

Fair Observer

Monthly

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ABOUT FAIR OBSERVER

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Our digital media platform has nearly 2,500 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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Solving Africa's Hunger Challenge

Betsy Henderson

June 1, 2020

As Africa faces a future of increased population and climate change, the current challenges of food waste, production and hunger will only become more prominent.

With border closures, supply chain interruptions and loss of income due to lockdowns caused by COVID-19, the number of people facing acute hunger around the world is estimated to rise from 135 million to 265 million this year. This is particularly the case in sub-Saharan Africa, where before the pandemic 20% of all citizens were already considered undernourished and 277 million people out of the continent's 1.28 billion population faced severe food insecurity.

Although sadly not a new phenomenon for Africa, this unprecedented level of hunger is unnecessary and presents an opportunity to reassess the status quo of food production on the African continent. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that \$1 trillion of food is lost or wasted every year — approximately one-third of the world's food, or enough to feed 2 billion people. The United States alone wastes roughly 30% to 40% of its annual food supply.

Twofold Approach

Why then is hunger such a challenge in Africa? Home to over 60% of the world's uncultivated arable land, the African continent has the capability to produce enough food to feed itself and perhaps the rest of the world. However, many African countries currently import the majority of their staple foods worth \$35 billion a year even if they have means to produce it. Nigeria, for example, imports over a third of the rice it consumes, whereas South Sudan has few sources of local food production and is completely reliant on food aid.

The present hunger situation in Africa requires a twofold approach: a significant humanitarian response to address immediate needs of those facing starvation this year, along with medium and long-term measures to improve food access and production for African citizens. Fortunately, several solutions exist that government, international aid and private sector partners can build upon and scale to alleviate Africa's present and future food shortages.

First is increasing farming productivity. Studies suggest using new farming practices to increase small-scale farmers' crop yields could triple the production of staple goods such as maize in sub-Saharan Africa. Sustainable farming practices in particular benefit the environment and allow farmers to generate more income on their harvests each season. The One Acre Fund, Acumen Fund and Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa are great examples of organizations currently equipping small-scale farmers with tools such as training, financing and access to new seeds and equipment to improve their crop yields.

Then comes addressing structural barriers. This includes addressing land issues and crossborder trade tariffs that hinder regional food production and distribution. Land ownership is often a challenge for small-scale farmers, especially in rural areas where there are few legal mechanisms to determine who can own or lease land. African farmers lose approximately 40% of each harvest due to crop decay, and so initiatives such as creating central storage and drying facilities have allowed farmers to store fresh food and get it to market with fewer losses. Regional trade barriers and lack of roads also limit how much food can be distributed across the continent, and implementing policies like the African Continental Free Trade Area agreement would promote regional market integration and provide farmers more opportunities to sell their goods.

Tech and Added Value

There is also a need to incorporate new technologies. There are now more digital financial services and fintech products available to African farmers than ever before. These range from blockchain technologies and cryptocurrencies that help small-scale farmers gain access to credit in order to buy seeds to new apps and data-centered farming resources.

Mobile applications such as iCow, FeoFarmer, Hello Tractor and Precision Agriculture for Development provide information about livestock, farming techniques and equipment rentals to assist farmers in their decision-making, while initiatives like Digital Green provide video training resources for farming communities in Ethiopia. There is also great potential to develop apps to better coordinate food production, storage and delivery logistics as well as use of drones in facilitating this process.

Finally, there needs to be a focus on value addition. African countries largely export raw materials but import finished products, thereby losing the ability to generate greater revenue for their existing natural resources. Agriculture is no different. For example, Africa produces 75% of the world's cocoa supply but receives only 2% of the \$100 billion a year produced by chocolate sales worldwide. This means countries experience greater losses if the price of raw goods fluctuates, which in turn negatively impacts small-scale farmers. In addition to increasing revenues, value addition — or increasing a good's value through added processing — is proven to help create jobs.

As Africa faces a future of increased population and climate change, the current challenges of food waste, production and hunger will only become more prominent. Although the solutions identified here will not result in immediate changes, they can provide a critical foundation for restructuring agricultural production and food distribution in Africa. COVID-19 does not yet have a known cure, but hunger does, and its current magnitude should serve as a wake-up call for both Africa and the

international community to act today and address a burgeoning yet solvable crisis.

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What Is Different About George Floyd's Death?

Ellis Cashmore
June 1, 2020

America's intractable racial inequality is no secret, but George Floyd's death has turned it into headline news around the world.

“If you had to choose a time to be, in the words of Lorraine Hansberry, young, gifted, and black in America, you would choose right now,” Barack Obama told a graduating class at Howard University in Washington DC four years ago, drawing attention to Hansberry's 1996 collection of plays, interviews and letters that bore a similar title to the 1970 hit record by Bob and Marcia, written by Nina Simone and Weldon Irvine. It was 2016, and the then-president of the United States advised that the country was, by every criterion, better than when he was a student in the 1960s — a period when the equal rights and social justice movements emerged in the modern era.

Obama may well have been speaking from the heart, but it was hard to square with events. Two months after his speech, five police officers in Dallas were killed in response to two incidents in which black men were shot dead by police. Any rational analysis of race relations in the US in the mid-1960s would have concluded that the crucial and inimical role racism had played in the history of America for the previous 400 years or more was bound to diminish. And Obama was probably right in a sense: It had diminished since the enactment, in 1964 and 1965, of legislation

that outlawed discrimination. But racism had not disappeared; there were many loose ends left to untangle.

America has a long history of white resentment. Resentment, that is, of what most people regard as progress, advancement, illumination, awakening, sophistication and open-mindedness. This might have been intelligible in 1955, when 14-year-old Emmett Till was killed by white men who spotted him talking to a white woman and responded by beating him, gouging out an eye, shooting him in the head, trying a cotton gin around his neck with barbed wire and throwing him in the Tallahatchie River, in Money, Mississippi — a place that features in Bobbie Gentry's song "Ode to Billie Joe."

Monstrous, but intelligible: America was racially segregated, and bigotry was real, remorseless and easily reconcilable with the way of life in the South. But the specter of Emmett Till loomed large and didn't vanish with the onset of civil rights — it continued to haunt the modern era.

Living Pestilence

Uprisings following the death of George Floyd, an unarmed black man, at the hands of Minneapolis police began peacefully last week, but escalated into arguably the most serious expressions of rage since the 1960s. The catalyst was the same one that precipitated the Till killing: racism. America has had its fair share of problems to deal with over the years, but none compares to the racism that has bedeviled the nation for its entire history.

Time and again, resolutions have been approached, and yet, over four hundred years since a group of about one hundred settlers founded the first English settlement in North America and called it Jamestown, none has ever been achieved. Every time a new milestone is reached — whether it is unflinching legislation or a black president — America is barbarously reminded that its slave past has never truly been consigned to history.

"Last night ... was an ugly night all across the nation," said Andrew Cuomo, New York's governor, over the weekend. "The real issue is the continuing racism in this country and it is chronic and it is endemic and it is institutional." Endemic and institutional: His choice of terms is revealing. It suggests racism, like the coronavirus that now menaces the planet, is a condition that is regularly found and is bound to reappear. It is also incorporated into the repeated patterns of behavior rather than being the exclusive preserve of one particular group. In fact, it has become so routine that we barely notice racist activities simply because they are so familiar. Even when we do notice, racism has a virus-like way of surreptitiously reentering our ecosystem. Think: #BlackLivesMatter and #OscarsSoWhite are both recent reminders that racism is not a relic, but a living pestilence.

And yet here we are: Another unarmed black man dead at the hands of a white police officer. Were this one incident in an era otherwise unmutated by racist incidents, it would still be an occasion for serious reflection and soul-searching as well as an opportunity for police reform. But it is far, far from an isolated incident.

On a March night in 1991, four Los Angeles policemen were filmed by an unseen onlooker brutally beating a man pulled over for a traffic violation. The police officers were white, while Rodney King was African American. It was probably the kind of incident that happened routinely in this and many other parts of the world. But the presence of an unseen third party weaponized with a video camera transformed this into something unexpected. The actual footage is still viewable.

When the case against the police went to court in April 1992, the judge ordered an unusual change of venue for the trial to a predominantly white suburb. The officers were cleared on all but one charge by a jury comprising 10 whites, one Asian and one Latino — no African Americans. Violent protest against the apparent lack of justice spread across the nation for four days. The

Rodney King riots, as they became known, left the US stunned, though not changed forever.

Exposé of Violence

Although no one knew it at the time, the Rodney King riots were the start of a new narrative that would take shape over the next three decades. “This is America,” screamed many in disbelief. The 1992 uprisings were the first meaningful signs of racial unrest since the civil rights era. But it was only a start.

Only two months after the rioting, a 35-year-old black motorist Malice Green was beaten by Detroit police officers and later died from the injuries. Two police officers were convicted of second-degree murder, both later reduced to the less serious charge of involuntary manslaughter. In 1997, Abner Louima, a 33-year-old Haitian immigrant, was arrested for interfering with officers trying to break up a fight. Police officers were charged and convicted of beating and torturing him and, later, for obstructing justice by covering up the crime.

But perhaps the most extraordinary exposé of violence and racial injustice came on February 4, 1999, when a 23-year-old West African street trader named Amadou Diallo stepped out from his apartment in the Bronx. He encountered four plainclothes NYPD officers who opened fire, discharging 41 shots and killing Diallo instantly. Their defense was that they thought Diallo was reaching for a gun whereas he was pulling out his wallet to show ID.

Diallo’s death said all anyone needed to know about how cosmetic the so-called colorblind society actually was. Sean Bell and Eric Garner in New York, Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, Ahmaud Arbery in Georgia: These are just a few of the victims that form part of a grim litany. Garner’s dying words, “I can’t breathe,” were uttered by Floyd and have once more become the slogan of an international protest. Amnesty International came up with its own slogan to capture the long, repetitive history, “Another Year, Another Unarmed Black Man Killed by Police.” It used this as its headline for a

report on the anniversary funeral of Oscar Grant, who was killed by police officers in Oakland, California, in 2009.

Is Floyd’s death different? No. But the response appears to be. Perhaps the world is perversely united by a common interest in extirpating COVID-19 at the moment. If so, its population is vigilantly watching any kind of event in the United States. America’s intractable racial inequality is no secret, but Floyd’s death has turned it into headline news everywhere. People are hurting. Their loved ones are dying. They are losing their jobs, their businesses and, in many cases, their houses because of an unseen malefactor. They can empathize with others who are victimized by a different type of evildoer, this time visible from anywhere on earth.

Obama’s upbeat remark was probably right at the time. In 2016, he was leaving office and, in the eyes of many, the US was in good shape. Having an African American in charge for eight years was sure to have an impact in every conceivable corner of society — or so we all thought. When he came to power in 2009, Obama was exalted as the man who would change America and perhaps guide it toward being a colorblind society. His replacement by a man who appears retrogressive in his approach to racism has shifted the needle back.

Last August, following the mass shootings at El Paso, Texas, Trump was accused of giving aid and comfort to white supremacists, stirring up conflict and intensifying racial hatred. Even if you set opinions aside and rely on bare facts, there is plausible data that suggests anti-immigrant sentiment and xenophobia, as well as racism and sexism, are strongly related to support for Trump. It would be unwise and inaccurate to lay the blame solely at Donald Trump’s feet. But the president sets the tone for the nation, and support for his 2016 campaign was driven by racism. We will know later this year if he still enjoys much of that support.

It is no longer a good time to be young, gifted and black. It is a perilous time.

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

Amy Cooper, White Privilege and the Murder of Black People

Tsedale M. Melaku
June 2, 2020

There are white people who feel they can use the system to do what they want simply as a virtue of being white — this is white privilege.

Amy Cooper worked at my firm when I was a paralegal. She was a cohort member in my PhD program, a professor whose class I took, a professor in the department I taught in and on the faculty I interviewed with for a job. Amy Cooper is a character type. She votes democratically, lives in a liberal city, imagines herself a liberal, believes she's "woke" and wears a mask that hides her racism and investment in the power of whiteness. Liberal white women are everywhere.

The recent events relating to Amy Cooper, a supposed white liberal, feigning fear of a black man in New York City's Central Park and falsely alerting police her safety was being threatened, is abhorrent. The fact that she could make a false accusation to incite fear in Christian Cooper (no relation) while knowing she was being recorded speaks volumes about her white privilege and how systemic racism operates. This visual representation harkens back to a time when countless black boys and men were murdered by lynch mobs because of lies. White lies have mattered throughout history and are still a tool used to subjugate and control black people.

White Women's Rage

Amy Cooper was compelled to apologize due to social pressure. I see this as disingenuous, not as an acknowledgment that her intentional act could

have led to deleterious effects on Christian Cooper's life. I don't buy her saying: "I'm not a racist. I did not mean to harm that man in any way." The racial ignorance projected in this statement is strategic and is used to illicit sympathy. It reminds me of the many stories I have heard from black women lawyers in my study who have been on the receiving end of white women's rage.

This is a false rhetoric used by white liberals who purport to be progressive yet harbor racist views of black people. That's why most economic, political, educational and professional organizations remain white institutional spaces. Many white liberals say they are anti-racist yet are reluctant to give up any privilege that would challenge the power they enjoy or disrupt the status quo. Am I to understand that an educated white liberal woman is not aware of America's racial history and the implications of her accusations? If we are going to give her the benefit of the doubt, a luxury that most black people never get, let me explain what her call to the police reflects.

First, by threatening to call the police, Amy Cooper intentionally weaponized race to enforce her white privilege. She preempts the call by centering race, saying, "I'm going to tell them there's an African American man threatening my life." When she calls the police, her voice strategically becomes more frazzled and fearful to express the urgency in the threat that a black man poses to her wellbeing. The performance is magic! It's a classic representation of the racial and gender privilege many white women have long enjoyed. Amy Cooper played on race to mobilize the police in an attempt to force Christian Cooper to cower. There are white people who feel they can use the system to do what they want simply as a virtue of being white — this is white privilege.

Second, the presumption that white people are truthful when calling the police on black people is pervasive. An entire dialogue exists, centered on white women who make false accusations targeting black people, summarized in the

colloquial “Karen” meme. Black people targeted while doing mundane activities speak to the privilege of being white in America. Many examples exist, but recently, we have seen an abundance of white violence enacted on black bodies. This includes the killing of Ahmaud Arbery in February, Breonna Taylor in March and George Floyd, who was killed in a bold act of police brutality a week ago. Floyd’s agonizing death, captured on video, has incited nationwide protests against the continued brutalization of black people. George Floyd was killed the same day Amy Cooper made her false accusations against Christian Cooper.

Racism Everywhere

For black people, false accusations can lead to dangerous outcomes ending in emotional trauma, incarceration, severe injury or death. This incident occurred in New York and was perpetuated by a white liberal. What does this say about folks arguing that racism only exists in particular states where white supremacy is more overt? We cannot deny that racism exists in the streets, schools, corporations, government, academia — everywhere.

The Amy Cooper incident spread like wildfire on social media, inciting anger, disappointment, confirmation and disbelief. As a result, she was forced to apologize and surrender her dog. She lost her job at Franklin Templeton, her sense of anonymity has been shattered, and she forfeited her ability to be viewed as a liberal. Without the video recording, who knows how this story would have ended, although history shows that white women’s accusations end poorly for black men.

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva’s idea of abstract liberalism, a frame used to perpetuate colorblind racist ideology, captures how whites can simultaneously adopt a liberal viewpoint while opposing practical methods of addressing racial inequalities. Amy Cooper wants us to believe that this was an unintentional act — a classic abstract liberal retort. Amy Cooper’s false accusations and the murder of black people are very much

connected. It is a reflection of the devaluation of black lives and the perpetuation of white privilege.

This is all happening during a global pandemic, where COVID-19 has amplified the racial inequalities that disproportionately affect black communities. Even a deadly virus cannot quell the plague of racism that infects the daily lives of black people.

I urge anyone who perceives themselves to be a liberal to carefully examine whether they harbor racist beliefs that can creep up in moments where they feel emboldened to take risks with the lives of black people. This could be anything from making false accusations, questioning competence, denying access to jobs, advancement, housing opportunities, loans, imprisonment, political engagement and everything else mitigated by the racialized social and power structures that exists in America.

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The Deadly Disorder Behind COVID-19 and Police Violence

Iziah Thompson
June 3, 2020

Black men are falling at the hands of police weapons and black patients are falling to COVID-19.

It was 1963 when the governor of Alabama, George Wallace, proclaimed, “Segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever ... [in] the name of the greatest people that ever trod this earth,” referring to people with Western European ethnic ancestry. This and the ensuing pro-segregation forces in the US were very much a response to the 1954 *Brown v.*

Board declaration that separate can never be equal, at least in public schools.

The Supreme Court found this essential penumbra existed in the US Constitution — this soul of the document — and it was antithetical to “separate but equal” because education was the foundation of good citizenship. Obviously, the South had a soul that was different. Southern states famously defied segregation orders up to and following National Guard troop escorts of black students through color barriers throughout Alabama, Georgia and other states.

Years from now, future Americans will look back on the crucial period we are in similarly to the way we view the civil rights era of the 1950s and 1960s. The current pace of societal change, clashes over ideas that will dictate what societies look like and data left behind will all speak to what it was like to live in our time. Depending on the outcomes, how we emerge from coronavirus pandemic and how our systems react to people saying enough is enough when it comes to police brutality will shade how this period is perceived. Ultimately, now and then, there is an aspect, a connectivity to these two crucial issues (and others) that cannot be ignored.

COVID-19

Take COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus. For every 100,000 black Americans, 54.6 have died from the disease. That same figure is 24.9 deaths for Latinx Americans, 24.3 for Asian Americans and 22.7 for white Americans. We are talking about a difference of thousands of people. In fact, if people in every racial category died from COVID-19 at the same rate as white Americans, almost 13,000 black Americans and 1,300 Latino Americans would still be alive today, according to APM Research Lab.

We find similar statistics when looking at what happens when Americans interact with the police. White males aged 10 and over account for the largest number of deaths by the hands of police, yet black and Hispanic males are almost three and two times more likely to die from lethal

police force, respectively. But surely, for many, this isn't surprising.

In fact, both these sets of statistics may seem unsurprising, but what is more up for debate are the causes of these disparities. For COVID-19, we know that black Americans are at higher risk of exposure to the disease than white Americans. Predominately, black counties are seeing higher rates of infection (threefold) than predominantly white ones and a sixfold higher death rate largely due to the prevalence of hypertension, diabetes, obesity and cardiovascular disease in these communities.

Comorbidities (additional diseases) may be driving deaths and sickness, but it is likely that overcrowding contributed greatly to the increased rate of infection. When the data is available, it is expected to be found that the cramped conditions in segregated communities like certain low-income areas of Chicago or areas with housing authority apartments in New York are to blame for such high COVID-19 rates amongst black populations. Lastly, it is clear that “essential” jobs during this current pandemic are overwhelmingly done by black and Latinx workers, putting them at a much greater risk.

The causal factors for the use of lethal force by police can be similarly laid out. Police encounters, from juvenile arrests to traffic stops and stop and frisk actions, are simply more likely to occur for blacks than whites, and to a lesser degree for Latinx Americans. Hence, this disparity exists whether or not the use of force was justified or not.

This finding matches what we know about the over-policing of communities of color. Commentators and researchers are quick to point out that there are factors like violence and petty crime incidence that likely contribute to this disparity. And while there are many confounding factors, similar to the comorbidities mentioned in regard to COVID-19, how big a role these factors play within and outside the context of race is a crucial question.

Disparity Beyond the “Comorbidities”

There is a video game known as “shoot don’t shoot.” It’s a very simple game that simulates decisions that can involve life-or-death scenarios. In the game, police officers hold a model gun (game controller), and on a screen complex, backgrounds like streets, hallways, campuses and apartments are displayed. A person is shown on the screen and the officer must decide whether or not to shoot based on if that person is armed or not. It’s simple.

Yet researchers have found that participants were more likely to shoot an armed or unarmed target if the person was black, and they were more likely not to shoot an unarmed or armed target quicker if the person was white. Simply put, participants needed less certainty to decide to shoot blacks than whites; this was true for all races of participants (including blacks) but worse for white participants.

Studies like these tell us that while there are various factors that put black men primarily at risk to these use-of-force encounters, there is an underlying bias at play. It is the same with COVID-19 and health care in America. We can talk about the poverty and income disparity all we want, but that does not explain why black women are three to four times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than white women in the United States. Most of these cases are the result of postpartum hemorrhaging, a completely preventable cause of death.

Data shows that income does not completely explain this disparity either. Infant mortality is more likely to devastate well-educated, middle-class black families more than poor white families with less than a high school education. This terrible outcome is tied to the interactions black patients have with health care staff. Biases cloud the care received, so much so that, controlling for age, insurance status, income and severity of condition, black patients receive fewer diagnostic tests and have fewer surgeries. Like in the cases of blacks encountering police, the comorbidities do not explain much of these disparities. It is bias, and it is important to know that.

A Proper Diagnosis

Why is it so important to pinpoint the causes of these disparities? Because the most basic factor, implicit bias, is far-reaching and much more poisonous than others. The reality is that while the historic and institutional racism that has plagued the United States has had damaging and ever-present effects, we have, can and will watch them heal. In the 1960s, we watched racist laws get repealed, and while it is easy to see that the overt racism of these laws often was transformed into the dog whistle-coded policies of Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan and other US presidents, there is no shortage of movement to turn back the tides of these hideous policies.

The current progressive movement focusing on the right to health care, housing, education and even a cushioning of the safety-net through the outright provision of income and jobs is astounding. Looking at this current political moment in the context of a longer arc of history, the policy priorities making their way through the body politic have the potential to undo decades of ruthless policymaking that left the average American behind — this includes black, Latinx and other minorities. So, if we are allowed a cautious slither of hope, one can say that that this moment in time may lead us into a future with much less income inequality and racial disparity.

However, if it feels too early to celebrate, it is. For the specter of implicit bias may remain, even in that rosy future. Let’s take a moment to understand how implicit bias really works. There is no better exhibition than that of a 2011 study in the *Proceedings of National Academy of Sciences* journal. The study looked into the question of whether justice is blind and discovered, in fact, that justice was hungry. The authors went into courtrooms and observed judges. They recorded their activities, including their two daily food breaks. The two food breaks created three sets of decisions, those made before, in between and after both breaks. They found that the percentage of favorable rulings dropped from about 65% to almost zero within

each period. Then, after each lunch break, favorable rulings abruptly jumped back up to about 65%.

This is how implicit bias works. It doesn't announce itself. It doesn't come with dog whistles. It affects everyone, but no one admits to it. Like judges who see themselves as the beacons of impartiality and would never admit that their grumbling stomachs weigh in on their decision, everyone from real estate agents and hiring departments to doctors and the police are often in denial about inherent biases. This is bad when it means unfair treatment of the defendant with unlucky timing, and it is devastating when it indicts entire races.

Solving Implicit Bias

In order to fix implicit bias, we have to face it, which may be more difficult than facing the racism of yesteryear. It is easy in today's world to paint the American South as the stalwart of racial progress and symbol of racism. Documents like the 1956 Southern Manifesto, which 96 Democratic congressmen signed, perfectly display this. But seldom is it pointed out that the most segregated areas in the US today are in the North and the Midwest and have long surpassed the South in that category. This is due largely to implicit not explicit bias.

Segregation is important in the conversation about implicit bias because it is one of the most crucial steps between implicit bias and police killings, lack of access to health care and concentration of underhoused people. It is important to understand how the racial issues of today and tomorrow will not be that of the archetypal angry Southern racist (while that population may still exist), and its causes are not Ku Klux Klan violence, black codes or issues with incomes and wealth.

It is easier to talk about implicit bias, through a steppingstone like segregation because everyone can see it. In American schools, work places and neighborhoods, you can see it, and the stark realization that despite the fact that you don't know anyone who is racist but you exist in

a largely homogenous community is visceral. Though being able to clearly see the manifestation of implicit bias is only half the battle.

Psychologists know that implicit biases are often not congruent with the possessor's conscious beliefs. For example, researchers have observed white men having increased levels of activity in parts of the brain needed to process threats when seeing a black face, and this heightened activity highly correlates with implicit bias. Studies have found that African Americans are given longer sentences than white defendants. The United States Sentencing Commission found that blacks received sentences 19.1% longer than similarly situated white male offenders.

The most popular solution rolled-out across the nation is addressing bias by raising awareness. The idea being that once a person knows they are affected by bias, they have control over it. The idea of awareness holds some theoretical veracity, but research has revealed that in some cases, the popular interventions to alter racial opinions can have minimal and sometimes an effect opposite of that which was intended. Simply telling people that biases exist is not enough.

Advances in neuroscience have allowed for the development of novel insights into the way the brain sorts, synthesizes and responds to massive influxes of stimuli. The preeminent theory on how the brain takes on this task is called predictive coding, a unified theory of brain function or the "hidden brain" as it has been referred to. The research is largely in its infancy, but the idea is that incoming data is synthesized via an interplay between the "slow-thinking" part (frontal lobe region) and the "fast-thinking" part (ex. amygdala). The brain has "codes" for patterns from the past that it probabilistically matches to the incoming data. This makes us really good at quickly recognizing things in our world but also subject to problematic conclusions. Implicit bias occurs because of this process functioning efficiently.

Theoretically, it happens because we quickly sort people into groups, based on past experience. We build up an unconscious empathy for some groups over others, using aspects like how much like ourselves a person is or on what society, experience and education have taught us. This empathy is dished out largely due to how we group individuals — that’s bias. Research has confirmed that the strongest of applications of this empathy comes when our brain believes something is similar or related to us, meaning that in high-tension environments, left unchecked, these outgroup biases are activated.

How do we fix what we cannot see or check what we do not even believe about ourselves? Rules, public policy and institutions large and small should be run as if everyone has implicit biases. While regular bias training and diversity initiatives have returned questionable results, there are some glimpses of hope.

Research actually shows that ownership of an outgroup body through the virtual reality (VR) experience can be used to reduce implicit bias. The user is tricked into another’s skin, allowing that unconscious empathy to be shared more equitably. There are already researchers at the nonprofit group EQUALITY LAB applying this technique in the real world, including to police officers themselves. However, this technology is largely limited to how realistic the simulation is, so the best results await the creation of powerful VR tech.

In the meantime, it seems that political diversity does have a positive effect on intermediate steps between implicit bias and racial disparities. One study found that in cities with large black populations, court fees and fines become major sources of revenue, but this relationship is severely reduced by having just one black person on the city council. Bringing up these types of bias-focused approaches does not mean we should not fight for lowering income inequality or holding police accountable for their actions. The point is not to lose sight of how race truly impacts American life.

Dealing With Bias

To be clear, the approaches to dealing with implicit bias may not be the best when confronting overt racism, and the more outward-facing bias still contributes to the disparities facing the United States. But while we do not seem to be suffering from a lack of awareness of racism, we seem to be falling into one of two camps: those ready to forget and ignore racism altogether and those wielding the word “racist” as a catch-all term.

It is important that we avoid falling too deep into the narrative that race-conscious politics can be forgotten in lieu of class-based politics, as Professor Adolph Reed Jr. seems to in his recent article, “Disparity Ideology, Coronavirus, and the Danger of the Return of Racial Medicine.” While it is true that we should not use race “as a proxy for the social conditions of poverty, lack of healthcare, and mass inequality,” it is just as true that giving everyone a health insurance card or \$2,000 a month, and ensuring that police officers are punished for unlawful uses of force will not fix racial disparities in the US.

These are important goals, but they are detached from the problem of implicit bias. Similarly, we should be careful not to carelessly conflate institutional racism, implicit bias and overt racism as these are distinct and require different tools to mitigate.

Ultimately, thousands of people have hit the streets with the image of Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin leaning his full weight behind a knee that dug into George Floyd’s neck as officers J. Alexander Kueng, Thomas Lane and Tou Thao stood by and watched. Many Americans cannot stop thinking about Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and the memories of the others before them.

The reality is that the same reason many black men fall at the hands of police weapons is the same reason thousands of black patients from cities around the US fall to COVID-19. We must deal with implicit bias and its steppingstone of segregation, or there will always be some degree

of racial disparity. Every ounce of racial disparity is too much.

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The Humanitarian Disaster Before Us: COVID-19 in Somalia

Arden Bentley
June 6, 2020

A global crisis requires a global response, one that does not leave some of the most vulnerable people behind.

For months, analysts have warned that Somalia is one of many African countries at the highest risk for the spread of the novel coronavirus, known as SARS-CoV2. Now, that forecast is turning quickly into a grim reality. Somali authorities have confirmed over 2,100 cases of COVID-19 — the disease caused by the coronavirus — but it is believed there are thousands of undetected infections due to a limited testing capacity.

Somalia, which is already beset by a series of natural and manmade calamities, is now bracing itself for the worst. A series of factors explain why humanitarians are so concerned about the impact of the global pandemic on the country's highly vulnerable population, including around 5.2 million people already in need of assistance.

Five Factors

First, according to RAND, Somalia is the most vulnerable country in the world for infectious diseases. Indeed, the country is already in the midst of a cholera outbreak. While the worldwide standard is around 25 health care workers per 100,000 people, Somalia has only 2 at this same ratio. There is only one hospital in the entire country capable of treating coronavirus patients.

In Somalia, 79 people — the most in East Africa — are confirmed to have died from COVID-19. Yet the total death toll is likely to be significantly higher, according to The Guardian. Despite efforts to contain the virus, support medical workers and increase humanitarian coordination, the country's health care system remains underequipped to combat a national epidemic and it needs external support.

Second, Somalia is home to 4.8 million food-insecure people. Around 2.1 million face acute food insecurity, while 1.1 million children under age 5 are acutely malnourished. Conflict is the principal driver in the world of food insecurity, but extreme weather events also contribute to Somalia's food crisis. Ongoing droughts in central and northern Somalia have left about 162,000 people displaced, while southern and central Somalia has been experiencing extreme flooding during the rainy season.

Meanwhile, a locust crisis is accelerating regional food insecurity across East Africa and parts of the Middle East. Further complicating the humanitarian response, flight cancellations also mean that shipping costs of required equipment have increased by about 300%. The response to the COVID-19 crisis in Somalia is creating difficulty to address the driving factors of food insecurity and provide humanitarian assistance to those affected.

Third, Somalia's civil war, which broke out in 1991, has created insecurity throughout the country. Limits on the movement of critical resources and the weakening of government influence complicate efforts to prevent an outbreak of the coronavirus in a conflict zone. Instability has allowed al-Shabab, a militant group, to maintain control of parts of southern and central Somalia. Al-Shabab has exploited the virus for political gains by claiming that it was spread "by the crusader forces who have invaded the country and the disbelieving countries that support them."

Humanitarian organizations have difficulty accessing areas that al-Shabab controls, which is becoming more critical as the public health crisis

continues. Limits on the delivery of aid, a lack of preventive measures to stop the spread of the coronavirus, and the dissemination of false information about COVID-19 will only heighten vulnerabilities for populations living under their control.

Fourth, the Somali government has been unable or unwilling to undertake an effective campaign to inform the public of the steps that need to be taken to contain and mitigate the spread of the virus. According to a survey by Save the Children, many residents, internally displaced people (IDPs) and other displaced populations were aware of the coronavirus, but a “significant number” did not have enough knowledge to take collective action against the spread of it. Somalia’s health care capacity is nearly nonexistent, so preventative measures are critical to enforce through the dissemination of public information.

Fifth, displaced communities and others in need of humanitarian assistance have many of the factors that put them at risk of contracting COVID-19. An estimated 2.6 million IDPs live in Somalia, with over 200,000 of them being newly displaced in 2020 alone. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) confirmed the first case of infection in an IDP camp on March 17. These camps are at risk of the virus spreading due to the high-density population and difficulties in social distancing. These environments are best served by surveillance programs and widespread testing, along with a capacity to isolate those who may have been infected — all of which are in short supply in Somalia.

Somalia Is at Risk

All of these factors combined lead experts to warn that Somalia could quickly become one of the worst-affected regions in the world if the spread of the coronavirus cannot be prevented or contained. However, the Somali government cannot do so alone. First, it needs help, especially when it comes to key humanitarian programs to give vulnerable populations access to water,

sanitation and hygiene (WASH). Such interventions are essential elements of an effective response to the pandemic. Second, its health care facilities and hospitals need support to increase the ability to test people for the virus and trace who those infected came into contact with, especially in IDP camps. There is also a pressing need for personal protective equipment (PPE) and training for health workers. Yet only 13.6% of the UN COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan for Somalia has been funded.

Donors must step up to give Somalia a fighting chance in the face of the pandemic. A global health crisis requires a truly global response, one that does not leave some of Africa’s most vulnerable populations behind.

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Is the COVID-19 Bailout Another Scam on American Taxpayers?

Atul Singh & Ti Ngo
June 7, 2020

Bankers who gobbled up bailout money in 2009 are now diverting loans meant for small businesses to big companies while ordinary Americans are hurting.

A young Karl Marx once famously wrote that history repeats itself “the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce.” At the height of the 2008-09 economic recession, Barack Obama’s administration unveiled an \$832-billion stimulus package aimed at stabilizing the fractured banking system. While the Obama stimulus helped stabilize the US economy, its provisions put the interests of big banks and investment firms over that of individuals and small businesses. Wall Street trumped Main Street and arguably paved Donald Trump’s path to the White House.

Obama's stimulus allowed and even encouraged corporations such as J.P. Morgan Chase and Goldman Sachs to swallow up smaller competitors. The CEOs of firms responsible for the financial crisis were not only exempt from criminal prosecution but given bonuses from taxpayer money. These millionaires ended up ruining their companies and still walked away with state funds. This was capitalism on the upside and socialism on the downside. It led to outrage. Both Occupy Wall Street of the left and the Tea Party movement of the right were born as a result.

Under President Obama, banks that were "too big to fail" became even bigger to fail. They were given a license to speculate on American taxpayer money. Timothy Geithner, the secretary of the treasury, left his cushy government job for an even cushier private one. After bailing out Wall Street, he became the president of Warburg Pincus, a noted private equity firm. Needless to say, he was and continues to be paid handsomely.

Geithner represents a sinister trend in American economic policymaking. Wall Street has taken over the US Treasury. Two of Geithner's predecessors, Robert Rubin and Hank Paulson, marched in to take command of the Treasury from Goldman Sachs. Steve Mnuchin, the current big boss of the Treasury, also worked at Goldman, as did his father.

If this was Nigeria or India, The New York Times would have carried a full story on incorrigibly corrupt Third World elites. However, this sordid story of American bankers coming and going through a revolving door from Wall Street to the Treasury and vice versa does not quite count as corruption for most Americans media houses. The same incestuous Ivy League elite runs both American media and finance.

While most journalists might give these sleazy arrangements a pass, ordinary Americans have become increasingly unhappy with what they see as a corrupt political system and rigged economic arrangement. Even as inequality has increased, social mobility has decreased. That is why President Trump's slogan, "Make America Great

Again," resonated with voters in 2016. Many did remember a time when they could hope to lead better lives than their parents. The same dissatisfaction fueled Senator Bernie Sanders, an avowed socialist, to national prominence in both 2016 and 2020. Unlike Trump, Sanders could not mount a successful coup in his party.

The Rich Gain and the Poor Suffer, Again

Eleven years after the Obama bailout, another crisis has hit America. Thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic and an inept Trump administration, the economy is experiencing its biggest crisis since the Wall Street crash of 1929. Democrats and Republicans cooperated for once to pass the largest stimulus bill in American history. Of the \$2.3-trillion package, \$660 billion is earmarked for government-backed loans to save small businesses. Named the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), this effort to save the little guys seems to be geared more toward the big boys. It smells almighty fishy, if not rotten.

It is important to examine what the PPP promises. Loans "will be fully forgiven if the funds are used for payroll costs, interest on mortgages, rent, and utilities." At least 75% of the forgiven amount must go to payroll. Loan repayments will be "deferred for six months." Loans will be issued without collateral or personal guarantees. Also, "neither the government nor lenders will charge small businesses any fees."

If it sounds too good to be true, then it usually is. The PPP is no exception. There are many reasons why the PPP has failed already.

First, the Small Business Administration (SBA) is responsible for the PPP. This small government agency has been overwhelmed by millions of loan applications, as have the banks partnering with it. Second, implementation has been so haphazard that banks are confused as to who to give loans to. Third, the loans were distributed on a first-come, first-serve basis. The money ran out quickly and few small businesses could file their applications in time. Fourth, the deadline of using the money by June and the

dictum that 75% of the loan had to go to payroll was idiotic. Many small businesses decided not to apply because they simply could not qualify. Finally, Wall Street prioritized Goliaths over Davids for fat fees. Banks raked in \$10 billion in two weeks for just processing loans given out by SBA.

Shake Shack and Ruth's Chris Steak House received PPP loans worth \$10 million and \$20 million, respectively, but returned them after public outcry. Denny's announced that franchisees that own more than half of its stores have received PPP loans, with more Denny's restaurants still waiting for funds. The One Group Hospitality, a publicly-traded company that runs steak-house chain STK, had received \$18 million by early May. The Los Angeles Lakers, which has a net worth of \$4.4 billion, won a \$4.6-million loan. Large, troubled companies have taken the money supposed to go to small, struggling businesses. If this is not corrupt, then little else is. America is increasingly eerily similar to the banana republics its corporations used to run in Latin America.

Doing "God's Work" Pays

To understand how all of this happened, we need to look no further than the banks. In 2009, Lloyd Blankfein created quite a stir. The preternaturally confident CEO of Goldman Sachs declared banks were doing "God's work." After all, they helped "companies to grow by helping them to raise capital." These growing companies created wealth. This led to "jobs that create more growth and more wealth." In his view, banks "have a social purpose." Big profits and fat bonuses were a small price to pay for these dream builders of the global economy. How could anyone remotely sensible disagree?

It seems curmudgeonly small businesses might. Citi's private bank filled in applications for its customers. The minimum account size at the bank is \$25 million. Clearly, the definition of small is relative. Other banks were determined not to be left behind. Some banks provided highly-personalized, so-called concierge service

to their clients. They did god's work by cutting through the red tape for their rich clients. In contrast, small businesses could only fill out online forms and wait for banks to get back to them. All too often, the banks never did.

There is a bigger issue at stake. Even if small businesses could get PPP loans, many would be wary of taking them. There is far too much uncertainty. For small businesses, uncertainty is an even bigger risk to solvency than liquidity. For example, no one knows when restaurants could reopen following the coronavirus shutdown, what type of restrictions would be mandated and whether the public might recover its appetite to eat out. If social distancing rules kicked in and restaurants had to operate at, say, 50% capacity, few would be able to survive in an industry with already wafer-thin margins. Indeed, many historical restaurants have decided to throw in the towel altogether and have let their patrons know they will not be reopening.

What was originally a three-week hiatus has become a three-month ordeal. From the beginning of March, authorities have issued "shelter-in-place" orders with the assumption that these would be temporary measures. Workers are finding these measures as temporary as soldiers in World War I found going to the front. Interestingly, it turns out that Memorial Day (May 25), which is when the US remembers those who died serving in the military, has come and gone, but Americans have yet to get back to work.

To add fuel to the fire, the brutal killing of yet another black man by a white policeman has ignited protests and riots across the country. Looters smashed store windows this past week, emulating large corporations who had looted a \$660-billion loan forgiveness program meant for small businesses. Once, Mississippi burned. Today, a spark in Minnesota has set off a tinderbox in America.

In the meantime, over 42 million Americans have applied for unemployment and are going hungry even as small dairies in Wisconsin and Ohio have dumped thousands of gallons of fresh

milk into lagoons and manure pits. In Idaho, farmers have buried millions of kilograms of onions. In South Florida, a fertile region supplying much of the East Coast, beans, cabbages and perfectly ripe vegetables are being thrown back into the soil. At the same time, millions of American families are lining up for hours at food banks and leaving with little or even nothing.

It is small businesses, farmers and ordinary Americans who need PPP loans, not corporations or their millionaire CEOs or their wealthy shareholders. In the Obama bailout, bankers laughed all the way to the bank. Today, they are doing god's work again by selling indulgences à la the 16th Catholic Church to the likes of Denny's. Banks pocket fees, Denny's gets the money. The Trump bailout is leaving small businesses and farmers high and dry. As Hamlet remarked, "the time is out of joint" and as Yanis Varoufakis observes, "the weak suffer what they must."

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Marriage Equality Is Still a Dream for India's LGBTQ Community

Taera Singh
June 12, 2020

Despite recent advances, India's LGBTQ community still faces a long fight ahead for equality before the law.

On September 6, 2018, the Supreme Court of India struck down Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code in a landmark decision, *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India*, decriminalizing consensual sexual intercourse between consenting adults of the same sex. More than a year and a half later and on the occasion of Pride Month, India's LGBTQ community is still

immensely grateful for this significant advancement in equality before the law but also wonders when it will be granted the complete set of civil rights it has been campaigning for.

What courts see as complex argumentation and the Indian Parliament views as legislative nuance, LGBTQ Indians consider intimate, tender moments between them and their loved ones — moments that are a common part of cisgender heterosexual relationships but feel monumental to the LGBTQ community. As it stands, LGBTQ individuals cannot have their marriage validated by law. Each of the separate codified Marriage Acts in force in India are interpreted as having "heteronormative underpinnings."

The exclusion of same-sex couples from each set of laws is evident in their wording. The Hindu and Christian marriage acts refer specifically to a bride and a bridegroom when stating the minimum age at which people are allowed to marry. The implications of such exclusion are immense due to the list of rights available to married Indian citizens. LGBTQ Indians in a same-sex union cannot jointly adopt a child, cannot avail of the right to maintenance and cannot name their partners as their legal heirs. These rights are based on the same marriage acts that are interpreted as excluding same-sex couples.

Despite there being no explicit guidelines laid down by the Reserve Bank of India, same-sex couples have been met with resistance when attempting to open joint bank accounts due to a perceived lack of legitimacy of their union — a problem that can be eliminated once marriage equality is achieved. Since partners in same-sex unions are not perceived as family, they are denied hospital visitation rights.

Although the *Johar v. Union of India* judgment was an expression of judicial support for LGBTQ individuals, the fight for equal marriage presents a new set of challenges that need to be understood. The Delhi High Court dismissed a challenge to amend the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 in favor of including same-

sex marriage as recently as July 2019, almost a year after the Supreme Court's decriminalization of Section 377. The reason for this ruling was, according to the court, that amending these laws is the duty of the legislature, not the judiciary. Unlike, for example, the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) in the United States, Indian marriage laws do not explicitly ban same-sex unions, which could warrant a legal challenge that such a ban is unconstitutional. The exclusion of such unions is implicit. This brings the fight for LGBTQ rights to a new theater — India's Parliament.

Globally, the complete set of civil rights hasn't been granted to LGBTQ citizens without legislative action. Prior to the United States' landmark Obergefell v. Hodges decision of 2015, bills affirming the legal sanction of same-sex marriages had been passed in 36 states. Same-sex marriages in England and Wales were granted legal recognition through the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act of 2013. However, the Indian legal system presents a unique set of challenges due to the presence of separate personal laws for different religions. Proposed suggestions to tackle this include amending each individual act, recognizing same-sex marriages under the 1954 Special Marriage Act and the greatly debated suggestion of a Uniform Civil Code that recognizes same-sex marriage, as proposed in a 2017 draft.

These are complex questions of law whose essence lies in a deeply personal sphere. Taking into consideration the particular importance of the legislature, both LGBTQ and cisgender heterosexual Indians should be well acquainted with parliamentary efforts to support the LGBTQ community's right to love. The Pink List is a research project that does precisely this by serving as an online repository of LGBTQ-friendly Indian legislators at each level of government.

Such recognition of the importance of grassroots-level legislative action is crucial for an inclusive, nationwide fight for marriage equality. Amplifying the efforts of LGBTQ-friendly

legislators and publicly expressing support for those who engage in discourse regarding marriage equality both in state and central legislatures will hopefully inspire more lawmakers to do the same.

We have reasons to be optimistic. In 2018, the Supreme Court handed down the long-awaited ruling that the LGBTQ community in India is entitled to equal protection in the eyes of the law across all areas. In a bid for legal recognition, a writ petition has been filed at the Kerala High Court by two men in order for their marriage to be recognized under the Special Marriages Act. While the judiciary has already expressed support for granting the full set of civil rights to LGBTQ Indians, it is time for the legislature to follow suit.

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Why India and China Are Fighting Right Now

Esther M. Sit
June 15, 2020

The current border clashes serve the domestic needs of Xi Jinping and Narendra Modi but are unlikely to lead to a full-blown war.

The border clash between China and India has made the headlines of international news. On May 5, troops from both countries confronted each other on the banks of Pangong Lake in Ladakh, the northernmost region of India. Four days later, they squared off in North Sikkim, an area of India that lies between Nepal and Bhutan.

Although no shots were fired, stones were thrown and fistfights broke out. They resulted in injuries to 11 soldiers from both sides. Numerous fights also occurred in the following weeks, with troops stationed in disputed territories accusing

the other side of trespassing. US President Trump offered to mediate but this was rejected.

This is not the first China-India border conflict. In 2017, both sides confronted each other in Doklam Plateau — a tri-border area between India, China and Bhutan — for two months, almost triggering an armed conflict. Such tensions between the two countries have existed for over seven decades. They triggered the Sino-Indian War in 1962. Today, China claims and refers to the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh as Southern Tibet. On the other hand, India sees the China-controlled Aksai Chin as its territory. Since 1962, both sides have signed a series of agreements and agreed to respect the Line of Actual Control that separates the countries.

Can War Break Out Again?

Despite rising tensions, the current standoff is unlikely to turn into a direct military confrontation for a number of reasons.

First, the border conflict could simply be a means of relieving leaders of both countries from rising internal pressure. The worsening global economic conditions and the ongoing China-US trade war no longer enable Beijing to rely on rapid growth as the sole source of the regime's security. Instead of relying on its domestic economic performance, China is showcasing its strength by defending its territorial claims.

Therefore, Beijing has been more aggressive not only in the China-India border conflict but also elsewhere. In recent weeks, China has deployed more troops to the South China Sea and more jets to the Taiwan Strait. It has also passed a national security law to tighten its grip on Hong Kong.

Second, Beijing might be calculating that India is too occupied with fighting the COVID-19 disease to wage a border conflict with China.

Third, China might just be showing off its army's capabilities while, at the same time, delivering a political message to India not to get too close to the US. Since the 2017 Doklam border standoff, Indian Prime Minister Narendra

Modi has been moving closer to the Americans. India has agreed to expand its two-way trade in advanced defense items and become part of the US manufacturing supply chain. The South Asian giant has also decided to block Chinese companies from taking over domestic businesses. If India moves closer to the US, this could hamper China's infrastructure development in South Asia, including the disputed economic corridor that links China to Pakistan.

Fourth, the border conflict might be serving Modi's domestic political needs in addition to Chinese President Xi Jinping's, but a full-blown would serve neither. The novel coronavirus, which causes the COVID-19 disease, has hit India hard and the government has been criticized for its response. At the time of publishing, there were over 340,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in India.

Before the outbreak of the coronavirus, many ethnic groups and the opposition organized nationwide protests against the country's new citizenship law, which allows persecuted non-Muslim minorities to become Indian nationals. Furthermore, since India revoked Kashmir's semi-autonomous status in August 2019, the disputed territory has been under lockdown. The border issue diverts citizens' attention conveniently. Also, India considers this a strategic opportunity to push China to recognize the current status of the border, given that it is under immense international pressure. India sees China in no condition to start a war.

Fifth, both sides may be jostling to gain favorable strategic positions on the border, but they know that the costs of starting a war outweigh its potential benefits for both of them. These two nuclear powers have enough deterrence capacities against each other. Besides, a conflict with India would weaken China's focus on meeting key security challenges in the South China Sea. At the same time, India recognizes its military inferiority and inability to win an outright war. In 2019, China's national defense budget was \$261 billion, almost three times that of India's \$71.1 billion.

What Happens Next?

So far, both sides have relied on many communication channels and constant dialogue to prevent the escalation of violence. In early June, top Chinese and Indian generals held high-level talks with each other.

Modi has declared that India is open to a diplomatic solution. India has increased its number of troops at the border and issued a statement about China's hindrance of India's normal patrolling patterns, but the rhetoric has been relatively restrained. China has declared the overall situation to be "stable and controllable." It has also announced that the sides would make use of "unimpeded" channels to resolve their issues.

Such statements indicate that both countries have no desire for any further escalation of the current border conflict and that war is unlikely.

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Deeper Fragmentation Looms for Libya

Sherif El-Ashmawy
June 18, 2020

The increasingly internationalized nature of the Libyan conflict, deep mistrust between the country's rival authorities and the shattered social fabric are driving Libya's deepening fragmentation.

Sweeping military victories in recent weeks by forces aligned with the Government of National Accord (GNA) in northwestern Libya have effectively ushered in the end of the self-styled Libyan National Army's (LNA) 14-month offensive to capture Tripoli. While fighting between the warring parties persists as the GNA forces are building on their momentum to advance on Sirte and central Libya, the LNA

commander Khalifa Haftar's objective of seizing the capital and oust the GNA and its allied armed groups has become elusive. Deeper fragmentation on the security, political and economic levels lies ahead for Libya as a comprehensive settlement remains out of reach.

Internationalized Conflict

International interference in Libya has only grown over the past year and has further entrenched hostilities. The LNA has benefited from Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan and Saudi Arabia's support in recent years. The incorporation of hundreds of Russian private fighters to its ranks and the continued Russian military and logistical support for the LNA and the eastern authorities have significantly increased the Kremlin's influence in Libya over the past year, while Moscow has officially been calling for a political solution for the conflict.

Turkey's overt intervention in Libya with the signature of maritime and security treaties with the GNA in November 2019 brought with it drones, air defense systems and Turkey-aligned Syrian mercenaries. The Turkish support averted the GNA's collapse and allowed GNA-aligned armed groups to increasingly recapture territory from the LNA in the northwest since March 2020 and put an end to the latter's offensive. The Turkish and Russian deepening involvement in Libya came amid the declining influence of European powers, particularly France and Italy, in the Libyan theater, while the US has remained skeptical of playing an active role in resolving the conflict.

The increased roles of Turkey and Russia became apparent when, in January, both countries negotiated a ceasefire, which reduced the intensity of the fighting on the southern outskirts of Tripoli for a few weeks. The Turkish-backed GNA's recapture of most of northwestern Libya and their ongoing offensive to recapture Sirte will further increase Turkey's involvement in the North African country, most likely through oil investments and military bases. This will potentially follow the model Turkey adopted in

2017 when it deployed troops to a military base in Qatar following its support for Doha against Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt who began an economic and diplomatic boycott of the emirate in June of the same year.

On its part, Russia is likely to build on its investment in the LNA and the eastern authorities to increase its role as an active player in shaping Libya's future, most probably through negotiations with Turkey. The de-facto division of Libya between the northwest (with significant Turkish and Qatari influence) and the east (with a Russian, Emirati and Egyptian presence) will further deepen the country's fragmentation.

Governance and Economic Challenges

Libya's annus horribilis from April 2019 has further deepened the country's fragmented governance between the GNA, the Benghazi-based interim government and parliament, and the significantly autonomous local municipal and tribal authorities. The authorities' response to the COVID-19 pandemic, where the GNA, interim government and local authorities have implemented different curfew and lockdown measures without much coordination, highlight the level of existing fragmentation.

Following almost three years of gradual improvement in the security environment from mid-2016 that allowed oil production to rebound from around 300,000 barrels per day (bpd) in mid-2016 to around 1.2 million bpd by the end of 2019, the belligerent parties over the past year have increasingly weaponized the country's resources against their opponents. For example, in April 2019, the Tripoli-based central bank imposed restrictions on several eastern-based banks' ability to process foreign currency transactions. In January 2020, LNA-aligned tribes blockaded oil export terminals and oil pipelines, triggering a collapse in output from 1.2 million bpd before the blockade to around 90,000 bpd in the following months.

Business Sentiment

Since April 2019, the ongoing conflict has damaged foreign business sentiment toward Libya. Between September 2016 and April 2019, Haftar built much of his international credentials on the fact that his forces secured energy infrastructure in eastern Libya and allowed oil exports to resume, following several years of blockade by the former Petroleum Facilities Guards (PFG) headed by militia leader Ibrahim Jadhran. The LNA's January 2019 territorial expansion in the southwest was also positively viewed by international oil companies as the LNA-aligned PFGs protecting the giant Sharara and El-Feel oilfields effectively reduced the frequency and intensity of disruption to oil operations in the Murzuq Basin.

Many foreign businesses had benefited from the slowly stabilizing security environment and détente between the GNA and the eastern authorities in 2017-19 to resume their operations in the country. Such a détente and an increase in the state's flow of revenue from oil sales had allowed the implementation of economic reforms that stabilized the local currency's value.

The resumption of hostilities in April 2019 with the offensive on Tripoli has reversed those gains and led to a decline in business confidence in Libya. This trend has deepened as the conflict broadened in the following months beyond the southern Tripoli frontline and involved airstrikes and mortar shelling across the wider northwest, including against infrastructure facilities such as Tripoli's Mitiga and Misrata airports.

With the end of the Tripoli offensive, there is an increasing potential, albeit still limited, for a renewed interest from foreign investors, especially in the energy and power sectors, to resume their operations in Libya. However, the conflict situation is fluid and sources of insecurity remain, even in the northwest where the pace of fighting has significantly slowed down in recent weeks. For example, Libya's southwestern oilfields of Sharara and El-Feel, in the week of June 8, restarted production after the forces protecting the fields changed allegiance from the LNA to the GNA. However, shortly

after resuming production, forces aligned with the LNA closed the fields again. Separately, on June 10, a local militia group from Zuwara city aligned with the GNA stormed the northwestern Mellitah Oil and Gas Complex, where natural gas is exported to Italy through the Greenstream pipeline, and briefly interrupted the complex's operations.

Competition over the control of oil installations is likely to increase over the coming months. The LNA remains intent on blockading oil exports to reduce the GNA's flow of revenue. The GNA has an interest in resuming oil production and exports to reduce the pressure on its finances by expanding its control over oil resources, as the oil sector represents approximately 95% of the country's exports and 60% of the GDP. However, the GNA's ability to control the plethora of its affiliated militias to lead a coherent security and policing strategy in the areas it controls is questionable. With the absence of a common enemy in northwestern Libya, represented by the LNA, divisions between the GNA-aligned armed groups are likely to reemerge and compromise efforts to provide adequate security and policing services.

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The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Faces Its Most Consequential Decision in Decades

Gary Grappo
June 25, 2020

Palestinians, most Arabs and much of Europe have voiced strong objections to Israel's pending annexation decision, while the US, perhaps the most critical influencer, remains silent.

Uncertainty hangs over Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's pending decision on whether to annex as much as 30% of the West Bank, including the possibility of all existing Israeli settlements there and the entire Jordan Valley. Should he proceed, the proposal will go before the Israeli cabinet and the Knesset, where it will likely win approval.

Predictably, Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas strongly objects. He's already discontinued security cooperation with Israel, halted receipt of Israeli tax collections on behalf of the PA and closed off travel of Palestinians to Israel. Many of these actions harm Israel little but could severely impact some Palestinians, for example, those needing medical attention. Abbas even threatened to try any Israeli arrested in Palestine for a crime. And he has renounced the Palestinians' commitments under the 1993 and 1995 Oslo Accords. The clear message is that should Israel follow through, it will have resigned itself to an occupying power for the duration.

One thing Abbas and other PA officials have avoided doing is calling for another intifada, or Palestinian uprising. Most Palestinians remember the bitter result of their last intifada in 2000-05 following the failed Camp David II talks. Israel Defense Forces moved in mass into the West Bank and left destruction and death in their wake. In the end, the failed uprising effectively marked the end of the Israeli left, previously the vanguard of the peace movement in Israel.

Finally, any violence this time could backfire and lead to calls for the removal or resignation of Abbas and the rest of the PA leadership. Even peaceful demonstrations could easily spiral out of control, leaving only the dangerous prospects of Palestinian security forces having to crack down on Palestinians and of the real possibility of serious violence.

A Deal Killer

The EU and various member states have also expressed objections to any annexation, pledging not to recognize the actions and warning of dire

consequences for the region. More than a thousand European MPs have condemned annexation, echoing the arguments of many that it would doom any chance of a comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian settlement. Last month, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell voiced similar opposition, but the EU has so far avoided threatening trade sanctions, though that may still be in the cards for some. The EU is Israel's largest trading partner.

In addressing a virtual meeting of the UN Security Council on June 24, Secretary General Antonio Guterres characterized the pending annexation as a “watershed moment” and a “most serious violation of international law.” Arab League chief Ahmed Aboul Gheit made similar claims, suggesting it would spell the end of what little hope Palestinians may have for an independent state. However, the UNSC took no formal action.

King Abdullah II of Jordan, perhaps Israel's closest relationship in the Middle East, warned that annexation “would lead to a massive conflict” with his country. One of the more startling statements, however, came from the UAE's ambassador to the US, Yousef al-Otaiba, in an op-ed published in Hebrew in the Israeli daily Yediot Ahronot. In the editorial, entitled “Annexation or Normalization,” Otaiba reviews progress to date as well as possibilities for future cooperation between Israel and the UAE and other Arab states on security, trade, technology and cultural exchanges, all areas in which Israel has long sought relations with Arabs.

Many Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, especially Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Oman, have already forged links, all be it unofficial, with Israel. But Otaiba warned all that and future prospects of formal diplomatic ties were at risk now. Not only Arab-Israeli relations but an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement would be irrevocably checked by annexation. The op-ed was the most direct and blunt expression of views held by virtually all Arab states.

According to one poll, only half of Israelis support annexation, even though they support

eventual Israeli sovereignty over most settlements in a comprehensive agreement with the Palestinians. Former Israeli security officials have also expressed grave reservations over annexation, explaining that even taking control of the Jordan Valley would offer Israel no value added for its security since it already retains almost complete security control.

Furthermore, they argue that the larger risk from annexation is that it would leave Palestinians with little possibility of their own state and make a single state, in which Palestinians would seek equal rights, as the only possible outcome. In their view, that would present an even graver threat to the Jewish state's prevailing Jewish and democratic character. Some far-right conservative Israelis also oppose annexation since, under the Trump peace plan signed by Netanyahu, it would automatically recognize the Palestinians' right to an independent state, which they reject.

Fate Hanging on a Single Decider

Amidst all that critical clamor, the one voice not heard has been that of the US. And it is the only one to be taken seriously by Netanyahu. So far, apart from the language of the Trump peace plan, there has been no formal word from official Washington on the pending annexation, not even a tweet from the congenial tweeter-in-chief, Mr. Trump. An earlier initiative to advance annexation was quietly nixed by the White House.

In the presidential campaign, foreign policy is unlikely to play a major role for most American voters. However, this issue and the ongoing feud between the US and Iran will unquestionably receive attention. Trump's hardcore supporters would enthusiastically embrace an official nod toward Jerusalem. But as he continues to poll between six and 12 percentage points behind expected Democratic opponent Joe Biden, Trump will need to reach independent and undecided voters. Approving annexation and killing the two-state solution aren't likely to endear him to those. Biden has already expressed his strong

objection to annexation. The White House will have to decide on its position no later than next week.

As unlikely and out of character as it might be, one way to forestall all of this is for Abbas to announce ahead of the annexation decision that he's willing to reenter into negotiations with the US side on the Trump plan. First, it will buy the Palestinians time, especially since the Trump administration won't have much bandwidth for negotiations as the presidential campaign moves into the final stretch in September. Second, the Trump plan leaves ample space for continued negotiation on borders and other issues most vital to the Palestinians, including ensuring their lands in the West Bank remain contiguous and retaining a larger portion of the Jordan Valley. Lastly, it would represent a gesture rarely seen from the Palestinian side and place them on a more favorable trajectory vis-à-vis both Washington and the Israeli public.

The real decider in the matter, however, will be Donald Trump. Netanyahu is loath to cross the US president, who has been more supportive of Israel than any of his predecessors. For the Israelis and Netanyahu, it's doubtful they'll ever have an opportunity like this again, short of a comprehensive agreement with the Palestinians. Neither Netanyahu nor any future Israeli prime minister will see the likes of another US president so one-sidedly supportive.

The notion that someone so previously ignorant of the many complexities of this conflict and who has been so weighted to one side may be making the most consequential decision in the conflict in the last 20 years is nothing less than stupefying. But then the ever-mercurial and unpredictable Donald Trump has done that a lot over the last three and a half years.

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