion

Intuitively, one can sympathize with the legions of women who feel disadvantaged when they look along the start line and see the imposing figure of Semenya or, for that matter, other female athletes who enjoy the supposed advantage of elevated natural testosterone. After all, 7.1 in every 1,000 elite female athletes is about 140 greater than in the general population.

But the rest of society is moving away from division and segregation and toward fluidity and inclusion. The traditional sex binary is being challenged almost daily. Unlike when de Coubertin was contemplating allowing women into the Olympics, sex is no longer regarded as a straightforward twofold scheme, but a spectrum. Sex reassignment either through surgery or hormone treatment also makes it changeable. So it could be argued our understanding of sex itself is in the throes of change. Perhaps sport will be forced to dissolve its historical division and start to integrate all people regardless of sex, natal or assigned, into the same competitions.

After years of legal back and forth, the Court of Arbitration for Sport's decision on May 1 has put to rest any doubt over Semenya's eligibility to compete in female events. The decision to maintain the status quo and effectively snub Semenya plunges sport into a moral maelstrom. People will argue persuasively that insisting that an athlete takes testosterone-suppressing medication to change a natural condition is a violation not only of individual human rights, but of its own rules. After all, since the 1970s, the vast majority of sports have affirmed and strengthened strictures on doping. To force an

athlete to change her body chemistry artificially seems monstrously hypocritical.

It also seems oddly out of sync with the zeitgeist, which has spirited to us a newish term — gender fluidity. This means that people are annexing the right to define their own sex and gender, perhaps swapping as they move through life, or even from one situation to the next. By opposing Semenya, sport confirms its commitment to the durable but outmoded binary model of two sexes at the very time when the rest of society is discarding it.

This legal battle has concluded with a decision that will have consequences as impactful and far reaching as the 1970s ruling that prohibited performance enhancing drugs. Semenya is now the symbol of a very modern debate over gender classifications, with the pronouncement sure to have implications for intersex and transgender women across sport.

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What If Michael Jackson Had Lived?

Ellis Cashmore

June 21, 2019

Michael Jackson, who died on June 25, 2009, has become one the most castigated figures in recent history. What if he'd lived to see it?

What if, on June 24, 2009, the paramedics had arrived at Michael Jackson's home in Los Angeles at 12:24pm — two minutes earlier than they actually did when responding to the 911 call from Jackson's security people? Imagine: After finding that Jackson isn't breathing, the paramedics attempt CPR on him, compressing his chest and delivering mouth-to-mouth ventilation until, after

4 minutes, he revives. He's then rushed to the Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center, with fractured ribs and internal bleeding, but no brain damage. Surgeons say they expect a complete recovery. After a few weeks, the 50-year-old Jackson resumes rehearsals for his 50-concert comeback tour, *This Is It*, at London's newly opened O2 Arena. What if?

Nearly 10 years later, *Leaving Neverland*, a documentary directed by British filmmaker Dan Reed, is released after all manner of legal obstacles are overcome. The documentary features two men, James Safechuck and Wade Robson, both of whom claim that they were sexually abused by the star from their childhood into their teens. Jackson had repeatedly denied allegations of sexual abuse and was acquitted on pedophilia charges after a trial in 2005. The documentary renews suspicions about Jackson. Again, he denies the allegations and tries in vain to stop transmission, the stories that haunted him 20 years before returning to torment him again. What if?

Jackson died a decade ago. In life he was regarded, variously, as a wunderkind, the King of Pop, an eccentric and a freak. He's been posthumously disgraced, dishonored and stigmatized as a child molester. It's possible that the past would have caught up with Jackson if he'd lived. The blizzard of hearsay, rumor and malicious tittle-tattle combined with the millions of dollars in unobtrusively settled legal cases would have presented formidable challenges for Jackson. But he'd fended off scandals and emerged with his reputation if not intact, then with enough structure for him to sell out his vaunted London concerts and, perhaps, produce more bestselling albums.

Death Is a Good Career Move

Michael Jackson's death undermines the barbed observation that dying is a good career move, which has been circulating ever since Elvis departed from this world in 1977. Had Jackson lived, there is a chance he would still be performing and recording like his contemporary

Madonna, now 60, her 14th studio album released earlier this year. The accusations would have probably surfaced, but Jackson would have repudiated them. Would anyone believe him? And, if they didn't, would they forgive him? It's a fascinating duel between the known and the unknown.

Would the open-and-shut case have ever reopened had Jackson lived? After all, both Safechuck and Robson have for years denied he had ever touched them, having testified under oath to this effect. Safechuck didn't testify during Jackson's 2005 trial, though he claims to have lied in a statement given to the 1993 investigation. Robson claims to have lied during his testimony in the 2005 trial at which he was a witness for the defense. He had earlier unequivocally defended Jackson during the 1993 investigation. In 2013, four years after Jackson's death, Robson reversed his claim and filed a lawsuit alleging abuse. The change of heart suggested undisclosed, perhaps unworthy motivations, but neither he nor Safechuck was compensated for participating in the documentary.

In *Leaving Neverland*, Robson claims the prospect of Jackson's imprisonment prohibited him from revealing the truth earlier, suggesting the depth of attachment between the victim and the abuser, a sort of Stockholm Syndrome perhaps. Were Jackson still alive, presumably he would still not wish him ill.

We don't even know how Jackson will be thought of in the years to come. Perhaps as a spooked Richard Nixon-type, someone who was hailed triumphantly when elected to the US presidency, but later vilified as the most notorious American leader in history. Or a Tiger Woods, perhaps, once disgraced, embarrassed and written off, but now fully restored and acclaimed as a conquering hero. At the moment, the needle points toward the former.

Jackson's life could be an allegory of a violent, tribal, conflict-torn America still trying to rid itself of its most obdurate demon. Jackson was a singer, a dancer, an idiosyncratic collector,

a quirky obsessive, a sexual enigma and many other things besides. He didn't fight or assuage racism or position himself as an icon of black struggle. Jackson was such a uniquely divisive, yet historically significant figure, that he will continue to command argument in much the same way as Muhammad Ali, Billie Holiday and Martin Luther King Jr., inspire discussion. In many senses, Jackson was a presence as relevant and challenging as any African American. Or was he?

Comfort or Menace?

There is a theory that the integration of blacks into American society was and remains conditional: They were permitted to manifest excellence in two realms, sports and the entertainment industry — both areas where they performed for the amusement and delectation of white audiences. They still do, of course. Historically, the fears of slave rebellions and anxiety over civil rights were assuaged by flamboyantly talented entertainers who were too grateful to be concerned with bucking the system. Whites were able to exorcise their trepidation by rewarding a few blacks with money and status way beyond the reach of the majority.

Worshipping someone like Michael Jackson was an honorable deed. It meant whites could persuade themselves that the nightmare of historical racism was gone, and that they were contributing to a fair and more righteous society in which talented African Americans could rise to the top. It seems paradoxical that Jackson was momentarily influential in encouraging a mainstream enthusiasm for black popular music even as his own skin became mysteriously fairer, and his face, particularly his nose, altered dramatically.

Or perhaps it isn't such a paradox. It's possible that Jackson's global acceptance as an entertainer nonpareil came at least partly because he was a black person with the world at his feet and could have anything he wanted apart from the thing he seemed to desire most — to be white. The consummate purveyor of a cool funk

that made his African American roots audible in every note, Jackson was so evidently uncomfortable in his own skin that he wanted to shed it.

“I am a black American ... I am proud of my race,” proclaimed Jackson in a 1993 television interview with Oprah Winfrey. But it sounded implausible. For years, he seemed to be transmogrifying. Since 1979 — when he was 21 — in fact, when had an accident during rehearsals and had plastic surgery that left him with a narrower nose. It was the first of several procedures: His lips lost plumpness, and his chin acquired a cleft. Combined with his chemically treated hair, his blanched skin (he apparently had vitiligo, a condition that affects skin pigmentation) and the signs of dermal fillers, the overall impression he gave was of a man trying to escape his natural appearance and replace it with that of a white man.

Crashing Comet

If this made Jackson interesting, the allegations that emerged in late 1993 made him gripping. Accused of abuse, Jackson settled out of court in the excess of \$20 million. His next album, *HIStory: Past, Present and Future, Book I*, sold 20 million (and counting) copies, seeming to confirm his substantial fan base was unfazed by the imputations. It seems unlikely that any star today would be treated as leniently by the public as Jackson has been. Combined with proliferating stories of his eccentricities and the secretive goings-on at his well-protected Neverland estate, the Jackson mystique could have taken on a thoroughly unwholesome character. In the event, this rumor-within-rumors became the single most compelling reason for his lasting attractiveness.

In many entertainers, moral deficiencies can be ruinous; but not in Jackson’s case. The singer appears to have operated untrammelled as a serial child abuser — in 2015, it was claimed Jackson had silenced up to 20 accusers with payoffs totaling \$200 million — often with the tacit, if unwitting, complicity of the victims’ parents, as *Leaving Neverland* shows so well. The reason it

didn’t damage him may be that audiences, especially white audiences, found his flaws reassuring. Here was a man-child with blessings in abundance and arguably more adulation than any other entertainer. He could have reaped the wonders of the world. But he was defective, grotesquely so. And, in a black man, this made him more of a comfort than a menace.

Once a dazzling comet that flashed across cultural skies, only to crash spectacularly and devastatingly to earth, Jackson was a reminder that black men, even those gilded in virtuosity, can be deceptively dangerous.

A decade after his death, Michael Jackson draws the admiration and perhaps respect of an unknown legion of devotees, music aficionados and perhaps cynics who have witnessed black men symbolically emasculated many times before. For them, he is a falsely disparaged hero. He also incenses a sharp-clawed public who believes it was taken in by his depraved subterfuge; it will denounce him as an unforgivably malevolent villain. In his afterlife, Jackson will be a fugitive soul destined to remain somewhere outside heaven, but on the threshold of hell.

If he had survived, an embattled Jackson might have found himself marooned without friends or devotees, and possibly even in prison. Or he might have completed his longest and most successful series of concerts in London, released a new album and rivaled Beyoncé as the most important black entertainer in living memory. We can impose a narrative on the unknowable survival of Jackson, but speculation is just that, of course. We can only conjecture on what might have happened had Michael Jackson lived. But one thing is certain: His life may be gone, but his influence, beneficial or malevolent, will endure.

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Romance Novels Are a Weapon Against Misogyny

Hans-Georg Betz
July 26, 2019

Romance novels have the potential to empower more women than any feminist academic article could ever do.

Contemporary romance novels are big business, and they empower women in a number of ways. In the United States alone, romance novels account for about one third of the fiction market, about the same as mystery and fantasies combined. The vast majority of romance writers are women, and so are their readers — at around 80%, they amount to some 40 million readers.

For ages, romance novels have been subjected to ridicule and derision, contemptuously dismissed as “chic lit” and “cliterature.” In recent years, however, this has (somewhat) changed. One important turning point was the hiring of Jaime Green as romance fiction columnist for *The New York Times* in 2018. This was arguably a result of the negative response the paper had received one year earlier to a male critic’s review of romance novels — and to the publication’s defense of it — both of which one reader characterized as “absolutely appalling,” “incredibly offensive” and “out of touch.”

The comment might seem a bit harsh and slightly overstepping the mark. Yet essentially it is right on target. Today’s romance novels are a far cry from the Harlequin novels of times past — and even this might be a mischaracterization of Harlequin fiction — or the German *Bastei Arzteromane* (doctor novels) my parents’ generation read in the postwar period. Today’s romance novel heroines are no longer the passive one-dimensional cookie-cutter fairy princess-like figures waiting for their prince charming in white scrubs.

This is not to say that the latter don’t exist. The genre abounds with millionaires and

particularly billionaires (who would have thought the US has so many of them, and all of them so young and stunningly good-looking?), rock stars, top hockey, football and even soccer players — and, yes, doctors and surgeons.

Ordinary “working-class” men are relatively rare — no wonder given the rapidly diminishing prospects of working-class males — but they do exist, predominantly as rugged motorcycle club members, titillating tattoo artists or “panty-droppingly” beautiful male escorts. But, then, the genre is not primarily about men and their insecurities and hang-ups, but about the women who fall in love with them, who give them a second chance when they screw up — and they certainly do more often than not — who tell them off in no uncertain terms and put them in their place.

New Feminist Reading

A few years ago, Maya Rodale, author of “Dangerous Books for Girls: The Bad Reputation of Romance Novels Explained,” claimed in the *Huffington Post* that romance novels empower women. She should know, being a successful romance author herself, whose books have routinely graced the bestseller lists. Her statement might, however, come as somewhat of a surprise, even a shock. After all, even avid readers of romance novels more often than not feel apologetic about reading “these books” that don’t make for the “most intelligent reading.”

And yet, romance novels have a massive following, particularly in the United States, but not only there. You can find them, translated into French, at Carrerfour in provincial France, or into German at Press & Books in Swiss train stations, and on Amazon in India — and for good reason.

Maya Rodale has maintained that romance novels are those “dangerous books for girls that show women again and again that they’re worth it;” where “women’s voices predominantly shape the narrative about themselves in the world;” and where “real, good love doesn’t ask you to lose weight, change your hair, get a different job, silence your feelings or in some way shrink

yourself to fit into a box society has labeled ‘desirable.’”

What this suggests is that romance novels play a role similar to what has been claimed for some contemporary Latin American telenovelas. Instead of presenting women in a submissive role, they empower them. As a major (male) Mexican telenovela star has put it, “Female characters are presented how they truly are in Mexico and Latin America. Nowadays, women decide themselves and are fighters with strong values. Women play important roles in culture and their opinions are taken into account.”

Even Hallmark, once a bastion of white coy heterosexual holiday schmaltz, has cautiously started to go with the times, increasingly, if reluctantly, “portraying women who have options and who make their own choices about work and love” and, in the process, advancing “a subtle feminist message.”

Against that, contemporary romance novels are anything but subtle, particularly with respect to the one thing that is unique to the genre – its blatant sexuality. Some 30 years ago, Ann Douglas, a professor of English at Columbia University, characterized Harlequin novels as “porn softened to fit the needs of female emotionality.” Today, “female emotionality” has fundamentally changed. At the time, Douglas characterized John Cleland’s 1749 erotic classic, “Fanny Hill” as a “hard-porn” story of an innocent, naive country girl turned into a “woman of pleasure.”

If this is true, then virtually all contemporary romance novels are hardcore porn, often going far beyond “Fanny Hill.” The New York Times bestselling authors such as Helena Hunting, Sawyer Bennett or Jana Aston have not only mastered the art of writing steamy sex scenes — they have also paved the way for the myriad writers inspired by them to drop any pretense of false modesty and call a spade a spade.

At the time, “Fanny Hill” caused outrage, was proscribed, forced underground, but never successfully suppressed. Ironically enough, the novel ultimately is a moral story. The heroine

might love sex, might be “hooked on sexual pleasure” which “she pursued with abandon and elan.” Yet at the end, Fanny Hill comes to discover “that true sexual fulfillment can only be found within the confines of marriage.”

End of Men

“Fanny Hill” was written by a man. It is a man’s phantasy. Today’s romance novels are predominately written by women, and, as such, they presumably are an expression of women’s phantasies. Yet they as often follow the plot line that informed “Fanny Hill” as they do the lead of that other great romance novel, Jane Austen’s “Pride and Prejudice.”

To be sure, true sexual fulfillment is no longer confined to the realm of married life, which is hardly surprising given today’s divorce rate. Yet neither is it relegated to serendipitous fleeting encounters. In fact, more often than not, hook-ups and one-night stands mark sensual turning points that awaken pent up but unmet desires that, once fulfilled, invariably lead to love, commitment and the “happily ever after.”

Ten years ago, Hannan Rosin, writing for The Atlantic, heralded the “end of men.” The advance of a modern postindustrial economy, or so Rosin argued, was simply more “congenial” to women than to men. “As thinking and communicating have come to eclipse physical strength and stamina as the keys to economic success,” women were no longer at a disadvantage compared to men.

On the contrary: The Great Recession brutally demonstrated to what degree men had become structurally expendable in the work force. Of the 8 million jobs lost as a result of the financial crisis, the vast majority were in industries that were “overwhelmingly male and deeply identified with macho: construction, manufacturing, high finance.”

In the years that followed, prospects have hardly improved for men. In fact, in 2017 three leading trade economists published a paper analyzing the diminishing “marriage-market

value of young men” caused by the decline in American manufacturing.

The anxieties, resentment and anguish provoked by these developments among a proportion of white American males have been identified as one of the main factors behind the election of Donald Trump. Trump’s open contempt for women — together with his unwavering support for diehard misogynists such as the US Senate hopeful Roy Moore — partially explains his appeal among these segments of the electorate that see themselves as victims and losers, their masculine identity threatened.

Trump’s lashing out against strong women leaders and his relentless attacks on young women lawmakers soothe their lacerated egos while fanning the flames of nostalgia for those good old days of “Leave It to Beaver” when women still looked up to their husbands and contented themselves with keeping an immaculate home.

Subversive Potential

Under these circumstances, contemporary romance novels can no longer be dismissed as mere shallow entertainment. Rather, they should be recognized for their subversive potential — as narratives of resistance to the prevailing climate of misogyny and anti-genderism informed by a Trumpist desire to reaffirm and reestablish (white) male dominance and privilege as part of the “natural order.”

To be sure, romance novels are hardly innovative literature. They follow a rather predictable script intrinsic to the genre, starting from “Pride and Prejudice” to contemporary Hallmark and Bollywood movies. They invoke certain tropes, stereotypes and clichés associated with the “male gaze” and turn them around, with a strong dose of objectification. Only this time, the object of desire is the man: his firm and tall body, ripped abs, hard butt, tattoos. This in itself has a subversive potential.

As Katherine Lampe has noted in a blog with the telling title, “Writing the Female Gaze,” “women have sexual desires and urges. Women

look at men they find attractive.” However, when women act upon their sexual attractions and desires, they get stigmatized, ostracized and punished. Women, as well as fictional female characters, are expected “to behave certain ways around sex, to be the one acted upon rather than the actor. A woman who’s up front about her sexuality, who picks and chooses and directs instead of going along, is a challenge to our self concepts and our own relationships with carnality.” And this includes women, as Lampe herself learned from women’s responses to the way she depicted the heroine of her novels. These comments showed her that “we have a long way to go before women’s points of view become normal and women’s sexuality, in all its many forms, becomes as acceptable as men’s.”

Most commercially successful romance novels do their part to advance this cause. They demonstrate, without being preachy, that it is possible for a man and a woman to be equals, sexually as well as intellectually. They show that vulnerability is not a flaw — not even for a powerful man. And they demonstrate over and over again that the secret to a fulfilled relationship is the ability to communicate on an equal footing, with mutual respect and appreciation, without one side seeking to impose his or her will on the other. In today’s testosterone-laden world, headed by a commander-in-chief who takes pride in being a pussy grabber, this is no small feat.

If this is true, romance novels are indeed subversive weapons against the relentless assault of the contemporary misogynistic right, fed by a combination of anxiety and contempt, and, ultimately, the objective of restoring the subordination of women. They have the potential, given a readership that goes into the millions, to empower more women than any feminist academic article could ever do. Similar to what has been observed with respect to telenovelas in developing countries, they can have a “profound emancipating impact” on their readers. Particularly younger readers appear to recognize

that “romance novels do embody feminist ideals.”

Empowerment, however, is not a one-way street. Unfortunately, romance novels remain, to an overwhelming degree, the domain of women readers. Recent surveys suggest that their readership among males is increasing, albeit slowly and hardly substantially. Given the structural power of men, as long as romance novels continue to fail to appeal to male readers, they will fall short of their subversive potential.

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INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

Peace in the Central African Republic Requires Patience

Alexandra Lamarche

January 21, 2019

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

This week will start the next, and possibly final, round of an African Union-led peace dialogue on the Central African Republic (CAR) held in Khartoum. The talks will bring together the CAR government of the 14 armed groups that collectively control the vast majority of the country. This offers an important opportunity for CAR to begin the long, hard road to peace. A lot could go wrong, and stakes are high with millions of civilian lives hanging in the balance. But failure is avoidable if the negotiating parties are patient and stop repeating past mistakes.

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

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

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

In late 2017, the African Union launched the peace process, known as the African Initiative, to broker an agreement between the armed groups and the CAR government. These militias dragged their feet on setting a date for the next round of negotiations. In the meantime, they became richer and more powerful. They also committed more attacks — on civilians, on aid workers and on the United Nations Peacekeeping force. During my time in the CAR in the fall of last year, three densely populated displacement camps were set ablaze, and hundreds of their inhabitants injured and killed. Finally, last week, in a welcomed breakthrough, Central African Republic’s president, Faustin Archange Touadera, announced that talks would resume in Sudan on January 24. But those at the negotiating table must take steps to ensure that the talks are meaningful.

One Peace

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

The decision to hold the next round of African Initiative talks in Sudan may well be a move to

appease Russia and Sudan in order for them to back the AU process. But there is still a very real danger that Sudan, as the host, may seek to meddle in the talks to further its own agenda. The same goes for Russia, which has provided defense advisers to the CAR's forces, reportedly in return for mineral concessions. The African Union's commissioner for peace and security, Ambassador Smail Chergui, and coordinator of the African Initiative's Panel of Facilitators, Professor Mohamed El Hacem Lebat, must assert their authority to lead the discussion. And they must be backed by other key regional and international stakeholders like Chad, Cameroon, the United States and France.

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

Third, participants and mediators must set realistic expectations and avoid rushing the process. Patience to build a credible and sustainable process is crucial. The commitments generated should not be overly ambitious. This dialogue should be used as a platform to show good faith and culminate with an agreement on basic principles. Technical working groups should be established to design and implement solutions. Those working on the African Initiative signaled to me that many issues have been sources of significant contention in past negotiations. The failure to address them has set the stage for a return to conflict. To be successful, the working groups must be staffed by outside experts with the knowledge and experience to help the parties and mediators.

Necessary Expertise

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

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

When the country eventually stabilizes, displaced populations — refugees and internally displaced alike — will want to return home. This process should be supported by the appropriate technical assistance needed to ensure their dignified return and address housing, land and property law issues for those whose homes have been damaged or occupied. Lastly, transhumance access — the seasonal routes used by cattle herders throughout the country and into neighboring lands — will necessitate careful negotiation. This will also require the involvement of officials from Cameroon, Chad, Sudan and South Sudan.

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

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

Peace and reconciliation in the Central African Republic will take patience, difficult

bargaining, well-thought-out plans and diligent implementation. Rushing the process or repeating mistakes of the past will only lead to more violence. The people of the Central African Republic have long waited and long suffered. If done right, the African Initiative can, with time, give them the peace they have paid so dearly for.

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The Collision Course in the Asia Pacific

Karola Klatt
May 31, 2019

Donald Trump is making political waves by deploying warships. But is the United States gambling with its credibility as an international force for order?

Since 2002, the most important security conference in the Asia-Pacific region has been held annually at the Shangri-La Hotel in Singapore. Similar to the Munich Security Conference, presidents, top politicians, ambassadors, high-ranking military personnel and security experts from across the 28 Asia-Pacific states will convene from May 31 to June 2 to discuss security and defense policy. Scientists, mediators and defense-industry representatives will also attend the meeting, which is organized by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), a renowned British think tank.

But right now, the Asia Pacific is awash with conflict potential, threatening the success of the talks. In recent years, China has been increasingly aggressive in asserting its territorial claims in the South China Sea and, with the creation of artificial islands for military bases, it has given the jitters to its Asian neighbors and put the US and its allies Australia, Japan, France and Britain on high alert. Tensions surrounding

the unresolved Korean conflict have been ratcheted up following the recent missile test in North Korea. You don't need a crystal ball to predict two other issues that are set to dominate the meeting: the escalating trade dispute between the US and China and the Trump administration's confrontation course against Iran.

Gunboat Policy in the South China Sea

A speech by US Secretary of Defense Patrick Shanahan has been scheduled for the morning of June 1. He is expected to outline the American perspective on the threats posed by North Korea and China, while explaining how the US Department of Defense intends to implement its strategy of maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific Ocean. Amid the escalating trade dispute between the two major world powers, the US and China, the US Navy sent two destroyers into the waters around the controversial Spratly and Paracel Islands in early May. China considers the islands to be part of its territory, despite a contradictory ruling by the International Court of Arbitration in The Hague. The warships invaded the sensitive 12-mile zone, making an unambiguous statement that Washington would not tolerate China's territorial claims.

However, doubts abound on whether the Trump administration's Indo-Pacific strategy goes beyond an aggressive gunboat policy in the South China Sea. It numbers among a string of unilateral moves by the US government: policies that walk roughshod over allies' concerns and their calls for restraint. These include the unilateral termination of the Iran nuclear agreement, the risky escalation of the Iranian crisis, the deployment of aircraft carriers to the Persian Gulf, and the dispute with China that is currently spiraling into a trade war.

Under President Donald Trump, the US government appears to solely focus on scoring points in the short-term by demonstrating its military muscle — and seems prepared to pay the price of any long-term harm that will ensue. Right now, we are witnessing a great power, which played a decisive role in shaping the

liberal world order after the Second World War, sacrificing its role as an international authority for a political style marked by ruthlessness and short-sightedness.

Diminishing Capacity to Rule?

In a recent essay published in the IISS magazine *Survival*, political scientist Hanns W. Maull describes how the international order depends on the capacity of the nation-states. For Maull, whether it is possible to keep global warming below 2 degrees Celsius or to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals depends on national governments' ability to cooperate. However, this necessitates resilient governments that work toward long-term strategies. This applies, in particular, to the more powerful states, those that can be regarded as maintaining international order.

The Sustainable Governance Indicators of Bertelsmann Stiftung (SGI) examine the resilience of industrialized countries and the sustainability and long-term nature of their policies. When asked how much influence strategic planning and advisory bodies have on government decision-making, the experts in the latest SGI country report on the US came to a devastating verdict: "In most areas of government and policy, President Trump has shown virtually no interest in long-range planning, professional expertise, or even organized, careful deliberation. ... In national security policy, he has favored senior military officers, but often relied on his own untutored preferences and impulses. His White House has had essentially no conventionally organized advisory and decision processes."

This lack of advice, planning and strategy has already dented the US government's international operations. The SGI indicator for government cooperation with other states reveals how the US loses two points and, with a score of six out of 10 possible points, ranking only around the middle of the range of countries surveyed. According to the country experts, a trend reversal is not to be

expected for 2019 either. On the contrary, the pattern is expected to continue.

At the international level, the Trump administration's rejection of multilateralism and its overestimation of its own power is triggering a backlash — as experienced by former President George W. Bush for his approach to the 2003 Iraq War. This rise in criticism is undermining America's international reputation. If it is to lose its status as a global role model, the US will eventually damage the normative, liberal-democratic international consensus that has shaped institutions like the United Nations ever since they were founded.

Australia, Japan, France and Britain are also showing strength by dispatching their warships on so-called freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea. Unlike the US, however, they retain a distance of at least 12 nautical miles to the islands of Spratly and Paracel. These military operations protect the status quo of the freedom of the seas under international law — China's hegemonic claim to the South China Sea cannot set a precedent. But it is the US alone that wants to invade the 12-mile zone claimed by China, thereby running the risk of direct confrontation with Chinese naval units.

As seen in other areas of its foreign policy, the Trump administration has steered itself on a collision course, thus destabilizing the region and harming the international order through its uncoordinated solo missions.

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For Iran, Options Are Few and Prospects Are Grim

Gary Grappo
June 18, 2019

After the tanker attacks in the Gulf of Oman, Tehran will need to undertake a sober

assessment of its options, which are few, and its prospects, which only get worse.

Last week's attacks on two oil tankers outside the Strait of Hormuz show that for now Tehran is choosing from a very limited playbook in responding to America's increasingly painful sanctions on the Islamic Republic. If indeed Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps naval forces are responsible for these recent attacks as well as those on four tankers last month, then Tehran's reasoning seems clear. Attacks on tankers exiting the Gulf will lead to speculation about the future dependability of Gulf-sourced oil, responsible for nearly one-third of the global oil supply. Such thoughts are hardly comforting to markets, inevitably leading to higher prices. That's what Tehran wants.

Iran can't be the only one to suffer the consequences of Washington's sanctions. The rest of the world, including those who don't necessarily source their oil imports from the Gulf, must also pay a price for Washington's actions. Predictably, markets reacted to both attacks with prices spiking in the immediate aftermath. But perhaps because armed conflict is seen as unlikely for the time being — both President Donald Trump and Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei have said they do not want war — prices have fallen back to nearly pre-attacks levels.

The stronger trend in oil markets is lower demand as a result of slowing economies. That could change if real conflict follows, and we confront another "Tanker War" as was the case during the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-1988, when Iraq attacked an Iranian oil facility in 1984, sparking an all-out second front to the one raging on their common border. Tankers carrying both countries' oil became each other's prime targets, with the West, including the US, the UK and the USSR, flagging and escorting tankers in an attempt to discourage both sides — especially Iran — from going after tankers protected by nations with substantial navies capable of striking back.

Prices spiked back then as well, but then also fell as markets adjusted. So, history and current circumstances suggest that Tehran's strategy will likely have little lasting impact, especially given the limited number of attacks.

Maybe a Blockade?

Tehran could move to blockade the Strait of Hormuz as it did during the Iran-Iraq conflict. But that too had little lasting impact in oil markets. More importantly, it led to confrontation between the US and Iran, including an Iranian rocket attack on a US Navy ship and an accidental downing by a US naval vessel of an Iranian commercial airliner that killed all 270 passengers aboard. The Iranians would be well advised to heed history and avoid such provocations this time. Under President Trump, who is influenced by war hawks like Secretary of State Michael Pompeo and National Security Adviser John Bolton, the US response would not be proportional.

The tanker war is additionally instructive of the uncertain escalatory nature of tit-for-tat actions between the two feuding countries. As was with the case of the Iranian airliner, the escalatory ladder is unpredictable and very unstable. Anticipating an enemy's response is dangerously inexact, especially when factoring in public emotions.

So, if Iran wants to trigger higher oil prices, it has few options other than continuing its current strategy of occasional tanker attacks that temporarily rile markets. Even targeting more tankers — unless it's on a massive scale that is beyond its capability short of declaring all-out war on Gulf tanker traffic — will probably have little medium-to-long-term impact. Moreover, such an all-out tanker war strategy would expose Tehran to worldwide condemnation and loss of whatever public high ground it may have after Washington's abandonment of the Iran nuclear deal, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), in May 2018.

There is one other potentially deniable tactic — employing its proxy forces like Hezbollah, the

Houthis in Yemen or Iraqi Shia militias to go after American or allied targets. Such attacks, like the one on Monday against the Saudi airport in Abha in the Western part of the kingdom, also carry high risk. The potential killing of large numbers of civilians, and especially of an American, would almost demand a prompt and forceful response from Washington or a US ally. Furthermore, such proxies cannot always be relied upon to do precisely what Iran may direct. The kind of control necessary to contain the risky set of consequences is lost.

Finally, Iran can resume its nuclear weapons program as it has already threatened. While that might lose it the support of the remaining signers of the JCPOA, it might also give Tehran more sway in getting Washington to back off and consider rejoining the nuclear agreement, albeit under different criteria. Under Trump, the Americans seem impervious, however, to the pleadings of even their closest allies. Even they would be reluctant to go to the US administration without some concrete incentives to get them back into the JCPOA.

The Road Not Taken

Despite the apparent futility of its playlist, Tehran has achieved some modest success. Donald Trump has stated he doesn't want war with Iran, does not seek regime change and wants to talk with the Iranians. These options may appear meager, but collectively could be used by Iran's leadership to signal to the Iranian public that its strategy has worked and it is now ready to begin talks with the Americans. That would be the smart approach, and Americans, Iranians and the rest of the world would breathe a great sigh of relief.

The perfect opportunity for that occurred last week when Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited Tehran and met with the supreme leader to seek some lessening of tensions between the two sides. Khamenei indicated he wasn't interested in talking to Washington, however.

Tehran will need to undertake a sober assessment of its options, which are few, and its

prospects, which only get worse. It can never hope to match Washington's abundant arsenal of economic and military options to make life in Iran and political leadership in Tehran ever more difficult and fraught. Iranians certainly have an extraordinary capacity for enduring suffering, as they amply demonstrated during the devastating Iran-Iraq War and 40 years of onerous American sanctions before 2015. But does the supreme leader really want to impose that on his people and subject his leadership to inescapable criticism?

In fact, if Khamenei wants to end this and allow his richly endowed nation to benefit from the global economy, then the decision seems clear. Sit down with Washington and negotiate. So why can't he? The answer lies simply in the course those negotiations are likely to take. The US agrees to lift all sanctions and perhaps make some commitment not to attempt to remove the regime. There are no ideological or existential reasons preventing Washington from doing its part.

But Tehran would have to agree to release Americans it currently unjustly holds; to severely curtail its medium-range missile testing; extend the time horizons for development of its nuclear program, doubtlessly surrendering the possibility of having a nuclear weapons capability for the foreseeable future; and cease all support for Iran-allied terrorist organizations to include Hezbollah, et al. For Tehran and the Islamic Republic, these are obstacles that extend far beyond the political or even military considerations. They are existential in that to forever forswear nuclear weapons and support for its proxies is tantamount to a repudiation of the Islamic Revolution. Indeed, options are few and prospects are grim in Iran.

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Is Europe Ready to Do More on Security Matters?

Orsolya Raczova
July 17, 2019

Brexit creates challenges as well as opportunities for the European security landscape.

The notion of a stronger European security framework is gaining momentum again. While the history of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) goes back to the Western European Union, more recent initiatives include 11 member states calling for a new defense policy and a more majority-based decision-making procedure to be put in place on defense matters to prevent individual members obstructing initiatives through their veto power.

Recently, doubts about the United States' willingness to defend the European continent if needed have arisen when President Donald Trump has publicly questioned the relevance of NATO, Europe's financial contributions to the alliance and the fact that American soldiers have to sacrifice their lives in NATO missions.

In the meantime, external security threats — for instance related to Russia — are causing concerns among many European states. With the historical ability to rely on US support now in question, European leaders are rethinking regional military capabilities and know-how. Many have doubts that the EU is able to defend itself against an unforeseen attack in the potential absence of fulfilling the Article 5 guarantees of the North Atlantic Treaty.

European Security Landscape

Defense and security are a complex issue to discuss when it comes to the EU. The union is made up of 28 member states (pending Britain's exit), with institutions on both EU as well as national levels. Security and defense related decisions are up to each member state, which reflects on how developed national military

capabilities are or how high defense expenditure across the member states is. Although many among the allies have increased their defense spending in the past years, currently just six European Union countries are meeting the NATO requirement of 2% or more of national GDP. It is fair to say that there has been development on a national level, but there is more to be done.

According to official estimates, member states' defense spending amounts to more than €200 billion (\$224 billion), while their armed forces amount to 1.4 million soldiers. Due to lack of coordination and cooperation, duplications and fragmentations are unavoidable, while the effectiveness of spending has also been questioned. New EU-level initiatives aim to overcome such problems and allow for better coordination and cooperation on defense matters.

The idea of a European Defence Fund was announced by the president of the European Commission at the time, Jean-Claude Juncker, in 2016, and although it is still subject to further approval during the upcoming negotiations concerning the 2021-27 EU budget, a partial agreement on the fund was already adopted by the European Parliament in April, amounting to €11.5 billion (in 2018 prices). The fund, together with the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), will allow member states to cooperate on defense projects and develop capabilities or invest in shared projects.

When it comes to matters related to security, decisions are either taken unanimously on the EU level or left entirely to individual member states. In such decision-making procedures, countries skeptical of deeper European defense cooperation or those fearing potential decoupling, discrimination or duplication of existing efforts by NATO, have the opportunity to intervene. The UK has used its veto power over the past years when it came to key security questions. However, Britain is set to leave the EU, possibly as early as October, which will ultimately have an impact on European security matters.

A Window of Opportunity

Brexit creates challenges as well as opportunities for the European security landscape. The UK is arguably the strongest military power in the bloc, and its loss will be reflected on the EU's total military capability. However, the focus should not be primarily on what capabilities and know-how the country has, but how much it is willing to contribute. The reality is that Britain's personnel contribution to CSDP missions has been rather small compared to the fact that it has the largest defense budget in the EU, reaching the 2% target.

The UK contributes 2.3% of total member state personnel across missions, but it plays a more significant role when it comes to intelligence sharing, providing expertise and equipment, as well as financial contributions to the EU budget.

Just like a coin has two sides, so does Brexit. The UK's departure means the exit of an influential but skeptical country and so an opportunity for those who wish to do more on security. For instance, Britain vetoed the creation of the European Operational Headquarters in 2011, opposed to increase the European Defence Agency's budget on a number of occasions, and opposed the creation of a single European army. Now, pro-integration countries such as France and Germany have a chance to establish a more united Europe and aim for consensus in areas where cooperation has so far been elusive.

Moreover, apart from Britain, France is the only European country with a nuclear deterrent, and while losing the UK has an ultimate impact on Europe's deterrence capabilities, it gives a potential opportunity to France to emerge as a leader on security issues.

Perhaps it is not a coincidence that key security initiatives came shortly after Britain's 2016 EU referendum. In 2017, Germany and France announced the development of common capabilities to strengthen the EU as a European Security Union. Apart from the announcement of the EU's Global Strategy in 2016 calling on the EU to become a global security actor, concrete initiatives include the launch of PESCO and the

European Defence Fund, the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence and the European Defence Industrial Development Programme. For example, PESCO was agreed upon in December 2017, with the exception of only Malta, Denmark and the UK.

Germany is a strong proponent of doing security cooperation and ensuring that Europe speaks with one voice. German Chancellor Angela Merkel has pointed out that the unanimity that applies to security and defense issues should not apply to every security decision. On the other hand, differences in strategic culture and approaches to integration are already visible between the two countries, while domestic political uncertainties further obfuscate future cooperation opportunities.

Challenges Remain

The reality is that in the absence of strong supranational institutions, domestic politics will continue to impede EU integration in the long run. Nevertheless, new initiatives on funding, institutionalization or cooperation structures can only succeed with the support of other member states outside of the French-German nexus.

There is no doubt that doing more on security has been challenging. Potential legal complications arise when it comes to talks on deployment of a common army. This initiative depends on the strategic culture and the different regulation frameworks of member states. For example, while in France the president's approval is required for troop deployment, in Germany it is up to parliament. Moreover, defense and security related information is sensitive and often classified, so increasing sharing channels is not favored by many for a reason.

Every region and each country has different strategic priorities, and the size of defense budgets varies. There is no question that the future of European security also depends on how much member states are willing to spend on defense. It is a good sign that, for instance, Germany's downward trend was reversed, from 1.18% in 2015 to 1.23% in 2018.

It is fair to conclude that many countries recognize the rising threat from Russia and have concerns about the future of the continent's safety in light of recent political developments in the US. The questions on Europe being able to defend itself and the frustration over individual member states' weakness compared to global actors like China or the US are being discussed. With Brexit looming large and transatlantic relations strained, Europe has a window of opportunity to do more on security. The question remains as to what extent member states will be able to overcome their differences to reach a common goal.

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We May Be Better Off Without a Clear Definition of Terrorism

Cole A. Baker
July 23, 2019

Ambiguity is currently the world's best option for preventing the misuse of the term "terrorism."

In all likelihood, you have an ambiguous understanding of "terrorism." The average individual can recognize an event as terrorism but, when asked to define the term, is able to offer only the most general of definitions. The reason for this is that terrorism is undefined or, more accurately, over-defined, with even the US government having multiple definitions of the term.

Moreover, there is no commonly accepted international definition of terrorism. For example, in the United States an act is deemed terrorism if its intent is to influence policy, citizens or the US government through coercion, whereas in France the intent must simply be to disrupt law and order deliberately and to a great degree. Due to this ambiguity, many people do not understand the

multifaceted and sometimes mercurial definition of the term "terrorism."

Yet, while living with a vague definition of terrorism seems irrational and certainly has practical downsides, this ambiguity is currently the world's best option for preventing the misuse of the term.

Societal Conceptions

The lack of an authoritative definition has led to a societal characterization of terrorism — even if only on a subconscious or emotional level — as being explicitly tied to Islam. For instance, when the prime minister of Sri Lanka, Ranil Wickremesinghe, denounced attacks on churches by radical Islamists in April 2019 as terrorism, the rest of the world did not bat an eye. However, New Zealand's prime minister, Jacinda Ardern, made headlines for making the exact same announcement about a white nationalist's live-streamed attack on two Christchurch mosques one month earlier.

A major problem with conceptualizing terrorism as being inherently linked to radical Islam is that it widens an ever-present — and ever-growing — societal division. When an Islamist and a white nationalist commit similar attacks against the public with only the Islamist labeled a terrorist, a societal conception begins to form: If only Islamists can be terrorists, then Islam, and by extension all Muslims, should be feared.

This alienation of Muslims encourages discrimination and attacks against their community, which then becomes another contributing factor in radicalization. Moreover, by not characterizing the white nationalist attacks as terrorism, our society focuses on condemning the individual rather than the driving ideology. This allows white nationalist ideas to become increasingly mainstream.

Additionally, the ambiguous definition of terrorism, and the lack of an international definition, allows for government overreach. In 2018 alone, the Turkish government arrested 68 journalists, accusing many of them of supporting

or being affiliated with terrorist groups. However, an examination of many of these cases has led to the conclusion that the only crime committed by these journalists was criticizing the government or simply reporting on the enemies of the state, such as the Kurdistan Workers Party and the Gulen movement. Led by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the Turkish government has interpreted its definition of terrorism, which includes any acts done by members of an organization with the intent of “changing the characteristics of the Republic,” to suit its own means.

However, this interpretation has been heavily criticized by the international community, with Turkey being increasingly viewed as an authoritarian state by both foreign governments and civil society. Moreover, multiple countries, including Spain and the United States, have refused to extradite individuals charged with terrorism offenses by Ankara. These examples prove that sometimes the ambiguous definition can be beneficial.

Potential Abuse

The complexity of terrorism necessitates a broad definition, as an incredibly specific interpretation would inevitably be too narrow to address the entire spectrum of the phenomena. However, a broad definition would allow for the potential over-designation of groups or individuals as terrorist. The difference between the potential abuse of power and what Turkey is already doing is that such a characterization, regardless of how prejudiced, would be justifiable. Governments could silence, or at the very least mitigate, criticism by pointing to the justification of the definition, thereby allowing governments more control in shaping public perception.

Additionally, an international definition of terrorism would have legal implications, making it potentially more difficult for countries to refuse extradition requests that fall under the purview of the definition.

The potential misuse of an international definition to justify government actions, harness

public opinion and obligate the international community is particularly problematic because citizens around the world have ceded immense powers to their governments for the purpose of dealing with terrorist threats. The United States, Russia, China, the United Kingdom and France all possess expansive counterterrorism legislation. These laws allow, among other things, closed material proceedings, travel controls and even for the executive branch to use all “necessary and appropriate force” against terrorist groups that meet a certain criteria.

This is an immense level of power with few constraints, one of which is the international community and civil society’s ability to offer government oversight through criticism and opposition to unfounded terrorism designations. Rather than enabling this oversight, however, an international definition of terrorism would encourage government overreach and facilitate possible abuse of power. A broad definition creates the potential for mischaracterization and manipulation while simultaneously allowing governments the privilege of justification. By any measurement, this is an ominous pairing.

While leaving terrorism undefined contributes to misunderstanding and hate, it also allows for dialogue and dissent. A more concrete understanding of terrorism is undoubtedly desirable. Yet when the letter of the law will inevitably be manipulated, it is safer to trust in ambiguity.

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ENVIRONMENT

There’s a Rock Heading for Earth

Arek Sinanian
January 14, 2019

Now that we’ve got your attention, Arek Sinanian examines the global stalemate over

climate change with this analogy about a meteor heading for Earth.

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

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

How would the world deal with such a predicament?

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

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

So the deniers now can latch on the uncertainty: Oh, so there's disagreement amongst

the experts, and we don't know exactly how big it is, and don't even know exactly when it's going to reach us. A few scientists even claim that this is a completely fraudulent fabrication by large corporations and, in particular, the arms industry. You get the picture.

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

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

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

And that's why the challenges of climate change are often described as a "diabolical problem." As I've described in my book, *A Climate for Denial*, climate change is diabolical because, firstly, it is difficult to define. Some people are now suggesting that it shouldn't be called climate change because the climate has been and will continue to change. And continuing the rocks-coming-our-way analogy, the rocks of climate change are different sizes (some enormous, some the size of a pebble), all traveling at different speeds, and they will all hit the Earth in different locations, at different times. Some rocks will be so small that a simple umbrella will be adequate for protection (is there

a pun in there?). Some places on Earth will not even be hit or be affected by any rocks at all.

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

Climate Paralysis

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

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

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

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

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

It may not be a stalemate. It may be described as paralysis. But relative to the required speed for climate action, it’s at best advancing at a snail’s pace while the rocks keep coming.

***Arek Sinanian** is the author of “A Climate for Denial” and an international expert on climate change.

No Blue Skies for Beijing

Rachael Willis

March 5, 2019

It would be impossible for China to tackle air pollution without overhauling the rural economy.

Beijing has vowed to continue cracking down on the city’s notorious smog problem in 2019, although, unlike previous years, the capital has declined to give specific target numbers for average fine particle (PM2.5) concentrations. With the more easily attainable measures already having been employed in previous anti-pollution campaigns, authorities now plan to target vehicle emissions and external impacts from neighboring regions, particularly in the mining strongholds of Shaanxi and Shanxi provinces.

The announcement is an important recognition that China urgently needs to tackle rampant pollution in rural areas, where coal and wood burning, along with heavy industry, have kept emissions high. While references to Chinese smog frequently conjure up images of hazy skyscrapers, exposure to PM2.5 in the countryside is in fact so severe that research

indicates some 450,000 premature deaths may have been avoided between 1980 and 2010 thanks to China's great urban migration. For many people, even a smoggy Beijing was healthier than the smoky rooms at home.

Large portions of China's rural population continue to rely on burning solid fuels for cooking and heating, leading to a laundry list of deleterious health effects: chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, lung cancer, tuberculosis, cataracts and, possibly, heart disease, not to mention high levels of pollution. An essential challenge for Beijing, then, lies in promoting a clean-energy transition in China's rural heartlands.

War Against Smog

The Chinese government has admittedly already taken some steps toward addressing this ongoing environmental — and, evidently, public health — crisis. In a number of areas, residents have been effectively forced to make the switch from heating their homes with coal to natural gas. Villages like Tangzitou, an hour north of downtown Beijing, suddenly saw the coal ovens they had relied on for cooking and heating confiscated last fall by Chinese officials. The villagers are just some of an estimated 3.29 million households across northern China which have been converted to natural gas this winter, while another 1.5 million living in the smoggy Fenwei plain have been shifted from coal to electric heating.

The abrupt energy transition these households have gone through marks a new stage in Beijing's so-called "war against smog." It's a battle that, no matter its pivotal role in safeguarding the country's environment and health, comes with a hefty price tag. For now, heavy subsidy payments from the government are somewhat masking the cost of the transition, but there certainly is no turning back as far as authorities are concerned: Hundreds of thousands of highly-polluting small factories have already been closed and even partially dismantled.

But this new, green image that China wants to promote remains incomplete. For one thing, even with the hefty subsidies, some Chinese families are struggling to meet the costs of moving away from coal. The burden of the transition on rural households is aggravated given that many heavily polluting firms under Beijing's spotlight are also major employers. The hidden cost of China's shift away from coal is hundreds of thousands of laid-off workers, each with a higher energy bill to boot.

For another, China still has a long way to go in terms of cleaning its air, particularly ahead of the 2022 Winter Olympics. Despite its various initiatives in recent years, China's PM 2.5 levels remain more than three times higher than the levels recommended by the World Health Organization. Areas such as Hebei province, home to China's seven smoggiest cities where some skiing and snowboarding events will take place during the 2022 games, remain particularly dependent on coal-fired power and heavy industry, such as steel and aluminum production. Authorities are clearly aware of the problem: "We must use the staging of the Winter Olympics as an opportunity to stimulate economic and social development, speed up our transformation and upgrading, expand effective investment and strengthen poverty alleviation," claimed Zhao Kezhi, the Communist Party chief for Hebei province.

Heavy Industry Continues Undeterred

Despite Zhao's confidence, the case of China's heavy industries only emphasizes how much remains to be done. The aluminum sector in particular — despite the fact that many Chinese smelters are unprofitable — is still juggling overcapacity concerns and rampant emission rates: Chinese aluminum production climbed 12% last summer compared to the previous year, while production of copper, lead, zinc and nickel rose more than 8% in the same period.

While China has imposed winter curbs on these industries to try and keep pollution down, this year authorities shied away from blanket

production cuts in favor of exempting various aluminum and steel producers. As analyst Liu Xiaolet notes, this more relaxed policy meant that in the aluminum sector there was “a very limited number of plants required to halt production this winter.”

The steel and aluminum industries are powerful political forces in China, and Beijing’s economy remains heavily dependent on construction and bulk industry, delaying the transition to the slow-growth, clean energy-dependent economy that China needs to adopt in order to cut emissions further. The blueprints for such a transition already exist: President Xi Jinping’s administration has cultivated a host of documentation designed to guide China’s economy toward a consumption-based, high-tech and service-driven model of growth. Even so, a full rural roll-out is easier said than done.

There can be no doubt that through aggressive measures, including enforcing and subsidizing a large-scale shift from coal to natural gas heating, China has already achieved anti-pollution targets that seemed impossible only a few years ago. Regardless, until Beijing tackles the heavy industries dotting the country’s provinces, bluer skies will remain a distant dream.

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Climate Emergency: Rise of a Civil Disobedience Movement

Vasundhara Saravade
May 4, 2019

What has prompted more than a million young individuals around the world to mobilize into a civil march for action on climate change?

“**W**e have a climate emergency” was the overwhelming chant echoing through the streets of Waterloo, in

Canada’s Ontario province, on March 15. An estimated 1.4 million young people, in Canada and all over the world, collectively skipped school that Friday to raise their voices against the biggest existential threat humanity faces. Civil disobedience protests like the Extinction Rebellion are bringing major cities like London to a standstill and shining a spotlight on just how harmful business-as-usual is for the planet.

This type of large-scale global youth mobilization is indicative of the palpable frustration about the lack of sustained action on tackling climate change that is now reverberating through the younger generations. Given the widespread coverage the global media now dedicate to climate change, the rest of the world is beginning to catch up on the various studies documenting our impact on the planet and the consequences we face if there is no change in the status quo.

It all depends on whether we choose to limit our global average temperature rise by even half a degree Celsius. A 2019 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report outlines how even a 1.5-degree rise in global average temperatures above pre-industrial levels can be detrimental to global socio-economic stability.

Another interesting infographic by the World Resources Institute compares the rise in temperatures and its impact on humans and ecosystems. For example, at a rise of 1.5°C, extreme heat events increase by 14% (or once every five years), sea level rises by 0.40 meters, species extinction rises by 4%, crop yields reduce by 3%, and fisheries decline by 1.5 million tons. At 2°C, these impacts become much more severe, namely 2.6 times worse for heat waves, bringing with it a 0.46-meter sea level rise, a doubled rate of species loss and fisheries decline, as well as 2.3 times lower crop yields.

Global March for Climate

What has prompted more than a million young individuals around the world to mobilize into a civil march for action on climate change? Simply put, for the younger generations climate impacts

will increasingly get worse and disrupt a chance for a peaceful and stable life enjoyed by the previous generations. Climate protests like Fridays for Future and Extinction Rebellion believe that climate change is an emergency that needs to be prevented — now. For the young people of today, the stakes are high, as carbon budgets will get ever smaller with more extreme climate impacts. That is why young leaders like climate activist Greta Thunberg or US Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez are some of the leading voices when it comes to talking about climate change and its effects on the younger and future generations.

It is also due to protest movements such as these that 450 local governments and city councils around the world have declared a “climate emergency.” These local governments represent 40 million people from across Australia, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States and Canada. Although it is a local win for most climate activists, according to The Climate Mobilization local governments are often the starting place for progress on bigger issues like minimum wage or civil rights. By declaring a climate emergency, such campaigns are a starting point for passing declarations on climate commitments, creating a transition pathway and mobilizing local policy changes.

As we can see from The Climate Mobilization data, a growing number of people in several countries is becoming concerned with climate change. For example, over 35% of Britain’s population and 28% of Canadians supported their local councils in declaring a climate emergency in their towns and cities.

It is especially interesting to see these local climate movements being led in places like the UK and Canada, where a rise of populist national and provincial governments — which do not necessarily support adaptation or mitigation efforts — might make for an interesting reaction to how people perceive climate change. As some studies suggest, higher levels of concern are a direct result of experiences with climate impacts like super hurricanes, unending wildfires or

regular flooding. However, as a CBC article points out, experience may be a poor teacher, given how deeply entrenched climate change is as a partisan issue.

As demonstrated by the fraught debate on the subject in the United States, this partisan divide is not unique to Canada. However, analysis from The Climate Mobilization points out to an interesting finding that shows the highest number of responses from Canadian local councils — 379 as compared to 16 in the US or 91 in the UK — declaring a climate emergency. As various governments around the world go into their election cycles either this year or next, we will start to see if climate change translates into a real voting issue or not.

However, the biggest part of the world’s population that faces impacts from climate change is the generation that may not even be of voting age yet. An interesting tool from the Carbon Brief combines data from emissions and population changes with climate modeling. By doing so, it can calculate the carbon budget of an average citizen over his or her lifetime in order to keep the temperature rise below 1.5°C or 2°C. If the world is to meet these targets to avoid catastrophic climate impacts, current and future generations will need to make drastic changes to their emission levels. Some of these include reduction in flying, meat consumption and the use of fossil fuels, among other things. And it gets worse with every generation: Children born now have a lifetime carbon budget that is 90% less than their grandparents.

The lack of climate action further impacts other socio-economic aspects like “employment, access to housing, availability of pensions” and the overall stability of our current lifestyles. This is a classic example of an intergenerational equity debate — one that environmentalists hear so often but rarely get to see in reality. Do we make the switch, or do we let future generations deal with the impacts as and when they happen?

To make it simple, as pointed out by the Extinction Rebellion infographic, the baby boomer generation (born between the mid-1940s

to mid-1960s) and Generation X (born between the mid-1960s and early 1980s) is not likely to experience temperature anomalies. However, lifetime change for millennials (1980s-2000s) and Generation Z (mid-2000s) is going to look very different due to projected temperatures under different climate scenarios.

The problem of dealing with climate change or environmental degradation is not up to the future generations. It is a decision that we all, including baby boomers, Generation Xers and millennials, have to make in the present because it is about our families' futures. We are still in the safe zone of climate impact, and this gives us the room to adapt our economies to being low-carbon, our consumptive habits to being sustainable, and our behavior to thinking long-term.

Although humans are more often reactive than proactive when it comes to change, it now becomes a question of whether we want to lead better lives than our parents, or an existence that is plagued of social, economic and climate emergencies. The widespread growth of these global youth-led climate movements is an important lesson to the older generations: Bottom-up, sustainable, green change is coming, whether you like it or not.

***Vasundhara Saravade** is a graduate student.

The Amazon Rainforest Fires Are Worse Than You Think

Luiz Cesar Pimentel
August 30, 2019

The fires burning in Brazil will affect the entire world, making the Amazon rainforest a truly global issue.

Let's put the situation in perspective. The whole world is outraged by the raging fires in the Amazon rainforest. It has been said that the "lungs of the world" are burning,

and this has since become a trending topic globally. Yet the analogy is totally wrong. The situation is much worse than you think.

Tropical rainforests occupy about 7% of the world's surface area and are estimated to be home to 50% of the planet's biodiversity. Every year, fires break out in the Amazon, a practice allowed by Brazilian legislation. In a controlled way, of course. Or it's supposed to be at least. The fires are meant to clear land for pastures and crops. But, this year, the number of fires has increased by 84% compared to 2018.

So much so that, on August 19, the day turned to night in the middle of the afternoon and it rained a dark liquid in São Paulo, the city where I live in. The straight-line distance from São Paulo to Manaus, the capital of the state of Amazonas, is almost 3,000 kilometers. This route was contaminated by the fire soot.

There are two issues to take into account when looking at the burning Amazon rainforest. First, the growth rate of deforestation in the Amazon this year was 80%. Historically, forests have been burned in dry conditions to transform them into pasture land.

Second, the Brazilian government has refused to accept any opinion that is contrary to the political discourse of development. When Ricardo Galvão, the director of the National Institute for Space Research that regulates deforestation control in the Amazon, warned less than two months ago that deforestation had grown at an alarming rate, the government fired him. Why? For disclosing information to the public before consulting his superiors.

When the black rain fell in São Paulo, the media questioned the government about its responsibility to contain the fires. The answer was that government officials suspected criminal arson by disgruntled NGO workers undergoing cuts to their funding.

Only when the situation gained worldwide attention did the Brazilian government decide to show that it was doing something about it. Of course, this didn't go without offending the French president and anyone who dared to say

that deforestation of the Amazon is a problem for the whole world.

The Lungs of the World

The Amazon rainforest is not the “lungs of the world.” In fact, it is kind of the opposite. Lungs capture oxygen from the atmosphere and transform it into carbon dioxide. The forest captures carbon dioxide from the atmosphere to perform photosynthesis. And between the uptake and emission of pure oxygen into the air, the bill is sort of balanced. What deserves credit for oxygen production is seaweed, which makes 55% of the gas we breathe.

The Amazon rainforest is important for its biodiversity. Scientists estimate that only 0.5% of the flora has been studied medicinally. Who knows what cures have yet to be discovered? Not to mention, of course, the richness of the local wildlife.

Each year, 7 trillion tons of water is produced in the evapotranspiration process, responsible for water and climate control in many regions of the world. The Amazon River alone discharges 20% of the planet’s fresh water into the Atlantic Ocean.

Let us not forget the “inverted lung” effect, since the forest carbon stock is sufficient to justify the position of the world’s only conserved rainforest. Still preserved, it must be said.

The prediction is that if Amazon deforestation exceeds 20% of its area, it will threaten the rainforest and can start the process of transformation into other vegetation — making it much less significant to the world. The deforestation account is at 15%, before the current fires. That is why it is so important for the international community to keep watch and protest against any process of local degradation.

We have political issues and global issues. In Brazil, political issues often determine the strongest congressional seats. They almost always trump other issues, to tell the truth. Among the strongest political issues is agribusiness, and politicians support it over the Amazon. The core of agribusiness operations is

the pasture area. So, it is not difficult to understand why the government tries to cover up deforestation growth.

But politicians come and go while the world stays. We are talking about a global issue. The Amazon rainforest is a global issue.

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A Gen Zer’s Perspective on Climate Change Reform

Neil Kapoor

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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 exposé 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.

Public Opinion Matters

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 (CSS) 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.

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