

Make Sense

of 2020



Fair Observer^o

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Fair Observer

Fair Observer | 237 Hamilton Ave | Mountain View | CA 94043 | USA
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International Standard Serial Number (ISSN): 2372-9112

CONTENTS

About Fair Observer	13
Share Your Perspective	14

AFRICA

Why a Troop Drawdown in Africa Is Exactly the Wrong Approach	15
Erika Lafrennie	
Libya Is a Problem for All of Africa	19
Swaleh Ochieng	
Africa’s Mixed Record on Keeping Up With UN Goals	21
Sylvia Croese	
A New Leader in the Wings for Burundi	23
Filip Reyntjens	
Trump’s Treatment of WHO Boss Is a Lesson for Africa	24
Gatete Nyiringabo Ruhumuliza	
Africa Needs Its Own “New Deal”	27
Betsy G. Henderson	

ASIA PACIFIC

China’s Race for Scientific and Technological Supremacy	29
Daniel Wagner	
Chinese Diaspora Revisits Its Identity and Relationship to Beijing	31
Brennan Kau	

Indonesia’s Policy Over Travel Leads to Confusion for Eid	34
Muhammad Zulfikar Rakhmat	
Black Lives Matter Shines the Spotlight on the Shadow of Slavery	36
Hans-Georg Betz	
China Continues Its Persecution of Uighur Muslims	39
Ayesha Baloch & Rahima Mahmut	
The Importance of the US-South Korea Relationship	42
Steve Westly & James Bang	

CENTRAL & SOUTH ASIA

Will the US-Taliban Deal Bring Peace to Afghanistan?	43
Abbas Farasoo & Roh Yakobi	
Five Urgent Economic Reforms for India	46
Atul Singh & Manu Sharma	
Missing Bangladeshi Journalist Has Been “Found” — Now He Must Be Freed	51
Alannah Travers	
Can the US Help Central Asia Reclaim the Silk Road?	52
Austen Dowell	
Why Punjabis in Pakistan Have Abandoned Punjabi	57
Ishtiaq Ahmed	
India’s Police: An Instrument of Injustice	60
Javeed Ahmad	

EUROPE

- Putin Is Leaving, But Not Saying Goodbye** 63
Dmitry Belyaev
- Switzerland Confronts Its Role in the Slave Trade** 65
Hans-Georg Betz
- Armenia and Azerbaijan Clash Again** 67
Rejeanne Lacroix
- Big Blow for a Stable Dictatorship: Major Protests Hit Belarus** 70
Anna Romandash
- Britain Fails Its Exams** 72
Rupert Hodder
- What Is Behind the Rise of Islamophobia in France?** 75
Ali Demirdas

LATIN AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN

- Will the West Lose Guyana to the Chinese?** 77
Ian McCredie
- Cubans Feel the Blow of US Sanctions** 79
Elton Smole
- Chinese Ambitions for Latin America: What's the Trade-Off?** 80
German Peinado Delgado & Glenn Ojeda Vega
- Why Maximum Pressure on Venezuela Is the Only Way Out** 82
Leonardo Vivas

Hosting Refugees and Migrants Is a Global Public Good 87
Diego Chaves-González & Olivier Lavinal

Brazil Rejects Bolsonaro's Anti-Politics 90
Karin Schmalz

MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA

Iran Faces Yet Another Undemocratic Election 94
Biryar Meriwani

Hope Fades for New Talks in Yemen as Battles Intensify 96
Fernando Carvajal

Deeper Fragmentation Looms for Libya 98
Sherif El-Ashmawy

Israel and the UAE: The Myth of Normalizing Abnormalities 101
Munir A. Saeed

Finding a Cure for Lebanon's Imperialist Hangover 103
Hashim Abed

Iran's Revenge Against Israel Will Be a Long Game 105
Ian McCredie

NORTH AMERICA

Can America's Progressive Movement Thrive Without Bernie Sanders? 107
S. Suresh

What Is Different About George Floyd's Death? 109
Ellis Cashmore

The Rise and Fall of US Democracy	111
Peter Isackson	
Femicide Continues to Plague Mexico	118
Lester Chavez	
Held Together With String, Can America Hold?	120
Atul Singh	
Joe Biden and America's Second Reconstruction	125
Gary Grappo	

BUSINESS

When It Comes to Investing, a Company's History Is Key	129
Sunil Asnani	
What Stock Market Awaits Gen Z in the 2020s?	131
Dan Fries	
Fintech: Embracing the Digital Age in the Time of Social Distancing	133
German Peinado Delgado & Glenn Ojeda Vega	
Only Losers Pay Taxes: Apple and the Ingenuity of Tax Avoidance	136
Hans-Georg Betz	
What Has COVID-19 Done to Small Businesses?	138
Vinay Subramanian	
Will China's Digital Currency Revolutionize Global Payments?	134
Daniel Wagner	

ECONOMICS

- The Gig Economy Takeover: Will It Last?** 145
Beau Peters
- Will a Struggling Global Economy Survive the Coronavirus?** 147
Atul Singh
- COVID-19 Makes Johnson and Trump Reject Thatcher and Reagan** 149
Atul Singh
- COVID-19 and Populism: A Bad Combination for Europe's Banks** 152
Gary Buswell
- The Unintended Economic Impacts of China's Belt and Road Initiative** 153
Daniel Wagner
- "Human Work" Is the Key to Ending Income Inequality** 155
Jamie Merisotis

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

- Cyberspace Needs Global Norms — Here's Where to Start** 157
Sabina Frizell
- China's Influence Dampens International Response to Coronavirus Outbreak** 160
Daniel Wagner
- Han and Hindu Nationalism Come Face to Face** 162
Atul Singh, Glenn Carle, & Vikram Sood
- The Future of the Iran Nuclear Deal** 179
Elif Beyza Karaalioglu

25 Years On, The Dayton Peace Agreement Is a Ticking Time Bomb	181
Emir Hadzikadunic	
Turkey Must Be Held Accountable for Its Abuse of Syria's Yazidis	187
Philip Kowalski	

CULTURE

Are the Windsors the New Kardashians?	189
Ellis Cashmore	
How Zoom Can Make Videoconferencing More Human-Friendly	191
William Softky	
Should Schools Rely on Ed Tech?	194
Criscillia Benford	
Sex Abuse Is the Moral Downfall of the Catholic Church	203
Hans-Georg Betz	
Britain's Commitment to Retaining the Spoils of History	206
Peter Isackson	
Foreign-Language Entertainment Is Having Its Soft-Power Moment	208
Franthiesco Ballerini	

ENVIRONMENT

Canada's Indigenous Communities Fight to Protect Their Environment	210
Gary Buswell	
Solving Africa's Hunger Challenge	212
Betsy G. Henderson	

Plastics Threaten the Himalayan Environment	213
Satya Prakash Negi	
How Will the UAE Cope With Growing Environmental Insecurity?	215
Kristian Alexander & Giorgio Cafiero	
When Is Hot Too Hot?	218
Arek Sinanian	
We Can Still Win the War on Plastic	220
Michael K. Dorsey	

ABOUT FAIR OBSERVER

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Why a Troop Drawdown in Africa Is Exactly the Wrong Approach

Erika Lafrennie
January 21, 2020

There are many compelling reasons why it would be a disastrous miscalculation to withdraw US troops from West Africa.

On December 24, 2019, The New York Times reported that Defense Secretary Mark T. Esper is weighing proposals for a major reduction — or even a complete pullout — of US forces from West Africa. This is the first phase of reviewing deployments that could reshuffle thousands of troops worldwide in an effort to prioritize confronting global powers like Russia and China, as chartered by the 2018 National Defense Strategy. Esper has given Africa Command until later this month to draft a withdrawal plan, as well as a plan for redeploying troops.

In December 2018, then-National Security Adviser John Bolton unveiled the Trump administration’s Africa policy, built on three pillars: advancing American and African prosperity through increased US commercial ties in Africa, enhancing security through counterterrorism efforts, and promoting American interests and African “self-reliance” through a more targeted and selective use of US foreign aid. The strategy called out the threat of Chinese and Russian economic and political influence expanding across the continent, and acknowledged that both countries are deliberately and aggressively targeting their investments to gain a competitive advantage over the United States.

The strategy’s acknowledgment of Chinese and Russian tactics is crucial, but it lacks one key

component: explaining the relationship between the three pillars and US military presence.

Chain Reaction

While the intent is for West Africa to be the starting point of a worldwide review of troop deployments, pulling US troops out of West Africa would set off a chain reaction, relinquishing hard-fought relationships and influence across the continent. A US pullout would leave a vacuum in West Africa, opening the door for Russia, at a time when the G5 Sahel countries — Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger — are already asking for additional counterterrorism support to help stem the rapid expansion of ethnic and jihadist militancy in the region. Russia holds existing military cooperation agreements with all of the G5 Sahel countries except Mauritania.

As we enter a new decade, a number of country specific threats will complicate the chessboard for governments and US businesses alike. Global leadership is in retreat, as heads of state from North America to Asia are mired in domestic crises. The number of stalled revolutions around the world is on the rise. China grows bolder in its quest to solidify its position as an international superpower through any means necessary, while Russia is busy expanding its influence through the familiar model of arms first, business concessions later. All of this, taken together, is driving a massive shift in the global order, and making it more important than ever for the United States to preserve its influence in places where it has already established roots.

In October 2017, when four American soldiers were killed in Niger, criticism from both the public and Congress was swift, raising questions about the relevance of the mission and shining a light on the Washington establishment’s inability to justify it beyond the predictable argument of fighting global terror. In fact, analysts have long struggled to clearly articulate Africa’s strategic importance and the reasons why what takes place on the continent could become a threat to US national security.

With global competition for African partners escalating, however, this lack of a clear argument is not the same as a lack of threats, which are as insidious as they are nuanced. A drawdown of US troops from West Africa may not pose a short-term threat to the ideals of democracy or national security, but most certainly poses a long-term threat to the sovereignty and economic prosperity of African nations. That reality ultimately degrades American influence and market access.

Terrorism is a Small Fish

The standard argument for maintaining a US military presence in Africa is primarily one of counterterrorism, reasoning that factors ranging from water stress and food insecurity to displacement and internal conflict will foster conditions ideal for the rise of terrorist groups, which will in turn create security concerns for the United States. This line of reasoning further elaborates that, while one of these factors alone may not lead directly to conflict, such risk factors exacerbate existing tensions that can create conflict and instability.

While this explanation is both rational and valid on a local or regional level, it never quite manages to convincingly connect all of the dots to reach the threshold of a US national security threat. A thorough study of the African terror groups often cited as concerns — Boko Haram, al-Shabaab, Islamic State (IS) in the greater Sahara, among others — reveals that they possess neither a demonstrated ability nor a stated desire to attack the United States on its own soil, which has long been the standard for such assessment. Despite loose associations with global terrorist brands like al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, the struggles of these groups inherently remain local.

There are many compelling reasons why it would be a disastrous miscalculation to withdraw US troops from West Africa. In 2020, a strong military presence is just one of a number of factors that contribute to a country's global level of influence, but its importance is out-sized. In the game of geopolitical chess, perception is often

90% of reality. The presence of US troops around the world signifies the strength of American hegemony, which has an enormous impact on everything from regional stability to economic prosperity.

Having US troops placed strategically the world over acts as a deterrent against future conflict, as well as a balancing force. It is a reminder that the United States takes a measure of interest in the well-being of the host country, is there to help and support during times of tension and has a toehold established in the event that a much larger military force is needed in a time of crisis. In many of the locations where the United States has a military footprint, that footprint is physically small, but psychologically large.

But perhaps most importantly, a US troop presence, and all that it implies, helps form the backbone of stable relationships that foster trade and economic growth. In the 21st century, Africa is poised to become a battleground for both established and emerging economies, whether it's the explosion of newly accessible consumers or the race to lock down oil and mineral rights. Nowhere is this more evident right now than in Djibouti, where global competition is heating up alongside intra-Gulf competition for control of the Red Sea.

On the other side of the continent, withdrawing US troops from West Africa would be the first domino to fall on a path toward shutting out US influence on the continent, bringing about severe market implications for generations to come. US businesses would essentially begin to be blocked from competing in Africa, while Russia and China continue to lock down meaningful partnerships that span the gamut from economic to military. These relationships are often more appealing, in many ways, than a partnership with the United States or other Western nations because they come with few or no moral strings attached.

Economic Strategy and Warfare

China, despite its best efforts externally to present its ambitions as modest and peaceful, is

quite transparent internally about its desire for global dominance. One need only look at Beijing's recent track record on human rights — including the treatment of the Uighurs and phenomena like forced organ transplants, the exponential growth of the surveillance state, and implementation of the social credit system, among other issues — to understand that it's focused on bringing its vision of a China-centered future to fruition at any cost.

By 2050, China intends to have the strongest military force in the world, to be the center of global technology, and to be the anchor of a global trade and infrastructure network — all to the deliberate detriment of the existing Western-focused system.

Africa as a continent is an important stepping stone on Beijing's journey to world domination, and while the United States has been busy fighting terrorism there, China has been cashing in and buying influence across the continent, securing the production of minerals vital to modern electronics, among other things. In fact, Sino-African economic engagement has grown exponentially since the first Forum on Chinese-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000.

China is now Africa's largest trading partner. Just 18 years later, 53 out of 54 African countries attended the annual FOCAC summit in Beijing. In 2018, China-Africa trade topped \$204 billion. Forty African states have signed memoranda of understanding with Beijing to finance and build modern infrastructure like highways, airports and railways since the introduction of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

China's growing influence in Africa is not confined to the realm of commerce, however. China is also increasing its engagement with African nations through military support, arms deals, foreign direct investment, media, education and travel. In August 2017, China opened its first foreign military base in Djibouti. It sits on prime real estate next to one of Djibouti's main ports, and is just six miles from Camp Lemonnier, the US military's only permanent base on the continent.

China is the second largest financial donor to United Nations peacekeeping missions, and the 11th largest contributor of troops. Beijing has roughly 2000 soldiers serving as peacekeepers across Africa. China is also a regular supplier of arms to African nations and, of particular note, has provided (or offered) arms to Zimbabwe's former dictator Robert Mugabe, to Libya's former strongman Muammar Qaddafi and to the recently removed leader of Sudan, war criminal Omar al-Bashir, during the genocide in Darfur.

More than 10,000 Chinese-owned firms are currently operating across the African continent, and the value of Chinese business there since 2005 amounts to more than \$2 trillion, with potential for \$300 billion in investments. Estimates suggest that these Chinese firms employ several million Africans. In the last decade, China has also significantly expanded its media presence in Africa, urging African media to “tell China's story well,” while also influencing telecommunications, data and information industries and standards across the continent.

Direct airline flights between Africa and China have increased by more than 600% in the past decade. These flights are undertaken not only by workers and traders, but also by tourists and students. Beijing is cultivating the next generation of African leaders through education, often sponsoring the graduate and post-graduate studies of African students. As of 2017, more Anglophone African students studied in China than in the United States or the United Kingdom — their previous destinations of choice.

The Russian Threat

In recent years, the global community has finally begun to express concern over China's multi-pronged incursion into the African continent. This suits former KGB-era intelligence officer and current Russian president, Vladimir Putin, just fine, offering something of a smokescreen for Russia's quieter, stealthier invasion. Unlike China, which uses commercial projects like the BRI to pave the way for realizing hegemonic

ambitions, Russia is relying on its standard model of providing arms and military support to pave the way for its commercial ambitions. This is as much a result of Russia's lesser buying power as it is a deliberate tactic to gain access to strategic economic sectors like energy and mining.

In late October 2019, Putin hosted the first-ever Russia-Africa economic summit in Sochi, culminating in over 92 commercial agreements valued at roughly \$12 billion, though few have yet to materialize just over two months later. Around four dozen African leaders and high-level government officials attended the summit. On offer from Russia was everything from nuclear power plants to fighter jets and missile defense systems, designed to win influence across the continent.

Specific deals to come out of the summit include a signed a memorandum giving Russian oil company Lukoil drilling rights in Equatorial Guinea and Nigeria; a range of signed memoranda and agreements for Rosatom to develop nuclear energy in at least 18 African countries, including Egypt, Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Zambia, Rwanda and Ethiopia; and a contract for Russia to deliver 12 Russian Mi-35 attack helicopters to Nigeria. A number of other countries like the Central African Republic, Namibia, Madagascar and Uganda asked for more tanks, planes, helicopters, missiles, rifles and military advisers.

According to Rosoboronexport, Russia's state-run arms export agency, Russia has defense orders for more than \$14 billion from African countries, now accounting for around a third of Moscow's military exports. Just as it has recently done in Syria, Moscow's aim is to use military and trade ties to reassert itself as a geopolitical powerbroker on the African continent. Although Moscow's actual presence on the ground is still relatively marginal in comparison to France or the United States, Russia holds "military technical cooperation agreements" with more than 30 African states.

Russia doesn't bother to masquerade as a benevolent actor, though its tactics tend to be far

more subtle and under the radar when compared to those of China. Much of Moscow's African diplomacy is being conducted by the Wagner Group, a self-described private military company. Wagner is believed to be owned by Yevgeny Prigozhin, a restaurateur and businessman with close ties to Putin. Something of a public-private partnership between financiers like Prigozhin exists with Russia's military intelligence. In this way, using the Wagner Group as a proxy gives Putin an asymmetrical capability with broad reach that allows him to enjoy strategic gains while also maintaining plausible deniability if things do not go well.

In the Central African Republic, Wagner receives compensation for training the presidential guard, but also receives a percentage of profits from the gold and diamond mines it guards. Wagner is believed to be operating in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Libya, Madagascar, Angola, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and Zimbabwe.

Russia's soft power approach in Africa includes boosting media cooperation and sponsoring educational opportunities, just like China. But another recognizable Russian tactic features just as prominently: social media influence campaigns. If Prigozhin's name is familiar, it is likely because he also funds and directs the Internet Research Agency, known in the Western media as the "troll farm." Prigozhin has been sanctioned multiple times by the US Treasury Department, including for aiding Russia's involvement in the war in Ukraine in 2016 and, more recently, for meddling in the 2016 US presidential election.

That Prigozhin commands both real-world and online private armies on behalf of Moscow makes him an invaluable tool to the Kremlin. His reach epitomizes Russia's approach to currying influence. At the end of October 2019, Facebook announced that it had removed three networks of fake accounts targeting eight African countries — unlikely a coincidence, but nearly the same list of countries where Wagner is currently operating — with messages intended to boost support for

Russia's political and commercial efforts. Facebook linked the coordinated influence operations to Prigozhin.

Pragmatic Steps Forward

It is not clear that American and other Western leaders fully appreciate the scope of economic and defensive changes that are necessary to prevent the further deterioration of or to potentially reestablish preeminent influence and market access on the African continent.

Though China and Russia are using very different strategies in their approach to African engagement, the end goal is the same: They are investing throughout the continent to secure political influence. Russia has a rich history of engagement in Africa, one that is not tainted by colonialism. China has deep pockets, and a willingness to spend. With autocratic governments of their own, neither country attaches moral conditions to friendship. For the United States, with its historically values-based approach, that makes competition tough. But history has demonstrated that when the United States leaves and creates a vacuum, it almost always invites further autocracy to develop. Egypt after the Arab Spring is a prime example.

Western governments and businesses must be prepared to meet African nations where they're at, especially with regard to competition from China and Russia. African leaders, for their part, are unlikely to choose a side in the way that Western nations will want them to. Many have been waiting for years for their countries to be considered of high strategic value, and many African heads of state welcome the competition, viewing it as an opportunity to increase both resources and influence.

One key to accomplishing the requisite shift in strategy is not scaling back troops in West Africa or beyond — it is changing the lens through which troop deployments are viewed. The United States must make a greater effort to understand why the so-called Great Powers have been successful and accept that, within any legal

constraints, it may need to use similar tactics to compete, particularly in BRI nations.

The realities of soft power in the 21st century demand a cohesive strategy to combat the asymmetric hybrid warfare methods — the future combination of modern warfare and business strategy the world over — used by Beijing and Moscow. The strong military partnerships we have already formed and nurtured are key foundational building blocks for all other forms of engagement to take place. The answer in this next decade is not less engagement, but more.

***Erika Lafrennie** is a co-founder and Managing Partner at Luminae Group, a geopolitical intelligence advisory firm, and a former US intelligence analyst.

Libya Is a Problem for All of Africa

Swaleh Ochieng
February 14, 2020

The Libyan Civil War is a vortex that traps migrants and draws in fighters from all over Africa.

As General Khalifa Haftar's troops continue to battle the UN-recognized Government of National Accord for the control of Libya's capital Tripoli in a "final push," it is evident things might get worse than they already are for the country that has been engulfed in conflict since 2011. Despite prolonged conflict in what was once one of Africa's more stable economies, the African Union has not shown much commitment to helping solve the crisis in Libya that is affecting other African nations across the continent.

Thanks to its strategic position, porous borders, lawlessness and an abundance of militia groups, smugglers and cartels, thousands of

Africans — mostly from Ghana, Nigeria, Cameroon, Zambia, Senegal, Gambia, Benin, Niger, Sudan and countries in the Horn of Africa — risk their lives traveling across the Sahara desert into Libya. They then follow the Mediterranean route, paying ruthless traffickers at least \$1,000 to be smuggled into Europe.

Most of the migrants say they save for years to meet the expenses for this journey to a better life. Desperate to escape poverty, disease, unemployment and conflict, only a small fraction of the thousands of migrants actually manage to set foot in Europe.

Desperate Journeys

Before they get far, many die in the desert. They either fall off the back of the overcrowded pickup trucks or collapse due to immense heat. The stopovers in Tripoli, which can last months or even years, give immigrants an opportunity to work casual jobs to meet the expenses of the next phase of the journey to Europe. But vulnerable migrants are often kidnapped by rival smugglers fighting for the control of the lucrative human trafficking business only to be released after their families back home pay a ransom.

For those who manage to make it past these hurdles, the actualization of the European dream is still nowhere in sight. While thousands manage to cross the Mediterranean Sea into Europe, many drown in the sea along with their dreams of a good life, never to be found. According to the International Organization for Migration, at least 1,041 people died in the Mediterranean in 2019, a decrease from 2,299 in 2018.

Thousands of African migrants in Libya who are either intercepted at sea by the Libyan coastguard or arrested in Tripoli or during their journey trying to enter or leave Libya, are being detained in inhumane detention centers across the country, some of them in conflict areas. Those held in these centers are said to number at least 5,000 and have no access to medical attention or adequate food. Overcrowding means disease, making life in Libya no different, or perhaps even worse than the epidemics they are running away

from in their home countries. There are widespread allegations of malnutrition, torture and risk of auctioned off into modern-day slavery for as little as \$400.

In July 2019, 44 were killed and 133 injured, the majority of them from Sudan, Eritrea and Somalia, after an air raid on a migrant and refugee center near a military camp in Tajoura suburb of Tripoli. The section of the center hit held some 150 of the 600 migrants and refugees. The UN-recognized government blamed Khalifa Haftar for the attacks. The UN has since called for the dismantling of the detention centers saying they are not fit to house migrants.

Recruitment of Sudanese Fighters

While Sudanese were demonstrating and waging a revolution back at home in 2019 and trying to cope with and initiate a successful post-dictatorship era, some of their young men who could help rebuild the nation, which was under the rule of Omar al-Bashir for 30 years, were being recruited to fight alongside Khalifa Haftar in Libya.

In August 2019, the newly formed transitional government of Sudan intercepted seven members of the Revolutionary Awakening Council from Sudan's Darfur ethnic group who were alleged to be headed to Libya to fight in Haftar's Libyan National Army. In November, the UN accused Sudan and Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, the head of Sudan's Rapid Support Forces, which has its roots in the infamous Janjaweed militia and has carried out brutal counterinsurgency operations in Darfur as recently as 2015, of violating UN sanctions by deploying 1,000 troops to Libya.

Almost a decade since the beginning of the Libya crisis that grew out of the 2011 Arab Spring, the war in Libya does not seem to be nearing a resolution, with foreign interference and outside interests clashing on the ground in the oil-rich county. The ongoing conflict means that more immigrants will be detained in Libya. Some will die in the Mediterranean or, as Haftar's offensive continues, African fighters will end up joining Libya's warring factions.

The European Union and the United Nations continue, with more than questionable results thus far, to look for strategies to stem the refugee crisis in which Libya is a major point of passage. But it is the responsibility of African leaders, especially in West Africa, to create employment opportunities and encourage small-scale enterprise to keep their citizens away from the temptations and the hopelessness that drive them toward Libya.

***Swaleh Ochieng** is a Kenyan journalist, author, and researcher.

Africa's Mixed Record on Keeping Up With UN Goals

Sylvia Croese
March 10, 2020

The UN has called for a “decade of action” to push countries toward meeting the sustainable development goals by 2030. How do African nations fare?

Almost five years ago, all member states of the United Nations signed the 2030 Agenda on sustainable development. This agenda includes 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) on global challenges such as poverty, urbanization and climate action, all featuring targets and indicators to measure progress.

The SDGs were brought in to replace the millennium development goals (MDGs) and, unlike their predecessors, they apply to all countries in the world, developing and developed alike. Compared with the MDGs, the SDGs also represent a more holistic view on development, incorporating its social, economic and environmental dimensions, as well as the importance of equality, justice and partnerships.

African states have been active supporters of the SDGs and have established high-level institutions and development policies aimed at supporting their implementation. However, almost five years since the adoption of the SDGs, progress on implementation remains mixed. North Africa represents the best-performing region on the continent, while Central Africa is the worst-performing. In West Africa and East Africa, there is stagnation in progress toward most of the goals, while southern Africa, as a region, is not on track to meet any of the SDGs.

With only 10 years to go until 2030, we now enter what the UN has called the “decade of action.” This means it is now time to speed up bids to meet the pledges on SDGs. Based on current trends, what are the prospects of this happening in Africa?

Halfway Toward the Goals

According to the latest Africa SDG Index produced by the SDG Center for Africa and the UN-affiliated Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), the continent as a whole is barely halfway to achieving the SDGs. Global performance on the SDGs is also falling short, with only Nordic countries, such as Denmark, Sweden and Finland, on track to meeting most goals by 2030. However, for most residents of these countries, meeting the goals will not make much of a difference to their already high standards of living, while progress on the goals in African countries will significantly change people's lives.

Current progress, or the lack thereof, can be explained by a range of factors. This includes the lack of policy coherence and coordination across different levels of government, as well as lack of adequate financial resources, capacity, political will or limitations in terms of the data required to monitor the achievement of the SDGs. Moreover, there is also a relationship between levels of progress on SDG implementation and levels of political, economic and governance transformation. This becomes clear when comparing the findings of the Africa SDG Index

and the soon-to-be-released Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) analysis of political, economic and governance trajectories in the region.

The outcomes largely align when it comes to the best-performing countries and also the worst performing countries — most of them in Central and some in East Africa. However, there are some interesting findings when it comes to those in the middle.

Best and Worst

Overall, the front-runners in the SDG Index are those that BTI considers to be performing best in terms of political and economic transformation, as well as governance performance. This is the case of Mauritius, which is the highest-scoring country in the Africa SDG Index and which BTI considered to be a consolidated democracy, advanced in terms of economic transformation and good in terms of governance. Countries such as Tunisia, Botswana and Ghana represent similar characteristics and similarly stand among the top 10 of best-ranking countries on the SDG Index.

On the other end of the spectrum are countries such as Eritrea, Somalia and South Sudan. These countries are at the bottom of the SDG Africa ranking and are also among the nations that BTI scores most poorly in its soon-to-be-published 2020 report on the region, due to ongoing civil conflict (Somalia, South Sudan), a lack of multi-party elections (Eritrea) and, in all cases, rudimentary levels of economic transformation.

This makes any kind of coherent development planning and implementation nearly impossible. “Eastern Africa features several countries with some of the lowest levels of human development in the world, including Burundi, Eritrea, Somalia and South Sudan,” the report explains.

Contrasts are represented by countries such as Rwanda, which performs well on the Africa SDG Index — coming 12th out of 52 countries — but which BTI politically considers to be a hard-line autocracy. On the other hand, Madagascar performs very poorly on the Africa SDG Index,

(position 44 out of 52 countries), but scores relatively well in terms of political and governance performance, according to BTI, although it is making limited progress on its economic transformation.

The example of Rwanda shows the difference that high-level political leadership and commitment to SDG implementation can make, even in the absence of effective democracy, supported by rising levels of economic growth. Madagascar, on the other hand, has experienced some political instability over the past years as well as stagnating economic growth rates, which has hampered progress toward the global goals.

Looking Ahead to 2030

Although the best governance scores are found exclusively among democracies, overall it seems that a combination of good governance and economic transformation, rather than good governance and high levels of political transformation, contribute to higher levels of progress toward the SDGs. This is not only illustrated by the case in Rwanda but also in Djibouti, where hard-line authoritarian regimes have recorded some impressive development achievements, including high economic growth.

Yet while economic growth is important to generate the resources to fund better services, infrastructure and employment opportunities, this needs to be combined with long-term planning and action for SDG implementation. For such action to be integrated, inclusive and sustained, this requires the participation of all sectors, levels and actors of society, including civil society, universities and the private sector. This necessitates political systems that are open, transparent and accountable. If Africa is in it for sustainable development in the long haul, the time for political transformation is now.

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A New Leader in the Wings for Burundi

Filip Reyntjens
April 20, 2020

Eyes are on Burundi's election in May, which is a more open race after the current President Pierre Nkurunziza announced he would not run for another term.

Presidential, parliamentary and municipal elections will take place in Burundi on May 20. The previous polls in 2015 brought the country to the brink. After the ruling party CNDD-FDD proposed that President Pierre Nkurunziza run for a third term — which was considered unconstitutional by many — there were street protests, mainly in the capital city Bujumbura, a military coup attempt was narrowly defeated, around a thousand people were killed by the police and hundreds of thousands fled the country.

Added to this, the CNDD-FDD split, with some of its most competent leaders fleeing abroad. Opposition politicians, journalists and civil society activists went into exile. International observers expressed fear that a genocide was in the offing. Donors imposed sanctions expected to bring the regime to its knees. Rebel forces, supported by neighboring Rwanda, started operations intended to topple the regime.

But that didn't happen. The elections went ahead and Nkurunziza was elected with a large margin. All the institutions remained in place and more or less functioned. While there was violence, it never came near to genocide. Above all, the regime played the card of “normality” — it practiced business as usual and ignored international pressure, helped by a divided regional community. Both the political and armed opposition abroad were inept and failed to seriously jeopardize the regime's survival.

Despite the economic crisis, partly but not exclusively a result of the sanctions, it has remained standing.

Important developments have taken place in 2019 and early 2020 during the run-up to the elections, altering the political playing field. The most important one is that Nkurunziza will not run for the presidency. When he announced on several occasions in the past that he would abide by the constitution and that his current (in his eyes his second) term would be his last, this was met with considerable skepticism, in part informed by experience elsewhere in Africa. However, he kept his promise and, on January 26, the ruling party selected General Secretary Evariste Ndayishimiye as its presidential candidate. Less than a week earlier, parliament had graced Nkurunziza with the title of “Supreme Guide of Patriotism,” and gave him a “severance pay” of around €500,000 (\$543,000) and a “villa of high standing”.

New Presidential Candidates

There were other significant events on the road to the polls. The Congrès national pour la liberté (CNL), led by the deputy speaker of the National Assembly, Agathon Rwasa, who is considered the most important opponent, was registered. Rwasa is one of six presidential candidates approved by the electoral commission CENI (a seventh one was added by the constitutional court), and he is certainly the most serious challenger of the CNDD-FDD contender. Experience elsewhere in Africa has shown that the polls are more open if the incumbent doesn't stand.

On the side of the opposition in exile, the Conseil national pour le respect de l'Accord d'Arusha pour la paix et la réconciliation au Burundi (CNARED), marred by internal dissensions and defections in the past, formally split at the end of December 2019, with one side considering returning home and participating in the elections and the other remaining intransigent. Neither fraction is likely to have much political impact.

In the meantime, both the international community, the European Union in particular, and regional leaders have lost interest and leverage on Burundi's political development. This is in part due to fatigue in the face of the regime's resilience toward outside pressure and the ineptness of the opposition offering no alternative. This tendency to return to normal relations is reinforced by the fact that the main reason for sanctions, namely Nkurunziza's resolve to hang on in 2015 and the ensuing violence, has now disappeared.

Meanwhile, the soon-to-be-released Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) 2020 report on Burundi illustrates how its international cooperation is slipping. Judged on how far the political leadership is willing and able to cooperate with neighboring countries, the national score fell from seven out of a possible 10 points in 2008-18 to a mere three points in 2020. Meanwhile, the government's role as a credible and reliable partner in its international relations remained low, scoring just three out of 10 points.

Human Rights and Relations With Rwanda

The human rights situation continues giving serious cause for concern. Gross violations include assassinations, forced disappearances and arbitrary detentions of political opponents, in particular those of the CNL, journalists and human rights defenders. In February, the minister of the interior requested a list of local staff members of international NGOs with their ethnic identity, creating fear of further government meddling.

Another key issue for the country is hostile relations with its northern neighbor Rwanda. For several years now, both countries have been trading accusations about the other's support for subversive groups. In recent years, several incidents have taken place on or near their common border, most notably in November 2019, when a Burundian army position was attacked, leaving at least 17 military killed and dozens wounded. The Burundian government formally accused the Rwandan army for the

attack, which Rwanda denied. An investigation was carried out by the Expanded Joint Verification Mechanism (EJVM) of the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) in December, but no report was available at the time of writing.

The likely outcome of the approaching electoral period is that Burundi will experience more of the same. Business has become so usual that the May polls will in all likelihood take place in an orderly fashion and return more or less functional institutions. Both political and technocratic/bureaucratic governance are flawed, and there is no reason to believe that they will significantly improve.

This scenario can perhaps be averted if the new president, in all likelihood Evariste Ndayishimiye, cautiously moves away from his predecessor's policies. For this to happen, he will need to strengthen his position within the ruling party and to be supported by domestic and external players.

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Trump's Treatment of WHO Boss Is a Lesson for Africa

Gatete Nyiringabo Ruhumuliza

June 4, 2020

Donald Trump seems to have served the UN to China on a silver platter. This is a strategic error by the US and an uncertain prospect for the rest of the world.

We may not like what President Donald Trump is saying about the World Health Organization (WHO), China and the world at large. In fact, we do not like it at

all, but Trump has a point, and acknowledging it would empower us to address him in earnest, with honesty and efficiency.

The world is led by two things: bombs and dollars — a carrot and a stick. The United Nations is no different. While the strong prefer to see the world the way it is, the weak prefer to paint themselves a pretty picture and complain whenever reality fails to meet their imagination. This self-infused bipolar syndrome is in the interest of the strong, for it keeps the weak in a permanent state of sedation, exposing them to exploitation.

Africa is a classic case in point. After years of exploitation by the West, Africans seem to wish for a kinder master: Beijing. However, recent images of mistreatment of Africans in China give us a taste of how that would work out. They confirm the ancient wisdom that a new master is just as oppressive, if not more. One is invariably best served not by a master but by oneself.

The Emperor is Naked

For all his sins, Donald Trump has the merit of removing the veil regarding mastery. He speaks the language of truth: money. Trump believes that if his government gives more of it to the UN, America should get better treatment at the international table. This has always been the case, but the US president strips away the pretense. It is known to everyone that big contributors get VIP seats at charity events.

Trump's premise is not skewed — it's just uncomfortable. Acknowledging that premise will empower us to break it down to the US president that hefty UN contracts go to American firms, that the UN headquarters are based in New York, that American citizens occupy top positions in UN agencies and that member states are incapable of adopting international sanctions against the US and its allies, let alone enforce them. In other words, the US gets a good return on its investment in international systems. Washington and its allies can and do violate international law frequently and with no

consequences, while the rest of us remain its prisoners.

So, Trump's decision to cut WHO funding will affect the US more than it will affect the WHO. The WHO and Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, its executive director, will survive without American money.

Tedros is employed by the WHO's Executive Board that comprises 34 members selected from the UN General Assembly on a rotational basis. The executive director reports directly to the UN secretary general. Both entities find Tedros' performance outstanding in response to the novel coronavirus. Any resolution initiated by Trump in the UN Security Council to have him removed would manage two out of five votes at best. Only the UK is likely to vote with the US. In other words, Tedros is untouchable.

There is a strong chance he might outlive Trump in office. Furthermore, while the US contribution accounts for around 25% of the WHO budget, UN agencies are capable of fundraising on a bilateral basis. As the US announced its withdrawal from WHO, China, which seems to have been the source of the WHO's misery, has pledged \$2 billion over a period of two years in a historic speech by President Xi Jinping at the opening of the 73rd World Health Assembly on May 18.

That's not all: Xi took the opportunity to announce the creation of a WHO global humanitarian depot, essentially making it the UN world's pharmacy, among other exciting measures, especially targeted at developing countries. The US seems to have served the UN to China on a silver platter. This is a colossal strategic error by Trump and an uncertain prospect for the rest of the world.

What Can Africa Learn?

Where does this change leave Africa? Africans would be wise to learn a thing or two from Trump. This world isn't as flat as they imagine it to be. No one hates or loves Africans. All nations of the world, except African ones, are enlisted in a race for power and influence. It is high time for

Africans to get their act together and join in, instead of complaining from the sidelines. Their nations may be weak but, united as a continent, Africans could be strong.

Let me illustrate. India is a multiethnic society much like Africa. It was colonized for longer than Africa. After years of talking about peace and disarmament, India initiated its nuclear program. As soon as it did so, the balance of power in the region tipped in its favor. It was only a matter of time before it would have had the upper hand in the Kashmir region. In due course, the entire region could have been unilaterally annexed, and even Pakistan as we know it could have ceased to exist.

From then on, *alea iacta est* — the die had been cast. In 1965, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, then prime minister of Pakistan declared: “If India builds the bomb, we will eat grass and leaves for a thousand years, even go hungry, but we will get one of our own. The Christians have the bomb, the Jews have the bomb and now the Hindus have the bomb. Why not the Muslims too have the bomb?”

Sure enough, they got their bomb. In January 1972, Pakistan rallied scientists to build an atomic bomb for national survival and, on May 28, 1998, a few weeks after India’s second nuclear test Pakistan, detonated five nuclear devices of its own. Islamabad claimed that their nuclear weapons were not for offensive purposes but were developed to give Pakistan “nuclear deterrence capability.”

Unlike big powers, Africans have been weak and divided. These two capital sins never allowed them to have the bomb and the money, the only two things that rule the world.

Yet Africans should not forget they have leverage. The uranium that was used in the two infamous American bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki came from the Democratic Republic of Congo. If one African country attempted to develop the bomb on its own, it would be eradicated from the face of the earth.

That is what happened to Libya. However, if Africa as a continent developed a bomb together and established a nuclear deterrence post somewhere, say atop Mount Kilimanjaro, no single country could be sanctioned. The entire continent could not be bombed to oblivion by the US or NATO. All of Africa would then become secure.

Liberal Script

Ironically, when it comes to Africa, Trump is reading from a script written by his liberal critics. They want to help poor Africans. Western media and their experts never cease to mention aid when they talk about Africa.

The truth is that Africa does not need Western aid. Africa needs unity, organization and ambition. In any case, aid represents a meager 2% of Africa’s GDP. In contrast, capital flight from Africa to the West is about 45% of the continent’s GDP. If France says it is withdrawing aid to West Africa, the right rejoinder is not to appeal to French President Emmanuel Macron’s sense of solidarity but to tell France that Africa will kick out Areva, Bolloré and Total in response.

Luckily, Macron is a reasonable man. Unfortunately, Trump is a bully. The only effective way to deal with bullies is standing up to them, not appealing to their non-existent generosity. Africa must unite behind Dr. Tedros. He will not resign from his job. Other nations and private money will fund the WHO when Trump pulls the plug.

Lately, African leaders and thinkers have been speaking more frequently with a common voice on international matters. We welcome this. But they remain weak as long as they do not have the bomb or the money.

To quote Nelson Mandela, “A person in chains does not negotiate.” Amid a global crisis, it is incumbent upon Africans to not be comfortably numb. To borrow a quote from a European statesman, Winston Churchill, “Let’s not let a good crisis go to waste.” They must think creatively and act speedily to make their

own bomb, earn more money and protect their earnings and their people.

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Africa Needs Its Own “New Deal”

Betsy Henderson
September 17, 2020

African countries will need a New Deal to collectively recover from the pandemic and address the mounting debt crisis.

In the midst of the global COVID-19 pandemic, Africa faces an unprecedented level of starvation, poverty and suffering that will last far beyond 2020. A lack of medical facilities and resources to offset economic losses is expected to push 37.5 million more Africans into extreme poverty this year, adding to the more than 400 million people already living on less than \$1.90 a day.

Compounding these challenges, African governments are encountering a major debt crunch. Over the past 15 years, African countries have been building new infrastructure projects, from roads to football stadiums, and collectively taking on \$417 billion in debt from lenders like the World Bank, the Chinese government and private investors. The pandemic has also drawn attention to the amount African governments pay in servicing these loans, where countries like Ghana spend five times on annual debt payments as on health care.

As Africa struggles to provide crucial medical services and build the necessary infrastructure, it is clear that African countries will need a new approach to collectively recover from the pandemic and address the mounting debt crisis.

Calls for Debt Relief

In response to the effects of COVID-19, African finance ministers have called for a \$100-billion relief package, including \$44 billion in delayed debt payments over the next two years. African countries that are unable to make debt payments risk having their credit ratings downgraded, which would limit their financing capabilities for future economic growth initiatives. Countries that default on these loans may also face nightmarish predatory vulture funds or a repeat of the 1980s debt crisis.

To alleviate immediate concerns surrounding debt repayment, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the G20 and other multilateral institutions froze debt payments through the end of 2020 to help African governments respond to the pandemic. They are now discussing additional measures, including involving more private lenders. There is a global dialogue about redistributing IMF special drawing rights for additional resources, while questions remain how China — Africa’s largest bilateral creditor — will manage its remaining African debt, with broad debt forgiveness looking unlikely.

While these measures will each have some effect, any meaningful approach to debt relief in Africa must help countries survive today while building a foundation for future economic recovery. Therefore, investing in infrastructure and creating jobs in the short term is crucial to Africa’s economic recovery and advancement.

Infrastructure is widely viewed as a critical element for development and economic growth in Africa. Bureaucratic hurdles, lack of investment and perceived risk, however, remain key barriers to obtaining the estimated \$130 to \$170 billion of infrastructure funding the continent requires. Infrastructure construction in Africa is currently critical because it would expedite provision of basic services and regional trade, both necessary for alleviating economic pain from the global recession.

For example, improving regional road networks would allow countries to trade food more regionally rather than facing current

shortages from reduced food imports. In addition, building power-generating facilities would increase access to electricity and the internet for students learning from home during the pandemic, power health centers and facilitate future investments.

Increasing physical infrastructure across Africa would also advance implementation of the long-awaited African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), which policy leaders consider an important mechanism for the continent's economic recovery and resiliency to future shocks. Whenever the AfCFTA comes into force, having more regional infrastructure in place will only accelerate its ability to boost regional income by 7% (or \$450 billion) by 2035, despite COVID-19. The faster Africa's economies can recover and grow, the sooner countries can alleviate debt and address citizens' needs.

Africa requires a "New Deal" approach to debt relief and economic recovery, a mechanism to provide jobs and infrastructure that helps African economies recover from the worst recession since the Great Depression. In the 1930s, US President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal created the Works Progress Administration (WPA) on the heels of the Great Depression. The WPA alone put 8.2 million people to work and built 78,000 bridges, 800 airports and over 650,000 miles of paved roads across the United States in less than eight years.

As Roosevelt's New Deal focused on much-needed job creation, a similar plan could be adopted in Africa. Although not a silver bullet to the continent's high unemployment rates, jobs generated by regional infrastructure projects could reduce the number of people living in extreme poverty and provide skills training needed for future work, another oft-cited barrier to investment. Perhaps most importantly, creating more jobs in Africa during a generational recession could save lives and livelihoods.

The underlying principles of the New Deal could be applied in Africa in several ways, but creating a short-term pan-African fund for

infrastructure projects could be most effective. Leaders could set up the fund as a special purpose vehicle or a designated initiative within an existing pan-African organization such as the African Union, the UN Economic Commission for Africa or the African Development Bank.

Like the New Deal's WPA, this infrastructure fund could have a defined lifespan (five to seven years) and include appropriate financial oversight for donors like the United States, the European Union and private sector partners. The WPA was dissolved after the completion of its mandate, and adopting a similar approach for this initiative could focus efforts on critical projects, after which African leaders could choose how to address remaining infrastructure needs.

This fund should allow leaders to identify and implement infrastructure projects with the highest potential for economic recovery and regional development. Having a central entity with authority to coordinate infrastructure projects among African member states could significantly fast-track execution and reduce bureaucratic red tape that often hinders infrastructure projects. A wealth of information about African infrastructure needs and opportunities already exists to facilitate project selection.

Infrastructure in Africa has long been viewed as a national issue that individual countries must address rather than a regional challenge that requires broad international collaboration. Through a New Deal approach that incorporates collective infrastructure investment into global debt relief efforts, international partners have an opportunity to help Africa weather unprecedented challenges today and build a foundation for an accelerated economic recovery that can be sustained well into the future.

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China's Race for Scientific and Technological Supremacy

Daniel Wagner
January 13, 2020

Soon enough, the West will be looking at China in the tech space from the front window, rather than the rearview mirror.

Science and technology will become the lifeblood of the Chinese economy in this decade and will remain its lifeblood in the future. That is, in part, because China has become sufficiently advanced to be able to effectively compete with the US and other technological leaders in the West. It is also the key to China's ability to innovate and compete in the future, as it is for other advanced economies. Innovation-driven growth is also required in order for Beijing to smoothly deleverage away from its manufacturing base model of growth, which is slowly running out of steam.

In the decade that has just passed, its productivity gains faltered and credit-driven investment in low return capital propped up its growth. China must address its slowing productivity gains to produce a smooth rebalancing of the economy. Productivity growth will not come from textiles, steel or the property market, and the flourishing services sector will require cutting-edge technology to remain competitive. To pull it off, China will need to acquire and deploy advanced technology quickly and efficiently throughout its economy.

China is diligently preparing to assume a seemingly preordained role as the world leader in a plethora of areas. It is driven. It is focused. And it will stop at nothing to ensure that it has all the advantages it can glean from the existing world order to create a world order in its own image.

Technology is absolutely critical to achieving that objective, and there is little that is more important in that regard than cutting-edge telecommunications — specifically 5G technology.

The Huawei saga has served to illustrate this point. America's issues with Huawei are as much about who has access to, and thus controls, the data of the future, as they are about superpower politics and the rule of law. Some Western intelligence sources believe the company is state-owned and has deep connections to China's intelligence services. Its founder was an engineer with the People's Liberation Army (PLA), and it is worth adding that no large Chinese company is fully independent of the government.

Although China spends more than \$200 billion on research (second only to the US), generates close to 30,000 PhDs in science and engineering, and leads the world in patent applications each year, its record is mixed in terms of the actual impact of innovation, as measured by the success of companies in commercializing new ideas and competing in the global market. China has some unique strengths in innovation, which includes the rapid commercialization of new ideas by virtue of the size of its consumer base.

It also has the world's most extensive manufacturing ecosystem, enabling continuous innovation in production processes that reduce costs and improve quality, and has created capacity for research with a growing number of universities and research institutions, as well as an expanding pool of talent. On the minus side of the ledger, China's slow regulatory processes and weak intellectual property protections prevent foreign investors from wanting to bring their best and brightest researchers and innovations to the country.

Completing the journey from innovation sponge (absorbing and adapting existing technology and knowledge from around the world) to global innovation leader is not just a way to signal China's progress as an economy and society. The boost to productivity that

innovation provides is critically important for sustaining China's growth.

Beijing has enacted some two dozen laws that have created a technology-siphoning machine. That apparatus maintains databases of foreign co-optees and distributes stipends, sinecures and cash to foreign donors of high-tech innovations. China has targeted all sources of American innovation, including universities, corporations and government labs, exploiting both their openness and naivete, with methods and tradecraft custom-tailored to each target.

The Chinese government's current system for processing and reverse engineering stolen designs has grown significantly larger than it was during the Cold War and has developed from a strictly military operation into a system permeating the entire Chinese government. It is an elaborate, comprehensive system for identifying foreign technologies, acquiring them by every means imaginable and converting them into weapons and competitive goods. China could not have experienced the dramatic economic transformation it has experienced in the 21st century, nor have sustained its progress as it has, without inexpensive and unrestricted access to other countries' technology.

Chinese firms have routinely become investors in American startups, particularly those working on cutting-edge technologies with potential military applications. These are companies that make rocket engines for spacecraft, sensors for autonomous navy ships and printers that make flexible screens that can be used in fighter-plane cockpits. Many of the Chinese firms are owned by state-owned companies or have direct connections to Chinese leaders.

According to the US Department of Defense, Beijing actively encourages Chinese companies with close government ties to invest in American startups specializing in critical technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and robots to advance China's military capacity, as well as its economy.

US government controls intended to protect potentially critical technologies against countries like China have fallen short. It took a while, but such transactions eventually started ringing alarm bells in Washington. US lawmakers raised broad questions about the nature of China's economic relationship with the US well before the Trump administration started applying tariffs on Chinese products, in an effort to reduce the inherent inequity in bilateral trade between the two nations.

China is extremely capable and driven. When it aims to be a leader in a particular sector or acquire a certain technology, it does so with precision. There is no question that Beijing aims to be a leader in AI, semiconductors and any number of other sub-sectors of the technology-driven 21st-century economy. It has the advantage of having a lot of money to spend and plenty of people and resources to devote to the issue.

Since it certainly appears that the US government will not be devoting similar resources to the tech sector any time soon, it is merely a question of time until China captures that title, too. In the battle for the future, the Chinese Communist Party understands very well what is at stake. It took the US and West too long to realize what China was doing, and by the time they did, Beijing was already approaching strongly from behind. Soon enough, the West will be looking at China in the tech space from the front window, rather than the rearview mirror.

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Chinese Diaspora Revisits Its Identity and Relationship to Beijing

Brennan Kau
March 16, 2020

Coinciding with China's rise, doubts have been raised worldwide with regards to exactly where the loyalty of overseas Chinese lie.

Tracing the ever-rising death toll of the COVID-19 outbreak to the exotic meat on sale at a wet market in Wuhan, China, probably feels a bit surreal. If anything, it serves as a sobering reminder of how, in our globalized, interconnected lives, a plate of dubiously sourced food can rapidly lead to packed hospitals, empty supermarkets and general panic around the world. On top of this, another reminder is of how these connections have drawn greater scrutiny of Chinese nationals living abroad and, more often than not, of ethnic Chinese who hold no ties to the mainland — or even of anyone who looks remotely Asian. But the question today expands beyond the side effects of the virus and toward Chinese communities that didn't have wait for 2020 to be reminded of their strange status in the world today.

Strange, in this sense, refers to ethnic Chinese being the target of hysteria and violence, and even suspicion of being agents sent directly from Beijing, despite having no connections or loyalties to the mainland. In fact, those in the Chinese diaspora have become more relevant than ever as a result of China's growing economic and social influence, forcing overseas ethnic Chinese to revisit their identities and how they relate to other Chinese people around the world.

A Century of Chinese Migration

Of the approximately 50 million overseas ethnic Chinese abroad, around half reside in Southeast Asia, with the largest populations concentrated in countries like Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia.

Singapore is a particular case, being the only country in the world outside China and Taiwan to have a population that is majority ethnic Chinese, at around 76%. As of today, these Chinese emigrants are largely third or fourth-generation, having had their ancestors settle during the time of the Qing or Chiang Kai-shek's rule. With the exception of a minority of emigrants who have only moved within the last few decades, these ethnic Chinese are known as *huayi*, or people of Chinese descent.

This minority in Southeast Asia is part of another wave of Chinese emigration, in which their compatriots have largely preferred to settle in the West, in countries such as the US, the UK, Canada and Australia. These emigrants are first or second-generation and, as a result, tend to have closer ties to the mainland and are known as *huaqiao*, or people of Chinese origin.

As a consequence of the passage of time between these two waves, the identities of the *huayi* and the *huaqiao* are divided on several key points. When it comes to language, the *huayi* tend to have roots in dialects such as Cantonese, Hokkien and Teochew, while the *huaqiao* are more comfortable with the post-1950s, Communist Party-approved Standard Chinese. In religion, the *huayi* are more likely to profess adherence to Buddhism, Taoism or Christianity, in contrast to the more non-religious *huaqiao* who inherit modern China's tumultuous and complicated relationship with religion.

Having family in and memories of China also plays an important part in identity-shaping, where first or second-generation immigrants are more likely to have them as compared to immigrant families who have spent decades in their country of residence. Finally, it is by and large the *huayi* who have been the recipients of attacks and repression of their Chinese identity in the 20th century. Examples of this include legislation in Indonesia in 1966 that pressured Chinese immigrants to replace their surnames with more Indonesian-sounding ones, or the sectarian violence against ethnic Chinese in 1960s Malaysia.

Thus, there exists a division in the perception of China by the overseas Chinese community. The *huayi*, as compared to the *huaqiao*, are more keen to emphasize their distance from Beijing, viewing themselves as communities that hold no obligations or loyalties to the country of their ancestral origin. This makes it difficult for the former to relate to the latter, who are more likely to embrace the duality of their identity, holding ties to both China and their country of residence.

For the *huayi*, one controversial case was the proposal of the recognition of dual citizenship status around the turn of the century. As suggested by sinologist Leo Suryadinata, the act of granting all ethnic Chinese the right to be considered a Chinese citizen in addition to being a citizen of their country of residence was primarily aimed at enticing the “new wave” of Chinese first-generation *huaqiao* immigrants with the opportunity to reestablish ties with their homeland. The Southeast Asian Chinese feared that they would be forced into competing obligations, with a country long removed from their consciousness potentially interfering in their lives. Following such opposition, the proposal was not entertained any further.

Compare this to the *huaqiao* and their representation in the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference’s “overseas delegate” system. Every year, 35 prominent members of overseas Chinese communities who have obtained foreign nationalities are invited to sit in on the conference alongside Communist Party members as representatives of the Chinese diaspora.

For these members, and the communities they represent, their active participation in Chinese civil society does not conflict with the roles they play in their country of residence, with one previous member being a senior adviser to the US Federal Reserve Board. This demonstrates the intrinsic difference between how the *huayi* and the *huaqiao* view themselves and, thus, the fundamental division within the Chinese diaspora.

Agents of Influence

This fundamental division is a volatile one and with potentially harmful results over how Beijing views and treats the reluctant *huayi* community. Such harm may come about unintentionally via China’s misunderstanding of the *huayi* identity and their perceived obligations to their ancestral homeland. For example, the case of Singapore may be raised, where its majority *huayi* population closely cooperates with China in economic and social sectors, with government officials, thought leaders and academics enjoying long-lasting ties. Some in China have gone on to nickname the Nanyang Technological University the “overseas branch of the Central Party School.”

Yet there is a danger that this cooperation has been borne out of Beijing’s enduring perception of the Singaporean *huayi* community as China’s implicit supporter. Some in China may point out the authoritative nature of the Singaporean government or the population’s inheritance of Chinese tradition and heritage as proof of Singapore’s cultural similarities to their own. This has been criticized as leading, at its worst, to “unrealistic expectations” in bilateral relations. Those more critical of China may conversely be targeted as part of its network of influence operations abroad. In particular, these influence operations may be criticized as deliberately targeting *huayi* communities with the intent of drawing them into Beijing’s sphere of influence. In Singapore, this includes the use of “cultural organizations, clan associations, business associations and youth programs” to cultivate an affinity to China or lobby governments on pro-China issues.

Back in Malaysia, Chinese officials have gone as far as visiting *huayi* communities, endorsing Chinese political candidates and donating to Chinese-language schools. This has come amid a period of a rise in ethnically-motivated sentiment within Malaysia, where in the past, the influence and actions of the local Chinese community have been blamed for infringing upon the

constitutionally guaranteed favoritism of the ethnic Malay majority.

More subversively, China's desire to "preserve the rights and interests" of overseas Chinese could very well be gradually influencing its relationship with the *huayi*. This is a phrase often used by Beijing to justify the behavior of Chinese companies or individuals abroad, or the overseas demonstrations of Chinese international students supporting China's stance on international affairs. It is a dangerous possibility that in the near future, Beijing may begin expanding the scope of this phrase to include the affairs of the *huayi* around the world.

This was the case in 2015, when China's ambassador to Malaysia protested "infringements" on Chinese national interests in response to local demonstrations against the local ethnic Chinese community. Inflammatory actions along these lines may exacerbate societal tensions in countries with large *huayi* communities and, through alienating them from their countries of residence, draw them further into China's sphere of societal and cultural influence.

Greater China

For a glimpse at the stresses that have already arisen in the Chinese diaspora, it is sufficient to look no further than the current and pertinent example provided by the COVID-19 pandemic. The simple and common fear of disease serves as a convenient mask for anti-Chinese or anti-Asian sentiment. Moreover, fear of the *huaqiao* by local communities as potential vectors of the virus has morphed into a larger fear of the *huayi*, with an underlying insecurity about any ties to China and the virus that these generational immigrants might have. Such rising inter-ethnic tensions may not have been the result of influence operations by Beijing, but could very well have the same effect in driving a wedge between the *huayi* and their countries of residence.

Under the Communist Party leadership presided over by President Xi Jinping, overseas Chinese continue to be "persuaded, induced, or in extremis, coerced into accepting allegiance to

China as at least part of their identity." This will most likely continue at least into the near future, placing additional stresses on overseas ethnic Chinese to identify with China over their country of residence.

Although vehemently denied by Beijing, some continue to speculate that there is an intention to promote a narrative of a "greater China" that includes all ethnic Chinese regardless of nationality. An overseas Chinese community professing a stronger affinity with this "greater China" would present a formidable weapon of soft power, especially in areas of the world where China finds economic and strategic value. Southeast Asia, with its large *huayi* population inhabiting a critical node in China's Belt and Road Initiative, will most certainly be one of these areas, and Beijing may soon look to influence opinion in a region increasingly lukewarm to its ventures.

This soft-power arsenal is often overshadowed by more high-profile examples of Chinese involvement in the affairs of foreign countries, from the tech giant Huawei's threats to information security in Europe and North America to debt-trap diplomacy in Africa and Asia, but it nevertheless remains a dangerous threat worldwide. In the short term, it would be crucial for governments to prioritize the resolution of ethnically-motivated tensions with large *huayi* communities. Although every country will have its own unique racial backdrop and solutions, a particular focus that may be especially useful includes a greater recognition of racially-motivated micro-aggressions that have been on the rise with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the prompt and judicious identification and handling of such issues in workplaces and in public.

Increased vigilance against Chinese influence in domestic affairs is also paramount, especially against the "agents of influence" who have used their prominent positions to attempt to pressure foreign policy decisions and public opinion. Countries that do so would not just be assuming a firm stance against China's attempts to subvert

public order but, more importantly, reaffirming their commitment to a clean, sovereign society free from coercion by foreign interests.

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Indonesia's Policy Over Travel Leads to Confusion for Eid

Muhammad Zulfikar Rakhmat
May 20, 2020

Indonesia should learn lessons from China on how to restrict travel during Eid al-Fitr.

Indonesia has been hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic. At the time of publishing, there have been more than 19,000 confirmed cases and over 1,200 deaths. Due to a lack of testing — just 776 people per 1 million in a country with a population of 268 million — the number of infections is believed to be much higher.

Now, Indonesians are concerned as Eid al-Fitr — the Islamic festival that marks the end of Ramadan — takes place on either May 23 or 24, and it is often a time when people travel from cities where they live and work back to their hometowns. In 2019, in the greater Jakarta area, there were 14.9 million people who traveled home for the festival. Likewise, there were 5.6 million in Central Java, 3.7 million in West Java and 1.6 million in East Java. This could mean that COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus, could spread even further if a similar situation takes place this week.

The problem is that urban centers like the greater Jakarta area are highly exposed to possible infections. In this region alone, around 6,000 people have been confirmed with COVID-

19 and 483 have died. If large numbers of people travel before Eid, there is a high risk of virus transmission in other regions such as Sumatra, Kalimantan, Sulawesi or the small villages of Java. These are places where urbanized Indonesians originally hail from and, therefore, if they return, there is a risk of these islands being exposed to the coronavirus.

While the government has introduced measures to restrict mass travel during Eid al-Fitr, its instructions have confused Indonesians. In this case, Indonesia should step up its efforts to limit travel during the Eid festivities, and it could take lessons from Beijing's handling of the Chinese New Year in January.

Indonesia's Confusing Policy

The confusion over Jakarta's policy to ban mass travel lies in the fact that just a few days after the measures were put forward, the government introduced another piece of legislation. This stipulated that people could return to their hometowns if they obtained a permit from the authorities, but only if they had a valid reason to travel.

As a result, many have criticized the government's actions. Not only that but, in the last few weeks, Indonesians have also focused on the difference between the terms *mudik* (going home) and *pulang kampung* (returning home). On April 22, President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo said in an interview that *mudik* is temporary but *pulang kampung* applies to those who return indefinitely. According to him, the former is for people who want to visit their home village for a short vacation — which is prohibited — while the latter refers to migrant workers who have lost their jobs due to the economic disruption caused by the pandemic.

In the government's definition, "returning home" involves the movement of people due to economic factors, while "going home" is a form of cultural behavior. For many, however, this shows that Jokowi's government is not serious about preventing a mass exodus during Eid al-Fitr to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

Both *mudik* and *pulang kampung* have been used interchangeably, which has led to certain questions. For example, what about those who still have jobs and can afford to live in big cities but want to go home for Eid? How will the government ensure that they don't travel?

The government has drawn up a plan for those who wish to return home indefinitely. This includes completing relevant paperwork, not returning to the city, undergoing health checks and adhering to self-isolation once back in their villages.

Yet given the number of people who simply want to return home for Eid al-Fitr — potentially reaching tens of millions — it is difficult to guarantee that this will be effective. Despite the distinction between *mudik* and *pulang kampung*, there will likely be people who just want to travel on Eid but falsely claim they wish to migrate back home permanently. A strong control mechanism from the government to identify those “going home” vs. others “returning home” will be difficult.

What makes the policy even more confusing is that despite the ban, the Ministry of Transport has permitted all commercial services to operate in the country. According to the government, the decision has been made to limit the impact of the coronavirus on the economy. The transport minister, Budi Karya Sumadi, has also allowed politicians to travel to other parts of the country as long as it is a business trip and not personal travel.

Given this, it is not surprising that the government's policy concerning mass travel during the Eid festival has faced criticism.

Lessons from Wuhan

In this regard, Indonesia could learn lessons from Wuhan, the Chinese city where the novel coronavirus was first discovered in late 2019, just weeks before the Chinese New Year. Like Eid in Indonesia, the New Year is a time where Chinese people go home in droves to spend time with their families.

The Chinese government knew that the mass movement of people would have meant the coronavirus would spread like wildfire in a country with 1.4 billion people, so the authorities introduced strict measures. The government halted nearly all public transport in and out of Wuhan — which is where the outbreak first emerged — just days before the Chinese New Year. This was combined with a lockdown of Wuhan as people were banned from even leaving their homes. Daily necessities like food and other supplies were delivered to them. Public places were also closed and events were canceled.

While the measures taken by China were criticized as being extreme, Indonesia should prohibit all travel during Eid al-Fitr. This should apply to both people visiting their home villages and also those who are migrating permanently. People who have lost their jobs should be allowed to return to their hometowns once Eid is over as a way of preventing mass travel at the same time. The government should introduce strict penalties for those who flout the law.

In Italy, before a total lockdown was introduced in March for the Lombardy region in an attempt to slow the spread of the coronavirus, people rushed to travel to different parts of the country. If the same thing happens in Indonesia, particularly in the epicenter of Jakarta, there is a risk of other hotspots of infection popping up. As a result, Indonesia would find it more and more difficult to control the health crisis.

Before a travel ban and lockdown were enforced in Wuhan, 5 million people had left the city. China provided facilities for quarantine and people diagnosed with COVID-19 were isolated in hospitals. This was supported by “grassroots activities for routine screening, contact tracing, and early detection and medical care of COVID-19 patients.”

With millions of people potentially traveling during Eid al-Fitr, it is clearly difficult for Indonesian authorities to monitor everyone. In this case, Jakarta needs to ensure that it prepares for an outbreak of the virus and clusters forming in other parts of the country. This will mean

testing, contact tracing and opening facilities for quarantine. Preparation is of paramount importance, but this must be combined with a ban on travel during this week's busy Islamic festival.

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Black Lives Matter Shines the Spotlight on the Shadow of Slavery

Hans-Georg Betz
June 30, 2020

Until there remain the vestiges of thinking that one “race” can be superior to another, Black Lives Matter will remain an unfinished project.

The Black Lives Matter movement has been sweeping advanced liberal democracies, from the United States to Western Europe, impacting even those countries, such as Switzerland, comparatively marginally involved in the slave trade. Black Lives Matter confronts all of these societies with their historical role in the trafficking and exploitation of human beings, whose only “defect” was that they were considered “not up to the standard” of civilization and, therefore, inferior — a convenient source of cheap labor.

The worldwide demonstrations protesting what is somewhat euphemistically referred to as police brutality in the United States have triggered a new awareness of Europeans' involvement in the denigration, subjugation, exploitation and extermination of “the people without history,” as the anthropologist Eric Jones famously put it.

Slavery in the United States was part of that story. Yet it should not be ignored that the vast majority of African slaves ended up in the

plantations of the Caribbean and South America, particularly in Brazil, where slavery was not abolished until 1888. Until today, in Brazil, racial discrimination, subtle or not, remains an issue, whether it involves coming to terms with the country's post-independence efforts to embranquecer — to “whiten” its population — or the fact that even today, Brazilian parents are fretting over the question of whether their newborn child is “white enough.”

A Brazilian student once told me that slavery in Brazil was “different,” milder, and that it cannot be compared to what happened in the United States. Perhaps. Films like the 1976 comedy “Xica,” which romanticizes the reality of slavery in Brazil, have done their part to sustain this narrative. The Portuguese continue to sustain the notion that they were “good colonizers” citing the fact “that inter-racial relationships flourished in Brazil,” as evidenced by “Xica.”

Different Story

Today's reality, however, tells a different story. Empirical evidence shows that in Brazil, like in the United States and the UK, “the virus is killing proportionally more black Brazilians than whites, exposing, in sharp relief, the country's staggering inequalities.” And like in the United States, black Brazilians account for a large majority of the victims of police shootings. Most recently, a 14-year-old became collateral damage during a drug-related police raid.

But, then, what do you expect from a country whose top official in charge of “promoting black culture” has dismissed the country's black rights movement as “scum,” vowed to defund the country's Black Consciousness Day and dismissed Black Lives Matter as “useless.” By the way, this top official happens to be a black Brazilian and, hardly surprising, a fervent acolyte of Brazil's would-be autocrat, Bolsonaro. Apparently, political leadership does make a difference, after all — often with disastrous consequences.

Superficially, there is not very much that Brazil and Australia have in common. Australia

was settled by the British, Brazil colonized by the Portuguese. Australia has a relatively small population, while Brazil is by far the most populous country in South America. Australia is part of the exclusive club of advanced capitalist economies, Brazil is still to a large extent a developing country. And yet, both countries have at least one thing in common — a history of seeking to preserve white supremacy.

In Brazil, this was particularly prominent in the period between the 1890s and the outbreak of the First World War. It was based on the notion that the white race was “more advanced” than other races. At the same time, there was the expectation that “racial mixing” was going to produce a “lighter population” either because “white genes were stronger” or because “people chose partners lighter than themselves.”

Australia officially introduced a “White Australia” policy in 1901. It was meant to preserve Australia as an “outpost of the British race” in the “South Seas.”

In practice, this meant “the prohibition of all alien coloured immigration” and, moreover, “at the earliest time, by reasonable and just means, the deportation or reduction of the number of aliens now in our midst.” It was not until after World War II that Australia’s white-only policy was abolished.

Abolition, however, did not necessarily mean an end to the controversy over the future make-up of Australian society. One of the most prominent reflections was the election of Queensland fish-and-chips shop owner, Pauline Hanson, in 1996, who would become one of Australia’s best-known and most reviled politicians.

At the time, Hanson ran on an anti-Asian platform, reminiscent of Australia’s white-only policy. Hanson’s fame did not last very long. After being investigated and falsely charged with electoral fraud, she disappeared from Australia’s political landscape, only to reappear some 20 years later. In 2016, Hanson was reelected, this time as a senator and on a platform that appealed to diffuse fears of Islam.

Stark Reminder

Hanson’s reelection serves as a stark reminder of the problems parts of Australian society still have with the country’s transition into a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural society. The arrival of Black Lives Matter on Australia’s shore has only but exacerbated existing tensions. Australia was never directly involved in the slave trade. Indirectly, however, it profited from it. In the 1830s, the British Parliament granted compensation to former slave owners for “the loss of their slaves (but not to those who had been enslaved).” The sum was gigantic, amounting to the equivalent of £300 billion (\$369 billion) in today’s money, which, at the time represented 40% of Britain’s income.

Some of these former slave owners compensated for the loss of their income used the money to resettle in Australia. In Australia, they gained prominence in a number of major ventures, such as the Australian Agricultural Company. It is perhaps not entirely surprising that official biographies of prominent Australians who had profited from compensation money omit mentioning their involvement in slavery.

The question of slavery, however, is hardly the only stain on Australia’s history. Some three years ago, the descendants of Pacific Islanders started to call for amending the epitaphs of the statues of famous Australian settlers to provide an honest reflection of history. The reference is to statues of Australian “pioneers” who had been involved in “blackbirding.” Blackbirding refers to the often involuntary transfer of Pacific Islanders to Queensland, where they worked as indentured laborers on sugar and cotton plantations. Once no longer needed, they were deported so they “would not threaten Australia’s design of racial autarchy.”

Altogether, some 60,000 islanders were shipped to Australia, “often kidnapped, tricked or coerced” and when they were deported, they oftentimes ended up in different islands from the ones they had come from. Although in a literal sense, blackbirding did not constitute slavery, it

did in many instances “hold all the hallmarks of slavery.”

With Black Lives Matter protests sweeping across the globe, the role of prominent Australian settlers has once again become a major issue of contention, and with it, the statues erected in their honor. It has been particularly contentious in Queensland where two cities, Mackay and Townsville, are named after settlers involved in blackbirding. So far in Australia, statues have not yet been toppled, but some of them have been spray-painted with graffiti (“no pride in genocide”) or defaced with red paint. This has some tradition in Australia. It already happened in 2017, provoking outrage from then-prime minister, Malcolm Turnbull, who characterized the acts as “a deeply disturbing and totalitarian campaign to not just challenge our history but to deny it and obliterate it” in a fashion reminiscent of Stalinism.

Any story about Black Lives Matter in Australia would be incomplete without making mention of Australia’s “indigenous population” — the Aboriginals and the Torres Strait Islanders — who make up around 2% of Australia’s population. It should also be remembered that it took until 1967 for Australia’s indigenous population to be formally recognized as Australian citizens — the result of a constitutional referendum that saw 91% of voters come out in support of indigenous people’s rights.

In the decades that followed, indigenous rights issues, such as the forcible removal by federal government authorities of indigenous children from their families as part of a policy of assimilation continued to remain on the political agenda, much to the chagrin of Australia’s far right — the 9%, presumably, who in 1967 had refused to grant basic human rights to Australia’s indigenous population.

Back With a Vengeance

Enter Pauline Hanson. During her first tenure in Parliament, one of Hanson’s favorite targets besides Asian migrants was what she called the

“Aboriginal industry.” With Black Lives Matter, Hanson’s vitriol has come back with a vengeance. Already before the Black Lives Matter movement, Hanson provoked outrage. During a debate on how to close the gap between indigenous people and the rest of the country’s population, Hanson charged that the reason Aboriginal Australians failed to advance was their refusal to change, “their own lack of commitment and responsibility to helping themselves.”

Instead of devoting more funds to the advancement of indigenous people, the government should spend them elsewhere. With the Black Lives Matter movement gaining steam, and the role of prominent settlers once again coming under close scrutiny, Hanson went into attack mode. And for good reasons. After all, Hanson’s constituency is in Queensland, the state most associated with blackbirding.

In the past, Hanson has been closely associated with the defense of white supremacy in Australia. In late 2018, Hanson introduced a motion designed to recognize “anti-white racism” in Australia and to extend official recognition to the notion that “it is OK to be white.” At the same time, Hanson has gone on record charging that white men are the “most demonized” group in Australia.

To a certain extent, Hanson’s rhetoric does seem to resonate among Australia’s white majority. A few weeks ago, a survey found a relative plurality of Australians agreeing with the notion that “police forces in Australia are not institutionally racist against Indigenous Australians.” Official statistics tell a different story. A government report from 2018 found that indigenous people were considerably more likely to end up in jail than the rest of the population. Under the circumstances, the focus of Black Lives Matter demonstrations in Australia on discrimination on the part of the police against indigenous people was not entirely without cause. Except for Pauline Hanson. True to the narrative she has been peddling for decades, in early June she introduced a motion in the Australian Senate

in support of the notion that “all lives matter.” The attempt to put the motion up for a vote was roundly defeated by the vast majority of senators, who refused to get duped by the senator from Queensland. As the Labor Senate leader, Penny Wong, put it, “Asserting black lives matter isn’t saying that other lives do not matter.”

The Many Faces of Racism

Ever since the election of Donald Trump, the question of white supremacy has been a constant in the analysis of contemporary American politics. The United States, however, is hardly the only country infected with it. The recent wave of Black Lives Matter demonstrations has once again turned the spotlight on the vestiges of slavery, colonialism, racism, discrimination and white privilege.

These vestiges are felt wherever white supremacy took roots centuries ago, from the United States to Brazil, from Australia to, most infamously, South Africa. Most deplorably, perhaps, it did not even halt with “progressive regimes,” like the one in Cuba. Socialism apparently does not immunize against racial discrimination. The Cuban Revolution was led by white men, and, until recently, white men occupied all the positions of power. Black Cubans were the losers of Cuba’s opening to capitalist countries, which particularly benefited the tourism industry. Black Cubans were hardly ever hired in that sector, a source of hard currency tips; instead, the industry preferred hiring light-skinned Cubans, their more “pleasant aspect” considered to be more appealing to Western customers.

Racism has many faces. One of its most important ones is the notion that, for whatever reason, one “race” is superior to another. In the worst case, this means extermination or the reduction of the inferior race to the status of slave labor. This arguably accounts for Hitler’s continued appeal in various parts of the world. A milder form is reflected in the famous notion of the “white man’s burden” — the onerous task of cajoling “savages” to see and imbue the benefits

and wonders of “civilization” and dragging them into the 19th, 20th or 21st century.

Black Lives Matter is a reminder of the horrors this kind of thinking engendered, in Europe, North America, Latin America, the Antipodes and elsewhere. Spray-painting, toppling statues is easy. Coming to terms with the mindset that allowed British slave traders, Portuguese slave owners, Spanish conquistadores as well as German and Belgian colonial officers to commit heinous crimes against humanity is a quite different thing. Until this is accomplished, Black Lives Matter remains an unfinished project.

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China Continues Its Persecution of Uighur Muslims

Ayesha Baloch & Rahima Mahmut
July 1, 2020

As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, China must be held accountable for its flagrant and unapologetic violations of human rights.

The coronavirus pandemic has laid bare the shortcomings of the capitalist and institutionally racist systems that govern our world, but its precedence in the media has drawn attention away from human rights abuses that continue to take place. Worse still, the global lockdowns caused by the public health crisis have been relentlessly exploited by various political actors as a means to curb human rights such as freedom of speech, expression and movement.

One of the most obvious and disturbing illustrations of this is China’s national security law (NSL) that has been implemented in Hong Kong. The NSL is the nail in the coffin for Hong

Kong, which previously enjoyed autonomy and freedom from mainland China, and it will target “subversion, succession, terrorism and foreign interference.” By criminalizing broad, vague offenses that include criticism of the government and peaceful protests, China aims to fully absorb Hong Kong into the mainland’s system of political repression.

Amidst international friction over China’s mishandling of the coronavirus outbreak as the first epicenter of the pandemic, there is increasing concern over the political crackdown in Hong Kong, which has witnessed protests for the past year and rapidly become the nucleus of the struggle for freedom, democracy and human rights in China.

Meanwhile, in Xinjiang...

Yet while Hong Kong has rightfully gained media attention and continues to struggle for its freedom, the Chinese government has pressed on with its “mass arbitrary detention, torture, and mistreatment” of Uighur Muslims. Since August 2016, this repression has culminated in the detention of over 1 million Uighurs, a humanitarian catastrophe of monumental proportions.

The Uighurs are a community of some 11 million Turkic Muslims living in China’s Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR). Despite the name, Uighurs are awarded little autonomy and have been targeted by the Chinese government since 1949, following the incorporation of East Turkestan into mainland China. As a communist state, China views social groups that have ethnic or religious differences as ethno-nationalist threats.

In a country with a majority Han population, this has resulted in repeated attempts to pacify and assimilate communities such as the Uighurs, who are ethnically and culturally more closer to Central Asian nations and identify religiously as Muslim. It is only recently that the persecution of Uighurs has been brought to the attention of the international community, largely due to China’s undeniable geopolitical importance and the fact

that outside media are banned from reporting on Xinjiang.

In spite of the Chinese government’s efforts to suppress information, the work of organizations like the World Uyghur Congress and the Uyghur Solidarity Campaign have brought the crisis to the forefront of the discussion on human rights, with various countries and political actors condemning China’s actions. In an apparent U-turn from his previous encouragement of detention camps for Uighurs, US President Donald Trump signed into law the Uighur Human Rights Policy Act on June 17, calling for sanctions on the Chinese officials responsible.

In the United Kingdom, Shadow Foreign Secretary Lisa Nandy said in May that China’s behavior “should give us cause for concern.” Meanwhile, the shadow secretary for Asia and the Pacific, Stephen Kinnock, classed former Prime Minister David Cameron’s golden era of engagement with China as “an abject failure.” The Labour Party’s general stance on China has also hardened significantly, while the recent launch of the China Research Group by a number of Conservative MPs makes it clear that there is little debate on China’s abhorrent human rights record among British politicians.

The fact that even Conservative MPs have begun to openly condemn China’s actions should further encourage Labour Party action, as this opens up the possibility of cross-party talks and increases the potential for meaningful and government-sanctioned measures. The current media scrutiny on China due to the spread of COVID-19 — the disease caused by the novel coronavirus — also provides an opportunity to further draw attention to this ongoing humanitarian crisis. Now more than ever, the Conservative-led government in the UK must ensure that safeguarding human rights remains a priority.

Despotic Measures

Since May 2014, the Chinese government has implemented the “Strike Hard Campaign Against Violent Terrorism” in Xinjiang, depriving Uighur

Muslims of their most fundamental human rights. The ascension of Party Secretary Chen Quanguo as leader of Xinjiang in 2016 has resulted in increasingly despotic measures. Practicing Islam has essentially been forbidden. Authorities confiscate religious paraphernalia, including copies of the Quran and prayer mats, while “abnormally long” beards and Muslim veils are banned, at the risk of inciting “religious fanaticism.”

The government has also taken to closing, converting and demolishing mosques. The Keriya Aitika Mosque in Xinjiang, a major historical and cultural site protected at the national level, was destroyed sometime in early 2018. Xinjiang has also witnessed the emergence of a surveillance state, as QR codes have been displayed on the front of Uighur homes, in order to readily access personal details and monitor those living inside. Former residents have claimed that they are forced to take biometric tests and spy on their neighbors.

Some Uighur Muslims have had their passports confiscated, while many who live abroad, including university students, are subject to extradition and internment. Freedom of movement has been curtailed, as residents of Xinjiang must apply for permission to leave their local area, whether to visit family or even for medical purposes.

The most alarming development in the crackdown on Uighurs has been the institution of concentration camps. The government has continued to evade responsibility, with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi describing reports of the camps and the detention of over 1 million Uighur Muslims as “fake news” in February. Where the presence of camps has been acknowledged, they are portrayed merely as vocational training centers. In these camps, Uighur prisoners are forced to learn Mandarin, swear loyalty to Chinese President Xi Jinping and renounce their religion. An official Chinese Communist Youth League recording, obtained by Radio Free Asia, details the chilling aims of “re-education hospitals” used to “cleanse the virus

from their brain and restore their normal mind.” Resistance, or failing a “lesson,” is punishable by solitary confinement, starvation or being forced to stand for 24-hour periods, among other methods of physical and psychological torture, including sexual assault.

A report by AFP mentions that guards are equipped with “tear gas, Tasers, stun guns and spiked clubs” to keep order, while a former inmate claims that he was forced to drink alcohol and eat pork while incarcerated, both of which are prohibited in Islam. A recent report by Deutsche Welle has uncovered that those detained are retroactively made to “choose” the crimes for which they have been imprisoned from a list of 70 acts, which includes traveling, contacting people abroad, praying or wearing a headscarf. After picking their crime, detainees are forced to face a sham trial in which they have no legal representation and are “convicted without evidence or due process of any kind.”

Such overwhelming evidence doubtlessly implicates the Chinese government in a draconian campaign of cultural cleansing and human rights abuses of monumental proportions.

Uighurs and Global Companies

A chilling development was recently reported by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, which revealed that hundreds of thousands of Uighur Muslims previously held in detention centers were now being transferred to factories across the country. Through forced Uighur labor, China is producing cotton and other products for various well-known companies, including Apple, Dell, Nike and H&M, according to the report. Around 84 percent of China’s cotton is produced in Xinjiang.

With media access even more fraught due to the coronavirus pandemic, developments with the Uighur crisis have been increasingly difficult to trace. International support groups have urged the World Health Organization to send a fact-finding mission to the camps amid fears that unsanitary conditions are leading to unreported cases of COVID-19. It is evident, however, that the

Chinese government shows no signs of accepting responsibility, let alone ending its relentless persecution of the Uighur Muslim population. Moreover, with the global recession caused by coronavirus lockdowns, China has seemingly transformed its insidious campaign of persecution into one that generates economic gains through forced labor.

As the most populous country in the world, a principal geopolitical actor and one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, China must be held accountable for its flagrant and unapologetic violations of human rights. We must not allow the COVID-19 pandemic to drown out the voices of China's Uighur Muslim population.

With the United States now likely to impose sanctions, the UK has a duty — and a prime opportunity — to take action. Now is the time to raise awareness and initiate cross-party dialogue to take strong, united measures to safeguard human rights. Now is the time to sanction global companies and ban Chinese cotton imports that have been produced with forced Uighur labor. Now is the time for the UK to uphold its pledge to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and bring about a swift end to “the largest mass incarceration of a minority population in the world today.”

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The Importance of the US-South Korea Relationship

Steve Westly & James Bang
October 26, 2020

Presidential leadership needs to be even-handed and sensitive to the concerns of US allies.

There are many things we look for in a president. We look for leadership and the ability to manage grave challenges like a pandemic. While most people are focused on avoiding COVID-19 and keeping their jobs, we would be wise to remember that one of the most important roles for any president is to build a set of global allies who will stand with us when inevitable conflicts occur.

Today, America faces unprecedented challenges from foreign powers, especially China and North Korea. To meet the challenges, we must build a coherent foreign policy that the world — especially our allies — can understand and support. We are witnessing China increasingly flexing its muscles on the Indian border, in Hong Kong, in the South China Sea and with Taiwan. America puts itself at risk to not realize that China is investing much of its resources into a growing, multifaceted military.

The US needs to build alliances throughout Asia to ensure our stability for the next century. We need to be doubling down on our relationships with India, Vietnam, Taiwan, Japan and especially South Korea. South Korea is the world's 12th-largest economic power and one of America's strongest allies for the last 60 years. It has been a bastion of democracy housing one of the largest US military bases in Asia. It also houses an essential element of the West's global supply chain for technology, transportation and telecommunications. This supply chain is more important than ever if relations with China continue to deteriorate.

While the importance of a strong South Korea policy is at an all-time high, US President Donald Trump managed to stick his finger in the eye of our Korean allies. In 2019, Trump demanded “out of thin air” that the Koreans pay \$4.7 billion per year to station US military forces on the Korean Peninsula, according to CNN.

There is no question that our allies have to pay their fair share for defense. However, cost-sharing negotiations must be based on rationale and data. At precisely the time we need strong allies in Asia, President Trump is burning bridges. This is a major political gaffe that America needs to correct before our relationship suffers long-term damage. If the South Koreans cannot count on reasonable and predictable US foreign policy, they will have little choice but to abandon Washington and to seek out other alliances.

The South Koreans weren't the only ones taken by surprise. Even Republican Senators Cory Gardner and Marco Rubio were unprepared to discuss the president's comments. Senator Ed Markey, the top Democrat on the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, said, “If South Korea decides that it is better off without the United States, President Trump will have undermined an over 60-year shared commitment to peace, stability, and rule of law.”

The United States can do better. We need to deepen our relationship with South Korea as an essential partner for dealing with North Korea and China. We should be doing the same with other Asian countries and continue to promote the policies that Democratic and Republican secretaries of state have built over decades. A president needs to communicate a consistent game plan that the American people — and our allies — can understand and count on.

Presidential leadership needs to be even-handed and sensitive to the concerns of our allies. Demands should be replaced by reasonable requests and ample explanations. Insisting that allies vastly increase payments to the United States might make good domestic election-year

politics at the cost of American safety in the world.

If we do not rethink the importance of our allies soon, we may be left to fight the next war alone.

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CENTRAL & SOUTH ASIA

Will the US-Taliban Deal Bring Peace to Afghanistan?

Abbas Farasoo & Roh Yakobi
March 2, 2020

Having triumphed over the United States, the Taliban are ready to enter into intra-Afghan talks with confidence and purpose.

After a week-long reduction in violence to test the Taliban's ability to control their fighters on the ground in Afghanistan, the US and the Taliban signed their long-awaited peace agreement on February 29 in Qatar's capital, Doha. The deal, officially titled the Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan, was signed by the US envoy, Zalmay Khalilzad, an Afghan-born American diplomat, and the Taliban's political chief, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, a co-founder of the group.

The agreement is expected to bring an end to nearly two decades of American and NATO military presence in Afghanistan in return for the Taliban cutting ties with al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups threatening the security of US and allied troops. However, another key element of the deal is for the Taliban to formally sit down with what is referred to as the “Afghan sides” — not once mentioning the Afghan government —

to hammer out a sustainable end to the conflict as a whole.

In tandem with the signing ceremony in Doha, Afghanistan's president, Ashraf Ghani, spoke to his countrymen and women in the capital Kabul. In an apparent show of solidarity with the Afghan government, Ghani was flanked by the NATO chief, Jens Stoltenberg, and US Secretary of Defense Mark Esper. The Afghan and US governments issued a joint declaration of commitment to future "positive relations, including economic cooperation for reconstruction."

A similar, albeit vague and caveated line, is also contained within the US-Taliban agreement, which states that "The United States will seek economic cooperation for reconstruction with the new post-settlement Afghan Islamic government as determined by the intra-Afghan dialogue and negotiations." The US has left enough wriggle room for itself about its future relationship with Afghanistan, whatever turn the country takes.

Taliban Victory?

Within hours of the agreement being signed, the leader of the Taliban, Hibatullah Akhundzada, congratulated his men on their "great victory" and urged them to "strengthen and organize your ranks to achieve the establishment of an Islamic government" following the withdrawal of foreign troops. His representative in Doha had struck a somber tone earlier, calling on Afghans to come together for "Islamic values" — no doubt a point of great contention in future intra-Afghan talks.

The Taliban now have in writing — and signed — what they wanted from Washington. In fact, they have extracted much more than they bargained for.

Despite US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo warning the Taliban against declaring victory and reminding them of how much Afghanistan and its people have changed since the first US soldier landed in the country almost two decades ago, the Taliban's sense of victory is not out of place. Not only have US-led forces agreed to leave the country, but the Taliban has now also gained de

facto international recognition and legitimacy in the process of negotiating their demands.

To mark their day, the Taliban delegation marched triumphantly through the streets of Doha, proudly waving white flags to the chants of "Long live the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan!" The Taliban can now partner with the US against al-Qaeda and the Islamic State Khorasan Province, as Mike Pompeo alluded to in his speech during the ceremony, an admission of failure by America's diplomat-in-chief.

The sense of victory for the Taliban makes the intra-Afghan dialogue difficult because, having been granted de facto legitimacy, the group will not soften its position in the negotiations with non-Taliban sides like the official government. This increases the concerns about a negotiated settlement in the future.

The Pakistan Factor

The US lost the war against the Taliban because, in its nearly two decades of involvement in Afghanistan, it failed to pursue a coherent political or military strategy capable of winning the war, which required turning Pakistan into a truthful ally. The Bush administration managed to make the then-Pakistani military dictator, General Pervez Musharraf, join in the war on terror within days of 9/11 attacks by cajoling him to give up on the Taliban despite his plea to facilitate talks between the US government and the group harboring al-Qaeda. In return for its cooperation, Pakistan was showered with military and economic aid, as well as being elevated to the status of Washington's major non-NATO ally.

But Pakistan never fully came on board. It kept the Taliban as an indispensable policy instrument toward Afghanistan and helped it mount an insurgency that cost countless lives. Years of vigorous protestations from American officials, including Zalmay Khalilzad, and their Afghan counterparts did little to dissuade Islamabad. In the end, with the US failing to turn Pakistan, the latter succeeded in turning the former. Roles reversed: Pakistan managed to get the US to talk to the Taliban, and on its terms.

What we saw unfold in Doha on Saturday was a victory made in Islamabad.

In order to have Pakistan's cooperation in reaching a "peace deal" with the Taliban, the US ignored mentioning anything about the future of the Taliban's sanctuaries in Pakistan in the agreement with the Taliban. This leaves the Taliban-Pakistan alignment as a critical factor that can undermine the process of the intra-Afghan talks. Thus, Pakistan will continue its support of the Taliban as its regional ally, making it difficult to put an end to the conflict once and for all.

Giving Pakistan a major role in negotiations without discussing its support for the Taliban brings back the specter of the 1988 Geneva Accords between Kabul and Islamabad that paved the way for the Soviet withdrawal and, subsequently, the collapse of the Afghan government. After the accords were signed, Pakistan continued its support for the mujahedeen to attack Kabul and overthrow the government of Mohammad Najibullah. This time again, the Taliban kept sanctuaries in Pakistan and signed an agreement with the US to leave the country without recognizing the Afghan government as part of the intra-Afghan talks.

Afghan Leadership Crisis

Having triumphed over the United States, the Taliban are ready to enter the intra-Afghan talks with confidence and purpose. The Afghan government, led by Ashraf Ghani and his partner, the Chief Executive of the National Unity Government Abdullah Abdullah, is mired in a political crisis over the result of the last presidential election, with Ghani declared as the winner by the country's Independent Election Commission. The ongoing tussle for power in Kabul has left little bandwidth for much else, least of all preparations for talks.

Kabul-based leaders, and the political class as a whole, have failed to agree on a framework in order to face down the Taliban and defend what the country has gained since the group was last in power. The lack of direction and unity in Kabul

casts a dark shadow over what the negotiations with the Taliban will hold for the future of the country. We are yet to hear what objectives the Afghan government and those with a stake in the upcoming talks will pursue.

The Taliban have kept a constructive ambiguity on issues relating to women's rights, the rights of religious and ethnic minorities, freedom of the press and the future make-up of the Afghan state and its political system. This ambiguity is the main source of concern in the country because of the Taliban's past human rights violation, their fanatical interpretation of Islamic law and their ethnocentric ambition for a monopoly of power. In addition, they are yet to accept the legitimacy of the Afghan government as the representative of the people of Afghanistan in the negotiations.

However, with the US set to leave Afghanistan in 14 months' time, and the terms of the agreement being relatively easy for the Taliban to meet, Kabul will have no leverage unless it quickly forms a united front with a set of resolute, shared objectives. Kabul's make-it-up-as-you-go-along attitude will not only jeopardize any existing chance of a political settlement for the country, but will feed into the Taliban's overconfidence and make the feasibility of compromise from both sides difficult. United, armed and experienced, the Taliban will have very little incentive to soften their attitude or lower demands while seating across from an inept, self-centered and disunited group of Afghans.

This will heighten the risks of derailing the whole process and plunge the country into a new cycle of violence and bloodshed. The Taliban have resumed attacks on Afghan security forces, putting an end to the "reduction in violence" across the country against Afghan security forces and civilians. With tensions brewing between Kabul and Washington over the release of 5,000 Taliban prisoners, it seems that the group wants to head into the intra-Afghan talks with guns blazing.

It is noteworthy that disunity among non-Taliban sides does not mean that the Taliban could easily take over the entire country by defeating Afghan security forces and other anti-Taliban groups. Rather, disagreement between everyone on everything makes peace difficult, especially when one side has sanctuaries in a neighboring country and uses it to enforce violence. The bloody civil war in the 1990s shows that any attempt to solve disagreements by force and by enforcement from a neighboring country only prolongs violence and involves more regional actors in the conflict.

Given a sense of Taliban victory, concerns arise that the group will not soften its position and will attempt to use violence during the negotiations as bargaining leverage to receive more concessions. If this happens, it will intensify the conflict that will now likely involve more regional actors and rivals, taking on a proxy-war dimension.

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Five Urgent Economic Reforms for India

Atul Singh & Manu Sharma
May 5, 2020

The COVID-19 crisis presents an opportunity to adopt new policies that leverage India's domestic markets for industrialization, employment and growth.

US President Donald Trump had already taken a sledgehammer to the export-led growth model. With the COVID-19 pandemic rousing primal passions, hitherto

unfashionable ideas are emerging like Dracula from their grave. Protecting infant industries to improve future competitive advantage or strategic players for national security reasons are policies many are embracing with gusto again. Some might argue protectionism never really went out of fashion, citing Boeing and Airbus as classic examples, but now many governments are treating masks and ventilators as national priorities. Clearly, a new zeitgeist is underway.

Why Did the Indian Elephant Move Slowly?

Like all economic systems, the post-World War II Bretton Woods order had winners and losers. Some benefited more than others. The US gave countries that opposed the Soviet Union and helped bring the demise of the Red Empire access to its capital, markets and even technology. As a Soviet ally, India benefited from the communist giant's munificence but, even so, it remained trapped in the Hindu rate of growth and lagged behind Asian tigers allied to the US.

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, India faced a balance of payments crisis. It had to fly out its gold reserves to London to secure dollars to keep the country going. With its Soviet godfather dead, New Delhi had no option but to liberalize its economy, releasing the stranglehold its infamous bureaucrats had maintained since independence in 1947. This stranglehold is popularly known as the Licence-Permit-Quota Raj, which replaced the British Raj under India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru.

The Indian economy, long compared to a lumbering elephant, broke into a run once businesses did not have to propitiate bureaucrats to the same degree as before. In particular, the services sector boomed with jobs in IT outsourcing growing rapidly and bringing in valuable export earnings.

Unlike China, though, India did not build infrastructure, develop manufacturing, generate employment and deliver prosperity in its economy. Its growth spurt was good when compared to the pre-1991 era but paled in comparison to its East Asian peers, especially

China. The fruits of growth in India were more unevenly distributed as well, which reflected in its poor performance on the human development index.

Analysts theorized profusely about India's poor performance, blaming a range of factors from democracy to Hinduism. A few even criticized the British-created civil services, the holy cows of Indian society. While it is true that India's colonial bureaucracy is inefficient and corrupt, its judiciary is equally detrimental to the economy.

Due to the glacial pace of hearings, it takes 1,445 days to enforce a contract, and India ranks a lowly 163 out of a total of 188 countries. Activist judges have further increased risk and uncertainty in the economy. Both domestic players and foreign companies dread the kiss of death by Indian courts.

Politicians in India do not escape blame. Most are poorly-educated and are prisoners of the Nehruvian mindset. Like politicians elsewhere, their focus is on the next election. In contrast to British or German politicians, they are not as focused on the economy. They lack policy chops and instead rely on bureaucrats who almost invariably do not have economic training or business experience. Rarely do India's politicians seek impartial, honest advice.

Time for the Status Quo to Go

India's economic policies have to change. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused the greatest crisis to the global economy since the Great Depression of 1929. With a population of more than 1.3 billion and still-widespread poverty, India has no choice but to act boldly and speedily. The authors propose that India adopts a five-prong policy to stimulate its economy.

First, the country must promote industry and turn the "Make in India" initiative into a reality. In 2017, information and communications technology (ICT) goods comprised more than 9.7% of India's imports and less than 0.9% of its exports. These ICT goods can and should be manufactured in India just as cars are. India must

set up special manufacturing zones (SMZs) with liberal industrial permissions, land policy, transparent tax regimes and sovereign guarantees of policy stability.

There are numerous foreign companies who want access to Indian markets. India must welcome them with open arms on one condition: foreign players must manufacture domestically. This policy has already been tried in the car market, and players like Toyota, Honda, Suzuki, Kia and SAIC are manufacturing in the country. Companies in other sectors could do the same if India drafts a decent SMZ policy.

Of course, this policy would also be available to domestic firms. They could raise capital either domestically or through foreign capital markets. Theoretically, Indian players like Mahindra and Tata could export to developing countries around the world, especially in Africa, because conditions in these places are similar.

Some might ask how this policy is different from the Nehruvian model of import substitution. That policy protected the domestic industry, which was given a captive market to sell substandard goods, such as the legendary Ambassador car of Hindustan Motors. Domestic players never benchmarked their quality with their international peers and earned merry profits as crony capitalists, pleasing politicians and bureaucrats, not consumers who bought their products. This proposed policy welcomes every leading global player to manufacture high-quality products in India for the Indian consumer.

It is important to remember that the Nehruvian policy of import substitution failed abysmally. Despite the Soviet Union selling oil at subsidized rates or giving it away through a barter system, the threat of a balance of payments crisis was never far away. India's energy imports kept growing, but it was unable to manufacture anything cheap enough or of high-quality to compete globally. As a result, exports lagged behind imports. If global players manufacture in India, that would cut down imports and sharpen the domestic ability to compete in the global export market.

Second, India's public sector is a sleeping giant that must be woken up. For decades, it has been used for patronage by politicians and bureaucrats. Officers of the heaven-born Indian Administrative Service (IAS) run businesses as diverse as Air India, the Food Corporation of India and Indian Tourism Development Corporation. They invariably have no industry expertise, guaranteed multi-decade careers and no penalty for failure. For example, Air India is in disarray, but no IAS officer who headed it has ever suffered any negative consequences. The same is true for every loss-making public sector unit that bleeds the taxpayer.

Many IAS officers like to compare themselves to American CEOs. They claim that the latter often lack industry expertise too. They forget that model has changed dramatically. Every internet giant is headed by CEOs who know their industry inside out. The days when Steve Jobs invited John Sculley of Pepsi fame to head Apple are long over. It is important to remember that, for all his success at Pepsi, Sculley nearly killed Apple. It was Jobs who revived Apple and made it the company it is today. Silicon Valley has not forgotten that bitter lesson.

Privatizing the public sector is an option but must be used judiciously. In a country with a history of crony capitalism, there is a danger of selling the family silver at fire-sale prices. The disastrous privatization of the public sector in Russia is a warning to all former socialist countries, and India is no exception. Instead, professionalizing the public sector is the better policy choice. The Antrix Corporation, with its numerous successes in space technologies and services, is a shining exemplar for the rest of the public sector.

Managing directors like Rakesh Sashibhushan of Antrix and E. Sreedharan, the legendary engineer who built Konkan Railway and Delhi Metro, are the need of the hour. Top positions cannot be the birthright of IAS officers with no domain expertise. Instead, professional management with industry experience must run India's public sector. Public sector boards must

change too. They must have people with varied, relevant skill sets, not bureaucrats or politicians or sycophants looking for sinecures.

The State Must Serve, Not Rule

Third, stakeholders such as manufacturers, traders and professionals must have a right to redressal of grievance against the government. Currently, Indian bureaucrats are utterly unaccountable. They can and do change policies on whims with little due process or notice, causing carnage. A petty clerk can sit over a file forever, delaying a tax refund or project clearance. India's British-designed bureaucracy is rentier in its DNA. It was supposed to suppress economic activity so that India would remain the supplier of raw materials and a market for British goods. That mentality persists and bureaucrats demand constant genuflection, if not outright bribes.

Furthermore, Indian bureaucrats wield far too much arbitrary power. Stakeholders can be falsely charged under confusing laws, indefinitely dragged to courts, lose their livelihood and perhaps lives with no accountability for the state or the wrongdoing bureaucrat. A doctor or accountant is liable for negligence under the law. The Indian bureaucrat is liable for nothing. Till today, the goods and services tax (GST) filing system remains glitchy. If a small trader's tax was not refunded in time, turning his or her cash flow issue into a solvency one, then the official responsible for the delay must face some penalty.

In a system with interminable delays, every bureaucrat must have a time limit to make a decision. If she or he fails to make a decision, then the stakeholder's file must be deemed automatically approved. At the same time, India needs fast-track, independent tribunals to speedily resolve stakeholder complaints. The "pocket veto" of bureaucrats in which they stymie economic activity by taking no action has to go. The state cannot penalize its citizens while its bureaucrats behave with impunity.

Fourth, Indian bureaucrats must no longer have the power to throttle supply-side activity.

The default principle of the British-designed still-colonial state is that activities not explicitly permitted are often automatically deemed illegal. In much of the world, if an activity is not expressly forbidden by the law, the citizen has the freedom to engage in it. In India, an activity not expressly permitted by law or regulation can be shut down anytime. The fact it might be of much economic or social value, provide employment or essential services for a community is irrelevant. Fines, long-drawn inquiries and even closure are real consequences if even a petty bureaucrat takes umbrage.

It is important to note that the British did not design such an oppressive bureaucracy for themselves. There is no British Administrative Service in the UK. The MI6, Scotland Yard, the British Treasury and the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office recruit horses for courses who are accountable for their performance. In contrast, Indian bureaucrats behave as rulers, not as public servants. In states such as Vietnam or Thailand that are not democracies like India, the default setting is different and labor, tax or environment regulators are not as powerful. This allows for greater entrepreneurial and economic activity.

Indian bureaucrats constantly argue that changing the default setting is a prelude to chaos. They need onerous laws to avoid a humongous country like India from descending into disorder. The reality is that small businesses are increasingly crushed by compliance requirements of innumerable regulations. If a trader fails to clarify, say, subclause three of clause 30 on the 10th page, then she or he can spend eternity running from pillar to post. The government has to simplify forms and stop interfering in economic activity if it wants income, jobs and growth to increase.

Victorian Moralizing Costs Too Much

Finally, India must discard its Victorian attitudes toward “sin” industries and rationalize its policies toward them. The country faces a massive economic crisis. In particular, state governments

may run out of cash. Many of them derive a significant percentage of their revenues from taxing liquor or tobacco and running lotteries. Yet both central and state follow moralizing, inconsistent and incoherent policies for these “sin” industries that do not make any sense at all.

While known carcinogens like khaini — the Indian version of fermented, dried tobacco — can be sold freely, too many relatively innocuous activities are either illegal or under restrictive regulations. One of the authors experienced the folly of prohibition as a young officer in Nagaland. Even pastors preaching temperance drank clandestinely as did police officers seizing liquor, making bootlegging the biggest industry in this American Baptist state. This caused a massive loss of revenue to Nagaland while fostering a culture of all-pervasive corruption. Other states have similarly impractical holier-than-thou policies.

Similarly, many Indian states take a strong stance against so-called sinful activities such as betting and live entertainment. As a result, these activities are pushed into the black economy. This benefits criminal rackets and deprives states of revenues, increasing the tax burden on more socially desirable activities. Puritanism in India has perverse consequences. A more mature approach that formalizes and taxes “sin” industries instead of driving them underground will boost the Indian economy immensely. India can take inspiration from its past. The Khajuraho Temples still draw in tourists and continue to benefit the local economy centuries after their construction.

It is an open secret that Indians flock to casinos in Singapore and Macau. India could allow casinos in coastal areas or islands to keep precious capital home and boost tax revenues. Goa already allows for gambling in circuitous ways. A rational policy toward gambling and betting is long overdue.

Question 1: Can These Policies Work?

For all its faults, India is a large economy and has established some domestic market institutions.

Unlike the 1950s or even the 1960s, the country is not facing the same existential questions. At that time, India suffered from food insecurity, lacked capital and had a lingering suspicion of corporations, which was only natural given its colonization by the British East India Company.

These policies are not advocating autarky like the Nehruvian model. They are not advocating East Asian-style export-led growth. That ship has sailed. The World Trade Organization (WTO) estimates that trade could fall by as much as 32% in 2020 thanks to COVID-19. Therefore, domestic industrialization through domestic players, foreign capital and foreign direct investment is the way forward.

Question 2: Will They Work?

In the pre-pandemic world, India could not compete with Japan, South Korea, China and other Asian economies. These countries had mastered the manufacturing game with scale, technology and supply chain linkages in their favor. Furthermore, the WTO rules did not allow India to support domestic industry. The free trade agreements India signed over the years also opened up markets to foreign players, decimating domestic rivals.

COVID-19 has fundamentally changed the rules of the game. Trump had already initiated a trade war against China. Now, other countries are turning away from the haloed principles of free trade, which was never truly free in the first place. Trade deals have always been a product of torturous negotiations, and Indian bureaucrats with little domain expertise or legal training have negotiated poor deals for the country. Feckless political leadership did not help either.

The post-pandemic world will give India a historic opportunity to reset the clock. Already, it has walked out of negotiations for the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), a trade bloc largely of East and Southeast Asian nations. Now, the RCEP wants India back at the table. This demonstrates that companies in these nations want access to Indian markets. Instead of signing yet another FTA, India must play

hardball and welcome these companies to manufacture their wares within Indian shores. If it does so, there is no reason why this domestic industrialization will not work.

Question 3: Are They Worth Undertaking?

With a broken financial sector, comatose private sector and clueless governance of the economy, India could experience mass suffering and political turmoil. The government has shown much political will on issues like Article 370 in Kashmir that have plagued the nation since 1947. It is time for it to show similar will in the economic realm and implement long-overdue structural reforms that include changing the toxic nature of its colonial state.

The services sector is at a saturation point. Agriculture remains stagnant and industry has been hit hard. India desperately needs a new growth engine. If India boosts domestic manufacturing, reforms its underperforming public sector, gives stakeholders the right to redress their grievances against the state, takes away supply-side constraints and rationalizes policy on “sin industries,” it could enter a multi-decade growth spurt as in 1991. Then, as now, India could put a crisis to good use and improve the living standards of millions. Surely, that is worth undertaking.

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Missing Bangladeshi Journalist Has Been “Found” — Now He Must Be Freed

Alannah Travers
May 12, 2020

The manner of Kajol’s disappearance and the illogical charges that have been brought against him raise serious human rights concerns.

Last week, 53 days after his suspicious disappearance on March 10, Bangladeshi journalist Shafiqul Islam Kajol was “found” by authorities in Benapole, 150 miles from Dhaka where he was last seen. On May 3, border guards apparently discovered Kajol, the editor of the daily newspaper Dainik Pokkhokal, in a field near the Bangladesh-India border, blindfolded and with his legs and arms bound.

While it is a relief to learn that Kajol is alive, his discovery is by no means the end of his ordeal. In the immediate days that followed, the photojournalist faced five charges against him: three under the country’s infamous Digital Security Act and two further cases brought after his discovery.

Instead of ensuring his well-being and swift release, Kajol was accused of attempting to illegally cross the border into Bangladesh, arrested and detained on charges of trespassing and entering the country without legal documentation. His 20-year-old son, Monorom Polok, received a phone call from an officer at Benapole police station informing him of his father’s situation. Polok immediately made the six-hour journey from the family home in Dhaka to see his father and attend his hearing in Jessore.

Although trespassing is aailable offense in Bangladesh, and the court ordered that Kajol be granted bail, the authorities have refused to release him. Later that day, Polok learned that police filed a further case against him under the

widely criticized Section 54 of the Criminal Procedure Code — a law used to detain anyone under suspicion, without requiring evidence or proof — in order to justify his extended captivity. But this charge was brought after the bail hearing, meaning that Kajol should have been released.

The Charges

The day before his disappearance, Kajol was one of 32 individuals subjected to a criminal defamation complaint by an Awami League MP, Saifuzzaman Shikhor, facing accusations of publishing defamatory news in the form of a Facebook post about the alleged involvement of Shikhor and other figures with a female escort service. Under the country’s repressive Digital Security Act, Kajol faces up to seven years in prison. His disappearance, and suspected torture, appear to be heavily connected.

Over 500 people have been victims of suspicious disappearances in Bangladesh over the last decade, many of them journalists. The Reporters Without Borders’ (RSF) 2020 World Press Freedom Index ranks Bangladesh 151 out of 180 countries, attributing its poor position to the tougher methods adopted by Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and the ruling Awami League party.

RSF explicitly criticizes the 2018 Digital Security Act — under which Kajol has been charged — calling it a “custom-made judicial weapon for silencing journalists.” Amnesty International has stressed how the act violates the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, a treaty to which Bangladesh is a party.

Although much remains unknown about what Kajol experienced during the several weeks he was unaccounted for and what sentence he may receive, one thing is clear: his life is at risk. The World Health Organization has measured Bangladesh’s closed-case death rate from the COVID-19 disease at over four times that of India and 10 times higher than Sri Lanka. Due to the outbreak of the novel coronavirus in Bangladesh, the courts are currently closed, and it

appears likely that his trial will be put on hold until the threat of the pandemic passes.

Kajol's Family

According to Polok, "The issue that is taking our sleep away at the moment is his health." While the prisoner capacity in Bangladesh is 41,000, the current number of prisoners is 90,000 — more than double. Kajol's family is gravely concerned about the increased risk he faces of contracting COVID-19 in Bangladesh's overcrowded prisons, particularly as an older, vulnerable inmate.

The day after Kajol was discovered, 874 police officers tested positive for the disease, and guards and prisoners face a greater risk of catching and transmitting the virus. In court, police officers wore protective clothing and face masks while Kajol had no protection.

In Bangladesh, many prisoners — including those sentenced for the most serious crimes of murder and rape — have been allowed to leave confinement for their health and safety. Sheikh Hasina has urged Bangladeshis to show humanity and stay at home in order to contain the pandemic. With prisoners around the world being released or permitted to serve their sentence at home to protect them from the spread of the virus, Kajol's family desperately hopes he will receive similar treatment.

Polok continues: "My mother has stopped eating and sleeping. Her salary has stopped because of COVID-19. We do not know how to run our family and fight this legal battle."

Since his father disappeared, Polok has run a relentless campaign to draw interest to the case. He even held an online photography exhibition, "Last Man Standing," of his father's work last month that has been viewed by over 200,000 people, at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic has meant physical protests are impossible. Maintaining public attention on the case matters, and many believe it led to Kajol being "found." It is exhausting and thankless, but Polok pledges to continue fighting until his father is free, telling

us: "I'm not doing any of this for my benefit; I'm doing this as my duty to my father."

Ultimately, the brutal manner of Kajol's disappearance, the multiple and illogical charges that have been brought against him, and the apparent political nature of these attacks on his freedom of expression raise serious human rights concerns.

International human rights laws require governments to protect the right to freedom of expression. As long as Kajol remains in custody, and with the closure of courts restricting his ability to challenge his detention, we will continue to call on the Bangladeshi authorities to release him.

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Can the US Help Central Asia Reclaim the Silk Road?

Austen Dowell
June 3, 2020

The US still has a role to play in Central Asia, and it is one that will help the nations of the region to capture the true spirit of the Silk Road once again.

Everyone likes a snappy pop-cultural title with which to approach international politics and strategy because it makes relatable what is often viewed as an opaque process of the elites. Rudyard Kipling's "Great Game" was a chessboard and originally referred to the various schemes and posturing of the British and Russian empires throughout Central Asia, with both parties trying to keep their opponent out of fragile imperial holdings. This dynamic was reformulated after the fall of the Soviet Union, with regional experts now using it

to refer to the jockeying of larger regional neighbors — Russia, China, India, Iran, Turkey — for geostrategic and economic advantages.

Then there is the Silk Road. It's an exciting term, invoking adventurous long-distance treks between the affluent Chinese Empire and voracious European markets. It seems like everyone wants to attach themselves to the name, with both China and the US articulating their own Silk Road projects. Tellingly, when some Central Asian policymakers proposed a new visa plan, they called it the Silk Road Visa. Even more telling, however, the visa is designed to attract tourists and make life easier for visitors.

We are thus presented with two terms that, for all their pedigree, have by now come to mean the same thing. For China, a new Silk Road means a series of subservient vassal states operating as markets as well as a way to get goods more cheaply to Europe while supporting the growth of Xinjiang — a strategic vision that suits certain European consumers perfectly while ruffling the feathers of other powers who fear some kind of threat to their interests in the area.

This sounds very similar to a Great Game competition for access and resources. The Silk Road, as articulated by policymakers on both sides of Eurasia, comes to mean the clearing of space for trade, linking Chinese and Western markets while winning over the hearts and loyalty of the restless tribes inhabiting the wilderness in between.

Heart of Eurasia

But what of the restless tribesmen themselves? Their own histories tell a vastly different story of the region and paint a picture of a Silk Road that was something altogether different from what policymakers in Beijing or Brussels would articulate now. Rather than a vision of long-distance travel, the Silk Road needs to be approached as a network of overlapping and thriving societies and trading economies, each exchanging concepts and adding value as goods rippled back and forth across them.

Central Asia itself has always possessed goods that neighbors were eager to gain access to, whether they be the legendary blood-sweating horses of antiquity or the abundant gas and mineral resources of today. New religions, technologies and goods raced up and down trade networks while the great steppe empires would routinely produce visionary rulers that founded great royal dynasties in what is now India and China. Obviously, nobody is expecting a return to militarily-dominant Central Asian states with cutting-edge technology, and there is so much that harkening back to a golden age will do for us in analyzing the present. However, referencing history is a helpful tool for expanding our mindset when it comes to looking at long-term prospects for the region.

It is in US interests to help the region capture the true spirit of the Silk Road once again. At its strongest, the Silk Road was a collaborative process driven by supply and demand, a physical space defined by a dynamic interaction between communities rather than the foreign merchants that had to traverse it. Almost every economist or development expert would tell you that connections are a good thing, making you stronger as a country and as a network. It's how you manage those connections that makes or breaks a state, something that worries Eurasian and American strategists alike.

Central Asia remains of strategic importance to the US. Its five countries — Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan — occupy the heart of Eurasia, acting as a geopolitical buffer against revisionist powers like Iran, Russia and China with pretensions to regional hegemony. Central Asian involvement will be crucial in helping Afghanistan to rebuild, while the region also figures prominently in plans for massive transportation networks primarily benefitting China (best known through the One Belt One Road Initiative that has been so debated by Western observers) and, to a lesser extent, Russia. The strength of borders and governance styles of the five states also play a role in controlling the spread of narcotics and

international terror, both as overflow from Afghanistan and in response to oppressive domestic policies.

On the face of it, there are of course significant barriers to a meaningful American role in Central Asia. A US drawdown in Afghanistan means that there is no longer demand for the logistical support that facilitated cooperation between authoritarian national leaders and US military planners, while both economically-dominant China and militarily-embedded Russia are better able to exert political and economic pressure in order to achieve favorable outcomes. Insular Central Asian elites have shown a tendency over the past 30 years to squabble both amongst themselves and with neighboring states, with a Soviet legacy of divide-and-conquer border creation as well as acute natural resource management issues encouraging competition rather than collaboration. Weak economies are dependent on energy sales and remittances, meaning that Central Asian countries are heavily dependent on Russia and China.

It is thus tempting for US foreign policymakers to write off the region as doomed to domination by larger neighbors, but it would be a mistake to not consider all possible futures and opportunities for involvement. It would also be a rather traditionally American mistake to assume that what we want matters, particularly to local governments and societies grappling with their own challenges and interests.

Ultimate outcomes will come only from the decisions and actions of the Central Asians themselves, but the US would be best served by foregoing the transactional, bilateral boardgame maneuvers of other Eurasian regional powers in favor of helping to revive a dynamic, unified Silk Road system that benefits growth and reform across the five states. There are three potential futures for Central Asian countries that take into account how US involvement in the region could look.

Stagnation

The easiest of the outcomes to foresee, a stagnation scenario envisages a brutal near future where the economic pressure of the COVID-19 pandemic would leave national economies in such shambles that already slow economic growth grinds to a halt. If this happens, economic and political reforms recently instituted in Uzbekistan under President Shavkat Mirziyoyev are likely to fall by the wayside, resulting in the country cutting down on its recent regional outreach and aspirations to be a transportation and tourism hub. Momentum on the recent thaw in relations between Uzbekistan and the rest of the region could dissipate, leading states to abandon cooperative initiatives in the face of the unprecedented pandemic.

Tajikistan would remain in the grips of the authoritarian Emomali family, which has controlled it since the end of the Tajik Civil War in 1997, and losses stemming from the outbreak will only worsen living conditions in what is considered the poorest country in the Commonwealth of Independent States. The political gridlock of Kyrgyzstan's fledgling democracy is likely to continue, alongside the accumulation of wealth and power by a small number of families.

The collapse of oil prices will hit Turkmenistan particularly hard, increasing internal elite infighting while keeping the country in what is already almost total isolation and economic disfunction. Kazakhstan's relative economic development and success in modernizing its infrastructure and oil industry over the last decade are likely to be erased as its dependence on reeling oil export prices leaves other underdeveloped sectors more vulnerable than ever.

In all of these situations, uncomfortably large amounts of debt and reliance on Chinese infrastructure investment would only intensify, leaving governments longer-term as little more than vassal states firmly in China's political orbit, with lip-service paid to Russia's historical military role in the region and the Collective

Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Russia's Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) would continue to exist as long as the Central Asian states see value in its economic support, but it could be dealt a fatal blow by countries defecting for more favorable terms with China. Long-standing competition over borders and water resources between the five states could flare up as they see opportunities or need to present an external enemy for their populace to rally against.

In this scenario, the United States has largely continued to stay on the sidelines amidst its own coronavirus-related struggles. Involvement still would revolve around verbal urgings to steer clear of Chinese investment and a strategy that consists of trying to convince states to connect with Afghanistan as it goes through a painful peace process following decades of war. Efforts to rile up anger at Chinese treatment of Uighurs and other Turkic nationalities in the province of Xinjiang would continue to be ignored by Central Asian elites and leaders who don't want to risk confrontation with their large neighbor, while China would continue to expand its influence over much of the Eurasian heartland.

Mixed Growth

In this scenario, the disruption caused by COVID-19 to guest workers and the price of natural resources would still keenly be felt by all of the states, but a potential global vaccine effort could mean that normalcy is more or less restored within a short period of time. Kazakhstan's economic growth could slowly be eclipsed by a revitalized and more populous Uzbekistan, but both countries would become standout performers in the area. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan would continue to be dependent on remittances from their citizens abroad, with political power relatively stable but ossified in both countries.

Isolationist Turkmenistan would thus remain viable based on the sale of its abundant natural resources but becoming ever more dependent on the energy trade with regional partners, namely China, which, as of 2019, already accounted for almost 80% of Turkmen exports. Meanwhile,

Uzbekistan could decide to enter into the EEU in an attempt to synchronize with its nearby markets but maintain a strong military outside of the CSTO. In a region with immense pressure coming from outside, Kazakhstan could grow closer to Russia in an attempt to withstand increasing Uzbek and Chinese collaboration while other regional powers get involved with rebuilding Afghanistan.

US political and economic involvement with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan could scale up from its current relationships — primarily oil-industry infrastructure investment and security collaboration with Afghanistan, respectively — and in recognition of their growing importance, with emphasis on providing alternatives to Chinese investment in the developing countries. The US International Development Finance Corporation (DFC, created in 2019) could herald the start of major American investment on projects related to infrastructure and development, and the multi-stakeholder Blue Dot Network Initiative (also launched in 2019) may begin to bear results as individual projects are licensed as non-exploitative and sustainable.

These projects would be viewed within the context of providing an alternative to Chinese Belt and Road projects and could give leaders the leeway to pursue multi-vector foreign policy. The C5+1 format would remain a benign but unobtrusive forum for US officials to communicate with Central Asian officials on improvements to security, the promotion of economic connectivity and increasing resilience against the impacts of climate change.

Unfortunately, the scope of investment would not be able to directly supplant Chinese support, with the DFC's \$60-billion portfolio expected to do the work of the nearly \$1 trillion expected to be spent on One Belt One Road investments. Canny leaders may simply play offers of support against each other in attempts to increase political and personal dividends, with the strings attached to Blue Dot and DFC investment proving to be too demanding for consistent usage. Similar individual attempts to cajole leaders to reject

Chinese financing or technologies may be pursued in a transactional, ad hoc manner, but would do nothing to halt the overall trend. The US would remain too physically, financially and ideologically distant to matter, while local governments would be wooed by players like Russia, India, Turkey, Iran or Pakistan.

Regional Collaboration

In the most unlikely of all scenarios, Central Asian states could band together more and more until they present a formidable regional bloc. This is hard to envisage, as relations between the five countries have historically been marred by intense saber-rattling and attempts to isolate each other. Former Uzbek President Islam Karimov was the best example of a strongman leader working to sabotage his neighbors, but relations between the states have recently seen an uptick with the ascendance of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev in Uzbekistan.

In this scenario, Uzbekistan's outreach would act as a catalyst that starts resolving long-running resource consumption disagreements while also breaking the ice on greater regional infrastructure and internal transportation networks. Chinese interest might slowly cool amidst a backlash against the Belt and Road Initiative as well as a changing Chinese domestic market rocked by the COVID-19 pandemic, but the economic imperative of connecting the region would be taken up by the countries themselves. Roads and railroads are used to move goods between Europe and China, but the increased connectivity and mingling of Central Asians themselves could result in mutual economic gains between partners.

On the one hand, this dynamic could mark the limit of positive gains, with authoritarian leaders empowered by economic gains still able to exert rigid control over their populations. On the other hand, economic growth and increased ease of movement between countries could also propel the growth of cross-border organizations and government-level cooperation. While national identity remains paramount, a shared Central

Asian identity could gradually coalesce, belying the ethnic diversity of the region.

This sense of community would be based on shared historical experiences under Russian and Soviet rule, with Islam a component of identity and cultural expression that has long been separate from the state and political processes. Leaders might begin to consult with each other, and increased regional economic gains mean that states would be better able to identify and pursue their own strategic objectives. With less reason to compete over resources, states may pursue win-win arrangements that could lead to an informal or formal bloc of governments able to present a more united front to Russia and China.

Here, American policymakers would have moved away from the single-tone attacks on China to embrace more nimble involvement in the region. Economic agreements and infrastructural investment could be presented on terms that are both palatable for local leaders while also building toward cooperative and organically-driven local needs. A two-pronged approach would grow support for strengthening civil institutions and developing private entrepreneurship, combined with a government-level focus on coordination and cooperation between states that doesn't threaten sovereignty. The C5+1 organization would be strengthened and foregrounded as support for states attempting to pursue multi-vector foreign policies, providing alternatives that will give local decision-makers ways to rally together to resist debt entrapment or the sale of strategic assets to China. The US-backed TAPI pipeline project and other similar infrastructure initiatives could help widen potential partners for Central Asian resources and economies, giving access to Western markets while lessening dependence on China and Russia.

It is in US interests to help the region expand its own internal infrastructure and collaborative networks, allowing for the rise of resiliency and dynamism of Central Asian expression and reform. While improving economies certainly doesn't guarantee political reform, a more cooperative relationship between the five

countries allows for the creation of an environment that could allow for, or even encourage, positive change.

Similarly, there is no guarantee that a friendly bloc of small nations would be a steadfast ally of the US or change the balance of power in Eurasia. It is more the case that a strong Silk Road stands to benefit both Central Asian and American interests. The United States still has a role to play in the region, and it is one that will help the people of Central Asia capture the true spirit of the Silk Road once again.

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Why Punjabis in Pakistan Have Abandoned Punjabi

Ishtiaq Ahmed
July 14, 2020

Punjabi elites identify with Urdu because they see it as the sophisticated language of South Asian Muslims that helps keep Pakistan together.

When Pakistan was formed in 1947, it included two parts: West and East Pakistan. These two parts of the country were approximately 1,600 kilometers apart. Between them was India. The two parts of Pakistan were divided by more than distance. The biggest linguistic group in East Pakistan were Bengalis who spoke Bangla. The biggest linguistic group in West Pakistan were Punjabis who spoke Punjabi.

Newly-independent Pakistan chose neither Bangla nor Punjabi as its national language. Instead, it chose Urdu. At Dhaka University's convocation on March 24, 1948, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, gave an iconic

speech that is quoted till today: "In my personal opinion, Pakistan's official language — which will become a source of communication between its different provinces — can only be one and that is Urdu. No language other than Urdu."

This stance caused tensions with East Pakistan because Bengalis were rather attached to their language. On February 21, 1952, less than four years after the Jinnah's speech, Pakistan brutally cracked down on those demanding the adoption of Bangla as the second national language. The state arrested and killed many students, teachers and intellectuals at Dhaka University. Many other developments exacerbated Bengali resentment and East Pakistan broke away from Pakistan. It emerged as the independent nation of Bangladesh in 1971 and promptly chose Bangla as its official language.

Urdu Waxes, Punjabi Wanes

The official language of Pakistan continues to be Urdu. Curiously, this language is the mother tongue of only 7-8% of Pakistanis. Of 213 million Pakistanis, Punjabi is spoken by 48-55% of the population. The reason for such a wide range is the debate over Saraiki. Some consider it a dialect of Punjabi, while others treat it as a separate language.

Punjabis dominate the Pakistani state and society at all levels from politics, bureaucracy and the ubiquitous military to economics and culture. Despite the domination of Punjabis, Pakistan has employed Urdu as a medium of instruction since its inception. The teaching of Punjabi in schools is prohibited. All official business of the state is conducted either in English or in Urdu. In fact, Pakistan's 1973 constitution recognizes Urdu as the country's only national language.

In the 1980s, some intellectuals began a daily newspaper in Punjabi. Named Sajjan, the newspaper's first issue came out on February 3, 1989, but it lasted merely 20 months because neither the government nor the private sector filled its coffers through advertisements or public notices. Until the early 1990s, members of the

Punjab Assembly, the state legislature, were forbidden to address the house in Punjabi. This ban was temporarily removed by the writer Hanif Ramay who, at that time, was the speaker of the assembly. However, the ban was revived afterward.

Some valiant champions of Punjabi continue to propagate the cause of the Punjabi language, but this has been confined to small intellectual circles. They have been demanding that Punjabi be taught in school at the primary level, but no government has accepted the idea. The Punjabi language, therefore, is relegated to informal day-to-day communication. A key question arises: Why have Pakistani Punjabis disowned their mother tongue?

Clues From the Past

We need to find clues in the peculiar cultural and political evolution of Punjab. The Punjabi language belongs like most others of northern India to the Indo-European family of languages. It began to be used in literary communications and in writings from at least the 13th century. Farid al-Din Masud Ganj-i-Shakar, a noted Sufi saint popularly known as Baba Farid, is said to have written in Punjabi using the Persian script. That tradition was continued by later Sufis such as Shah Hussain, Bahu Shah, Bulleh Shah and Waris Shah. In the 19th century, the likes of Mian Muhammad Bakhsh and Khawaja Ghulam Farid enriched the Punjabi literary tradition even as they used the vernacular to connect with ordinary people.

Punjabi was also adopted by another faith. When Guru Nanak founded Sikhism in the early 16th century, Punjabi became the language of a community that consolidated as a religious community under his spiritual successors. Sikhism adopted Gurmukhi, a distinct script devised by Guru Angad, the second of the 10 Sikh gurus who succeeded Guru Nanak. In contrast, Hindu Punjabis continued to use the Devanagari script and used Sanskrit for their religious ceremonies.

During much of the time of Sikh gurus and Sufi saints, the official language of Punjab was Persian. The state officialdom largely hailed from the Turco-Afghan nobility and conducted their affairs in Persian. This nobility owed loyalty to the ruler of Delhi and, later as the Mughal Empire declined, to the master of Kabul. In northern India, the common lingua franca was Hindustani. In literary usage, this language either took the form of Hindi written in the Devanagari script or of Urdu penned in the Persian script. Toward the end of Mughal rule, Urdu began to be cultivated by the urban literati even as Persian continued to be the official state language.

When the British emerged as the ruling power in India, they decided to adopt Urdu as the language of the state at the lower level, especially in the army. On April 2, 1849, the British annexed Punjab 10 years after the death of Ranjit Singh, the founder of a Lahore-based Sikh empire. To facilitate their administrators, they enforced Urdu as the vernacular language instead of Punjabi. Urdu was the state language in the army and other lower levels of government.

In the religious and communal revivals of the 19th century, Hindi came to be associated with Hindus, Urdu with Muslims and Punjabi with Sikhs. Yet spoken Punjabi is the shared vernacular of all Punjabis, cutting across religion, sect or caste. Even today, the language continues to be the day-to-day medium of communication and interaction.

The religious revivals of the 19th century have to be examined in the wider context of the anti-colonial freedom movement of the 20th century. The Indian National Congress (INC) claimed to represent all Indians irrespective of religion. It declared Hindustani, the common vernacular of north India with the Devanagari and Persian scripts, as the national language of a future independent, united India. The All-India Muslim League rejected the INC's claim to represent all Indians. Instead, the Muslim League, as it has come to be known, claimed to represent all Indian Muslims. It rejected Hindustani as the

national language and declared Urdu to be the official language of Indian Muslims.

Two states emerged when Indians won independence: India and Pakistan. The partition of British India in 1947 was brutal and bloody. The two Muslim-majority provinces of Bengal and Punjab were divided between India and Pakistan. Refugees fled from one country to another. The Urdu-speaking migrants from India came to be known as Muhajirs and were initially overrepresented in the central government. However, Punjabis dominated young Pakistan and its powerful military. Once Bangladesh seceded, Punjabi domination strengthened.

These Punjabi Muslims adopted Urdu because the language had been the lingua franca of Pakistan since 1947. Since 1971, Urdu became further entrenched. It became the language of middle and lower-middle-class Punjabi intelligentsia. Upper-class Punjabis like other upper-class South Asians were educated in English and had little love for vernacular languages or literature. The movement to introduce Punjabi instruction in school has failed despite Punjabis wielding most levers of power in Pakistan. It is because the Punjabi elites have given up on its language and adopted two other languages supposedly more sophisticated and modern than their native tongue.

It is worth mentioning that Pakistan is not alone in facing a problem with a national language. All states must choose one language to signify national identity and to conduct their affairs in an efficient and coherent manner. In multi-language societies, the choice of national or state language is always problematic. An apt example is Turkey where the Turkish language alone is declared as the state language. It has resulted in considerable resistance by the Kurds, a people proud of their identity and language.

Tiny Israel has also found the issue of a national language thorny. The founders of Israel were European Ashkenazi Jews who either spoke Yiddish or the national languages of the countries where they had grown up. In a radical choice, Israel decided to make Hebrew its national

language. Hebrew was the ancient language of Jews and had not been spoken for centuries. So far, it seems that Israel has succeeded in its national language policy.

In India, partition led to the abandonment of Hindustani as the national language. Instead, the country's officialdom increasingly uses a Sanskritized form of Hindi, even as most young people speak a mixture of Hindi and English termed Hinglish. Nevertheless, the rise of Hindu nationalism and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has strengthened the use of Sanskritized Hindi in government. Most North Indians continue to speak Hindustani, which is also the preferred language of Bollywood, India's multibillion-dollar film industry.

In the light of these examples, the case of Pakistani Punjabi elites and intelligentsia adopting Urdu as their language of written communication and formal speech makes sense. Urdu may only be the mother tongue of a small minority, but it is tied up with Pakistani identity. Also, Pakistani Punjabi elites are able to defuse tensions with smaller nationalities such as Sindhis, Pashtuns and Balochis who resent Punjabi domination. Punjabi elites can reasonably point out that they are not imposing their language on minority nationalities.

Despite Urdu being Pakistan's national language, people prefer to speak in their native tongues. In Punjab, educated elites in Lahore and Islamabad might speak either English or Urdu or both. However, the rest of the people converse in Punjabi. It might no longer be the written language of the state. Newspapers, novels, poems and high literature in Punjabi might be in short supply, but the oral language runs strong. Elven elites find its uses even though they treat it as a pariah tongue, useful to connect with the uneducated masses or to express crude humor and abuse.

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India's Police: An Instrument of Injustice

Javeed Ahmad
November 19, 2020

India's archaic laws allow politicians to use the police for their own purposes, not public benefit.

When Alexander the Great marched into Phrygian, the capital of Gordium, in 333 BC, he was told that an oracle had declared that any man who could unravel the Gordian knot — deemed impossible to untangle — would rule over Asia. After wrestling with the knot for a time with no success, Alexander drew his sword and cut the knot into half with a single stroke. To paraphrase the Bard of Avon, police reforms in India await a similar creative solution to a seemingly insurmountable problem.

It is ironic that, more than seven decades after independence, the police in India are still governed by the Indian Police Act of 1861. The British introduced this act immediately after what they called the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny. As per the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, the 1861 legislation was enacted with “the purpose of crushing dissent and any movement for self government.” After the 1857 uprising, the British monarchy took over from the East India Company, creating a colonial administrative architecture that would become the jewel in its crown. Along with the 1861 act, the 1860 Indian Penal Code was a major pillar of the new criminal justice system that served London well until India's independence in 1947.

The Legacy of the Raj

Independent India adopted a new constitution that gave states jurisdiction over the police. Henceforth, it was not New Delhi but state capitals that controlled policing. However, those who drafted the constitution failed to craft

legislation to create a new police force in tune with the new demands of democracy. The police force retained its colonial character, carrying the will of its new political masters. Order ordained by these masters had to be maintained. The rule of law and due process were to play second fiddle.

Like many former colonies, India became a democracy in form while its police force remained colonial in spirit. In the first few decades after independence, the combination of enlightened leaders, ignorant public opinion, some outstanding officers and the broad hegemony of one political party papered over the incongruity of the arrangement. That could not, and did not, last.

From the 1960s, Indian politics became increasingly fractious. By the mid-1970s, the pulls and pressures on police departments, thanks to political interference, increased dramatically. Inadequate organizational structure, exploitative ethos and brutal behavior came to typify the police force. In 1975, then-Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, the daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru, used the police to impose a state of emergency on the country. As in colonial times, the police suppressed civil liberties, foisted false cases on the ruling party's political opponents and even enforced sterilization on unwilling young men under a draconian family planning plan.

In 1977, the opposition won a historic victory. Immediately after taking power, the new government instituted the National Police Commission (NPC) to review India's system of policing and suggest reforms. It produced eight reports, including a Model Police Act, between 1979 and 1981. It also appointed a commission of inquiry under a retired chief justice of India, J.C. Shah. Its 1978 report chronicled the excesses, malpractices and misdeeds of the government during the emergency. It found that the police had obediently and brutally carried out instructions of its political masters, cowing the country into submission.

To date, these reports have been gathering dust. Governments have come and gone since

1981. They have implemented peripheral recommendations but ignored substantive ones that relate to accountability and autonomy.

Echoes Across the Country

In 2020, the police are still bound by diktats of the political bosses. The Delhi riots earlier this year prompted allegations of political interference, a repeat of what happened in the 1984 unrest. It moved Julio Ribeiro, one of the country's most respected police officers, to write a letter to the police chief of Delhi. He asked for a fair probe into the riots and questioned why the police did not investigate members of the ruling party for delivering hate speeches.

Ribeiro's question can be echoed across the country. The chief ministers of India's 28 states control the police just as British governors once did. Politicians pay lip service to police reforms but are unable to let go of the power they wield. At its essence, there is a fundamental asymmetry of power between the police and the citizens: The former are not accountable to the latter. The police answer only to their political and bureaucratic bosses.

The failure of politicians to reform the police has led to citizens and retired senior police officers appealing to the judiciary for change. In 2006, the Supreme Court of India passed a landmark judgment and gave seven clear directives. The government of India and its federal counterparts in state capitals were supposed to implement these directives. Instead, most have been ignored or implemented half-heartedly. As a result, many a chief justice had lamented that not a single state government is willing to cooperate: What's to be done?

The power politicians wield in various state capitals comes from Section 3 of the 1861 Police Act, which states: "The superintendence of the police throughout a general police-district shall vest in and shall be exercised by the State Government to which such district is subordinate, and except as authorized under the provisions of this Act, no person, officer of Court shall be

empowered by the State Government to supersede or control any police functionary."

Simply put, chief ministers and their consiglieres, the senior officers of the elite Indian Administrative Service and Indian Police Service (IPS), control every district in their states. The Model Police Act drafted by the NPC more than four decades ago recommended a tempering of this unfettered power of state governments. Its Section 39 provides for the state government to "exercise its superintendence ... in such manner ... as to promote the professional efficiency of the police."

The Second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) set up by the Indian government concluded that the proposed Section 39 was insufficient to provide police autonomy. Informal and often illegal instructions to the police are pervasive. It recommended that an amendment to the Model Police Act that expressly forbade illegal or mala fide demands from the police. It also recommended that obstruction of justice be categorized as an offense. Needless to say, the government of India is yet to accept the ARC's recommendations, let aside implement them.

Crime Pays

This politics-police equation is completely lopsided, with India's law enforcement the handmaiden of the politicians in power. This has been supported by numerous committees such as the one headed by Justice K.T. Thomas and scholars like Milan Vaishav. In fact, Indian voters have been increasingly electing politicians who face criminal proceedings against them. Money and muscle play a growing role in Indian politics. The result is decline, if not collapse, of the policing and criminal justice system.

After 73 years of independence, the formal institutions left behind by the British Raj are weakening. For ambitious politicians, controlling the police is an important way to secure benefits for themselves, consolidate electoral gains and distribute benefits to their supporters. If politicians control the police, they can avoid

criminal investigations into their activities. They can hobble opponents with false or frivolous charges. They can also dispense patronage to their core supporters who are often members of their community. This partisan use of the police furthers identity politics in an increasingly divided land. As a result, the rule of law suffers and the Indian state weakens.

The police force itself has become politicized in many if not all states. Caste, community or religious affinity is often more important than professionalism, diligence or excellence. Many politicians try to recruit members of their own group into the police. Since police officers have job security, this social engineering of the police can institutionalize the coercive power of a group long after their politician is voted out.

The Indian police have been weighed, measured and found wanting on numerous occasions. In 1992, the police stood by as a mob demolished the Babri Masjid mosque and, 10 years later, they did the same during the 2002 Gujarat riots. The rise in extrajudicial killings demonstrates the failure of due process of law. In 2005, the BBC reported that India's "fake encounters" — staged confrontations between criminals and the police, where the criminals mostly end up dead — were shockingly common. During the emergency in the 1970s and in recent years, the police have stifled dissent by slapping colonial-era sedition charges.

The police continue to wield repression on the streets. Beating people arbitrarily is common. In recent years, marginalized groups such as Dalits, minorities, tribesmen and women who protest peacefully have faced increased police brutality. Paul Brass has found that governments have used "curfews as means of control, victimization, and outright violence against targeted groups rather than as devices to bring peace during violent times for the benefit of all."

Instrument of Injustice

In India, the police no longer have a reputation for probity or for being an instrument of justice. In fact, the insensitive, illegal, inhuman and

indefensible handling of the September murder and gang rape of a Dalit girl in Hathras, a district in India's most populous state of Uttar Pradesh, laid bare the utterly unprofessional work culture of the Indian police. Such conduct occurs with numbing regularity because the political elite is deeply invested in the status quo.

Prospects for reform seem dim. In 2003, R.K. Raghavan, a former director of the Central Bureau of Investigation, observed that the police would continue to do the politicians' bidding unless certain basic reforms were enacted. The judiciary cannot enact these reforms — it is the politicians' duty. Until "they look upon the police as a tool to settle political scores with their adversaries, nothing will improve." Raghavan went on to argue that prospects for police reform were bleak "because the corruption that cuts across party lines, brings with it unanimity that the status quo should remain."

In September 2020, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi gave a speech to graduating IPS officers and called for a trust-based policing system. He argued that those who believe that instilling fear among the populace is the most effective policing strategy are out of sync with the march of the nation and its vibrant democracy. Modi's actions have not matched his rhetoric.

India does not need another report or judgment. It awaits a statesman who can rise above the temptations of short-term electoral gains and work for long-term national benefits and who will not hesitate to wield the sword to cut the Gordian knot that keeps the politician and the police bound together. Only then will India have rule of law, not mere order, and justice for all instead of for a privileged few.

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Putin Is Leaving, But Not Saying Goodbye

Dmitry Belyaev
January 21, 2020

Russia's President Vladimir Putin can't simply retire: Too much power is concentrated in his hands to just leave it all behind.

The reorganization of power has begun in Russia. This process is also referred to as the solution to the so-called “problem 2024” — the year that marks the end of Vladimir Putin's last term as president. By law he has no right to run in the next election, since Russia's Constitution stipulates a limit of two consecutive terms in office.

In 2008, at the end of Putin's first presidential cycle, he passed his post to then-Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev for four years. At the time, Putin took over as prime minister but continued to lead the country from the sidelines, in a set-up that became known as the “tandem.” However, at the end of the 2012 election everything had already returned to its place: Putin had been reelected president, and Medvedev was made the head of government as prime minister. In Russian politics, this maneuver is known as “castling” — an analogy with chess.

After the second coming of Putin, the presidential term in Russia was increased from four to six years, granting the head of state 12 years in power. During this time, the annexation of Crimea, the war with Ukraine and the ensuing Western sanctions, as well as Russia's increased involvement in the Syrian Civil War, took place. The only thing that remained unchanged was Putin's power. He quietly won all the country's elections, leaving all rivals far, far behind. Technically speaking, there is some political opposition in the country, but none of the real

opponents of the regime are allowed to engage in politics.

However, time is running out, and Putin will soon have to step down again formally as president. So, the time has come for the Kremlin to decide what power structures in Russia will remain after 2024. Journalists and political experts predicted various scenarios of the power transfer, such as the unification of Russia and Belarus to create a “Union State,” as well as some sort of new castling. However, everyone was sure of one thing: Putin can't simply retire. Too much power is concentrated in his hands to just leave it all behind.

Message to the Federal Assembly

The transfer of power began unexpectedly. The President's annual address to the federal assembly was scheduled for January 15. The country expected that Putin would talk about the economic situation and social issues. Russians have been growing increasingly weary of hearing about war and geopolitics. The president, aware of the popular mood, began his speech by announcing an increase in child allowances, and support to teachers, doctors and young families. He even promised free lunches to schoolchildren.

However, the second part of his speech was entirely devoted to the redistribution of roles among the branches of power in the country. In fact, Putin proclaimed the beginning of constitutional reform.

The president's statements provided a rough idea of how events will unfold after 2024. The main idea is that Russia will remain a presidential system, but the role of the prime minister and government will be strengthened. The head of the government will be proposed by parliament — no longer by the president, as it is now, but the president will still be able to dismiss the appointee. The federation council will have the right to remove judges from office, and officials and judges will be forbidden to hold a second citizenship or residence permits in other countries. Only those who have lived in Russia

for the last 25 years will be eligible for the presidency.

In addition, they must never have held a residence permit of another country or a second citizenship. Putin also announced that Russia would no longer grant precedence to international conventions or court rulings over its own laws.

President Putin also spoke in favor of strengthening the role of governors and the federation council, which currently have rather nominal functions. He also suggested removing the term “consecutive” from the two-term limit on holding office. Putin recommended that all his ideas be enshrined in the constitution. In Russian political terms, a “recommendation” by Putin means direct orders.

The president concluded his speech on a dramatic note, saying that renewal and the change of power are an essential condition for progressive evolution of society and stable development. He preferred not to talk about his role in his imagined Russia of the future. However, one thing is clear: He has taken the necessary steps to secure his own political future in the country. Since he can no longer remain president, he needs another powerful position that will allow him to exercise the full extent of his power.

Government Resignation

No one can say whether Dmitry Medvedev knew that January 15 would be his last day as head of government. He and the entire Russian cabinet resigned only a few hours after Putin’s address.

The president proposed the candidacy of a new prime minister that same evening: Mikhail Mishustin, the country’s chief tax collector. His name says nothing to the average man, as he only appeared on English Wikipedia after the new appointment. However, Mishustin is no novice in Russian politics. He is seen as a reformer, an expert in modern technology and a keeper of secrets for many Russian officials. The post of chief tax officer is a police post, with all its consequences.

Mishustin doesn’t have much popularity, but does he really need it in his new position of power? Prime ministers in Russia are usually the fall guys. They are responsible for all failures of the government in order to shift responsibility from the president, who is busy with geopolitics and global issues. Nevertheless, Russia’s parliament approved Mishustin’s appointment without much hesitation.

As for Medvedev, he will now become deputy head of the security council. This new position was invented just for him. For the former prime minister — the second most powerful person in the country — such a transfer doesn’t exactly mark a sign of success. However, this impression might be premature. The head of the security council is Vladimir Putin himself. It was the security council, not the Ministry of Defense, that was responsible for the Crimea operation.

For Medvedev, who has mainly been involved in matters of Russia’s economy and industry in recent years, this is an atypical position. Therefore, it is hard to say for sure whether it is a demotion or another strategic maneuver. For Putin, Medvedev is still a special person. He once entrusted him with the power over the country, and Medvedev gave it back without question. Putin values such people, as loyalty is the most important quality in his eyes.

What Happens Next?

A referendum on changing the constitution could potentially take place in September. Journalists and analysts are desperate to predict Russia’s future. Only one person knows for sure what awaits the country in 2024 — Vladimir Putin, and he is in no hurry to reveal his cards. A referendum on the constitution, parliamentary elections in 2021 and a full four years before the end of his current presidential term are still ahead of him.

For example, by that time the next US president will have already been elected to replace the one who came into power in 2020. The only thing we can state with certainty is that Putin is not going anywhere. Perhaps he will no

longer be addressed as president, but he won't stop ruling Russia. Now he is setting the scene for a new role. More precisely, you could even say he is forming a parallel government, a system within a system.

Perhaps he'll take over as prime minister? It's doubtful. Officially Putin doesn't even have a political party. In the last election, he ran as an independent, unwilling to be associated with any political bloc.

Maybe he rewrites the constitution and stays for a new term? Theoretically speaking, it's possible. Recent events have shown that the Russian Constitution is subject to amendment and can be rewritten to suit the political ambitions of the ruling class. If a new constitution brings in a new order and new rules allowing Putin to run again, this would potentially mean two more new terms and another 12 years of Putin. However, in this case, he will never get rid of the reputation of a dictator — even formally.

Maybe Putin will concentrate all the powers in the newly created state council? This is the more likely scenario. For good reason, he seeks to enshrine this office, which will allow him to oversee the various sectors of government and the direction of the country's foreign and domestic policy, in the constitution. Putin has four years to give the council the power it needs. It looks like the president will learn from neighboring Kazakhstan, where Nursultan Nazarbayev, who ruled his country for almost 30 years, voluntarily moved to the position of chair of the security council. In fact, Nazarbayev had become a local Ayatollah Khomeini — Iran's supreme leader — without whom no meaningful decision can be made. Putin may indeed embrace the role of the father of the nation.

Most likely, Putin is looking for a position where he could influence key decisions in the country, but not be in the foreground. In this case, it is no longer so important who becomes the new president of Russia. Maybe Dmitry Medvedev again, or someone else. Whoever it is, the country will continue to be ruled by Putin and his entourage. The same people will remain in power

and will only swap their official titles. In this sense, Russia is beginning to increasingly mirror China, where it is impossible to engage in politics if you are not a member of the Communist Party. The only difference is that in Russia, it's Putin's party, and the country's opinion has no meaning.

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Switzerland Confronts Its Role in the Slave Trade

Hans-Georg Betz
June 11, 2020

Until 2003, much of Switzerland's history relating to the slave trade was largely unknown.

In a country rich in peculiarities, the Swiss city of Neuchâtel is a particular oddity. Today, Neuchâtel is the capital city of the eponymous canton, located in Romandy — the French-speaking region of Switzerland. This in itself is quite odd, given the fact that since the early 18th century, Neuchâtel belonged to Prussia. The city's old town still pays tribute to this heritage. Its architecture evokes images of Potsdam, Prussia's garrison town outside Berlin.

In 1815, Neuchâtel joined the Swiss confederation, yet still retained its ties to Prussia. It was only in the revolutionary year of 1848 that the city gained its independence from Prussia. Today, the city is known for its university and its football club, which plays in Switzerland's top league — with moderate success. Otherwise it is little more than a provincial town along the train tracks that connect Geneva with Zurich.

And yet. At one point in its history, Neuchâtel played an important role in the trade in human beings between Africa and the New World. In fact, Neuchâtel's "grand families," whose

sumptuous mansions still grace its cityscape, owed much of their wealth to the slave trade. Much of this history was largely unknown, until 2003. That year, a Protestant pastor delivered a sermon, diffused via Romandy radio, in which he castigated one of the city's most illustrious historical figures and benefactors, Pierre Alexandre Du Peyrou (1729-1794), for his role in the exploitation of slave labor on his plantations in Surinam. Ironically enough, De Peyrou was close to Rousseau and Voltaire.

The 1.5%

The sermon caused a scandal and provoked vigorous protests, causing the city's Protestant authorities to distance themselves from its author. By then, however, the genie was out of the bottle. Following an interpellation in parliament, the Swiss government acknowledges the role of Swiss nationals in the slave trade, but cautions that Switzerland was not a "colonial power and therefore not implicated in the slave trade." In other words, it was private citizens, not the confederation that was involved in slavery.

In the years that followed, Swiss historians embarked on an investigation of Switzerland's role in the slave trade. They reconstructed the triangular trade, which started with Swiss fabrics, weapons and alcohol shipped to West Africa. There the ships took on slaves to be sent across the Atlantic and exchanged for coffee, cotton and other colonial wares. The trade was risky but highly lucrative. One of its profiteers, David de Pury, from Neuchâtel, amassed a huge fortune, worth some 700 million Swiss francs in today's money, which he left in its entirety to his native city.

The funds were used to turn Neuchâtel into one of the most picturesque cities in the country. To honor the great benefactor (this is how Wikipedia characterizes him), the city names its main square after him and erects a bronze statue. A few days ago, a collective of activists launched a petition demanding the removal of the statue.

In 2005, researchers from the University of Lausanne concluded that Swiss citizens were

involved in 1.5% of financing the transfer of some 11 million slaves to the New World. And it was hardly only those good citizens of Neuchâtel who profited from the slave trade. Citizens from other cantons, such as Vaud and Basel, also sought to make their fortunes at the expense of human misery. One of Basel's major firms went as far as to purchase a ship designed for the slave trade. The venture ended in disaster, resulting in the death of two-thirds of its human cargo. To be sure, 1.5% might seem rather negligible given the extent of the slave trade. Yet in Switzerland, it has caused significant soul searching. As an article from 2004 put it, "They were Swiss, but also Slavers."

And Yet

Today, the Swiss role in the slave trade is largely recognized, documented and acknowledged. A foundation, Cooperaxion, maintains an extensive databank that documents the activities of Swiss actors involved in the slave trade between the 17th and 19th centuries. In Neuchâtel, the city's museum devotes a large section to the city's role in the promotion and perpetuation of slavery. Private citizens offer walking tours devoted to the memory of the city's role in the slave trade.

And yet. Like most countries in Western Europe, Switzerland has had a hard time coming to terms with its history. This is particularly true with respect to its role during the Second World War. The country was in a rather delicate position — neutral, surrounded by hostile powers. Yet it was Switzerland that asked the Germans to stamp a "J" onto German-Jewish passports, making it easier for Swiss border guards to refuse entrance to German Jews. Until today, Switzerland's leading party, the Swiss People's Party, insists on the country's "honorable," if not heroic, role during the Second World War.

In comparison, Switzerland's confrontation with its less than honorable role in sustaining, if not promoting, the slave trade and slavery in general is exemplary. At the same time, however, Switzerland has done nothing in terms of what in

German is called Wiedergutmachung — literally, making things good again, or compensation. Here, of course, Switzerland is hardly alone. Wiedergutmachung does not necessarily mean only monetary compensation. It also means removing what offends, such as statues of national “heroes” whose deeds proved anything but heroic — from the imperialists in the UK to Confederate generals in the US to petty slavers in Switzerland. Both types of Wiedergutmachung have proven more than difficult, even in exemplary cases, such as Germany.

In Switzerland, recognition and acknowledgment of past misdeeds does not necessarily seem to have increased a sense of sensibility in the country. In Rolle, a small town between Geneva and Lausanne, the town’s main hotel is still called La Tête Noire — the black head. The German equivalent would be Mohrenkopf — the Moor’s head, the name of a chocolate-coated confectionary very popular in Germany and Austria. In both countries, the name has disappeared many years ago, replaced with the neutral “chocolate kiss.”

Not so in Switzerland. Until recently, one of the two major supermarket chains still offered the sweet under its original name, despite protests given its racist connotations. It was only in response to the current wave of antiracist protests that the chain decided to remove the product from its shelves. The producer, a small family enterprise, will continue to sell products under the traditional name. His argument: “The world is not going to be less racist if I change the name.” Sadly enough, he is probably right.

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Armenia and Azerbaijan Clash Again

Rejeanne Lacroix
July 17, 2020

After 30 years of a tense and barely tolerated relationship, it seems unlikely that any political or diplomatic solution will result from this latest round of tensions around Nagorno-Karabakh.

The on-again, off-again conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the border region of Nagorno-Karabakh became hot again on the weekend of July 11. Skirmishes are common in the contested region, which is known as Artsakh to the Armenian side, but this recent round of deadly attacks is the most serious escalation since the Four Day War in 2016 and is outside the typical point of contact. As usual, international calls for restraint and a diplomatic solution have been voiced, but internal politics between the two sides continue to amplify their serious disagreements. It seems as though the situation will continue to escalate, but the current circumstances are unlikely to spark a full-scale confrontation.

As in the case of other post-Soviet frozen conflicts — as well as land disputes in the North Caucasus — the dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh is intrinsically linked to the early history of the 20th century. Shifts of power resulting from the loss of the Ottoman Empire in World War I, the collapse of the Russian Empire and the territorial delineations configured in the formative days of the Soviet Union and its subsequent break-up created borders that did not appease all sides of the local populations. Nagorno-Karabakh has an ethnic Armenian majority, but political maneuvering in the 1920s handed its jurisdiction, and thus international recognition, to Azerbaijan. Armenia continued to voice its discontent over this arrangement, but matters of borders and ethnicity remained contained while the territories

were part of a wider empire with one central government.

As the Soviet Union neared its end, the question of Nagorno-Karabakh reemerged as Karabakh Armenians sought the reconnection of the territory with Armenia proper. Subsequent political actions, including an unofficial referendum and a petition to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR to sanction the territorial transfer, infuriated the Azeri public. In 1988, the Nagorno-Karabakh War officially broke out just as inter-ethnic relations deteriorated, killing between 20,000 and 30,000 people. A further referendum in 1991, boycotted by Azerbaijan, quashed the prior plea to join Armenia in favor of the pursuit of independence for Nagorno-Karabakh. Fighting escalated to the point that both Armenia and Azerbaijan accused each other of ethnic cleansing. It was at this point that the international community turned its attention to the regional conflict in the South Caucasus.

Contemporary Crisis

In 1994, the Russian Federation mediated a ceasefire between Armenia, Azerbaijan and the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh (as of 2017, officially the Republic of Artsakh). For the most part, this agreement has kept hostilities contained, minus the ongoing instances of low-level clashes and explicit violations by both sides. For example, the Four Day War in April 2016 witnessed Azerbaijan regain “two strategic hills, a village, and a total of about 2,000 hectares.” Nonetheless, Armenia has not fulfilled concessions required by UN Security Council resolutions, such as the withdrawal of its troops, leaving Azerbaijan perpetually frustrated.

There has been a continued push for engagement and peace talks by the international community, primarily the Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe’s (OSCE) Minsk Group, chaired by Russia, France and the United States, since 1992. Still, there are no official relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan as a result, and it has been difficult to

breathe life into peace talks in a decades-long conflict.

It is unclear what exactly sparked the current round of hostilities between Armenia and Azerbaijan, but both sides blame the other for the escalation. The heightened tensions came only days after Azerbaijan’s president, Ilham Aliyev, declared that peace talks to resolve the conflict had essentially stalled. One key difference between the current situation and those in the past is that the deadly encounter between forces did not occur directly in Nagorno-Karabakh, but rather in the northern Tavush section of the Armenian border.

On July 12, the Defense Ministry of Azerbaijan announced that Armenia launched an offensive that consequently killed two Azerbaijani servicemen and left five others wounded. In retaliation, Azeri forces launched a counter strike, setting the scene for yet another protracted spat. Attacks have continued almost on a daily basis since the outbreak of the current impasse, and there have been numerous reports of shelling, tank movements and the use of combat unmanned aerial vehicles and grenade launchers.

While actions on the ground may be dramatic, they remain at a low level. On the other hand, authorities in Armenia and Azerbaijan up the ante through heightened threats and verbal tit-for-tats. This is typical of ethnic spats that rely heavily on nationalist rhetoric to amplify cohesive public support for military actions, whether offensive or defensive. In a case of a highly provocative statement that should raise eyebrows, the head of Azerbaijan’s Ministry of Defense press service stated that “The Armenian side should not forget that the latest missile systems, which are in service with our army, allow hitting the Metsamor Nuclear Power Plant with high precision, which can lead to a huge catastrophe for Armenia.”

A report by the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted that such possible violations of international law are “an explicit demonstration of state terrorism and genocidal intent of Azerbaijan” as well as “leadership of Azerbaijan

acts as a menace to all the peoples of the region, including its own people.”

Too Late for Diplomacy?

After 30 years of a tense and barely tolerated relationship, it seems unlikely that any political or diplomatic solution will result from this latest round of tensions. Indeed, a significant diplomatic effort has been expended to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and wider disputes between Armenia and Azerbaijan to no avail. At this time, it is simply enough that the sides generally adhere to the 1994 ceasefire and engage with the Minsk Group. For instance, the OSCE institution released a press statement that the belligerents of the conflict must “resume substantive negotiations as soon as possible and emphasize the importance of returning OSCE monitors to the region as soon as circumstances allow.”

International voices have all chimed in and called for restraint by both Armenia and Azerbaijan. Besides being a co-chair for the Minsk Group, Russia is understandably concerned about the clashes in its neighborhood. Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey Rudenko reiterated sentiments similar to the OSCE, calling on “both parties to immediately ceasefire and start negotiations in order to prevent a recurrence of these incidents.” On the other hand, Turkey’s Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu called on Armenia to “pull its head together” and subsequently expressed that “Whatever solution Baku prefers for the occupied lands and Karabakh, we will stand by Azerbaijan.”

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Artsakh consequently slammed the Turkish position, condemned the destabilizing actions of Azerbaijan in the Tavush region, and echoed the need to return to the OSCE table. With numerous political actors and geopolitical interests at play, the fight over such a small but strategically important swathe of land becomes much more complex once compounded by the factors of ethnicity, history and national pride.

But it seems unlikely that the current situation will transition into another full-scale war. Rather, it is fair to assume that actions on the ground could escalate for the short term, but any protracted operation would be a serious regional blow to civilian populations and the energy sector. The Nagorno-Karabakh War of 1988-1994 displaced some 860,000 on both sides, and a similar outcome is possible today, with skirmishes occurring in populated areas.

Secondly, the Armenia-Azerbaijan borderlands are important transit points for oil and gas pipelines. Entities and media that follow energy markets have already raised concerns over the current fighting and how it may influence the flow of hydrocarbons. The ongoing situation around Tavush province is certainly more serious because it is closer to the South Caucasian Pipeline (SCP) that runs from the Azeri capital Baku to Tbilisi, Georgia, and then Erzurum, in Turkey. Furthermore, the SCP is part of the wider Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) and Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) — a network set to deliver gas to Europe upon completion later this year. These factors will obviously be taken into consideration by Azerbaijan’s strategists as they move forward with their plans in the region. It would be short-sighted to destabilize this network when diplomatic options are at hand to at least keep the status quo for the sake of business.

Additionally, the South Caucasus is a busy neighborhood, geopolitically speaking. In the case that the situation escalates and interests are at risk, one could expect greater involvement from Russia and Turkey. Although the Turkish Foreign Ministry gave a statement in strong support of Baku, it does not mean that Ankara would be willing to send forces. Moscow has little taste for engagement in a military operation either. Further, even the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) — a military alliance composed of countries from the Commonwealth of Independent States, including Armenia and Russia — promote a political solution rather than a military one. The

international community and organizations openly promote a return to the Minsk Group's negotiation table and, ideally, this will be the immediate result of the ongoing skirmishes.

The clashes between Armenia and Azerbaijan are likely to continue in the short term just as their non-existent diplomatic relations will endure without the political will for an inclusive political solution. Tavush province has taken the spotlight between the foes right now, but the recent occurrences are being widely viewed as the greater Nagorno-Karabakh conflict due to the proximity and the historical antagonism over the border. While it is unfortunate that cross-border shelling and conflict has attracted international interest to the South Caucasus yet again, it is not unexpected as matters never really settle to a level of peaceful monotony in the region.

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Big Blow for a Stable Dictatorship: Major Protests Hit Belarus

Anna Romandash
August 13, 2020

The protests have made a big crack in what is often referred to as Europe's last dictatorship, but the regime remains strong.

It's not that Belarus hasn't had any protests recently. It's just they have never been this big and this bloody. The capital, Minsk, has seen the use of military machinery, grenade explosions and special forces attacking both protesters and innocent bystanders. Smaller cities are experiencing major rallies, too. At least two people have died. Hundreds have been injured and nearly 7,000 arrested.

Journalists were attacked. Not that they were not attacked before, but again, it was never on a scale this massive and brutal. The regime blocked some of the popular media platforms which published independent content. I learned about some of my colleagues being detained. They were missing for days — no one knew what happened to them. Then, suddenly, the law enforcers decided to reveal that the journalists were, in fact, detained and that charges were being pressed against them.

When asked about the protests, Alexander Lukashenko rather unoriginally responded that they were being directed and funded from abroad. He also claimed that it was the foreign interference that blocked the internet in the country. Despite a lack of information and increasing violence, people managed to communicate via VPN and some encrypted channels. They keep protesting.

Neither Free nor Fair

Belarusians took to the streets on the evening of August 9, as voting stations were shutting down. This was hours before Lukashenko, the incumbent president, was announced to have won 80% of the vote in an election widely claimed to be fraudulent that the EU called “neither free nor fair.” Lukashenko's victory means a sixth term — and at least five more years — in office. He has ruled the country for 26 years already and is the only president independent Belarus has ever had.

Throughout his rule, Lukashenko had a low track record on human rights and managed to extend a nearly total control over the media, the military and the courts. He nearly succeeded in crushing all dissent and opposition. Previous protests were either brutally dispersed or died down on their own. However, the events leading up to the election demonstrated that some big changes were taking place in Belarus.

First of all, the opposition has managed to unite around an unlikely leader, Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, whose husband, a popular vlogger-turned-candidate Sergei Tikhanovsky,

was arrested and blocked from standing in the election. Second of all, the level of popular dissatisfaction has reached its all-time high, with people becoming increasingly disillusioned with the regime and its handling of the many crises facing Belarus. The pre-election protests, combined with post-election rallies, in Minsk as well as other major cities, have attracted the biggest crowds in the country's modern history.

On election day, people could not vote properly. There were long lines at voting stations, and many were unable to enter at all. The regime spoke about an unusually high rate of early voting. Some foreign journalists were detained and deported, and the internet worked only intermittently. Independent observers were detained across the country following reports of violations, and the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights has withdrawn its mission, leaving "no credible observers overseeing the election."

No Surprises

Consequently, the announcement of Lukashenko's sweeping victory surprised no one. It was also not surprising that people took to the streets to contest the result. What was surprising was the scale of the protests, their continuation despite a vicious crackdown and the level of fear that the regime has shown when attacking the demonstrators. Many people are missing, presumably detained, with widespread reports of inhumane treatment and beatings. The pictures of bloodied marchers on the streets of Minsk show the dangers of fighting for a right as basic as free elections.

Tikhanovskaya fled the country to neighboring Lithuania, following a brief disappearance after a visit to the election commission to file an appeal. She later recorded a video where she asked people not to protest. Many speculate she's being blackmailed by the regime.

The protests have continued for four days, with a little dialogue between the opposing sides. Women have come out wearing white, with

people forming human support chains, while doctors and workers at a number of factories across the country have walked out in protest. On August 12, more than 500 CEOs, investors and employees in the IT sector — the pride of Belarusian economy — have signed a letter calling for an end to violence and a new election, threatening to move their businesses elsewhere. There will potentially be an escalation or an attempt to quash the protest movement by the increasing use of force.

It is perhaps logical to be hopeful and to expect that change will come so that Belarus can transform into a more transparent country where human rights are respected and where citizens can vote, express themselves, enjoy peace and stability, and elect representatives who will follow democratic principles. However, even now, it's hard to predict what happens next.

The protests have made a big crack in what is often referred to as Europe's last dictatorship, but the regime remains strong. During his rule, Lukashenko had managed to maneuver Belarus between an assertive Russia while still maintaining limited contact with European leaders. So far, Germany has called for a reintroduction of sanctions that were lifted in 2016 to bolster cooperation, and Poland wants an emergency summit to discuss what the EU has condemned as "disproportionate and unacceptable state violence against peaceful protesters." But with the resources at his disposal, Lukashenko can remain in power unless both domestic and external pressure are applied equally strongly and consistently. The following days will show how the domestic situation evolves, and whether an external response will follow.

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Britain Fails Its Exams

Rupert Hodder
August 27, 2020

The A-level fiasco exposes the humbug swirling around the UK education system and the cynicism with which the government treats the people it claims to represent.

The Advanced Level Certificate (A-level), together with the General Certificate of Education (GCSE), is one of two sets of exams students across England, Wales and Northern Ireland (Scotland has its own system) sit in the summer.

The GCSE is a ticket to spending two years studying for A-levels, itself a ticket to university, where 40% of England's schoolchildren end up. The results are released in August by the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual.)

This year, there were no exams because the United Kingdom locked itself down against COVID-19. Instead, teachers supplied predicted grades. Teachers make these predictions every year, and it is with these in mind that universities make the offer of a place. Offers are made either unconditionally or with the proviso that the predictions are realized or bettered. In recent years, more and more offers have been made unconditionally, and these now comprise around a third of the total.

Universities do this because they are dependent upon the fees each student pays: no students, no fees, no university. The pressure rises as universities expand, and each finds itself having to attract a greater share of a shrinking number of school leavers.

Restrictions imposed by a hostile immigration service on international students' movements, and now in response to COVID-19, have made matters worse.

The Algorithm

This year was also different because, when the results were issued on August 13, it was obvious that Ofqual had intervened. The grades awarded to many students bore little resemblance to the schools' predictions. Worried that teachers were being too generous and that this would undermine the credibility of the exams, Ofqual devised and applied a mathematical formula to moderate the results. The algorithm took account of the students' mock results and the performance of each school in previous years, amongst other variables. The calculations determined that 40% of grades should be reduced. This threw offers and plans into doubt, causing umbrage among students, parents, teachers and universities.

Gavin Williamson, the education secretary, stuck resolutely to his guns. By August 17, he had abandoned them, and the original predicted results were reinstated. Williamson had been blindsided by Ofqual, he claimed, and only became aware of the full implications of the recalculations over the weekend. Ofqual struck back, saying that Williamson had known difficulties were brewing ever since March, when he ordered the regulator to adjust grades if they appeared inflated.

It was then made known that the head of Ofqual, Roger Taylor, established and ran a firm implicated in the Mid Staffs Hospital scandal. His firm, Dr Foster, had come up with an algorithm enabling the hospital to present its mortality rates as low when, in fact, they were dangerously high and its patients were being dreadfully mistreated.

Just what had Gavin Williamson been levelling at? The entire mess was completely avoidable and unnecessary. No exams had been taken, so there were no exams to be brought into disrepute. And there had been no exams because of exceptional circumstances. So why treat the teacher's predictions as an assault on standards, especially when predictions are made every year and unconditional offers are issued to a fair proportion of students as a matter of course?

Whatever the answer, the response was immediate. Gasps of disbelief at the secretary's

sheer incompetence (“He’s fucking useless,” declared one vice chancellor) were combined with emotional outbursts from students worried that their lives had been ruined, from parents trying to deal with the fallout at home, and from university staff whose summer breaks were interrupted.

All parties most likely suspected that things would eventually sort themselves out if only because chancellors are desperate to fill seats. Having said that, the government and Ofqual displayed a complete absence of trust in teachers and schools. Most disgraceful was the treatment of students with potential and drive who had worked hard against the odds in schools assessed as poor over the last few years. At a macro-level, it meant that the proportion of the most deprived pupils (the bottom third) who achieved a Grade C or better fell by nearly 11%, while the independent schools saw their proportion of A and A* grades increase by nearly 5%.

An education secretary, whose only claim to the job is that he was not educated at an independent school and did not go to Oxford or Cambridge, willfully took away the ladder from the very kids it is meant for. A more callous and spiteful decision in the name of equality is difficult to imagine. However, the farrago matters for another, even more important, reason. It illustrates just how superficial education has become.

Grades Are Everything

The A-levels are not just a passport to university. A school whose students’ average grades fall too far will come under greater scrutiny from the government, which can end in sanctions of one sort or another. These include changing staff pay and conditions; removing staff and governing bodies; turning the school’s budget over to an interim board; closing the school; or handing it (minus its former staff) to an academy. Academies, though state-funded, have more control over management, curriculum, pay, the selection of students and staff, and the freedom to attract money from private sponsors.

Of the 3,400 or so state-funded secondary schools (3.25 million pupils), nearly three-quarters (about 2.3 million children) are now academies. If an academy fails, then it, too, is either absorbed by a more successful one or closed. Independent schools judged to be failing can also find themselves in trouble. For instance, they may be prohibited from taking on new pupils, fined or closed. Proprietors who do not respond adequately to enforcement notices can end up in prison.

Grades, then, have come to mean everything. And because they mean everything, what they are supposed to signify has come to mean very little at all. The education system — and “system” is a good description — barely manages to educate. Where a good education is found in English schools, it is provided by teachers and parents despite the vast amount of nonsensical instructions (misleadingly entitled “guidelines”) issued by the government. In these oases of levelheadedness, staff teach outside the system’s narrow confines, helping children to explore more rounded and deeper understandings of the world, introducing them to new ways of thinking.

The problem is not just that teachers are weighed down and worn out by red tape. To avoid falling foul of the government and its quality enforcers, teachers must consume millions of words of legislation, statutory instruments, notices and guidance that lay out in extraordinary detail everyday practice within the school. It is that education — or rather the fulfillment of standards dictated by the government — has become a bureaucratic procedure, a glorified exercise in form-filling, in which content, imagination, experimentation and sustained and unconventional thought no longer matter.

Children and teachers must do what they are told to do in the way they are told to do it. “Best practice” holds sway over fresh thought. The student must see the world as directed. Thus, for instance, a play is a composite of meaning shaped by literary and dramatic devices. History is an unstable melange of constructions arrived at by

historians through their interpersonal relationships. The economy must be studied through the application of the correct economic models. Only by breaking the mind into a kaleidoscope of skills through which patchworks of information are collected and assembled, declare geography teachers, can social and natural worlds be understood. Facts, interpretations and evidence are set out in neat bullet points so they can be memorized and marshalled in the correct way and in the correct place.

All of this and more — such as precisely defined “command words” like “analyze” and “suggest,” and the marks to be awarded for each correctly placed fact or argument — is found in thick, glossy volumes of “specifications,” “amendments,” “sample assessments,” published “resources,” “mark schemes,” “specimen papers,” “exemplar material,” “schemes of work,” “skills for learning and work” and “topic materials” produced by exam boards for each subject.

Officialism smothers all schools. But when parents are well educated and bring up their children to read, learn, write, talk and think coherently, teachers have an easier time of it. Children are confident, and this shows in class and in their work. Teachers know that as far as the exams are concerned, their students can, to all intents and purposes, teach themselves. A teacher’s immediate job is to make sure a child is practiced in the bureaucracy and is given the required information. This will deliver the grades.

The second, and more important job, is to lead their children out and well beyond those limitations. It is this — a passion for their subject and a willingness to go further — that really prepares the child for university and beyond. Most, though not all, of these schools are independent and selective.

State-funded schools are far more constrained by the system, and it is all they can do to meet its demands. The bureaucracy does not allow them the time, freedom, money or incentive to instill in children and parents the outlooks, values, beliefs,

practices and confidence that will enable them to see beyond the government’s petty world view.

I should say that the distinction I make between independent and state is too stark. There are some excellent state schools, and there are some terrible independent schools — unhappy little communities tucked away in some old building in the countryside. My point is simply that education, rather than its bureaucratized version, is found unevenly and rarely, and is more likely where teachers and parents have the wherewithal and determination to play the system and so keep it from dragging them and their children down into a mire of niggling and pointless tasks, boredom and despondency.

Not Much Help

British universities have not been much help. Rather than find common cause with schools and encourage them in fostering a university-style education, universities have gone along with government reforms all too easily and are becoming more like brash, over-confident schools. The university has become a brand, an experience, a rite, designed to extract as much cash as possible from students. Walk away with a good degree, the student is told, and our brand will confer upon you a charisma, a light, a duende that will set you up for life or at least give you a foot in a door so that you show an employer what you can do. Meanwhile, behind all the pizzazz, the content of the degree is scratched away at and the process through which the certificate is awarded becomes more bureaucratic.

The trend is especially obvious in universities without a well-established pedigree. Why should a student pay tens of thousands of pounds for a certificate from a university no one has heard of? The answer is “relevance,” and relevance means “skills.” As the degree is hollowed out, the space is filled with an omnium-gatherum of skills: cognitive skills, intellectual skills, key skills, transferable skills, employment-related skills, practical skills, applied skills, inter-personal skills, writing skills, reading skills, thinking

skills, networking skills, team-working skills, observational skills, speaking skills, speech-making skills, analytical skills, editing skills, note-taking skills, research skills, computing skills, entrepreneurial skills, lab skills, creative skills, leadership skills, work ethic skills and ethical skills.

Choose a verb or adjective, put the word “skill” after it, and it becomes teachable, assessable and marketable. To write an essay or a thesis or to take an exam is to engage in a piece of bureaucracy, an updated form of medieval scholasticism, in which all these skills are stitched together, tracked and traced.

By lifting a corner of the veil, the A-level fiasco exposes a little of the humbug swirling around the government’s education system and something of the cynicism with which the government treats the people it claims to represent. Just how deep this cynicism goes, however, is revealed by a matter from which the farce distracted public attention over the last week — a week that I suspect will prove deadly. I say deadly because it will be difficult in the time left to deter the government from repeating the same mistakes it made at the start of the pandemic that cost over 40,000 lives.

At present, the UK government and its scientific advisers are busy saturating the press with its claim that the “life chances” of children will be damaged irreparably if schools stay closed. A generation of children will “fall behind,” many of those who rely on schools to feed them will go hungry, and many others, forced to stay at home, will be at greater risk of physical, sexual and emotional abuse.

The government’s chutzpah is breathtaking. To indict the produce of its own policies and then use that indictment as cheap blackmail in support of those same policies is surely the height of contempt. A fifth of the population is poor because of government actions and inactions over many years. It is these “ordinary” people, as ministers like to call them, who are most under pressure to go work because of cuts to welfare,

changes in benefit rules and threats from government.

It is also they who, last time around, suffered most from a virus allowed to run loose. And it is their children who are most likely to bring it back home after struggling on public transport and spending hours in crowded classrooms working on pointless and soul-destroying bureaucratic techniques. The only strand of reasoning that makes some kind of sense in this tangled web of lunacy is a ruthless one: the primary function of the education system is to keep Britain’s labor force — and especially its cheaper end — at work.

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What Is Behind the Rise of Islamophobia in France?

Ali Demirdas
November 5, 2020

France’s unsuccessful assimilation policies, a rapidly deteriorating economy and the ensuing rise of the far right have all contributed to the demonization of Muslims.

On October 29, the French Ministry of Interior sent out a message on social media warning of “Violent radicalization, Islamism ... If you have any doubts about someone you know, contact the toll-free number.” The situation in France has exploded into what is now increasingly reminiscent of 1930s Germany when Hitler sought informants on Jews.

Samuel Paty, a schoolteacher who showed his students the derogatory cartoons of Prophet Muhammad that inspired the 2015 attack on the offices of the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo in

Paris, was killed by an 18-year-old Chechen refugee, Abdoullakh Anzorov. When French President Emmanuel Macron defended the display of the cartoons, which are considered by Muslims to be extremely offensive, as a matter of freedom of expression, the ongoing tension between the French state and its roughly 6 million-strong Muslim population (or 10%) is, in fact, a manifestation of a much deeper crisis, heralding what seems to be a growing trend across Western civilization.

French Islam

For France, the issue has its roots in the country's domestic and international politics. The concept of radical assimilation has been a part of France's governance tradition since its colonial reign. In the 19th and 20th centuries, in Francophone Africa, the natives were considered "French" and "civilized" as long as they rejected their own cultures in favor of that of the colonial power.

The same mentality applies to the immigrants who have moved to France from former African colonies, particularly Algeria, Tunisia, and those countries across West Africa. This strict interpretation of the assimilation policy is further reinforced at home by the rigorous redefinition of French secularism, or *laïcité*, whereby the visibility of religion, particularly Islam, is suppressed in the public sphere, and the responsibility of immigrants, and Muslims in particular, is to demonstrate their attachment to French values and culture.

The suppression of religion in the public sphere has created enormous friction between the secular state and Muslims, whose faith requires observance around the clock. For example, the arrest of Muslims who have had to pray in the streets due to lack of mosques has become commonplace. In a striking display of French secularism, a Muslim woman was forced on a beach in Cannes in 2016 by police to remove her Islamic burkini and given a citation for "wearing an outfit that disrespects good morals and secularism." France's aggressive attempt to create nationwide equality has naturally led to

repression of diversity, forcing Muslims to retreat to ghettoized suburbs. This in turn created discrimination and a fear of social rejection among France's rapidly growing Muslim population.

This brings us to how Islam is viewed in France. Much as across Europe, Islam is the fastest-growing faith in France. French Muslims are much younger and have considerably more children than other French nationals. Correspondingly, Christianity in France is in free fall. According to the survey by St. Mary's University, London, only 25% of the French between the ages of 16 and 29 identify as Christian. What is even more concerning for the French state is that the number of people converting to Islam is on the rise as well. Out of France's 6 million Muslims, 200,000 are estimated to be converts, among whom are celebrity figures such as the rapper Diam's and footballer Franck Ribery. Conversion to Islam is particularly prevalent among women, which has created a body of research examining this trend.

The increasing demographic disparity between Islam and Christianity, coupled with an increasing refugee influx from Muslim countries, has given rise to the notion that within two generations, Muslims are going to be the majority in Europe. Naturally, this argument has been used by right-wing politicians across Europe. France is no exception. Marie Le Pen, the leader of the far-right National Rally, has skillfully used this argument throughout her political career. In the first round of the 2017 French presidential elections, Le Pen garnered a sizable 21.3% of the vote against Emmanuel Macron's 24%, only to lose in the run-off election. The 2017 election clearly showed that right-wing politics are on the rise in France and elsewhere in Europe.

Macron's harsh stance toward French Muslims should also be seen from this angle. In the 2022 French presidential race, Macron is expected to seek a second term against Le Pen, his most likely contender. To the president's dismay, the current polls suggest that at 26%, Le Pen has an edge over his 25%. This being the

case, the incumbent Macron is clearly courting the far-right constituency by adopting Islamophobic policies that would be expected from a Le Pen presidency.

More Problems

The current atmosphere is highly conducive for a further rise of the far right across Europe. Adolf Hitler's rise to power was facilitated by the Great Depression of 1929 and its devastating impact on Germany. Likewise, the 2008 global financial crisis jolted the West so much that we have been witnessing the demise of the center-left and the gradual rise of the radical right in Poland, Hungary, France, Germany, Italy, Britain and the United States.

Macron's current effort to elevate Islam as France's biggest problem should also be seen as an attempt to distract the public from his failures at home and abroad. The rapidly deteriorating economy, austerity measures, heavy taxation and the proposed pension reform have inspired the yellow vests movement that has been staging violent demonstrations against the government since 2018. Abroad, France appears to be bogged down in its never-ending wars in former African colonies as French casualties pile up. In Libya, Macron has failed to secure warlord Khalifa Haftar's rule. In the East Mediterranean, France has failed to secure the interests of Greece, an ally.

There is one country that France has had to unsuccessfully counter in the above-mentioned regions: Turkey. It is for this reason that Macron has consistently perceived Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan as his archrival and increased his anti-Turkey rhetoric. Furthermore, Erdogan, at the moment the most outspoken critic of the Charlie Hebdo cartoons, is the only world leader who can influence Muslims in France, and Macron knows it. Erdogan's call on Muslims for a worldwide boycott of French products prompted the French government's plea to the Muslim world to denounce the boycott. While the economic effect of the boycott is not known yet,

Macron seems to be softening his tone on the cartoon issue.

France's unsuccessful assimilation policies, rapidly deteriorating economy, failed foreign policy alongside the ensuing rise of the far right have all contributed to the current demonization of Muslims in the country. As Western values such as democracy, human rights and equality are losing relevance, there is little hope that this trend will change any time soon.

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LATIN AMERICA & THE CARRIBBEAN

Will the West Lose Guyana to the Chinese?

Ian McCredie
January 6, 2020

By investing in Guyana's oil industry, the Chinese are taking a longer, multi-generational view.

Guyana, home to just 750,000 people, is about to leap from one of the poorest to one of the richest countries in the world. The financial predators are circling, led by the Chinese. Guyana's inexperience, incompetence and lack of Western interest will hand the Chinese a valuable prey.

Oil discoveries off the coast of Guyana are on course to produce about 1 million barrels per day of oil for 30 years. If oil fetches just \$50 per barrel, this equates to nearly \$500 billion. Guyana's share of this will be approximately \$300 billion; the other \$200 billion will go to the

Exxon-controlled consortium. The amounts are conservative estimates: New oil discoveries keep coming. Exxon and its partners, Hess and Nexen (the latter owned by the Chinese), landed a very sweet deal.

Guyanese outrage about how its government granted such a stupendously generous package is vocal and growing. The reason is no more than incompetence and sharp Exxon negotiators. But Guyana's share is still gigantic and could transform the country.

Guyana's future is most likely either along the Equatorial Guinea path — where a small elite takes all the oil money and the majority remain in poverty — or the Norwegian model. Under the latter, the oil money is invested wisely so that all citizens become wealthy. The majority of Guyanese simply do not understand the consequences of the wall of money about to hit the country — nor does the government, whose development program is muddled, myopic and concerned only with short-term projects.

No leader has outlined a vision to guide this remarkable country out of poverty to a golden future. The government has not even produced a practical national development plan, only a list of well-meaning short-term objectives. Apart from President David Granger, who is a humble and honest ascetic, the rest of his government is hopelessly out of its depth. Granger is about to face a decisive election which, despite a potentially rosy future, he will likely lose to the notoriously corrupt opposition party. As a result, the Equatorial Guinea model is the likely outcome, with a few Guyanese becoming immensely wealthy, and the majority seeing little change.

A variety of carpet baggers and more or less (usually less) respectable merchants have turned up from Nigeria and other parts of West Africa exploit the opportunity. But above all, the Chinese have arrived in force, and dealing with a self-selected elite is just their style. They have a huge embassy to cultivate the locals, and spy out deals and projects to build. Already Chinese contractors have refurbished the main airport.

The Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi has visited to sign up Guyana to the Belt and Road Initiative, and there are many mega projects in his sights.

These include the first paved road from Boa Vista in the north east of Brazil to the Guyanese coast, a new deep-water port and industrial zone powered by gas piped from off shore. Guyana needs a new capital on higher ground. Georgetown, right on the coast, is about a meter below sea level, and at high tide the sea pours over the inadequate sea wall. The city is one big storm away from disaster, and rising sea levels will anyway inundate the city in a few years.

What's more, 90% of the country's population lives on a coastal strip nearly all of which is below sea level at high tide. The Chinese are ready and willing to relocate the capital and rebuild the coastal defenses. They are eager to provide the finance, secured against future oil revenue and to lock in Guyana for the long term. They will of course import tens of thousands of Chinese laborers to do the work. As usual in such situations, they will never leave.

Guyana's former colonial master, Great Britain, has a tiny embassy, and no senior UK ministers have visited in decades. The US is slightly more alert, though its embassy is full of Drug Enforcement Administration agents and is more interested in the war on drugs and the conflict with Venezuela. The US is going to miss out on the development bonanza and lose Guyana to the Chinese, and Western business doesn't want to invest in a country plagued by government ineptitude, petty corruption and almost total lack of local capacity.

Apart from Exxon and Hess, who sit safely off shore and ship their oil to foreign markets, Western businesses seem set to sit this opportunity out. The Chinese are taking a longer, multi-generational view. They will invest in this lucrative market, settle their nationals, rebuild the infrastructure — and Guyana will become another Chinese satellite.

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Cubans Feel the Blow of US Sanctions

Elton Smole
January 30, 2020

The latest US sanctions reversed the progress made by the Obama administration, and the brunt of their force is being felt by the very people the measures claim to support.

In Havana, Cuba, the effects of sanctions imposed by the Trump administration have seeped their way into daily life: the long lines of cars outside gas stations, the dwindling stock on store shelves, the increasingly common apagones, or power outages. In early September 2019, Cuba's President Miguel Díaz-Canel appeared on live television to address the Cuban people, describing the country's economic situation as "coyuntural," meaning happening on some occasions, but not in a habitual or customary manner.

This diagnosis was ridiculed by many Cubans, all too aware of the decade-long crisis known as the Special Period that followed the dissolution of the Soviet Union — a geopolitical shift that decimated the Cuban economy. With more and more symptoms of another lasting economic hardship today, the word "coyuntural" strikes many as an ironic description of a situation that may not be as temporary as it seems.

Cuban Thaw

Upon taking office in 2017, US President Donald Trump immediately vowed to reverse the policies of the Obama-era Cuban thaw, a period which saw the 44th US president become the first to visit Cuba in almost a century, along with the easing of the decades-old embargo, looser travel

restrictions and the reopening of embassies in Washington and Havana. "Since December 2014, the Treasury Department and our partners across the Administration have progressively reshaped our regulations in order to empower the Cuban people and enable economic advancements for Cubans and Americans," said Jack Lew, secretary of the treasury under Barack Obama, in a statement announcing the continued easing of sanctions, which were in effect until early 2017.

The Obama-era changes had marked a new potential for economic growth in a country in need of foreign investment to develop its economy. Tourism boomed as a result of these policies, along with changes to Cuba's Constitution in 2019 that expanded the private sector. Cuba became the "fastest growing country on Airbnb ever in the history of our platform," its founder said in 2016. The number of US tourists visiting Cuba annually rose from 63,046 in 2010 to 162,927 in 2015, then nearly doubled in both 2016 and 2017, before plateauing at 637,907 a year into Donald Trump's presidency. Between 2017 and 2018, the number of Americans visiting Cuba rose by a mere 19,561, compared to a 333,749 increase the previous year.

It was on June 16, 2017, that Trump issued a National Security Presidential Memorandum (NSPM) on "Strengthening the Policy of the United States Toward Cuba," outlining his hard-line stance. Restrictions on financial transactions, trade and commerce were announced in November of 2017 by the Departments of State, Commerce and the Treasury to implement the NSPM. The Trump administration has continued laying on sanctions, releasing new travel bans, including restrictions on vessels entering Cuba, in June last year.

This affected vessels transporting oil to the island from Venezuela. Cuba depends heavily on oil exports from Venezuela, which have slowed down in recent years as a result of the latter's own economic crisis. Up until 2015, Venezuela supplied Cuba with 90,000 barrels of crude and fuel per day, the majority of the island's 145,000 bpd consumption, according to Reuters.

However, sanctions placed by the US on PDVSA, Venezuela's national oil company, have led to a significant decline in its output in recent years, with an estimated \$11-billion loss in proceeds from exports in 2019. For Cuba, which as of 2017 only produces 51,000 bpd, these sanctions have had an extreme impact on daily life.

For the People

The Trump administration's policy on Cuba, like that of his predecessor, claims to be in support of the people of Cuba. "We are taking additional steps to financially isolate the Cuban regime. The United States holds the Cuban regime accountable for its oppression of the Cuban people and support of other dictatorships throughout the region, such as the illegitimate Maduro regime," Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said in September 2019. "Through these regulatory amendments, the Treasury is denying Cuba access to hard currency, and we are curbing the Cuban government's bad behavior while continuing to support the long-suffering people of Cuba."

Although these sanctions claim to be a response to government suppression, such as the arrest of an independent journalist, Roberto Quinones, in September, they do little to achieve their intended purpose of supporting the people of Cuba. In reality, the economic impact of the sanctions is felt most by ordinary Cubans struggling to make ends meet.

The petroleum shortages have caused a large-scale transportation crisis, leading to severely overcrowded public transportation and constant delays. Long lines of cars could be seen outside of gas stations, and some taxi drivers resorted to sleeping in their cabs overnight while waiting for gas, in order to continue working the next day. The University of Havana was forced to shorten the school day by two hours to allow more time for students to commute to class, and the National Library, among other national institutions, turned off its lights and closed its

doors early as a way to reduce energy consumption.

In many neighborhoods, power outages have also become increasingly common. During the Special Period in the 1990s, when Cuba faced more extreme oil shortages, the government was forced to implement scheduled power outages across the country. Although the current power cuts tend to be sporadic and temporary, they are a dark reminder of that difficult time, and some fear that the hardships of this so-called "coyuntural period" may become the norm.

Trump's approach to Cuba has been a policy failure at best, and at worst another chapter in the United States' long history of exerting its grip on the country under the guise of defending its people. The latest US sanctions reversed the progress made by the Obama administration in reopening diplomatic ties with Cuba and, more than anything, the brunt of their force is being felt by the very people the sanctions claim to support.

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Chinese Ambitions for Latin America: What's the Trade-Off?

German Peinado Delgado & Glenn Ojeda Vega
March 18, 2020

China's aggressive policies toward Latin America are undoing decades of progress, driving developing countries into deeper reliance on commodity exports.

As the global COVID-19 pandemic engulfs the world, the grand strategy of revisionist powers will either falter or accelerate. At the dawn of the post-coronavirus world — whenever it might come — the Chinese Communist Party will push forward with its Belt

and Road Initiative (BRI), which will threaten to further marginalize the role of South America in the global supply chain.

The Republic of Colombia and the People's Republic of China officially established diplomatic relations in 1980 when Colombia ended the diplomatic relationship with Taiwan (Republic of China). This October, both nations are celebrating 40 years of an important bilateral relationship that has flourished and continues to grow, particularly in terms of trade.

In recent years, Chinese consumer goods have flooded the Colombian market, throwing domestic manufacturers into dire financial straits. These mass imports to South American markets were a result of governments and private sector firms spending decades developing a local industrial base that would allow the continent to diversify beyond commodity exports. South American nations like Colombia must now look into new economic policies that ensure sustainable industrial development domestically and advantageous trade growth if they expect to further increase their strategic relevance in the global economy.

Colombia-China Trade Relations

In 2017, aggregate imports into Colombia were dominated by refined petroleum, broadcasting equipment and cars. That same year, Colombia's main import partners were the United States, representing 26% of all goods that entered the country, and China, accounting for 19% of all imports coming into Colombia. Meanwhile, Colombia's chief export products in 2017 were crude petroleum, coal and coffee. Within the export sector, Colombia's main customers are the US, Panama and China, representing, respectively, 28%, 6.6% and 5.2% of all the Colombian goods sold internationally.

At the end of 2017, Colombia's annual trade balance was in the red by \$5.18 billion, with a total of \$39.1 billion in exports and \$44.3 billion in imports. That year, Colombia exported approximately \$11.1 billion worth of goods to the United States, \$2.6 billion to Panama and over \$2

billion to China. Simultaneously, in 2017, Colombia imported some \$11.7 billion from the US and another \$8.6 billion from China. A macroanalysis of this commercial scenario stands in stark contrast with the year 2000, when the US purchased 49% of Colombia's exports, while China was the destination of less than 0.25% of all the goods the South American nation sold internationally. Similarly, in 2000, China was the origin of merely 2.9% of all goods imported into Colombia.

Nearly two decades later, Colombia's trade changed significantly. In 2017, Colombia's main export to China was crude petroleum, valued at \$1.8 billion, which represented 79% of Colombia's exports to China that year. Nevertheless, this represents a decrease from 2014, when crude petroleum totaled 90% of the value of Colombia's exports to China, with a total of \$5.2 billion. Likewise, in 2013, 84% of Colombia's export income from China was from crude petroleum, totaling \$4.3 billion. Amongst the key takeaways from this dataset is that, currently, one of China's main interests in Colombia is the purchase of energy resources and fossil fuels like petroleum.

Even though it might seem as if China purchased much less petroleum in 2017 than it did in 2014 and 2013, another takeaway is that China's trade balance with Colombia is dependent upon international petroleum prices. In reality, China imported between 32 million and 50 million barrels of crude petroleum annually from Colombia between 2013 and 2017. However, the average price per barrel in 2013 was \$100 and approximately \$95 in 2014. Meanwhile, by 2017, the price per oil barrel had decreased to an average of less than \$60.

A Macroeconomic Dilemma

Since independence from European colonialism, South American nations like Colombia have struggled to develop a robust local economy. Historically, the region's new republics relied heavily on the export of commodities to Europe and North America while importing most of their

manufactured goods. To reverse their dependency on commodity exports, the region's leading industrialists and policymakers spent most of the 20th century developing domestic manufacturing and regional industries.

This economic agenda was championed by South American economists preaching import substitution industrialization, also known as the ISI development model. These initiatives had different degrees of success throughout South America, with some economies developing larger and more significant industries than others. Overall, countries like Argentina, Brazil and Colombia achieved an unprecedented level of industrialization, even if large sectors of some national economies still relied on the export of agricultural and mineral commodities.

ISI's success was limited because it sought to commercialize domestic value-added goods in regional markets that were not yet fully developed, lacking the purchasing power to sustain significant growth. Even though a country like Colombia still relies on imports to get most of its high-end manufactured goods, particularly in the digital age, some progress has indeed been achieved toward the development of local expertise and the establishment of industries that can compete both domestically and internationally.

Today, however, China's aggressive policies toward the region and its intent to re-route the global value-added chain to Eurasia are undoing decades of progress, driving developing countries into deeper reliance on commodity exports, and pushing South America to a peripheral role within the global supply chain.

In 2019, President Ivan Duque's administration began to implement a new strategy toward the second largest economy in the world. To this end, in July of last year, Duque made an official visit to China aiming to increase cooperation and trade between the two nations. The last official visit from a Colombian president occurred in 2012, during the tenure of President Juan Manuel Santos. The attempt at a more hands-on approach from Colombia is without a

doubt an effort to increase value-added Chinese investments in the country and the region, as well as to reaffirm their commitment to diplomatic and economic relations.

Colombia will be wise to monitor how increased trade with China has led to a return toward the massive export of agricultural and mineral commodities, particularly in countries such as Brazil, Chile, Peru and Bolivia. If Colombia, and South America as a whole, wishes to grow nascent domestic manufacturing and not become a distant supplier of commodities for the BRI supply chain, it must put a check on Chinese-made consumer goods with significant value added, such as clothing, computers, appliances and cars currently flooding the national market.

With a Colombia-China free trade agreement on the horizon, the effects of Chinese ambitions on Colombia's future could burden the country for generations, and policymakers would be wise to look beyond an ephemeral victory lap.

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Why Maximum Pressure on Venezuela Is the Only Way Out

Leonardo Vivas
April 22, 2020

The best chance Venezuela has to avoid a humanitarian disaster is to force a change in the current leadership of the country.

Venezuela's dictatorship has proved to be highly resilient. It mutated from a lively democracy in the second half of the 20th century to a hybrid regime where unfree and

unfair elections were held and repression reigned, giving way to the current dictatorial domination. In the process, it also destroyed the economy and brought down most institutions. Moreover, it has become a co-opted state where a variety of criminal groups, including narcotics, operate freely.

Yet it is perhaps the collapse of the economy, including the century-long prosperous oil industry, that has brought about a highly dystopian world where the crudest mechanisms of a war economy flourish, favoring control of the population at the grassroots level, a crude exchange of food and medicines for political favors. In 2016, the late Hugo Chavez's planned breakdown of a weak market economy under the pretext of building a new brand of socialism led to a humanitarian crisis — with drastic shortages of food and medicines — and then to the largest migration crisis in the world, second only to Syria. This could bring total collapse and famine to Venezuela under the new conditions created by the coronavirus pandemic.

Although most international analysts agree on many of these trends, there is no consensus either on which of these features dominates or on how to bring back democracy and avoid a potential humanitarian disaster. Some observers rightly point to the fact that the bulk of the narcotics going through Venezuela is not decisive to the US drug trade. They fail to consider, however, the extent to which — different to other countries — criminal groups form part of the Venezuelan state.

Other experts, members of international organizations or even countries rejecting the current regime may agree on the trends but not on the solutions. The best way out of the tragedy, many of them argue, is to seek a negotiation between the different poles of Venezuelan politics, especially where two powers seem to dispute legitimacy. One led by the president of the national assembly, Juan Guaido, claims symbolic legitimacy while the other, led by the de facto president, Nicolas Maduro, holds most

levers of power (institutions, the military, the police, governorships and the like).

It seems to have been forgotten that all prior attempts at negotiations have always failed because Maduro and his ruling elite lack the right incentives to abandon power. As has transpired from those attempts, negotiators on the democratic side always noticed that their counterparts from the regime were not afraid of the consequences if no agreement is reached.

A National Crisis Becomes an International Hotspot

The last straw in the Venezuelan conundrum may perhaps be the most critical at the moment: The Venezuelan crisis is no longer a national or even a regional problem. In the last decade or so, it has truly become an international crisis, just like Syria a few years back, Cuba in the early 1960s or Suez in the 1950s.

Blasting the Trump administration for its intervention in Venezuela has become a recurrent theme for many analysts, either by arguing its importance in a reelection year, due to its importance in the Florida electorate or simply as a revamping of the Monroe doctrine. But most people fail to admit that Venezuela turned into a contested international spot since the beginning of Chavez's rule. In the aftermath of the 2002 coup in Venezuela, Cuba became directly involved, not only with the use of its doctors in the creation of the wide and much-publicized primary care network, but also in military counterintelligence, presidential security and in other fringe business.

Despite its current reticence to continue its involvement, China was for at least a decade Venezuela's main creditor, with oil loans that amounted to \$50 billion since 2007, of which around half still remained outstanding by 2019, after continuous renegotiations. But Beijing offered a long list of additional loans, directly related to its involvement in different industries, like railroads, house construction, bridges and other infrastructure facilities. China avoided getting entangled in more direct political or

security interventions, apart from building a satellite that allowed Venezuela greater telecommunications autonomy — hence, greater military security — until it collapsed a few weeks ago.

In contrast, typical of its highly assertive geopolitical stand, it is Russia that has higher stakes in Venezuela, mainly in two strategic areas: arms and oil. In the former, Russia sold around \$10 billion in a wide range of armaments, including missiles, airplanes, helicopters, tanks, infantry fighting vehicles with anti-tank missiles, rocket launchers, automatic rifles and many others, as Chavez maneuvered to break off from US military influence.

At the peak of the deals, Russia's armament companies deployed up to 2,000 technicians for support, declining drastically in the last couple of years. At the same time, mainly through oil giant Rosneft, Russia has invested around \$9 billion in Venezuela's oil — mostly in its heavy oil component — since 2006. Most of the investment in both areas took place through direct loans. While more eager than China to cash in their loans (close to 80% by the end of 2019), Russia has been far more supportive of Maduro, risking for some time the use of Rosneft's wide trading network to grant oil sales throughout the world, even under US sanctions.

On the opposite side, in recent years, a vast effort has taken place in both Latin America and Europe to isolate the Maduro regime and push for free elections. This is either through minor sanctions, mostly directed at individuals in power in Venezuela, by breaking diplomatic ties or by abandoning recently created regional organizations like the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) or the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), which were promoted by Chavez in his golden years.

But without doubt, the US has been the most important international player in Venezuela's turmoil. Early after taking office in 2017, the Trump administration dramatically changed Barack Obama's peaceful coexistence with Cuba and Venezuela. Where Obama initiated modest

personal sanctions against perpetrators of human rights violations, US President Donald Trump doubled down, expanding the range of personal sanctions and initiating financial sanctions against the Maduro administration and PDVSA, Venezuela's state oil company.

Year after year, the sanctions have grown in scope and depth, until recently putting into effect what amounts to an oil embargo. In recent weeks, three additional moves have put greater pressure on Venezuela's regime. The first was the indictment of Maduro and his closest allies for narcoterrorism, setting a price on the heads of a selected number of them. The second was the mobilization of a fleet to the Caribbean to allegedly stop narcotics trade directly (but indirectly to put military pressure on Venezuela). The third was sending an olive branch that allows for the creation of a transitional government in the country where Chavismo would participate and the high command of the armed forces respected.

The Coronavirus and Other Urgencies

One of the preferred arguments of the anti-sanction analysts has been that contrary to their purported goals of cracking the regime, what sanctions have achieved is the circling of the wagons around Maduro and the core elite. This may have been true so far, but there is no evidence that other strategies to bring them to the negotiating table have worked either. Nor has there been a minimal political will within the Maduro regime to correct course, allowing Venezuela to turn back to democracy and a less traumatic economic experience.

That was the case of other countries of the so-called "Pink Wave" in Latin America, like Bolivia, Ecuador in the times of Rafael Correa or even Nicaragua. This stance against sanctions and other strong measures has gained new credence in the midst of a crisis caused by the novel coronavirus, known as COVID-19. Why torment Venezuelans even more, they seem to claim? What these late new measures risk is

creating a horrendous sanitary situation, given the weakness of the health system in the country.

At first sight, these arguments seem commonsense. But at a closer look, they suggest substantial inconsistencies. Take COVID-19. For reasons that are still unknown, Mother Nature has been very benevolent with Venezuela regarding the impact of the coronavirus. So far, both the number of people infected and the resulting deaths have been very low. But as most experts claim, Venezuela may not fall prey to the pandemic in this first stage, but there is no guarantee that it may not succumb during another wave, mainly because there will be no means to immunize the population at large. Sooner or later, the country has to be prepared for an outbreak. What are then the odds that Venezuela will continue faring well?

One first aspect is the regime's capacity to overcome the shortages of the health system because, after all, it would be responsible for responding to an impending massive outbreak of the virus. Most experts, even those opposed to sanctions and other forms of pressure, agree that the health system in Venezuela is in dire straits. Not only has the primary care network developed by Chavez in his golden era collapsed, but the public hospitals and even private ones are in no condition to face the normal handling of public health, much less an epidemic.

It is not only the shortages in the specific requirements to face the epidemic, but even more critical ones: lack of running water, continuous electricity failures, and acute shortages of antibiotics and even alcohol and other minimal requirements for emergency room attention. If the regime has failed to reverse or even face these disturbing conditions in the last few years, why would it do it better now? Moreover, there is a lack of doctors, nurses and other paramedic personnel, many of whom have engrossed the diaspora. Clearly, the regime would be unable to bring them back on short notice, but an appeal by a transitional government might recruit greater numbers.

Another element to bear in mind is that imports of food and medicines are not included in the US sanctions. The Maduro administration has been freely importing food from Mexico and Colombia for its controlled handling of food packages and medicines. The only restriction is the volume of money the regime has been willing to disburse (or at its disposal) for greater levels of imports. And, of course, the latter question is directly related to the collapse of the Venezuelan economy, which has been pushed by Maduro to a continuous free fall for the last six years.

Another crucial factor of the current situation affecting not only the health system but the country as a whole is the shortage of gasoline. The current gasoline deficit is leading to a near collapse of agriculture, industry, public transportation and the rest of transportation requirements. In itself, it could bring about a total collapse of production and potentially a famine. Combined with a COVID-19 epidemic, the horror could be beyond description.

So far, the sanctions have impacted imports of gasoline, but the question to be asked is: Why, after having one of the world's largest and more modern systems to produce gasoline, has Venezuela had to import almost all the gasoline it consumes? When Chavez came to power in 1999, Venezuela had the capacity to refine around 1.3 million barrels of oil a day mostly into gasoline, gas oil and other products in three giant refineries. Roughly 60% of that capacity was for the internal market and the rest was exported worldwide. Today, the percentage of that capacity that is utilized amounts to only around 3%, which only covers a minimal fraction of the internal market. As a result, Venezuela has to import most of its gasoline and gas oil requirements.

Paradoxically, even in this critical situation, while Venezuelans wait in line sometimes for three days to fill up their tanks, Maduro is sending Cuba a continuous flow of barrels of gas oil and other derivatives. Only in the last few weeks did it send from Amuay (a refinery that is still open) 72,000 barrels, which added to another

three tankers, to bring the number of refined products to 422,000 barrels, not including 400,000 additional barrels of crude oil sent to a refinery in Cienfuegos, Cuba, to be processed there. This does not take into consideration the number of barrels of gasoline that are smuggled daily to Colombia thanks to the huge price differential between the two countries (most of which is allegedly controlled by the national guard).

So, again, the question to be asked is: What real advantages to everyday Venezuelans will levying the oil sanctions provide? Will refining capacity be restored? Will the huge distortions that the current subsidies entail disappear? Will gasoline shipments to Cuba be rationalized and sold at a fair price, or smuggling duly stopped?

The Path Forward

What lies ahead? Either Maduro finds his way to continue holding to power, in which case the country will continue its free fall, or a transition allows Venezuela a return to relative economic normalcy and to democratic rule. It is not clear which path will prevail, but if change occurs, in all probability utmost pressure would have made the difference.

At the moment, the regime has been losing its grip on the country as a result of the collapse of the oil industry, mostly self-inflicted. It is not only the production of gasoline that is in dire straits. Venezuela has reached the lowest level (around 600,000 barrels a day) of oil production in a long time, only comparable with production levels around 1941. And there are reports almost every day of fires in many oil settings, due to sheer incompetence and lack of maintenance, or simply the abandonment of oil rigs that until recently were active.

There is, of course, no guarantee that there will be internal cracks in the ruling coalition, but never has the regime been as weak as it is now. It is feeling the pressure (especially external) like never before and, different from other junctures, there is wariness among its ranks that it may not be able to resist. There were recent reports that

Maduro attempted a direct channel of negotiations with the Trump administration. Even if there are no clear signs of what Maduro wanted, immediately, the US State Department declared that there would be no direct dealing with the Venezuelan leader and that any new option to be discussed required that Maduro abandon power.

It is hard to anticipate who within the current ruling elite might be willing to yield and open a window for a transition. So far, they have held tight as a team, except in the March 30, 2019, episode where profuse reports indicated that several top members of the coalition considered entering a transition. As we know, it never happened. But at the time there were some indications that this group — which included Vladimir Padrino Lopez, the current minister of defense; Maikel Moreno, the head of the supreme justice tribunal; and other military officers — was ready to abandon Maduro.

Most of these officials have been currently targeted by the US Justice Department, so they are under direct pressure. So too is Maduro himself, as well as Diosdado Cabello, second in command and head of the PSUV (the ruling government's party), and Tareck El Aissami, former executive vice president of Venezuela and currently minister of industry and national production. It is not an exaggeration to say that the current power lies to a great extent in these latter three leaders.

In any case, abandoning sanctions to weather the coronavirus pandemic is not an option, given the disastrous conditions that the regime has created in all areas: the health system, especially hospitals and personnel; the collapse of production; acute gasoline shortages; and the total centralization of food distribution under the command of the government. Levying gasoline embargo would only help to refresh the regime's coffers, but with no guarantee that new imports would be directed to transportation needs and not to smuggling to Colombia or exports to Cuba.

The same goes for the health system. The likelihood of new loans or other means of

financial flows to be directed to strengthening hospital capacities, reinforcing the testing means or allowing for increasing the number of beds for hospitalization in the event of a steeper breakout of the epidemic is very low. If it has not happened until now, why should all of a sudden the regime reveal itself as a humanitarian warrior?

The best chance Venezuela has to avoid a humanitarian disaster, resulting from an impending famine and an expansion of the coronavirus crisis to very high levels, is to force a change in the current ruling of the country.

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Hosting Refugees and Migrants Is a Global Public Good

Diego Chaves & Olivier Lavinal
July 16, 2020

Multilateral support can help countries in Latin America overcome challenges and reap immigration's rewards.

On June 20, we celebrated World Refugee Day. This was an opportune time for us all to pay attention to the challenge of forced displacement today. Strikingly, the world is facing the largest forced displacement crisis since World War II, with nearly 80 million people having fled their countries because of persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations or events that have seriously disturbed public order. All continents now face forced displacement crises, and migratory problems cross state and community boundaries.

Forced displacement has hit Latin American and Caribbean countries particularly hard,

highlighting existing vulnerabilities such as increased levels of violence and, more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic. Latin America is now home to one of the largest forced displacement crises in the world. As of March 2020, more than 5 million Venezuelans were reportedly living outside of their country, with 4 million of them in other Latin American countries: Colombia (1.8 million), Peru (1 million), and Ecuador and Chile (for a total of 1 million).

Since the beginning of the Venezuelan crisis, most Latin American nations have tried to accommodate these recent arrivals, providing migrants with basic education, emergency health care services and legal status. These neighboring countries have provided a global public good by hosting millions at the risk of overwhelming their services and systems. But how will these nations be able to withstand the pressure?

Hosting countries face the new challenge of integrating larger numbers of migrants and refugees while dealing with the effects of the coronavirus outbreak. When taking into account that more than 60% of Venezuelan migration in Latin American countries is irregular and targets the most vulnerable populations, this crisis is now becoming a question of public health and safety and, ultimately, of regional security. It is time for the international community to provide a collective response that matches the magnitude of the crisis.

A first step was taken on May 26, with the virtual — livestreamed on YouTube — pledging conference for Venezuelan refugees and migrants that helped raise \$2.79 billion in total commitments. This included \$653 million of grant funding for the Refugee and Migrant Response Plan, which is a United Nations' appeal to largely address the emergency needs of the migrant population.

The situation in Latin America calls for enhanced international support across the humanitarian-development nexus. In other words, the response should address pressing immediate needs —such as temporary shelter and emergency medical services — as well as the

medium and long-term imperative of economic and social development through institutions, resilient local systems and service delivery. This is precisely what Colombian President Ivan Duque called for when advocating the shift from “emergency response to medium and long-term development and integration.”

Five Priorities

To help countries mitigate the impact of the crisis and charter a pathway to growth and stability, there are five development priorities to focus on.

First, new ways should be explored to provide regular status to refugees and migrants, including through targeted regularization or employment-based programs. There have been several efforts to provide regular status to recent refugees and migrants arriving from Venezuela.

Colombia, Peru and now Ecuador stand out for their ambitious regularization programs for hundreds of thousands of irregular refugees and migrants. Amid rising public anxieties over migration in some countries, it may become harder to implement such mass regularization programs or offer regular status to most who seek to enter. The approach followed by Colombia in providing regular status to those who have employment in specific sectors may provide another alternative. Similarly, Peru has been trying to regularize students in the country’s educational system — another strategy that Colombia and Ecuador seem likely to adopt in the future and one that may prove more politically viable in some countries.

Yet these approaches risk leaving out the vast majority of recent refugees and migrants who do not attend school or work in the formal economy, or the families of those who do benefit from such measures. Policymakers should, therefore, be thinking about the medium and long-term effects where providing legal status to refugees and migrants would produce optimal labor market outcomes — for themselves and the country overall. The details of implementation in each case will matter enormously, but there is room

for reiterative efforts that focus on specific different groups over time.

Second, health care barriers should be tackled through clear policies on access and financing. Almost all countries in the region, at least in theory, offer emergency health care to immigrants regardless of regular status. Still, specific policies are often unclear, and measures are not always implemented effectively at the local level, which means that migrants often have difficulties accessing health care in practice. In countries where local and regional governments pay part of health-care costs, financial burden sharing is also often unclear, leading local hospitals to cover costs that may never get reimbursed.

Creating clear policies and procedures defining both the services offered and what amount of costs will be covered and by whom are critical. In some countries, such as Colombia, Peru and Costa Rica, where residents need to enroll in the health care system to be eligible for benefits, it is vital to find agile ways of ensuring that new immigrants can register and sometimes to find ways of covering the costs of their care.

Third, access to education should be improved through flexible enrollment practices and ongoing support. One of the most critical decisions of countries has been to offer primary and secondary education to all students regardless of their status. In some countries, this was already embedded in the constitution, but others have more recently adopted these measures.

This helps avoid a generation of young people growing up without education and supports receiving countries to take advantage of the potential human capital of immigrant children who will likely grow up in their territory. In many places, however, strict registration requirements involving documents that are difficult for migrants and refugees to obtain can prevent some from enrolling their children in school.

There is also an urgent need to work with schools on policies, procedures and curricula to facilitate the integration of Venezuelan children,

who may face challenges adapting to their new schools and need additional support to develop critical skills (e.g., history, culture and other country-specific knowledge). In several countries, access to college, graduate education and trade schools is also restricted for those who do not have adequate documentation, which risks wasting the human capital of immigrant youth who aspire to enter professional and technical careers, including in fields that are in demand in their new countries.

Fourth, migrants' skills should be unlocked to boost labor market integration and local economies. The majority of Venezuelan adults suitable for paid work in countries across the region were already working before COVID-19. In fact, more than 90% of Venezuelan migrants in Peru and 8 in 10 Venezuelan migrants in Colombia were employed before the pandemic. While recognizing that the labor markets of many countries in the region are characterized by a high degree of informality, care should be taken to ensure that immigrants do have pathways to better-paid and more stable employment in the formal economy and to avoid creating conditions where employers can pay immigrants less than the prevailing wage, to the detriment of both newcomer and native-born workers.

There is no more important determinant for long-term positive labor market outcomes than ensuring regular status, which helps immigrant workers improve their wages over time and also helps avoid unfair wage competition between native-born and Venezuelan workers. Refugees and migrants tend to be relatively well-educated, which means that there is a wealth of highly skilled human capital that could benefit receiving countries.

To effectively leverage this potential, countries will need to create agile ways for immigrants to get professional and technical degrees earned in their home countries validated and recognized by employers. Argentina has done this through provincial universities, which has allowed the country to encourage professionals to leave the capital and settle in

other provinces where their skills are in demand. Creating expedited credential recognition pathways for applicants willing to settle in an area of the country where their skills are most needed could also help fill labor market gaps.

Fifth, constructive narratives about immigration should be developed to highlight opportunities while not ignoring its challenges. There is no question that the sudden outflow of 5 million Venezuelans constitutes a migration crisis, and one that host countries are keenly aware of. But this migration is also an opportunity for host countries, as illustrated by increased predictions by the World Bank of regional future economic growth as Venezuelan immigration drives labor market expansion.

Immigrants, when they have access to legal status, education, health care, financial services and pathways to validate their studies, tend to become net contributors to innovation, entrepreneurship and economic growth over time. Several governments in the region have gone out of their way to maintain their focus on these long-term opportunities, even while dealing with the challenges that the sudden arrival of so many people creates for already overburdened public services. Policymakers require assistance to orient the public debate on migration by keeping an eye on the medium and long-term benefits (and designing policies to help attain them). Still, they must also acknowledge the real strains involved in dealing with sudden, large-scale inflows.

Inclusive Development

Multilateral support will be critical in helping countries in the region meet these policy challenges. While migration from Venezuela holds the potential to enhance economic growth in the long term, it is also creating real and tangible short-term costs for already overburdened schools, hospitals and infrastructure. Multilateral support can help countries of the region overcome these challenges and reap immigration's benefits.

This requires moving from emergency responses to long-term development and integration. While there is still a critical need for emergency services for recently-arrived migrants from Venezuela, as crises in these countries stretch on, it is also important to plan for the medium and the long term. The most important question in the future will be how to support inclusive development that can help host communities and immigrants build connections and improve their livelihoods together. Enhancing access to and quality of schools, health care facilities, housing and urban infrastructure in areas where migrants settle is vital. This is the key to successful integration and also an opportunity to turn a migration crisis into a net benefit for host societies.

While there is some need for temporary shelter and emergency medical services that international actors could help meet, the greatest needs for support have to do with building local capacity for integration and service provision both to new arrivals and long-time residents. For this, multilateral organizations like the World Bank should continue to be actively engaged in helping better manage the forced displacement crisis, in support of its mission to reduce poverty and contribute to achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

**[The views expressed in this article are the authors' own and do not necessarily reflect the views of The World Bank, its Board of Executive Directors or the governments they represent. The World Bank does not guarantee the accuracy of the data included in this work.]*

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Brazil Rejects Bolsonaro's Anti-Politics

Karin Schmalz
December 9, 2020

There is a long road before Brazil's 2022 presidential race, but local election results suggest poor prospects for Jair Bolsonaro's destructive politics.

Municipal elections in Brazil were rarely the subject of international media attention before 2016. That year, growing political unrest culminated in President Dilma Rousseff's impeachment in August, and the October elections brought in a wave of far-right politicians aligned to the rising power of Jair Bolsonaro. Rio de Janeiro elected an evangelical bishop, Marcelo Crivella, and Jair Bolsonaro's son, Carlos Bolsonaro, won the city councilor run-off by over 100,000 votes, a record for Rio.

The world watched in awe as the "Tropical Trump," as Jair Bolsonaro is often referred to, went from strength to strength and took power democratically in Latin America's largest economy. This was the impact of local elections in Brazil.

Local Power

If only interesting to the world because of the global surge in far-right politics that contaminated Brazil (arguably aided by social media) in the 2010s, the country's municipal elections are extremely important because most social policies are enacted within municipalities, which are guaranteed ample managerial autonomy. Consequently, it is also at the municipal level that most resources are embezzled by corrupt officials who understand that perfect oversight by the federal government is nearly impossible in such vast territory.

Voter turnout is generally over 80%, and cities witness months of electoral campaigns on radio, TV and in print media. Mayoral candidates in the country's largest cities end up being recognized state and nationwide, and many will go on to resign their office and run in state and presidential elections.

Brazil just held its largest elections ever to choose mayors, vice mayors and city councilors in 5,567 municipalities. Over half a million candidates ran for 67,840 political offices. On November 15, in the first round of elections, 113 million of the nearly 148 million eligible voters went to polling stations, with 34 million claiming one of the exemptions to abstain from mandatory voting.

High abstention rates were expected due to the novel coronavirus pandemic and were the highest in 20 years. There were fewer blank and null ballots than in the last municipal elections in 2016, but these surpassed the number of votes for the winner in 483 municipalities, including state capitals.

On November 29, 57 municipalities with over 200,000 inhabitants, including 18 state capitals and the two largest cities in Brazil, Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, picked their winners in the second round. These municipal elections were the first since Bolsonaro — not representing any party — took power in January 2019. Some observers expected that the elections could push the country definitively into the hands of the far right as polls showed a 40% approval rate of Bolsonaro's government. Others saw how important these elections were for Bolsonaro's hold on power — and how uncertain his victory.

Blood on the Campaign Trail

Three political fields were vying for power in municipalities all over the country: the far-right, headed by the president and his supporters; the left, including center-left parties, which have been facing a crisis since Rousseff's impeachment; and the traditional right, including center-right parties, which have lost some power with the arrival of the far-right wave. With 33

official political parties, alliances are crucial to winning office, and parties with apparently conflicting ideologies often join forces in municipalities all over the country.

The Brazilian political spectrum is so complex that a 2017 report by the BBC tried to fit the country's parties onto a political map by analyzing how their members voted in the national congress. The report confirmed that most left-wing parties vote for progressive ideas, that the majority of right-wing parties adopt more conservative views, but that centrist parties change between progressive and conservative positions depending on the state of (power) play.

The 2020 campaign season saw a record number of candidates representing Bolsonaro's anti-political ideology, posing with guns for campaign photos and advocating violence. There was a 34% increase in evangelical candidates, usually representing the far right, and a more visible presence of priests of Afro-Brazilian religions with more progressive ideas, who faced aggressive resistance from evangelicals. On the other hand, there were record numbers of women, LGBTQI+ as well as black and Indigenous candidates, with the number of black and mixed-race candidates surpassing the number of white candidates for the first time.

Analysts explain these numbers as an effect of Bolsonaro's rule: While far-right candidates feel empowered to expose their extreme ideology, oppressed groups form social movements to fight back from a position of power.

Violence in municipal elections has always been a common occurrence on the campaign trail in Brazil, and a record was reached in 2016 with the surge of the far right. This year again witnessed unprecedented political violence, with 25 candidates assassinated during the campaign season, in a phenomenon caused, according to researchers, by the current administration's normalization of political violence. In Guarulhos, in Greater Sao Paulo, a shooter fired several bullets into a city council candidate while he was live streaming on social media. If one counts militants also killed during the campaign, the

number of casualties rises to 82, with militias allegedly involved in a number of cases.

Violence has been used by conservatives against women to limit their political participation. This has come as a reaction by the religious right to the implementation of the law that mandates that a minimum of 30% of all candidates must be women. Political violence continued past the first round and plagued run-off disputes, with some murders happening after the polls closed. The increase in violence was particularly pronounced in states where rich landowners are involved in politics as well as in the poorer states of the north and northeast regions.

Disinformation was broadly used as a campaign tool, a trend that started with the 2013 protests. With over 140 million internet users, Brazil suffered an epidemic of fake news before the elections, with progressive politicians being the target of misleading information being spread on social media. In 2018, a congressional commission uncovered a large operation headed by Carlos Bolsonaro to spread disinformation, the so-called “Cabinet of Hate,” responsible for organizing demonstrations against the federal supreme court.

The security chief of the president’s office and former head of the infamous UN peacekeeping forces in Haiti, General Augusto Heleno, floated the idea that Indigenous peoples, with the help of foreign powers, were sabotaging the elections in a plot to topple the president. To add to the problem, Bolsonaro himself raised doubts about the electoral system — without citing any evidence — the day following the first round of voting. He also pushed for printed voting receipts, a move that many suspect would make it easier for corrupt politicians to bribe voters who would photograph printed receipts as proof of loyalty.

Pendulum Swing

Despite these issues, elections ran in relative order even though the results were delayed due to incidents provoked by militant Bolsonaro

supporters all over Brazil. The results of the first round already pointed to a defeat of Bolsonaro’s political allies. From his ex-wife and his cousin, who were both not elected, to the slim margin of victory for his son Carlos, who was elected with a small percentage of his record win in 2016, Bolsonaro’s picks lost major positions in key cities. At the same time, traditional parties regained power, with progressive candidates winning seats all over Brazil and the wife of murdered councilor and activist Marielle Franco securing a seat on Rio’s city council.

Left-wing parties advanced in many of the 100 largest cities across Brazil and went on to dispute the second round in many capitals, notably in Sao Paulo. In two state capitals, Fortaleza and Rio de Janeiro, a candidate supported by Bolsonaro reached the second round, while the traditional right won seven capitals in the first round.

The Workers’ Party (PT) lost in bigger cities despite reaching the second round in some capitals, but managed to get 183 mayors elected across Brazil, down from 630 in 2012. Losses were expected for the PT since the rise of antipetismo, the political resentment fed by an intense right-wing media effort that led to the poor performance by the party’s presidential candidate Fernando Haddad in 2018. At the height of antipetismo, voters rejected candidates from traditional parties in favor of electing unknown faces not yet involved in public corruption scandals.

The second round of elections confirmed the loss of PT’s strength, with the centerists winning in the biggest cities and a growth in other left-wing parties, such as Socialism and Liberty Party and the traditional Democratic Labour Party. Center and center-right parties that were strong since Brazil’s return to democracy, like the Brazilian Democratic Movement and Brazilian Socialist Democratic Party (PSDB), took the place of far-right ones such as the far-right Social Liberal Party (to which the president was affiliated when elected) and Patriotas. On the other hand, PT lost 11 of the 15 state capitals in the second round.

Special attention was given for the second round in the two largest cities of Brazil, Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo. In Rio, Marcelo Crivella suffered a “humiliating loss” against the Democrats’ party candidate Eduardo Paes, although the evangelical pastor, an ally of Bolsonaro, launched a barrage of fake news against Paes, connecting the centrist politician with “pedophiles in schools.” Crivella’s defeat was a severe blow to Bolsonaro, whose political career began in Rio.

In Sao Paulo, “old politics” won again, with incumbent mayor Bruno Covas securing his position. His victory was not that surprising. Traditionally conservative, the richest city in Brazil has kept the PSDB in power for decades, with the exception of two left-wing mayors in 30 years, both from the Worker’s Party at a time when Luis Inácio Lula da Silva was president with an 85% approval rate. Surprising was the presence of the former leader of the Homeless Workers’ Movement, Guilherme Boulos, in the second round, showing that the grip of conservatism is not working, at least in Sao Paulo’s suburbs.

Bolsonaro is in open conflict with Sao Paulo’s state governor, Joao Doria of the PSDB, a former ally-turned-political-enemy, especially in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. Doria is one of the presumptive candidates against Bolsonaro in 2022, and his management of the wealthiest state in the country during the pandemic can give him a chance at victory.

Catastrophic Loss

There are many reasons for the catastrophe suffered by Bolsonaro and his supporters in the 2020 elections. Bolsonaro’s anti-political rhetoric, anti-democratic displays and illogical obsession with a mythical left bound to destroy the country’s youth did not sit well with voters. The far-right wave was a reflection of antipetismo, not of connivance with extremist ideology or lack of decorum. With a more progressive population becoming politically active this year, attitudes changed, and people

were able to display their discontent with the current administration by wearing anti-Bolsonaro slogans on their shirts to go to the polls, something that would have been impossible in 2018.

Bolsonaro’s loss of support also involves the spiral of corruption he and his family descended into in recent months, including the involvement of his eldest son, Flavio Bolsonaro, in an embezzlement scheme using his employees’ government salaries. The president’s response to the coverage of these scandals was a threat to beat a journalist and indirectly censor news agencies.

Mismanagement seems to be the trend in the administration, bringing with it serial economic, social and environmental crises. The state of Amapa, on the border with French Guyana, has had a power outage for almost a month. Elections were postponed to December 6, and the capital city, Macapa, will decide the second round between center-right or center-left candidates on December 20.

Bolsonaro’s catastrophic incompetence to address the COVID-19 pandemic may well have been the most crucial factor in his defeat. The president dismissed scientists’ warnings and condemned the country to a disaster of unparalleled proportions. State governors rebelled and took their own emergency measures, and the people sided with them. The federal government continues to ignore the pandemic and did not secure a national vaccine, with Bolsonaro announcing that he will not get vaccinated. Governor Doria is in a race to bring vaccines to the state of Sao Paulo in January and, if successful, will increase his chances in the presidential bid.

Political defeat seems to follow those governments that are mismanaging the pandemic and may have been a factor in the November US election. Bolsonaro’s political power was voluntarily tied to Donald Trump, whose defeat was predicted to affect Brazilian politics. After Joe Biden’s victory, Bolsonaro displayed his loyalty to Trump by not recognizing the election results, at least for a while.

European far-right parties openly sided with Donald Trump but are losing power in Germany, Austria and Italy, perhaps indicating a global return to traditional political attitudes and a rejection of the chaotic, violent and bigoted ways of proto-authoritarian governments. The coronavirus pandemic highlighted the importance of progressive politicians and, even if a new progressive era does not dawn in the wake of the largest public health crisis in a century, the conservative anti-scientific stance is not up for consideration either.

Personal views also influence people's perception of the pandemic and how they respond to it. For example, there is a clear political divide in Brazil, as elsewhere, when it comes to protective measures such as mask-wearing, with conservatives less likely to follow public health guidelines.

There is a long road before the 2022 presidential elections in Brazil, but the trend is not favorable to Bolsonaro's destructive politics. With all the political agitation in Brazil and around the globe, and with the end of the pandemic still out of sight, there is hope that Eliane Cantanhede's analysis of "Bolsonarismo" is right in stating that this era of political incompetence is just a "hiatus" in Brazil's young democracy and that the country will move forward toward a less chaotic political future.

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Iran Faces Yet Another Undemocratic Election

Biryar Meriwani
February 20, 2020

In Iran, a sham election is the only way for the governing regime to preserve its rule.

On February 21, yet another nominal election will take place in Iran, coming on the heels of widespread protests in over 100 cities at the end of last year. It was the third time that the Iranian government faced protests in the last decade and the biggest since the Islamic Revolution of 1979. According to various reports, anywhere between 300 and 1,500 may have been killed since the protests broke out in November after the government raised the price of petrol, with many more injured and thousands arrested.

The regime has been trying to restore its legitimacy by any means necessary ever since. It has been pleading with its people to vote, while at the same time stripping them of the right to nominate candidates. Almost the entire opposition is boycotting this parliamentary election, stating that a vote is a bullet to the heart of every citizen. Even some reformists within the regime announced that they are disinclined to cast their ballot.

In this context, understanding the origins of the latest protests helps to highlight the fact that the sham election is the only way for this absolute government by a small elite to preserve its rule.

Long-Lost Legitimacy

This is not the first time that the Iranian regime lost its legitimacy. This new wave of protesters brought together just the latest of the many

disillusioned with the government in Tehran. Following its vicious crackdown, the authorities once again attempted to regain lost legitimacy in various ways. The Islamic Republic of Iran usually uses religious rituals, hero-worshipping and the specter of national enemies to consolidate people and preserve the Islamic system.

The assassination in a US drone strike of Quds Force General Qassem Soleimani, well known for his heavy-handed suppression of protests in Iran and beyond, gave the regime an opportunity to hail him as a hero, to mobilize the masses into a spectacular funeral and thus divert attention from the real crisis.

Then, the shooting down of the Ukrainian airliner on January 8 in what Tehran has called an “unforgivable mistake” again exposed the regime’s lies and disrupted all its plans and displays. People became angry and came out again to protest against the regime, but not on a large scale because of the wariness of the regime’s trigger-happy response. Unlike the funeral of its hero Soleimani, the regime didn’t allow people to publicly commemorate those killed in the crash.

The undemocratic and religious government in Iran has never had much regard for human rights. In fact, the leaders and politicians of the regime have reduced the concept of “the people” to a small group of those in power. For them, the interests of that group mean the interests of people, even though these interests diverge significantly.

Iran is home to numerous nationalities, many of whom were previously colonized by imperial Persia, including Kurdish, Turkish, Arab and Baloch ethnic groups, alongside other small ethnic minorities. Yet only the Persian ethnic majority has political and cultural rights. Only Persian, the official language, is taught at school, part of the government's forceful approach to assimilation. In addition to all these levels of discrimination, the religious regime implements a radical and extremist interpretation of Islamic law that doesn’t recognize women’s rights. As a

result, half of the population of Iran lacks basic individual freedoms.

Apart from the issue of nationalities, there is also the problem of religion. Out of a population of 80 million, the majority are Shia Muslims, with 25% Sunni Muslims and small minorities of Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, Yarsan and Bahai. None of the religious minorities, including the Sunnis, have any political rights and often lack socio-cultural and economic rights.

There are also no independent political parties, no freedom of the press or expression, no democratic elections, no participation of various marginalized groups in politics, and so on. Only some governmental and religious political groups who are Shia Persians have an opportunity to exercise their political rights. The dominant political power doesn’t allow any change in the status quo. There is no liberty, equality or justice.

Bullets of the Regime

Last year, the regime, despite the abundant resources of oil and gas in its control, suddenly tripled the price of petrol. As a result, the price of almost everything else went up as well. With purchasing power thus reduced, people have been unable to cover their basic needs and were left with no choice but to rise up against the regime. And the regime, in turn, has no choice but to continue suppressing them. It needs ever more violence and ever more money to preserve itself, and to carry on supporting terrorist groups in the region.

For four decades now people have protested against this regime for which, since it has no real legitimacy, violence is the only option. At first people protested for social and political freedom, but they were suppressed even when the regime was not under the weight of US sanctions. Then they were suppressed for demanding human rights and civic freedoms, and now for demanding the fulfillment of their basic needs. Those who demanded political freedom and human rights were killed, jailed or have left the country. Now it is the turn of those who demand basic necessities to face the same fate.

On the eve of the election, the suppressed people are asked to vote. But this regime is not of the people, and it has meted out such violence against them because it is completely alienated from them. For many in Iran, their votes would turn into bullets used by the regime against the next generation.

The last wave of protests has strongly affected the regime's election campaign. Nevertheless, it will push ahead with the election to demonstrate its nominal legitimacy, although, being a religious regime with divine sanction, it doesn't need real democratic legitimacy. But people of Iran are gradually waking up to the origin of all their problems, and it is only a matter of time until the violence meted out against them will simply not be enough to stymie change.

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

Hope Fades for New Talks in Yemen as Battles Intensify

Fernando Carvajal
April 15, 2020

The Saudis have declared a unilateral ceasefire in Yemen, but hopes are quickly fading as battles continue.

After a five-year-long conflict, hope for a new round of peace talks in Yemen begins to fade away a week into Saudi Arabia's unilateral halt to military operations. Soon after the announcement on April 9, confusion set in over the intent of the ceasefire and the lack of monitoring. Clashes between Houthi militias and Yemeni government forces continue to escalate along various fronts, with Houthi rebels reporting dozens of airstrikes against their positions in Hajja and Mareb.

As the international community welcomed Saudi Arabia's announcement, the UN special envoy for Yemen, Martin Griffiths, published his framework of how to end the war in Yemen. Soon after, the Houthis introduced their own "Comprehensive National Vision" that included a number of demands, which were mostly directed at Saudi Arabia to prepare the path for a new round of talks and a solution to the conflict. The three announcements exposed the dynamics of the Yemen War and the fog that obscures the path forward.

New territory gains in al-Jawf, Mareb and Sanaa provinces this year have empowered Houthis and weakened the leverage of both the Yemeni government and the Saudi-led coalition. The dynamics of the conflict continue to shift as Houthis prove their capability to maintain drone and missile attacks across the Saudi-Yemeni border and deeper into the government's enclave in Mareb. The basic equation to restart the peace process has three parties that are unwilling to compromise, while "warlords continue to convince the Saudis that they can still win the war," according to Khaled al-Yamani, the former Yemeni foreign minister. Then there are the southern secessionists who continue to search for a guaranteed seat at the big table.

Some international observers saw the Saudi ceasefire as a sign of potential capitulation amid growing criticism of their conduct during the war or in response to economic stress. But "Saudi Arabia is far from accepting defeat or terms dictated by Houthis considering the rebels' alliance with Iran," says the Mareb-based Yemeni journalist Ali al-Sakani.

Three Perspectives to Consider

There are three issues to consider. First, Saudi Arabia did not appear to have coordinated its decision to announce a ceasefire with Yemen's President Abdu-Rabbu Mansour Hadi. Furthermore, media reports and a statement from Deputy Minister of Defense Prince Khaled bin Salman of Saudi Arabia focused on prioritizing public safety amid the coronavirus crisis.

The ceasefire that began at midday on April 9 came as news organizations reported that dozens of Saudi family members may have been infected with the novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19, and a day before Yemen reported its first case in al-Shihr, Hadhramaut. A week earlier, other media outlets reported that the public health crisis could have led to British personnel leaving the Riyadh-based Air Operations Center that is vital to the conduct of the aerial campaign over Yemen. In all, Hamed al-Bukhayti, a pro-Houthi writer, sees the abrupt announcement by Saudi Arabia as a move to prioritize its own security at home and in Yemen, while preempting any major damage to the chain of command and vital personnel.

Second, Griffiths presented Houthis and the legitimate government of Yemen with his own initiative on April 10. Again, while his initiative mentioned the importance of addressing the public health crisis, it seems to lack any coordination with the parties. The UN envoy tends to propose new road maps for peace talks following a round of talks with the parties involved, which was not the case this month. Nowhere in his statement did Griffiths address the secessionist Southern Transitional Council (STC), whose allied armed groups continue to engage Houthis in al-Dhale province and pro-Islah party military elements in Shabwah province.

Again, this highlights the limits of both Saudi Arabia's unilateral announcement and the UN envoy's proposal. While the Saudi government merely aims at a two-week pause, and the envoy rushed to call for a comprehensive dialogue, the government of Yemen is left condemning continued Houthi aggression in Hajja, al-Jawf, Mareb and Taiz.

Third, on April 9, the Houthis published a prepared and unsigned document in the name of the government for national salvation. The document also shows it was prepared by the Houthis' Supreme Revolutionary Committee (SRC), which was led by Mohammed Ali al-Houthi, who is now a member of the Supreme

Political Council (SPC) that runs the day-to-day affairs. The document lists a number of demands directed at Saudi Arabia as the leader of the coalition that supports the legitimate government of Yemen. In the document, the Houthis address the air and land blockade and economic constraints, including the lack of salaries for government employees.

For the past two years, the Houthis have insisted that any peace process must begin with direct talks with Saudi Arabia, followed by Yemeni-Yemeni dialogue — meaning the Houthis and the Hadi-led government.

The final point in the Houthi document emphasizes the “unity, independence and territorial integrity” of Yemen, excluding any mention of the STC and its own ambitions. It is interesting to note that the Houthis frame the fight in al-Dhale province as clashes with government troops and coalition mercenaries, coupled with the fact that the Houthis have yet to recognize the UAE-sponsored Security Belt or Elite Forces allied with the STC as anything other than mercenaries. The Houthis do recognize the role and responsibility of the UN within their comprehensive approach to the peace process.

Pressure Grows as Leverage Weakens

International aid organizations continue to warn over deteriorating conditions, adding pressure on donors and Houthi authorities. Over recent months, humanitarian agencies have faced mounting challenges that include Houthi obstruction of the delivery of aid across territory under their control, along with threats from donors to cut funds in response to Houthi corruption. UN agencies have confronted the Houthis since May 2019 over obstruction and rampant corruption without any improvement in the relationship. The conflict between the Houthis and aid organizations has escalated as the Saudi-led coalition refuses to loosen restrictions on imports through the Red Sea port of Hodeida or lift the blockade on Sanaa International Airport.

In recent weeks, the Trump administration in Washington is said to have further pressured Saudi Arabia to find a way out of the conflict. The US warned Saudi Arabia over Houthi advances in al-Jawf and Mareb as concerns grow over the Houthis encircling Mareb city from Sirwah in the west and Murad in the south. Yamani, the former foreign minister, noted that “if al-Jawf, Mareb ... the entire area falls in hands of Houthis, then it would be impossible for the Saudis to defend the desert,” adding to the challenges to restart peace talks while the Houthis have the upper hand. The government of President Hadi faces the possibility of losing the enclave at Mareb after being expelled from the interim capital of Aden in September 2019.

The pressure on Saudi Arabia grows, not merely as a result of Houthi gains but also as the implementation of the 2019 Riyadh Agreement stalls. Since the withdrawal of UAE troops from southern Yemen last year, Saudi Arabia became the sole mediator between the STC and Hadi’s government. So far, the only point implemented since the signing of the deal has been the return of Prime Minister Maen Abd al-Malek Saeed to Aden. Saudi Arabia has been unable to end the conflict between pro-STC forces and Islah-affiliated government army units in Abyan and Shabwah, undoubtedly distracting from the fight against Houthis. The Saudi government is now tasked with maintaining two major fronts, one against Houthis and the conflict between the STC and the legitimate government.

As various elements push for more confrontations between parties, in the north and the south, Saudi leadership comes under tremendous strain. It remains to be seen if this two-week pause allows Saudi officials to regroup and present new initiatives to move on the UN-sponsor peace proposal or increase financial and materiel support for Murad tribes and government troops in al-Baydha and al-Jawf provinces.

Just prior to the ceasefire announcement, media reports claimed that Saudi Arabia’s ministry of defense proposed to Crown Prince

Mohammed bin Salman the procurement of light-attack helicopters, precision-guided munitions for artillery and drones for aerial surveillance. Yet if the conflict in the south escalates, Saudi Arabia may be forced to reach out to the UAE to exert further influence over the STC.

Undoubtedly, the UAE will reengage under its own terms and a list of demands for Hadi regarding the role of the Islah party within his government and the military. It is doubtful the UAE would play a major role with troops fighting Houthis in Hodeida, but under the right circumstances, it could play a positive role in reaching out to both the Houthis and Iran to push for the start of UN-sponsored peace talks this year.

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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 oil fields 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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Israel and the UAE: The Myth of Normalizing Abnormalities

Munir Saeed
September 4, 2020

Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed has unconditionally opened to Israel doors that were promised only as part of a comprehensive settlement for the Palestinians.

As the El Al flight 971 touched down in Abu Dhabi, a number of people looking at the aircraft wondered about the significance of the message it carried. The number for what both sides claimed to be Israel's first-ever commercial flight to the UAE was the dialing code for the Emirates, with the return flight to be 972 — Israel's dialing code. More significantly, the aircraft's name, clearly written on the cheek of its front fuselage, Kiryat Gat, is that of a Palestinian village, Iraq al-Manshiyya, whose population was forcibly removed by the Israeli Defense Forces in 1948 and ultimately annexed to become the Israeli city of Kiryat Gat.

The symbolism was unmistakable. UAE's military strongman, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed, had earlier tweeted that his decision to "normalize" relations with Israel was part of a deal that will stop the annexation of the West Bank. Immediately, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu responded by contradicting Bin Zayed, stating that his decision was only a temporary suspension, requested by President Donald Trump, an indication that even the suspension itself was not influenced by Bin Zayed.

The deal with bin Zayed, Netanyahu affirmed, was "peace for peace." Nothing more. The aircraft's name was a confirmation that even as the flight carried the Arabic, English and Hebrew words for peace, it was not intended to revoke Israel's annexation program. Ultimately, like

Kiryat Gat before, the West Bank will also be annexed.

How Normal Is Normal?

It is the sovereign right of every country to define its relations with any other party. What Bin Zayed has done is revoke the promises made to the Palestinians by the UAE and other Arab nations, including the current undertaking, first declared in the Arab summit conference in Beirut in 2002 and reaffirmed as recently as 2017. Known as the Arab Peace Initiative, it offered normalization, but only if certain conditions were met. The UAE is a signatory to the original and subsequent declarations, including the 2017 document.

This and similar earlier declarations over the years by Arab governments had prevented Palestinians from seeking their own methods for liberating their lands. Negotiations, mainly controlled by Arab governments guided by their own political and economic agendas, had monopolized the Palestinian struggle for the past seven decades. In the process, Israel had become more powerful, imposing an increasing fait accompli by creating more settlements, while Palestinians still remain scattered in refugee camps, generation after generation, in hope that Arab governments will ultimately help them regain their rights. With Mohammed bin Zayed deciding to normalize relations with Tel Aviv, the question that springs to mind is how normal can relations be when one party to that normalization refuses to abide by normal behavior and in fact continues to evict, imprison, confiscate land, bulldoze houses and create more forced realities on the ground that deny the Palestinians some of the most basic human rights?

Under what definition can a relationship between Israel and the UAE be termed "normal," especially given Abu Dhabi's repeated commitments to the Palestinians under the Arab League Charter and Arab summit conferences? By this normalization, Bin Zayed has unconditionally opened to Israel doors that were promised only as part of a comprehensive

settlement for the Palestinians. This is not normalization. This is a sellout and betrayal of Palestinians who were denied — through Arab compromises and declarations — to seek their own route and method to a solution.

The UAE's abrogation of its commitments is not the first one we see. The US has abrogated its commitments under several international agreements. And the Palestinians themselves have been on the receiving end of numerous Israeli violations of their treaty commitments toward Palestinians, including many UN resolutions that obligate Israel, as a UN member, to obey. But the UAE used a pretext that the Palestinians find insulting — the claim that this normalization is part of a deal that will stop annexation of the West Bank. This claim is not only a foolhardy lie, as Netanyahu's immediate denial shows, but also demonstrates political immaturity and lack of understanding about the 72-year Palestinian struggle.

The Palestinian fight has never been about stopping or suspending Israel's West Bank annexation but about the entire history of Palestinian rights that are being systematically eradicated while Arab governments continue to hijack their cause. If indeed Bin Zayed is correct that such an understanding exists, then Netanyahu's turnaround will probably be just the first, but certainly not the last, that the UAE will experience in its dealings with Israel. The well-known Palestinian politician, Dr. Mustafa Barghouti, told RT: "The UAE will experience what we have seen many times over the years. Israel doesn't respect any treaties, any covenants, any promises it makes."

Of Dying and Forgetting

Referring to Palestinians in the diaspora, Ben Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, had said, "The old will die. The young will forget." More than 70 years after the creation of the state of Israel and the forced eviction of Palestinians, many of them hold the keys to their homes which are passed over to their children. Every year as Israel celebrates another anniversary of its

creation, Palestinians mourn another anniversary of the Nakba — the Catastrophe — that descended upon them. The old have died, and the young refuse to forget.

Khalid al-Sheikh Ali, a Palestinian living under Israeli occupation in Al Shaafath refugee camp, told Al Jazeera: "We live here in prison. We live in a camp while we have a plot of land inside Palestine — it is empty. You want me to be an intellectual human being, a well-informed human being, a non-violent human being and so on. But I am not living like a human being here. You go out, you see the army, the overrunning drains, the piling garbage, the humidity that is eating into us and our dwellings, the dirty drinking water. The most painful thing we suffer, every day, is to try to go outside the barriers."

This misery is being inflicted upon Palestinians to force them to abandon their homeland, throw away their keys, forget and escape. Instead, they endure, passing the barbed-wire barriers that separate them from their homes the keys to which they still hold on to, sure that they will return. Indeed, given the never-ending misery Palestinians inside and outside Palestine suffer, it is impossible to imagine Ben Gurion or any of his successors ever realizing their dream. Enduring pain has its own way of sustaining memories.

In an act that again demonstrated the inability of Arab rulers to resolve Arab problems, Iran and Turkey — repeatedly accused of interfering in Arab affairs — have been vindicated by Bin Zayed. Arabs, especially Palestinians, indeed need to look to regional solutions instead of Arab solutions. Clearly, Arab rulers have decided that self-preservation takes precedence over national preservation. The deal with Israel, supported by the US, aims at enabling Netanyahu and Trump to win elections with the quid pro quo of helping Mohammed bin Zayed push back the growing internal opposition to his rule. The security agenda in this deal unmistakably stands out by the deafening silence of the dealmakers on the subject. Going forward, this deal will result in

more draconian methods to silence the growing opposition.

Following the arrival of flight Kiryat Gat in the UAE, two explosions erupted almost simultaneously, one in Abu Dhabi, on a road leading to the airport, and another in Dubai. The government claimed gas leaks to be the cause for both. The coincidence and the timing are an uncanny precedence, in a country where such incidents are unheard of.

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Finding a Cure for Lebanon's Imperialist Hangover

Hashim Abed
September 17, 2020

Foreign interference has made it impossible for Lebanon to chart its own political destiny and achieve peace and security.

Lebanon, as a nation, was destined for conflict since its creation in November 1943 by the French colonial power. To this day, it remains a client state with several competing foreign powers trying to exploit the country's social, political and economic systems for their benefit. The current socio-economic crisis has clearly exposed the inadequacies of Lebanon's political set-up while on the other hand creating rivalry between foreign powers competing for further influence.

In order to make sense of the current crisis and its trajectory, it is vital to understand Lebanon's history. The Lebanese government is divided into three factions. The prime minister is a Sunni, whom the US influences via its client state of

Saudi Arabia. Riyadh has enjoyed cordial political and economic relationships with the Hariri family since 1992, which it uses to contain Iran's influence within Lebanon.

The parliament is predominantly Shia, controlled by Iran via its proxy, Hezbollah, a militant group designated as a terrorist organization by the United States, Europe and the Arab League. The president is a Maronite Christian. The Maronite faction falls under the French influence since France placed the Maronites in power after independence in 1943. Over the years, however, the United States has been able to exercise its influence on the Maronites by limiting French control.

Enter Syria

In January 1976, Syria intervened in the Lebanese Civil War following the appeals by the Maronite-dominated government. When the war ended in 1989, the dismantlement of the Christian militias led to a decrease of French influence, while Hezbollah continued to maintain its possession of arms. Most importantly, the intervention was supported by the US, with Syria assisting in safeguarding Washington's interests. As declassified documents reveal, US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger openly supported the Syrian intervention.

In one meeting, Kissinger said: "We must go back to Assad [Hafez Assad, father of current president, Bashar al-Assad] ... ask him what he is up to and if we agree with him, we will do our best to help him ... But warn him what he does must be done without the use of Syrian regular forces. I want to make it clear that a Syrian defeat in Lebanon would be a disaster."

Syria's occupation of Lebanon greatly helped the US to undermine French influence. Consequently, the Taif Agreement that ended the war in 1989 stripped most of the power away from the Maronites and boosted the power base of the Sunni faction in government. Since Saudi Arabia maintains cordial relations with the Sunni bloc, the US can easily leverage its influence within Lebanon via its surrogate in Riyadh

because the US, alongside Syria, was discreetly involved in shaping the Taif Agreement.

It is worth noting that Syria and the US share over 70% of common interests in the region, with Washington benefiting the most out of its relationship with Damascus. The common interests between the two revolve around achieving peace, fighting terrorism and preserving a unified Iraq. Since the 1970s, the Syrian regime has squarely been in the American camp, contrary to those who mistakenly believed it was pro-Soviet. The reality dictates that Syria has constantly aided US interests in Lebanon and across the region.

Syria, along with Egypt, maintains Israel's security and tacitly consents to its existence. Also, over the years, both Hafez and Bashar al-Assad have acquiesced to the loss of the Golan heights in 1967 to strengthen the regime's survival and to change the public's negative opinion regarding Israel's existence. Even in the ongoing Syrian Civil War, the US wants to maintain the Assad regime in power through utilizing other players like Russia and Turkey to provide the regime with support.

More importantly, Syrian presence in Lebanon resulted in bolstering the Shia faction of the Lebanese government due to the close relationship between Tehran and Damascus. Hence, Syria's presence created a genial atmosphere for Iranian influence, which led to the formation of Hezbollah in 1985. This indicates that not only did the US try to curtail French influence in Lebanon and simultaneously exert its own hegemony, but that it also tacitly consented to the formation of Hezbollah, which has helped the US keep Israel in check and prevent it from becoming too powerful. Washington's goal is to secure and maintain its interests in the region, and in doing so, it will not let any power, Arab or Israeli, jeopardize American interests.

Furthermore, Hezbollah has continued to exist in Lebanon. Despite a recent standoff with Tehran, Washington finds it useful to make the neighboring states more dependent on the US for their security in the face of a perceived Iranian

threat. Israel sees Hezbollah as a security threat, which is why it maintains its dependency on US military aid, which benefits Washington. As James Sinkinson writes for the Jewish News Syndicate, "Every penny of the quarter-billion-dollar U.S. annual contribution to Lebanon ends up supporting Hezbollah terrorists, Iranian imperialism and military threats to Israel." At the end of the day, rhetoric and written statements do not necessarily reflect reality.

In April 2005, when France entered Lebanon, the situation significantly changed. The French efforts led to UN Resolution 1595 to remove the Syrian troops from the country after the assassination of President Rafik al-Hariri. Due to the French condemnation of Syria's crimes in Lebanon, the US had little choice but to side with France. This enabled Washington to safeguard its reputation, playing a double game by joining French efforts to roll back the Syrian presence. With its objective of stripping away excess power from the Maronites and shifting it to the Sunni faction achieved, Washington didn't see any further use for maintaining Syrian troops in Lebanon.

Scramble for Influence

The Trump administration's "maximum pressure" campaign, which the US is using to force Iran to stop its malign activities in the region and to agree to a new nuclear deal on Washington's terms, has also hurt Lebanon. Since US sanctions are being levied on Lebanese banks that are affiliated with Iran's proxy Hezbollah, this has caused a further shortage of dollars as foreign investors lost confidence in Lebanese banks. Consequently, the sanctions have created favorable conditions for the US.

Earlier this year, then-Prime Minister Hassan Diab initiated a request for a loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). IMF loans come with stringent conditions related to structural adjustments, deliberate devaluation against the dollar, privatization and selling off state assets to private corporations. All these reforms would benefit the United States since it

represents the largest voting bloc and provides most of the IMF's financial contributions. Moreover, the IMF has played an important role in maintaining the US dollar's primacy around the globe.

Even despite the calamitous circumstances the Lebanese people currently find themselves in, the IMF recently stated that it is ready to provide a loan, but on condition that the country's institutions must cooperate and implement reforms. A senior US official stated that the country's political and economic reforms must take place, and transparency must be established — otherwise there will be no bailout. But this statement is duplicitous, as it is the foreign powers dominating the IMF that are liable for the dire straits that Lebanon finds itself in today. The ultimate blame, however, goes to the local politicians who continue to welcome such reforms that will never solve the country's crisis.

The catastrophic explosion at the port of Beirut on August 4 that devastated the capital has provided foreign powers like France and the US with a pretext to intervene to protect and expand their influence within Lebanon. The fact that French President Emmanuel Macron rushed to Lebanon even before the embers had settled and the dead were buried exemplifies his fears of possible US intrusion. Since France is suffering from major domestic problems of its own, including the disruptive yellow vest movement and the shrinking of the French economy for three consecutive quarters, it makes no strategic sense for Macron to be in Lebanon when his country is struggling. These actions clearly show that Macron is deeply worried about losing any remnants of French influence in Lebanon to the United States.

Once again, France and the US are in conflict with each other over their interests in Lebanon, which is what is expected of all great powers operating in a geopolitical sphere. As for the United States, it will increase its influence in Lebanon through its institutional tools at its disposal whilst increasing pressure on Hezbollah to appease Israel, which would further bolster

President Donald Trump's support for the Jewish state ahead of the upcoming US presidential election.

Currently, France is using all its efforts to implement political reforms in Lebanon that would favor its interests. However, Paris lacks the capabilities to make a significant difference. French diplomats have also admitted that France has little leverage in Lebanon and have indicated that political reforms put forward by President Macron are unlikely to be implemented.

More importantly, the Lebanese people need to realize that their situation is going to remain unchanged unless corrupt politicians are removed from power and the entire governmental system undergoes a radical change. Lebanon's current situation, like that of most Arab nations, is a consequence of imperial interference that began in the mid-1800s. Because of this imperialist hangover, Lebanon is incapable of charting its own political destiny and achieving peace and security. Unless these obstacles are permanently resolved, Lebanon would remain a nation destined for conflict.

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Iran's Revenge Against Israel Will Be a Long Game

Ian McCredie
December 4, 2020

Tehran will not jeopardize its strategic goals for the short-term satisfaction of a revenge attack for Israel's assassination of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh.

Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, shot to death by a remote-controlled weapon on November 27 in Iran's capital Tehran,

was the fifth nuclear scientist Israel's intelligence agency, the Mossad, has assassinated over the past 13 years. He joins a list of dozens killed by Israeli special forces over the last five decades in the occupied territories and abroad. For many years, most of the targets were Palestinian activists or "terrorists," but also included others deemed "enemies." Now, the Mossad is focused on killing the leaders of the Iranian nuclear industry.

As a general rule, the Mossad clears its lines with Washington before conducting such operations to avoid accidentally assassinating CIA penetration agents. Israel would of course have considered the imminent departure of President Donald Trump in the timing of the killing of Fakhrizadeh. The Mossad could guarantee that Trump would not veto the operation, so there was a strong incentive to do it before January 20, when Joe Biden's inauguration takes place. Biden is going to attempt the complicated task of trying to revive the Iran nuclear deal and would have prevented the operation from going ahead to avoid even more difficulty with Tehran.

However, the chance to kill Fakhrizadeh was undoubtedly fleeting, the result of a chain of coincidences — just as the opportunity for the US to assassinate General Qassem Soleimani back in January suddenly materialized. For this reason, still having Trump in the White House was fortuitous.

Israel conducts its extra-territorial executions with total impunity. No retaliatory action, such as the expulsion of Mossad officers for example, ever follows. One notorious Mossad operation was the 1990 killing of Gerald Bull, the Canadian scientist who was shot in his apartment in Belgium. Bull had been engaged, at a price of \$25 million, by Saddam Hussein to help build the Big Babylon "supergun" Baghdad had hoped would be capable of firing satellites into orbit or "blinding" spy satellites, as well as having the potential to fire projectiles from Iraq into Israel. After the assassination, Belgium took no action.

Only Vladimir Putin's Russia comes close to Israel — and only then a very distant second — in terms of the number of political assassinations it conducts. By contrast, Russia is heavily sanctioned for its actions.

The leading scientists and engineers working in the Iranian nuclear industry or ballistic missile program will all be on the Mossad's death list. Also on the list will be the leaders of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, the Iranian intelligence services and the leaders of Iranian military operations in Iraq and Syria. The Mossad launches highly complex and detailed operations to identify such individuals and to track every detail of their personal lives — where they live and work, what their interests are, which restaurants they like, where they go hiking, who their friends are — anything that might provide an opportunity for a strike.

The Mossad uses human sources, communications intercepts and social engineering on social media to gather this information. Anyone on its list foolish enough to have a GPS tracker in their phone should not be surprised if a drone appears and fires at them.

Iran knows that Israel is not going to stop its murderous campaign. Tehran may anticipate that the Biden administration will at least try to slow down this strategy of targeted attacks while he tries some sort of rapprochement with the Iranian regime. But Iranians are chess players, and have been for thousands of years; they think strategically and several moves ahead. Iran's rulers will not jeopardize their strategic goals for the short-term satisfaction of a revenge attack. That can wait.

First Iran wants to consolidate its positions in Syria, Iraq and Yemen and remove some, if not all, of the US sanctions. Iran also wants to hurry the remaining US forces in Iraq out of the country. There is also a larger strategic dimension. Iran and the Gulf are well aware the US is in retreat from the region. Moreover, the Gulf monarchies are bleeding money as a result of profligate spending and what appears to be a permanent downward shift in the demand and

price for oil. They can no longer afford the monstrously wasteful spending on US arms nor rely on the US defense shield that goes with it.

The alternative is an accommodation with Iran, perhaps even a security dialogue. That is the carrot. The stick that Iran also wields is that if the Gulf chooses to continue or escalate confrontation, then Iran can wipe out their oil processing refineries and loading terminals — and the vital desalination plants — in an afternoon. The devastating but deliberately restricted missile attack on the Abqaiq oil processing facility in September 2019 was a clear signal of what might be expected if Iran is cornered. This realization following the Abqaiq attack prompted the immediate opening of backchannel communications between UAE, Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Those lines will surely be humming with excuses and special pleading in the aftermath of the Fakhrizadeh assassination. This moment could be the high-water mark of the failed US campaign of “maximum pressure” and the Trump administration’s disastrous Middle Eastern policy.

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NORTH AMERICA

Can America’s Progressive Movement Thrive Without Bernie Sanders?

S. Suresh
April 17, 2020

How the political revolution created by Sanders survives and thrives depends on the surrogates filling the void he leaves behind.

Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders quit his presidential bid in early April and endorsed former Vice President Joe Biden soon thereafter. Sanders’ campaign suffered heavily from a coalition of his centrist opponents and could never recover from the surprise poor showing on Super Tuesday, making it just a matter of time before he abandoned the race for the White House.

Politics is terrible and murky even among people whose policies are reasonably aligned. The two progressive leaders in American politics, Senators Elizabeth Warren and Sanders, are guided by different core principles. While Sanders stands for equality, Warren stands for liberty. The two flagbearers of the progressive movement failed to see eye to eye and coalesce their campaign the way centrist candidates did. That proved to be a costly mistake, resulting in both of them aborting their campaigns prematurely.

Unabashedly declaring himself a democratic socialist, Sanders was able to shake the country with a rousing campaign for a five-year period during his two presidential bids. However, at 78, Sanders is in the twilight of his political career and is unlikely to seek reelection for his Senate seat in 2024, let alone a third presidential run. Does this spell the end of the progressive

movement Sanders has been instrumental in creating?

An American Utopia?

Despite his infectious passion that has engaged the younger generation of Americans, Sanders has not succeeded in challenging the nation to look past itself and look out for others. Even in the midst of one of the worst pandemics in human history, politicians have been unable to rise above politics, govern the country and lead the people safely and responsibly. The richest country on this planet is suffering the worst casualties, exposing its broken health-care system, inadequate testing infrastructure and a lack of supply of protective gear for health workers and the general public alike.

Not a day goes by without the nation's megalomaniac leader, Donald Trump, doing something that is scandalous, parochial and irresponsible. His Republican entourage meekly kowtows to the president's whims, leaving the impotent Democratic politicians flailing miserably, crying foul and accomplishing precious little.

Had Sanders, or any progressive leader, been at the helm during this disaster, science and facts would have dictated policies at the national level. The stimulus money that individuals receive would have been protected from banks and other private debt collectors having first dibs at it. The egregious abuse of power by an administration allowing the richest in the country to avoid paying \$82 billion in taxes by way of a loophole in the stimulus plan would have been inconceivable. Assuaging human suffering, caring for the lives and health of American citizens would have taken precedence over the well-being of corporations and restarting the economy.

Sanders' vision for America is egalitarian, not utopian. In his own words, every American "is entitled to health care as a right, is entitled to a decent paying job as a right, is entitled to a dignified retirement as a right, is entitled to a clean environment as a right, and is entitled to all

of the education they need to accomplish their life goals," capturing the essence of what he has been passionately fighting for.

Stranglehold of Capitalism

Strangely, millions of Americans who would benefit from an egalitarian society prefer to stay in the lower echelons of the economic caste system imposed on them by a capitalistic society. The select few who sit on top of the pyramid and wield the power have little incentive to change the system when the status quo is skewed so much in their favor. It is no surprise that Sanders calls his progressive movement a political revolution, for nothing sort of a revolution can bring about a change to this well-entrenched economic caste system foisted by capitalism.

How the political revolution created by Sanders survives and thrives after him depends on the surrogates filling the void he leaves behind. Until they truly become a force to reckon with within the Democratic establishment, they have to learn to win small concessions from the evolutionary policies of centrist Democrats without becoming obstructionists. Inspired by Sanders, it is promising to see many millennials aspire for political office. It would be critical for their aspirations to become reality as in the case of House Representatives Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ilhan Omar, Ayanna Pressley, Rashida Tlaib and Ro Khanna, all ardent believers in a progressive agenda.

As Congresswoman Omar correctly observes, "the progressive movement has never been about one individual. It is about issues." Shifting the mindset of an entire nation to a progressive agenda, either through a radical revolution, as Sanders advocates, or specifically targeting the excesses of the capitalist system, as Warren believes, will take years, if not decades. We would need a new generation of leaders in positions of political power who are unafraid to place the larger social good ahead of personal gains and the interests of a wealthy few. They must be prepared and ready for capitalism to choke any incremental gains they make toward a

more progressive society. Most importantly, they must be savvy enough to deal with it.

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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 “Kardashian Kulture.”

The Rise and Fall of US Democracy

Peter Isackson
October 14, 2020

The chaos of this year's election may well be enough to dispel all remaining illusions about American democracy.

A functioning democracy requires an educated, informed population that understands its role in the processes that define how the democratic nation is governed. Ordinary citizens have two opportunities for actively participating in those processes. They can run for office or help those who are running for office get elected. And they can vote. Most people settle for voting. Actually, in the best of years, only slightly more than the majority of eligible voters actually vote. American democracy has never fired on all its cylinders.

The failure of half of Americans to participate is surprising because America has sedulously made the effort to educate its future voters. From day one, every schoolchild in the United States learns not only that the form of government they live under is a democracy but also that it is a regime defined by its commitment to freedom. Teachers, seconded by the media and the politicians who appear in the media, relentlessly drill into them the idea that the US is uniquely free, in ways that no other nation can claim. Americans possess unbridled freedom to speak out and to act, even in socially eccentric ways. For some, it even includes the freedom to shoot.

Although democracy and freedom are not synonymous, every schoolchild is taught to believe that they are. This has created a curious phenomenon in US culture: the idea that what they have is less the freedom to speak out, act

and influence their community than the freedom from interference by other people — and especially by the government. In other words, many Americans understand that the most fundamental freedom is the freedom to be left alone. Instead of defining the individual's field of possible action and participation, in their minds, democracy defines the right to avoid all action and participation.

The Art of Democratic Identity

Children who enter first grade and learn for the first time that they live in a free country may be left wondering what an unfree country is. A literal-minded 6-year-old — such as this writer who entered first grade during the Cold War — may naively wonder why, in a country that our teacher insisted is free, we have to pay for the things we consume. After all, any child who had ever been to a restaurant, a movie theater or a hotdog stand could sense what Milton Friedman would later affirm: There's no such thing as a free lunch.

My teacher's message, of course, had nothing to do with the price of things. We would learn about price, cost and value later. Like our parents, one day we would have a job, a house and a dog and be saddled with the task of fending for ourselves in a competitive world. We weren't quite prepared to understand that our teacher's riffing on the fact that we were a "free country" was, at the time, simply about the fact that another country with nuclear capacity, the Soviet Union, wasn't free. We children knew nothing about Russia, the Iron Curtain, communism, capitalism and everything else that was talked about on the news, mainly because we watched cartoons on television. Our exposure to Cold War propaganda was only just beginning.

On that first day of school, we began the task of memorizing the secular prayer that would kickstart the learning process every day of our schooling for the following 12 years: the pledge of allegiance. Its syntax was incomprehensible, but it sounded comfortingly patriotic. The abstract idea of allegiance was too much for our

young minds to deal with. But the key words, beginning with "the flag," offered something concrete and allowed us to begin to understand that our job was to learn to comply with a system we couldn't yet begin to understand.

"The flag" had meaning because we could see it in front of us, whereas "the Republic for which it stands" remained a mystery. Even "one nation" failed to make much sense to any of us since we hadn't yet studied the Civil War — a moment in history when there were briefly two — but clearly one seemed to be the right number of nations to belong to. "Under God" confirmed what most of our parents had already told us, though the idea of who that being was differed from family to family.

It was the last six words of the pledge that held some meaning and still resonate in people's minds: "with liberty and justice for all." That's when we began to learn what it meant to be a democracy. This became reinforced later, when we began studying the salient facts of history, including the importance of the first three words of the Constitution: "We the people." The picture of a democratic society where people, on the one hand, are free (both to vote and to be left alone) and, on the other, treated fairly and equally, combined with our belief in the goodness of the complete system, had begun to fall into place.

Every official text we would subsequently discover, starting with the Declaration of Independence's proclamation that "all men are created equal," delivered the message that we, the citizens (or at least those who could vote), collectively controlled the form of a government that would protect us from various kinds of evil forces. Among those evil forces were, historically speaking, the European monarchies to the east against whom we revolted, and the rampaging Native Americans to the west.

The first group, the European kings, defined the enemy in our battle for freedom in the 18th century. The second group, the Indians on horseback, defined the 19th-century enemy. Once those two had been neutralized, all that was left in the 20th century, following our victory over

the Germans and Japanese in World War II, was the Soviet Union.

Things had now become remarkably simple. We were a democracy that thrived thanks to our freedom, and especially the freedom of our markets. The Soviet Union was a communist dictatorship with a five-year plan. We were consumers with the widest possible range of choice who knew we would be left alone to consume whatever we chose. Moreover, they were atheists, and we, despite our freedom to believe or not believe, were “under God.” They had the mission of spreading across the globe their elaborate system of government interference in every aspect of everyone’s lives. In contrast, we knew, as President Woodrow Wilson had clearly established decades earlier, that our mission was to “make the world safe for democracy.”

Reconciling Democracy and Predestined Greatness

Unlike the Soviets, we had the power to elect our leaders. They had a single party, the Communist Party. We had two, a consumer’s choice. We understood the principles of democracy. The first of those principles consists of having a constitution with a bill of rights. The second is to have regularly planned elections permitting to choose which of the two parties we wanted to be governed by. Any wonderful and wild idea was possible, so long as one of the two parties embraced that idea.

Communism, of course, or its twin sister, socialism, represented impossible ideas, not only because they made no sense in a consumer society, but because neither of the parties would embrace such ideas. Nevertheless, some feared that the Democrats might be tempted by socialism or even communism. And so, enterprising politicians committed to the idea of democratic choice invented the House of Un-American Activities, making it clear to political consumers — i.e. voters — that some choices, deemed political heresy, would not be available

in the political marketplace. Heresy can, after all, happen in a free country that is also “under God.”

Throughout our schooling, our teachers and textbooks led us to assume that the nation’s founders, like Woodrow Wilson more than a century later, had one mission in mind, though with a more local focus: making North America safe for democracy. According to the narrative we received, it was in the name of democracy that the Founding Fathers decided to break away from the despotism of the British monarchy. This created the enduring belief that the founders were visionaries intent on creating what would later become known as the “world’s greatest democracy.”

It’s a trope US politicians today never tire of repeating. The Democrat, President Harry Truman, may have been the first when he uttered the phrase in 1952, just as the Cold War was picking up steam. He cited America’s “responsibilities as the greatest nation in the history of the world.” Like George W. Bush, Mitt Romney and any Republican, President Donald Trump deems the US to be not only “the single greatest nation in the history of the world” but also “the greatest economy in the history of the world.” In contrast, this year’s Democratic candidate for the presidency, former Vice President Joe Biden, more modestly characterizes it as merely “the greatest nation on earth.” Perhaps he hasn’t studied history as carefully as Truman and Trump have.

It isn’t clear whether Cassius Clay, before becoming Muhammad Ali — who famously boasted he was “the greatest” — was inspired by patriotic politicians at the time vaunting the economic power and military prowess of the nation or whether today’s politicians who keep insisting on greatness are inspired by Ali. Donald Trump is not the only American to resonate to the idea of greatness. In every domain, Americans seek to determine who is the GOAT, the Greatest of All Time. There must always be a winner, someone who is totally exceptional.

American exceptionalism is not just an idea. It has become a dogma that leaders must embrace.

Violating it or even trying to nuance it can prove disastrous. At a press conference in Europe in April 2009, fielding a question from a Financial Times reporter, newly installed President Barack Obama tried to limit his patriotic hubris when he said, “I believe in American exceptionalism, just as I suspect that the Brits believe in British exceptionalism and the Greeks believe in Greek exceptionalism.” This was too much for many Americans, such as Republican Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal and Fox News, who saw this as proof that Obama wasn’t a true believer in American exceptionalism. How could he dare to reduce the nation’s prestige to that of has-been countries like the UK and Greece?

The Historical Truth

At the nation’s very beginning, the founders sought and fought simply to create a nation that was no longer attached to Britain. It was a first step in the direction of just wanting to be left alone. They grappled first with the idea of how whatever emerged might define itself as a political entity. After that came the question of how it should be governed. Because of the diversity of the colonies, the founders could agree on the idea of dispersed authority, leading to the idea of a federation that could be thought of as a single federal state. They also, and nearly as emphatically, agreed that it was not about democracy.

In 1814, John Adams, a revolutionary leader and the second president of the United States, famously responded with this curt judgment to one of his critics who berated him for maligning democracy: “Democracy never lasts long.” Lambasting what he referred to as the “ideology” of democracy, Adams expressed his horror at “democratic rage and popular fury” and insisted that democracy “soon wastes exhausts and murders itself. There never was a Democracy Yet, that did not commit suicide.” The chaos of the French Revolution, which they considered an exercise in democracy, had left a bad impression on the minds of the Founding Fathers.

Alexander Hamilton, who died prematurely in a duel 10 years before Adams drafted his letter to John Tyler (but who miraculously came back to life on Broadway in a rap-based musical comedy exactly two hundred years later) emphatically agreed with Adams: “We are a Republican Government. Real liberty is never found in despotism or in the extremes of Democracy.” Both men had studied ancient history and witnessed the chaos of the French Revolution. Hamilton concluded: “The ancient democracies in which the people themselves deliberated never possessed one good feature of government. Their very character was tyranny; their figure deformity.”

The idea of democracy got off to a bad start in the young republic. And yet, most Americans today assume that US democracy was born with the drafting of the US Constitution. Even if the Founding Fathers clearly stated their preference for the idea of a republic ruled by a patrician elite and sought to define the young nation as fundamentally the opposite of a democracy, for generations, Americans have tended to believe that the Constitution embodied and validated democratic principles.

Obsessed by the attribute of greatness, Americans also continue to believe that the US deserves the title of “the world’s greatest democracy.” This is a notion that has the potential to irritate people who are not American. Last year, Dutch blogger Moshe-Mordechai Van Zuiden, writing for The Times of Israel, bitterly contested the insistence on American greatness. He lists 10 reasons why the US electoral system in no way reflects the ideal or even the messy reality of effective national democracies.

After excoriating a two-party system offering “only a choice between two people widely despised,” as happened in 2016 and may even be the case in 2020, he makes a more fundamental complaint: “Top Dog Wins is not democracy. It’s a dictatorship of the majority.” All of the 10 points made by this brash Dutchman are well taken. Despite their national pride, more and more Americans are ready to agree.

The Last Election

Americans are clearly unaware of the fact that the revered founders believed that if democracy were to take hold, it would lead to the collapse of a fragile nation. The president who successfully marketed the idea of democracy for the first time, changing the course of America's political culture, was Andrew Jackson, the president Donald Trump most admires (after himself). It was during Jackson's presidency that Alexis de Tocqueville wrote and published "Democracy in America." Thanks to the French aristocrat's writing and Jackson's deeds, including displacing and sometimes massacring native tribes, the label stuck.

It subsequently became dogma that the United States not only is a democracy but exemplifies the ideal of what democracy should be. Abraham Lincoln went on to provide the concept of democracy with a permanent advertising slogan when he called it a "government of the people, by the people and for the people." By the time of Lincoln and the imminent Emancipation Proclamation, the idea of "people" had taken on a much broader meaning than at the time of the drafting of the Constitution.

As Van Zuiden and others have pointed out, the electoral system in the US was never designed to function as a true democracy. Nevertheless, the belief was solidly instilled that democracy was in the nation's DNA. It has withstood numerous assaults along the way and only recently begun to reveal some serious flaws that risk undermining Americans' unquestioning belief in its virtues. For future observers of US history, the illusion of democracy as the basis of government may technically have expired in December 2000 when nine Supreme Court justices, and not the people or even the states, elected George W. Bush as president. At the time and amid such confusion, few had the courage to acknowledge that Bush's election reflected a permanent change in their perception of democracy.

The chaos of this year's election, characterized by the twin evils of a persistent

pandemic and the personality of Donald Trump, may well be the election that dispels all remaining illusions. In 2021, a new approach to understanding the relationship between the people and the nation's institutions will most likely begin to emerge. The rupture with past traditions has been too great for the old dogmas to survive intact.

It's impossible to predict what form that seismic shift in the political culture will take. It now looks more than likely — though prudence is still required — that if democratic processes play out according to recognized rules, Joe Biden will be the 46th president of the United States. But there is no guarantee that democratic processes will play out in any recognizably legitimate way, partly because the COVID-19 pandemic has created a physical barrier to the already troublingly chaotic conduct of traditional elections whose results pass through the archaic Electoral College, and partly because President Donald Trump will be highly motivated to disturb, delay and possibly cancel whatever validated outcome emerges. But further complications and a practically infinite series of complementary risks are lying in the offing. The risk of uncontrollable civil unrest, if not civil war, is real.

Whatever the official result of the presidential election, whether it becomes known in the immediate aftermath of November 3 or sometime in January, it will be the object of contestation and possibly unpredictable forms of revolt by the citizens themselves. Like any episode of social upheaval, there is a strong chance that it will be quelled.

Biden's Dilemma

But even if quashed and silenced, it certainly will not be resolved. The most favorable scenario for neutralizing the revolt of the Trumpian right would be a landslide victory for Biden, with the Democrats retaking control of the Senate while maintaining and increasing their majority in the House. But even so, the losers will certainly cry foul.

A resounding majority for Biden and the Democrats would nevertheless buttress what remains of the population's belief in democracy, legitimizing Biden's claim to govern the nation. But even in the best of scenarios, a landslide would still leave Biden in a fragile, if not precarious position. Biden has done next to nothing to unite his own party. A Democratic victory will incite the young progressives to contest his legitimate control over an aged and aging party establishment. Gallup reports that "Americans' frustration with the parties is evident in the 57% of Americans saying a third party is needed."

That figure has been stable for at least the past 10 years, but the level of frustration has been magnified by the presence of uninspiring candidates in both parties. As governing structures, both dominant parties have been seriously fragilized in the past two elections, the Republicans by Trump's successful assault on their traditions and the Democrats by the nearly successful challenge of Bernie Sanders and the party establishment's resistance to change.

If elected, Biden will be challenged on the right by the combined force of fanatical believers in Trump as the messiah and hordes of libertarians appalled by the prospect of more "big government." He will be challenged on the left by the progressives who not only oppose his tepid policies but no longer believe in the integrity of the Democratic Party. If it was just a question of managing the personal rivalries within his party, as it was for Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, all might be fine. But with a prolonged pandemic, an out-of-control economic crisis, increasingly lucid and effective racial unrest and a growing anti-establishment sentiment across much of the right and the left, reinstalling the establishment that preceded Trump and restoring faith in its ability to govern will be a task logically beyond the capacity of 78-year-old Biden.

The End of an Era

And those issues only begin to define the challenges Biden will be facing. In an essay in

The New Criterion earlier this year, James Pierson observed the very real potential for social collapse: "Yet today the United States seems headed in a different direction: toward pluralism without consensus — a nation-state without a national idea — and towards animus among racial, religious, regional, and national groups." In his article, Pierson deftly summarizes the history of the nation from the convergence of disparate colonies into a "union" and its need for imperial expansion to maintain its unity. Historically speaking, both convergence and expansion are no longer what they used to be.

Pierson claims that before the Civil War and the victory of the Union forces, the US had not really decided what it was. He asks the question, "what was it: union, republic, or empire — or a combination of all three? Whatever it was, it was not yet a nation." He claims it only became a nation-state "over a ninety-year period from 1860 to 1950, an era bookended by the Civil War and World War II, two great wars for liberal democracy, with World War I sandwiched in between."

Pierson credits Abraham Lincoln with creating the democracy that eventually came to dominate the world in the 20th century. Although assassinated by John Wilkes Booth before he could begin to implement his plan, Lincoln effectively created a political culture or system of belief that has only begun to fray in the last few decades.

Pierson describes Honest Abe's ideological triumph. "Lincoln envisioned a nation held together by a 'political religion' based upon reverence for the Founding Fathers, the Constitution, and the Declaration of Independence." It was a nation "held together by loyalty to political institutions and abstract ideals."

Pierson believes that that stable system began to dissolve after 1950, when what had been clearly a WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) culture began to lose its capacity to impose its norms. He concludes, somewhat nostalgically: "It is no longer possible for the United States to go

forward as a ‘cultural’ nation in the form by which it developed between 1860 and 1950. Whether or not this is a good thing is beside the point: it has happened, is happening, and will continue to happen.” And then, fatalistically, he adds: “These developments leave the United States without any strong foundations to keep itself together as a political enterprise — in a circumstance when its increasing diversity requires some kind of unifying thread. What will that be? No one now knows.”

Pierson’s description of cultural decline echoes the thesis of Samuel Huntington’s book, “Who Are We?” It expresses a sentiment that Trump exploited with his slogan “Make American Great Again.” Pierson seems to recognize that a return to the good old WASP order, wished for by Huntington and Trump (and perhaps Pierson himself), is simply not going to happen.

Joe Biden has promised to provide the thread that will unify the nation. Pierson believes that’s an impossible task. Others, focused on the possibilities of the future rather than a nostalgia for the past, claim it can be done. But Biden, though more conciliatory than Trump, clearly lacks the vision and the personality required to achieve it. And, of course, another Trump victory would only fragment the culture further and faster.

The obvious conclusion should be that there is little choice for a politician who wishes to survive intact other than to move forward boldly and accept to resolve some serious historical ambiguities and overturn a number of institutions that have created a situation of political sclerosis and accelerated cultural decline. There are plenty of ideas to work with. Some of the younger members of the Democratic Party have demonstrated the kind of energy needed to achieve success. And the population will not be averse to change if they see it is intended to cure the disease and not just temporarily relieve the pain. The opioid crisis has at least taught them that mere pain relief is a dead end.

The problem is that there will be resistance, though it will not come from the people. They know what they want. A majority wants to see expanded choice and at the very minimum a third party, simply because they no longer trust the two parties that have been running the show. An even clearer majority supports single-payer health insurance. A majority among the younger generations and possibly the entire population expects a serious and thorough response to climate change. But as the actions of past presidents have demonstrated, changing the way of life of a society of consumers appears to be too much to ask of politicians.

Once the dust has settled from the election — unless that dust becomes radioactive while waiting for definitive results — 2021 is likely to be a year of confused political maneuvering and deep social instability. It will undoubtedly be a period of crisis. In a best case scenario, it will be the type of crisis that enables the nation to focus on a serious project of transformation. Those who see a Biden victory as a chance to return to the former status quo will attempt to manage the crisis, but they will inevitably be disappointed.

That includes traditional donors, Wall Street, Hollywood and the vast majority of the political class. The two-dimensional chessboard with its 64 squares that they have been playing on for decades has now acquired a third dimension. Their expertise in pushing around the same pieces, according to the same rules on the same traditional chessboard, has lost its validity.

Fragile Simulacrum

History has already overtaken the political potential of a fragile simulacrum of a democracy that was never meant to be a democracy. No historian tracing the events as they played out over more than two centuries should be surprised that, while maintaining the illusion of democracy, the system evolved to function essentially as an elaborate, well-armed oligarchy. The oligarchy will use every power it has in its high-tech arsenal, including new forms of apparent generosity, to stabilize those institutions that best

resist the seismic forces that have already begun cracking the entire system's foundations.

Even if it achieves some form of success and reaches what appears to be a state of relative stability, the world it believes it still controls will be very different and will begin evolving in highly unpredictable ways.

Many are predicting collapse. Given the degree to which an individualistic and corporatist culture has undermined most of the principles of human solidarity, collapse may well be the inevitable outcome. But collapse of what? Will it be the supposedly democratic political structures, traditions or ideologies? Will it be the economy? Or, as the coronavirus pandemic has shown, will it be human health, to say nothing of the health of the planet?

Voters in the November 3 election should be asking themselves not just whom they want to vote for, but a much more immediate question that is nevertheless difficult to answer. What do Biden and his future team think about all the above questions? Are they prepared? What do they seriously think they might do about them as soon as the cracks start appearing, many of which are already visible?

In the run-up to an election, politicians are unlikely to blurt out the truth, especially if it involves taking on serious problems whose solutions will inevitably cause pain in certain quarters.

They will typically try to deal with three somewhat contradictory concerns. Keep the people happy. Reassure the donors. Prepare the next round of unholy alliances just to be certain they will be able to get something done. And then the big question arises: When it comes to taking hold of the reins of power, who will they accept to disappoint? But the real question is this, who can they afford to disappoint?

We are left asking ourselves whether John Adams was right when he wrote that democracy never lasts long. If Biden is elected and serves two terms (reaching the age of 88 at the end of his second term), the kind of democracy the US has created will have lasted exactly two hundred

years. John Adams probably would consider that a long time.

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Femicide Continues to Plague Mexico

Lester Chavez
October 19, 2020

When it comes to violence against women, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador's track record leaves much to be desired.

President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO) won the 2018 election on a campaign of combating the underlying causes of the social ailments impacting Mexican society. He vowed to fight violence and narcotics trafficking by eliminating its root cause, poverty. His plan was summarized by his tagline, "hugs, not bullets." AMLO has sought to be the voice of the marginalized and to end the endemic corruption in Mexican politics. In September, during his state of the union speech, he claimed that most crime was down under his administration, including kidnapping, robbery and femicide. His track record thus far, however, disproves his claims and leaves much to be desired, especially when it comes to violence against women.

On August 3, the president celebrated a victory over the arrest of one of Mexico's most wanted criminals, Jose Antonio Yopez Ortiz, "El Marro," the alleged leader of the Santa Rosa de Lima cartel. That win was soon followed by the extradition from Spain of Emilio Lozoya, ex-chief of the state-owned oil company, PEMEX, on bribery and money laundering charges, which

ultimately implicated ex-presidents and various congressmen.

Gender-Based Violence

While Lopez Obrador touted these examples as clear evidence of his administration's success, he, like many populists in the region, believes that he can shape public opinion and reality solely through his own declarations, despite all the evidence to the contrary. However, on the heels of these so-called victories, a July government report captured a staggering statistic: 17,493 homicides in the first half of 2020, indicating a nearly 2% increase since last year, putting 2020 on track to be the deadliest year on Mexico's record.

Among the record-breaking homicides figure lies a much greater policy failure to combat femicide — the murder of women based on their gender. Femicide is up 9.2% compared to the first half of 2019, totaling 489 deaths through June this year according to the Secretariat of Security and Civilian Protection (SSPC). Femicide shot up by 36% alone from May to June. While violence against women has long been problematic in Mexico, COVID-19 lockdowns have only worsened the situation by forcing many victims into dangerous circumstances with their aggressors.

Budget cuts to federal and state programs due to the economic recession and diminishing tax revenues will likely make it harder to respond to domestic abuse calls and to prosecute femicides. Amid these extraordinary developments, AMLO's response so far has been to downplay the chronic nature of gender-based violence in Mexico.

Emergency calls show just how endemic the violence really is. Through the end of July, the emergency helpline had received 154,610 calls reporting gender violence incidents, up 47% from 2019, according to the SSCP. AMLO has claimed in a press conference that 90% of these calls are "false." While experts agree many of the calls are "inadmissible" or "unfounded," due to poor

connections, the victims hanging up and even prank calls, inadmissible calls don't exceed 77%.

The president is attempting to use the inadmissibility argument to refute the verified emergency call statistics of his own government. The figures also cannot account for the many victims who do not contact authorities out of fear. According to an independent NGO, 9 out of 10 women do not report gender-based violence in Mexico. Rather than providing compassion and answers to victims, the president has selfishly claimed that his opponents are using femicide statistics for political attacks.

Economic Impacts

Beyond the physical trauma, domestic and state abuse against women can also have profound effects on women's economic well-being. According to a 2018 report by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography of Mexico (INEGI), over 19 million women reported being victims of domestic abuse, with 64% of incidents leading to severe violence. As a result, each victim lost an average of 30 days of paid and 28 days of unpaid work annually. INEGI estimates that between October 2015 and October 2016, the total cost of lost income by women who missed work due to domestic violence amounted to 4.4 billion pesos (\$184 million).

These losses often perpetuate women's dependence on their aggressors, worsening what already are unequal economic circumstances. According to the United Nations Development Program's (UNDP) Gender Development Index, women on average earn \$11,254 per year, less than half of men, who make \$24,286. More women rely on informal employment, with 56.6% working in the informal sector (excluding agriculture) compared to 48.4% of men. The Mexican Social Security Institute noted that women only comprise 38% of social security beneficiaries. This economic and labor inequality has meant that women have been disproportionately hit by the COVID-19 lockdowns, rising unemployment and lack of access to social security benefits.

AMLO has failed to adequately respond to the issue, and the situation is likely to worsen unless the government makes a concerted effort. In August, a reporter confronted the president about a June report showing a cut of 37.5 million pesos to the National Commission to Prevent and Eradicate Violence Against Women. After the president's denial, the government released a statement saying that no such cuts would be made because fighting gender violence was an essential task.

However, the response still falls well short of a meaningful attempt to stamp out the endemic issues in the criminal system and within Mexican machismo culture at large. The president's austerity measures cannot come at the expense of rising femicide rates and violence against women throughout the country. Rather, a July report from the UNDP recommends that the government take on more debt to spend on protecting the most vulnerable groups from the socio-economic effects of the pandemic.

As endemic as femicide is in Mexico — it trails only Brazil's total number of cases in Latin America — gender-based violence is a pandemic that is claiming the lives of countless victims across the hemisphere. According to the United Nations' Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean, the countries with the highest rate of femicide per 100,000 women are: El Salvador (6.8), Honduras (5.1), Bolivia (2.3), Guatemala (2.0) and the Dominican Republic (1.9). Mexico's rate of femicide is 1.4, which suggests that in addition to national measures taken to halt this pandemic, Latin America as a region has much work to do to protect the well-being of half of its citizens.

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Held Together With String, Can America Hold?

Atul Singh
November 2, 2020

With many loose tribes pulling in different directions, America faces a protracted war for the soul of the nation.

In December 2007, Mwai Kibaki beat Raila Odinga in the Kenyan general election and all hell broke loose. Odinga's supporters took to the streets, alleging Kibaki had "stolen" the election. Police fired on demonstrators and some died. In retaliation, the targeted ethnic cleansing of Kikuyus, Kibaki's community, began.

The Kikuyus themselves responded by targeting other communities. A bloodbath ensued. The New York Times observed that "ethnic violence, fueled by political passions" was threatening to ruin the reputation of a country regarded as one of the most promising in Africa. It turns out that this promise was illusory. Rival ethnic groups within arbitrary colonial borders were held loosely together by self-interest and little national identity. The country was held together with string.

About 20 years ago, Stephen Heiniger, then a British policeman, visited a dear friend in New York. Like my view of Kenya, he observed that New York was held together with string. The Guatemalan who worked in a restaurant's kitchen had little in common with the owner. He did not really identify with New York or even the US. The immigrant was slaving away to make money to send back to his family, socializing largely with people from his part of the world.

What Heiniger observed about New York 20 years ago is increasingly true for America today. The country is full of such loose groups held together by self-interest. This is largely defined in terms of success, which in turn is mainly measured by money. A strong social, regional or

national identity and common purpose in a large, diverse and unequal land is increasingly lacking.

In the 2020 presidential election, America might be about to emulate Kenya. Political passions run so strong that the threat of violence looms high. Not since the Civil War ended in 1865 has America been so divided. The reputation of a country long considered the most promising in the world faces damage, if not ruin.

The Mother of All Elections

Michael Hirsh, the deputy news editor of Foreign Policy, thinks this is the most important election ever. It is more important than the seminal elections of 1800, 1860 and 1932. These led to the triumphs of Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln and Franklin D. Roosevelt respectively, changing the course of history. In each of these elections, America was divided but managed to hold together and move forward.

Hirsh argues that the 2020 election is the most significant because President Donald Trump has damaged institutions of American democracy to such a degree that the future of “the 244-year-old American experiment of a republic of laws” is at stake.” He blames Trump for openly encouraging racial violence, stoking division and failing to contain the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hirsh reflects the unease of many members of the American elite. For a long time, they have self-consciously thought of themselves as a modern-day Rome. Now, they fear that America could end up “as just another abject discard on the ash heap of failed republics going back to ancient Rome and Greece.”

As during the times of the Cold War, Americans fear an enemy. This time it is another communist country, a former ally named the People’s Republic of China. Hirsh believes the US is stumbling precisely at “a moment when [it] has lost its material preponderance” to China. Its “central place in stabilizing the global system” is on the ballot.

The Economist shares Hirsh’s view. It makes a case for Democratic nominee Joe Biden in a breezy editorial that seems to have been penned

in the Oxford Union. It declares Biden not to be the miracle cure for what is ailing America but a good man needed to “restore steadiness and civility to the White House.”

Media organizations from The New York Times to The Times of India agree upon the importance of the 2020 election. They have published millions of words on the subject and sought out pollsters to predict the election outcome. As the day of reckoning draws nigh, campaigning has reached fever pitch. Candidates for the House of Representatives, the Senate and the White House are all summing up their final arguments to Americans who have not voted yet. Even as citizens go to the polls on November 3, the Senate has confirmed Amy Coney Barrett to the Supreme Court, giving conservatives a 6-3 majority over liberals. Everything is on the ballot in 2020, including and especially the courts.

To understand the presidential election, it might be useful to cast our eyes to an event 30 years ago. In August 1990, Iraq’s Saddam Hussein “invaded and annexed Kuwait.” The US swung into action to liberate an oil-rich country that its cash-poor neighbor had gobbled. Hussein threatened “the mother of all battles” but suffered abject defeat. This was a heady time for the US. The Berlin Wall had fallen. George H.W. Bush had come to the White House promising “a kinder and gentler nation” and “no new taxes.” Ronald Reagan’s revolution of getting the government off people’s backs and bringing the Soviet Union to its knees seemed to have succeeded. By the end of 1991, the Soviet Union had collapsed.

President Bush had presided over the ultimate triumph of America. The dreaded Cold War with its specter of nuclear destruction was finally over. America’s liberal democracy and free market economy were deemed the only way forward. Francis Fukuyama waxed lyrical about the end of history and humanity was supposed to enter the gates of paradise, with all earthlings securing unalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

After a spectacular victory in the Gulf and the glorious subjugation of the Soviet Union, Bush should have romped to victory in the 1992 election. Instead, he lost. The economy had been slowing and deficits had been growing, forcing Bush to raise taxes. Many Americans went apoplectic. They could not forgive the president for breaking his promise. There was unease even then with the new era of globalization that Bush kicked off.

In that election, Texan billionaire Ross Perot made a dash for the White House campaigning against this brave new world. He warned against “shipping millions of jobs overseas” because of “one-way trade agreements.” Perot argued that countries with lower wages, lesser health care or retirement benefits and laxer environmental laws would attract factories away from American shores. With the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) on the cards, Perot famously predicted “there will be a giant sucking sound going south.” Perot did not win, but he took enough votes away from Bush to pave Bill Clinton’s primrose path to the White House.

In 2020, Trump is running for a second term as Perot’s angry child. He has jettisoned “bad” trade deals like NAFTA and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). Biden is the successor to Bush and Clinton. He was vice president when the US negotiated the TPP. The die is cast for a clash between two radically different visions for the future.

Who Will Win?

In 2016, I had an uncanny feeling that both Brexit and Trump’s triumph were not only possible but probable. In February that year, I examined the UK’s troubled marriage with Europe and argued that British Prime Minister David Cameron had promised more than he delivered, which would cause him problems later. In July, I posited that we could soon be living in the age of Trump because of increasing inequality and rising rage against entrenched elites.

I followed the two articles with a talk at Google in August on the global rise of the far

right. Aggrieved by the superciliousness of journalists based in New York and Washington, I resonated deeply with the “left-behind” voters. They believed that American elites had turned rapaciously parasitic and sanctimoniously hypocritical. It seemed inevitable that some Pied Piper would lead a populist reaction.

In 2020, I do not have my finger on the pulse in the same way as in 2016. Social distancing and limited travel in the era of COVID-19 has made it difficult to estimate what really is going on. Besides, Americans say radically different things depending on which candidate they support. Often, they are very guarded or say little, making it hard to judge what is truly happening.

Democrats seem convinced that the nation is horrified by four years of a Trump presidency. They see him as crass, racist, misogynist, dishonest and deeply dangerous. Democrats believe that Americans will punish Trump for damaging institutions, spreading hatred and lowering the dignity of his office. Opinion polls give the Democratic Party a handsome lead even in some key battleground swing states. Pollsters were wrong in 2016, but they might have improved their methods since. Therefore, Democrats believe that they could retain their majority in the House of Representatives, flip the Senate and win back the White House.

Republicans do not seem to have much faith in these polls. Many are confident of another close victory. They predict losing the popular vote but winning the Electoral College. Republican strategists are banking on the silent white vote to turn out in their favor. Many voters are uncomfortable with the Black Lives Matter movement, calls to “defund the police” and prospects of higher taxes. They fear Biden to be a Trojan horse for the culture warriors of the far left led by Kamala Harris, his running mate. They worry about identity politics and the strains it places on the social fabric. Republicans also hope to pick up minority support from Hispanics who oppose abortion, Indians who back Trump’s good friend Narendra Modi, Taiwanese who hate China and others.

Making Sense of Donald Trump

When I speak to Americans, one thing is clear. This election is a referendum on President Trump. His manifest flaws have been chronicled by numerous publications and innumerable late-night comedy shows. Yet Trump still retains the trust of many Americans. Why?

The best answer came from some militia members I spoke to in West Virginia. They conceded that Trump lies but gave him credit for telling one big truth: Things had turned much too ugly for far too many people like them.

Some of these militia members were veterans who had served in Iraq and Afghanistan. They were filled with a burning sense of injustice. These gentlemen had withering contempt for the likes of Paul Bremer, Paul Wolfowitz and John Bolton who served President George W. Bush. They viewed wars abroad as a criminal waste of American blood and treasure. These war veterans pointed out that Bremer, Wolfowitz and Bolton had been courtiers who climbed up the Washington greasy pole without ever serving in uniform. They remarked that Bush himself was a draft dodger who wriggled out of serving in Vietnam because of his father but sent others to die on foreign shores.

These West Virginians went on to say that their children had few prospects. Since 1991, working-class jobs have left for China. So, their children need a good education to compete for the few decent jobs in the services sector. However, they study in schools with few resources and overstretched teachers.

The militia members' argument is simple but powerful. Only children who study in private schools or state schools in districts where houses cost a million dollars or more get into top universities, which cost a mere \$300,000 or so for an undergraduate degree. Affluent foreign students also make a beeline for America after high school. Such is the competition that most parents hire expensive admissions consultants for their children. So, those who come from hardworking ordinary American families are simply outgunned.

The celebrated entrepreneurs of the US might be dropouts, but top corporates hire largely, if not exclusively, from top universities. The West Virginians pointed out that, before Barrett's nomination, "all nine justices of the nation's highest court would have attended law school at either Yale or Harvard universities." Those who go to posh schools and top universities effortlessly enter the cushy salaried class. They can walk in and buy a million-dollar home with a tiny down payment. All they need apart from their job is a good credit score. In contrast, ordinary Americans live paycheck to paycheck.

One militia member went on to discuss the bailout in some detail. He told me he had voted for change twice but got more of the same instead.

This gentleman blamed President Barack Obama for caving in to Wall Street. He said veterans struggled to get by while bankers got big bonuses from taxpayer money. For him, this showed that Democrats had sold out to Wall Street. He declared that fortunes of the new feudal superclass have been made through the serfdom of an ever-increasing underclass. In his memorable words, the system has "f**ked us over. Now, we will f**k it up."

The West Virginians brought to life many arguments I have made over the last decade. In July 2013, I argued that increasing inequality, lack of access to quality education and an erosion of liberty were chipping away at the very basis of the American dream.

Over the years, I have cited many studies that chronicled how America was becoming more unequal. In fact, inequality of both income and wealth has worsened even more during the COVID-19 pandemic. Note the economy has tanked but stock markets have stayed high. Social mobility continues to plummet. Poverty is shooting up dramatically. So is hunger. Surviving the terrible American nightmare has become more of a reality than achieving the great American dream.

Such developments have led to much anger. In an eloquent interview, Trump supporter-turned-

opponent Anthony Scaramucci explained why the president won the support of the white working class in places like West Virginia, Wisconsin and Michigan in 2016. For this class, the television celebrity was “an avatar to express their anger.” In rural and suburban areas, blighted factory towns and rundown neighborhoods, Trump was the “orange wrecking ball” to “disrupt and change the system.”

Another interview by Trump’s former strategist, Steve Bannon, is equally instructive. He rightly says that the American economy is no longer based on capitalism but on neo-feudalism. This former Goldman Sachs highflier argues that the underclass and the superclass don’t pay for anything. The working and middle class are left taking the tab. Quantitative easing (QE) might have saved the economy from collapse but has largely benefited the wealthy. In a clever turn of phrase, Bannon calls QE the bailing out of the guilty who had crashed the system itself. Trump is a “very imperfect instrument” for this populist revolt.

Likable Uncle Joe and Dancing Kamala

Many Republicans tell me that they like Biden. They think he is a good and likable man. These folks have reservations about his son Hunter but admire his late son Beau who served in the US Army. However, Republicans fear Biden could be turning senile and Harris would be the real power behind the throne. They reserve their special ire for Harris who they damn for practicing identity politics. Even many Democrats are uncomfortable about her cozy relationships with the Silicon Valley mafia who Americans feel care more about India than Indiana.

For many Republicans, Harris is a disingenuous elitist who plays the race card to win votes and sympathy. She had no compunctions putting young black men into jail for minor crimes as a prosecutor to further her political career. They detest the fact that Harris played the race card against Biden during the Democratic presidential primaries. She made a

big deal about his opposition to mandatory busing of colored children to largely white schools. Now, Harris is merrily dancing her way to the White House on a presidential ticket with the same man she excoriated not too long ago. Politics is a bloodsport, but some find Harris a bit too canny and bloodthirsty.

Biden’s supporters take a different view. They think he is still in good health and has good judgment. As per *The Economist*, the former vice president is “a centrist, an institutionalist, a consensus-builder.” He is exactly what the doctor ordered for a deeply-traumatized nation. Biden will not only steer the Democratic Party forward but also get rid of the scourge of Trump for the Republicans. Decency and civility will return to public life and the White House. Many point to Biden’s impassioned 1986 speech against the Reagan administration’s support for the South African apartheid regime as evidence of his deep commitment to equality and justice.

Democrats see reservations against Harris as evidence of America’s deep-seated sexism and racism. With Indian and Jamaican parents, Harris is multiracial like Obama. For many, she is the future of America. She could be the first woman vice president, breaking the key glass ceiling. Immigrants like her parents provide America the talent to stay top dog. As long as Sundar Pichai, Elon Musk and John Oliver make a beeline for America, Uncle Sam will triumph over the Middle Kingdom.

Democrats make good arguments for the Biden-Harris ticket, but they lack the passion Trump supporters displayed. The fervor of the 2008 Barack Obama or the 2016 Bernie Sanders campaigns is distinctly missing. Democrats are not offering a clear vision or a program for the future. They are running on kicking out Trump and restoring American democracy. It remains to be seen if this will enthrone working-class voters to switch their support to the party of Roosevelt.

Another Battle in a Long War

Both Biden and Trump have declared they are fighting for America’s soul. It is the mother of all

battles in what could prove to be a protracted war. The country is now economically, educationally, socially, culturally and virtually divided. The division that cable news networks exacerbated a few decades ago is now on steroids thanks to social media. Algorithms have created filter bubbles and echo chambers. People see more and more of the same. In the post-truth world of fake news, people cannot even agree upon basic facts.

In this unequal and polarized world, institutions are falling short. Congressmen who face reelection every two years are constantly fundraising. They have little time to write laws or hold the executive accountable. Senators often stick around forever, some until they die. Partisanship is so intense that little gets done. Judges are increasingly appointed on partisan grounds and this is damaging their legitimacy.

At the heart of the matter is a simple question: What holds America together? Bannon has a point when he says that immigration and trade benefit the affluent by lowering costs and raising profits. If hedge funds in Greenwich, Connecticut and internet oligopolies in Silicon Valley, California invest globally and move money through complex legal structures in different countries, what do they have in common with a plumber in Hattiesburg, Mississippi or a carpenter in Great Falls, Montana?

After the ethnic cleansing in 2007-08, Kenyan leaders signed a power-sharing agreement and the country drifted back to normalcy. As Kenya gears up for elections in 2022, fear and loathing are in the air again. The dormant divisions in this former colony threaten to erupt.

The same is true for America. Young black men suffer violent policing and mass incarceration in America's unjust criminal justice system. The white working class feels betrayed. The woke generation wants to upend the old social order. Feminists want to burn down the patriarchy. Catholics and evangelicals aim to outlaw abortion.

With America's different tribes pulling in different directions, things are truly held together with string.

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Joe Biden and America's Second Reconstruction

Gary Grappo
November 9, 2020

Biden will take on the world's oldest democracy's greatest challenge: healing a very divided nation.

After four days of agonizing vote tabulations, interminable political commentary, overwrought election dissection and national public angst, Joe Biden has been declared the winner of the 2020 election as America's next president. Biden partisans are entitled to some celebration. It was a hard-fought win against what seemed like impossible odds at the beginning of the year. But the politician who began his public life 50 years ago as a Wilmington, Delaware, councilman will now take on the biggest challenge of his life and of the nation he will lead.

First, however, it's important to call attention to all the things that went well for America this last week. And they're vitally important for Americans — and non-Americans, too — to understand and appreciate as the nation and its new president invest themselves in this herculean challenge ahead.

For all the Sturm und Drang in the lead-up to the election, voting came off largely without a hitch. All voters who came to vote were able to do so. In most cases, waiting times were mercifully brief. Waiting tended to occur more

frequently during the early voting. Those voters deserve their country's respect and gratitude for their patience, persistence and commitment to the democratic process. Despite plenty of hiccups in primary voting that took place earlier in the year, national election day procedures and systems performed just as they were supposed to do. Early voting as well as mail-in and absentee voting, occurring in many states for the first time to minimize the dangers of COVID-19, also proceeded with few problems.

Delays in ballot tabulation occurred in states like Pennsylvania, Georgia, Nevada and elsewhere largely because Republican-controlled legislatures prohibited starting the counting process until November 3 — voting day. In the end, that may have redounded against them and President Donald Trump. Also, to minimize voters' exposure to COVID-19, many states were using mail-in voting and same-day voter registration for the first time, accounting for further delays.

Vox Populi

The success of the process was bolstered throughout the nation by competent election administrators and effective election systems, manned by armies of conscientious volunteers, Republicans, Democrats and independents. Donald Trump's predictable, sore-loser accusations of fraud and manipulation are specious and groundless. His legal claims will likely go nowhere.

Furthermore, fears of violence or public unrest at polling places or in cities never really materialized, from either the left or the right. There were few, if any, reports of voter intimidation. The American people seemed to understand that this most sacred and honored element of their much-bruised democracy was off-limits. It was their chance to express their views, wishes and wants in the most forceful and effective way possible in a democracy.

The world may also take heart in the level of participation in this election. The voter participation rate — expected to reach nearly

two-thirds of the population eligible to vote once all ballots are counted — will exceed the previous high of 65.7% set in the 1908 elections. In my home state of Colorado, voter turnout will reach an astounding 85%, the highest in the nation and the highest ever of any US state in modern election history.

It may be fair to credit Donald Trump for wresting American voters from their traditional election lethargy. He unquestionably stirred deep and strong sentiments among supporters and critics alike. They responded as they should in a democratic society — by going to the polls. For America, vox populi prevailed.

There is a related benefit to the increased voter turnout. It would be hard to find a period in recent US history when so many Americans took such a strong interest in public affairs. One could hardly go to the supermarket, walk through a parking garage, take a stroll through the neighborhood or sit in a classroom or office — at least those still functioning under COVID-19 restrictions — without hearing people talk about the political issues and the election. Political conversations — whether online, on social media, TV, radio, print or at the kitchen table — dominated like never before. Animated and even stressful at times, these are nevertheless heartening. It is essential that this communication take place in order to keep a democracy vibrant and innervated. An engaged citizenry makes for a stronger democracy.

Finally, the much-feared tampering by outside “influencers” also failed to materialize, though not from want of trying. Federal, state and local agencies and authorities did in fact come together to ensure that these elections were largely interference-free and that the results do indeed reflect the genuine will of the people. Intelligence agencies tipped off Facebook, Twitter and other tech companies about fake social media accounts and posts in order to restrict the reach of bots and prevent the spread of false information. That was in spite of a president who has insisted for four years that outside agents had no influence in the 2016 election, when all three US intelligence

agencies — the CIA, NSC and FBI — concluded otherwise.

The upshot of the 2020 election process is that the core component of America's democracy — the expression of the people's will — proved strong, healthy and resilient. It worked.

Now the Hard Part

Despite that success, however, American democracy faces enormous pressures. The nation is plainly divided into two near-equal camps. Each seems unable and unwilling to listen or reach out to the opposite side, viewing the other as enemies rather than political adversaries. It is unhealthy and unsustainable. Democracy without compromise, almost a forbidden word in the rival camps, leads to stagnation and collapse. It will be President-elect Biden's task to start the process to bridge this gaping chasm in American public life.

Just how is America divided? Some argue, rather eloquently and persuasively, that it's a conflict of classes. In one corner is a wealthy, entitled, well-educated and aloof stratum of elites divorced from and insensitive to the needs of what is essentially a working class. This working class, in the opposite corner, provides for the elite's essential services, contributes the manual labor to build and maintain their glass-encased office complexes and luxury homes, grows and processes their food, makes and maintains the cars and machines they depend on, cleans their cities, operates and maintains the transportation networks, and fights and dies in their wars.

The latter point bears elaboration because it is particularly illustrative of an apparent divide. Since 2001, America has been at war in Afghanistan and Iraq, both of which continue today. US forces remain present, though in fewer numbers today than five or 10 years ago, in both countries as well in other countries around the world. A recent study by the Council on Foreign Relations showed that 83% of American military recruits come from families or neighborhoods whose median incomes fall below \$85, 850. Only 17% came from income levels above that.

The median household income in the US was \$68,703 in 2019. People of color are disproportionately represented in the enlisted ranks of the Army, Navy and Air Force (African Americans) and the Marine Corps (Hispanics). In fact, black Americans are far more likely to serve their country in uniform than their white counterparts.

The United States turns to its middle and lower classes to defend itself and fight its wars pretty much like every civilization throughout history dating back to the Roman Empire. But none of those were democracies. So-called elites, who benefit substantially more than their lower-income fellow citizens in terms of legal protections, opportunity, privilege and rights, bear fewer of the burdens of defending and sustaining that system of rights than those who arguably profit less from it. One does not go to Harvard, Stanford or MIT in order to enlist or even seek an officer's commission in America's armed forces.

Class or Geography?

However, it is another statistical nugget in the CFR study that may allow one to argue that, in fact, it isn't class that divides America. It's geography. Data of state-by-state contributions to the enlisted ranks of the military indicate that states of the southeast, which are less affluent, are overly represented. The more well-off states of the northeast are underrepresented.

With that in mind, consider the state-by-state electoral map. With the exception of Georgia, whose growing metropolis of Atlanta belatedly delivered the Southern state to Biden, the Southeast was Donald Trump territory. The Southeast and the Midwest, which also went for Trump, are disproportionately rural and host fewer large cities than the states along America's two coasts, which gave their electoral votes to Joe Biden.

America's electoral map has changed little since the end of the Civil War. The electoral maps of 1880, just 15 years after the war, and 1908, over 40 years afterward, are illustrative.

(Note: In the 1880 map, the colors used to designate the parties is reversed from what it is today — Republicans were blue and Democrat states red.) There is one important consideration that dramatically altered the party alignment in the South. With the civil rights movement in the 1960s, Southern Democrats switched to Republican. Richard Nixon cleverly played the race card in 1968 at the height of the civil rights movement and again in 1973, cementing Southern loyalty for the Republican Party for the first time. It isn't class that is at the heart of what divides America today. For one thing, Americans never bought into the old Marxist-Leninist argument of class warfare. It was an outmoded and unrelatable Old World argument. It didn't apply to them.

Classes most certainly exist in the US, and Americans know it. Except for the Native Americans, all US citizens find their roots among immigrants who came overwhelmingly from lower classes. Most immigrants who came to this country through the 1970s were poor and seeking the kind of opportunities not available to them in their countries of origin. What they sought, later defined as upward mobility, was an America where class may have existed but wouldn't matter. Most Americans, with the exception of blacks, Native Americans and other people of color, believed that class warfare could not exist in their country. Their problems, like everything else about America, were different.

The real division in America is urban versus rural, supplemented with a healthy dose of race. Two recent books make persuasive cases for class versus the urban-rural arguments. Michael Lind, in his well-researched "The New Class War," makes the case for social class divisions in America. Ezra Klein's "Why We're Polarized" makes the case for what I would describe as American tribalism, an almost political Hatfields against the McCoys. Only it's Republicans versus Democrats. In her review and comparison of these two excellent publications, Professor Amy Chua writes that Klein's categorization embraces religion, race and geography.

But electoral politics suggest that geography, and not just on a national scale, may be the culprit and what really defines America's current challenges. Even within predominantly Democratic states, rural counties typically were drawn to Donald Trump. Overwhelmingly Democrat California and New York — and Texas on the Republican side — illustrate the point. America's differences on just about every public issue today — race, gender, abortion, guns, big government, religion, taxes ... you name it — can almost always be sorted by the urban versus rural criteria.

America's Second Reconstruction

How does Joe Biden begin to fix that? Judging from his 50 years in politics, he may be fairly well suited. He's not an ideological iconoclast. Nor is he vindictive. He won't launch a campaign to vanquish his opponents in the fashion of Donald Trump. His campaign rhetoric and post-election commentary all suggest that he'll follow a moderate political course and look for compromise. And Biden comes from America's working classes.

That is all necessary. But it's far from sufficient. Biden needs a second Reconstruction. The ideological brainchild of Abraham Lincoln following the American Civil War, reconstruction sought to bring the South back into the American fold, promote economic reintegration and development, eradicate the vestiges of slavery, and incorporate the freed slaves into American society. It was generally considered to be successful despite Andrew Johnson's, Lincoln's successor, efforts to weaken it. A pro-Reconstruction, Republican-controlled Congress and President Ulysses Grant ensured steady progress. Nevertheless, it was tragically cut short, sacrificed in the political horse-trading to win Southern Democrats' support for Republican Rutherford B. Hayes following the disputed 1876 election.

With it went a united nation, with black Americans finally getting a taste of the forbidden American fruit of opportunity and upward

mobility. Jim Crow, segregation and lynching became the order of the day, effectively slavery without the formal system. Also lost were the South's opportunity to capitalize on what would soon explode in the North and elsewhere — the Industrial Revolution. Like the Great Emancipator, his noble dream of Reconstruction followed Lincoln to an early grave.

Reconstruction remains unfinished business in America. And not just in the South. Rural areas throughout America need reconstruction. They need capital, infrastructure, better health care, improved schools and opportunities, especially jobs. This must especially include areas of concentrations of black, brown and Indigenous Americans. To capitalize fully on its great bounty, America's rural communities need to connect to their urban counterparts.

Donald Trump may have correctly read the frustrations and anxieties of rural America. But he manipulated those earnest feelings to advance the Trump brand. He offered no solutions. Instead, Americans heard verbal palliatives that made rural Americans feel that someone in Washington was finally listening. But the frustrations of being outside America's prosperity are still with rural citizens and people of color.

Biden will have to find a way to earn their trust and then begin a new reconstruction. His Build Back Better program, starting with coming to grips with the pandemic and getting it under control, may offer the broad outlines for a new Reconstruction. To earn that trust and start the healing process of his country, Biden may wish to refer to Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address. With a large dose of humility, grace and forgiveness, President-elect Biden must listen to rural Americans, especially to those of color, all of whom want not only to share in America's bounty but also to preserve what is important to their cherished lifestyles. America's diversity is an unquestionable strength of its democracy. That must include its urban-rural diversity, too.

It may be historical irony that to heal a deeply divided nation, the newly elected president must look back to another president who sought to heal

the much deeper divisions of a broken nation. This time, it must be made to work. The country's future may depend on it.

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BUSINESS

When It Comes to Investing, a Company's History Is Key

Sunil Asnani
February 11, 2020

Lord Byron's adage, "The best prophet of the future is the past," applies to investing as well.

Never did I realize growing up that the subject I hated most would prove to be the most useful. No, I am not speaking about mathematics. Luckily, I was rather decent at the subject that many of my friends dreaded. The subject that I feared was none other than history. With its innumerable dates of battles and names of kings, it seemed not only boring but also terrifying when tests came around.

Now that I don't face the pressure to memorize for tests, I have learned to love history. In fact, the first thing I do before investing in a company is study its past. This exercise gives me clarity on the quality of the company's business and the capabilities of its leadership, the two most important drivers of value creation and stock market performance. I have come to believe that reconstructing and understanding a

company's history forms the very first principle of fundamental investing.

A Bad History

As an investor, I have analyzed hundreds of companies. On one occasion, I zeroed in on an Indian pharmaceutical company. On paper, it looked impressive. The company was growing rapidly, it had high profitability and an impressive pipeline of drugs that it was planning to launch in developed markets. I sought a meeting with senior management, and the chief financial officer briefed me about the company.

The CFO spun me a tale of his company's rapid growth. He described the acquisition of several businesses in many geographies. I asked the gentleman questions about each acquisition. I wanted to know the rationale for each acquisition. I wanted to know how things transpired after the acquisition. Did the actual synergies turn out to be less or more than the anticipated ones? What did the CFO and his colleagues learn from each acquisition?

During my conversation with the CFO, I realized that the management team put a premium on growing rapidly. Mergers and acquisitions were its favored method and had become second nature to the company. However, the M&A strategy seemed to be poorly thought through. Many of the past acquisitions by the company had not worked out well. More importantly, the management team had not really learned from its mistakes.

I concluded that the senior management was incentivized to show top-line growth, which in the investment world refers to a company's revenues or gross sales. However, sustainable and profitable growth is what matters and the management team did not seem to be focused on it. There was another fly in the ointment. The company was not developing any core competency to distinguish itself from its peers. It was clear that more focused competitors would one day eat its lunch, so I passed on the opportunity to invest in the company. It is a decision that time has since vindicated.

A Good History

In one of my fishing-for-investment expeditions, I ran into yet another pharmaceutical company with relatively small market capitalization. In investor speak, I came across a small cap pharma company exporting to an emerging market. Normally, such markets are sketchy high receivables, the term accountants use for bills due from a company's customers. In emerging markets, not only does it take a long time to collect receivables, but there is also a high default rate because some customers refuse or are unable to pay.

The small cap pharma company had piqued my fancy because it had negative working capital — a term investors use for the capital a business needs for its day-to-day operations. The company had negative working capital because its customers were paying in advance before getting their drugs. Such a phenomenon is unheard of. Therefore, I had many questions for the founder who turned out to be a poor communicator prone to going off on tangents. I had to constantly drag him back to the issues in question.

As usual, the most important issue for me was the founder's and his company's history. I wanted to learn how the company began, how it evolved, and why its market capital was a few hundred million dollars instead of a few billion. After all, the company had been listed on the stock market for 20 years. What the founder told me is the most fascinating story I have ever heard.

It turned out that the founder listed the company on the stock exchange because he had no money to set up his first factory. I almost fell out of my chair when I heard this. As an investor, I would have expected the founder to go to venture capitalists or private equity shops. Approaching a bank for a loan was another possibility that I could countenance. However, going to the public market right from the get go is something that never occurred to me.

The founder calmly pointed out to me that my assumptions were flawed. Two decades ago,

there was no venture capital or private equity in his country, and bank loans were expensive for small operators. Often, businesses had to bribe bank managers as well. In contrast, accessing capital through the stock market was cheaper. Of course, the downside was that the founder had to dilute his equity stake.

Listing the company on the stock market was only the first hurdle for the founder. It transpired that he had the wrong partners. After an initial growth phase, the company hit choppy waters. Overseas distributors simply did not pay the money they owed, causing the company in turn to default on its debts. This was a time when this extraordinary company went through a near-death moment. The partners dropped out and creditors turned on the screws. If the founder was a lesser man, he would have thrown in the towel. Instead, he moved to Africa.

On a new continent, this intrepid entrepreneur set up a restaurant. Many people from his country came there to eat. Among his customers, he identified those who could be clients for his pharmaceutical business. The founder started selling directly to them, cutting out all middlemen. Soon, these new customers brought in enough cash to support the pharma company's operations. The founder then closed the restaurant and went back full time to his pharmaceuticals business.

After Africa, the founder eyed Latin America. Here again, he found that distributors often paid late or did not pay at all. So, he found some poor teenagers with fire in their bellies in his country and paid for their Spanish lessons. They went on to become his distributors and partners. Today, they pay him in advance for his drugs, eliminating much of his business risk.

The history of the founder and his company taught me a few business lessons that I had failed to learn either at Wharton or McKinsey. First, fire in the belly matters more than polish when it comes to entrepreneurship. It is better to invest in a founder who can fall off the saddle and then climb back again instead of someone who wears a nice suit and speaks in smooth cadences.

Second, in the pharmaceutical business, it is not just research that matters. Distribution is key, especially in those emerging markets where life is a bit rough, laws often exist only on paper and business operates only on trust. Finally, the financials of a company only make sense when investors understand its fundamentals. Only then can they model the future and make prudent decisions.

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What Stock Market Awaits Gen Z in the 2020s?

Dan Fries
March 12, 2020

Every '20s decade has brought roaring bull markets catalyzed by technological advances, and each has ended with a widespread collapse of share prices.

The dawn of a new decade always comes alongside predictions of how the stock market will perform over the next 10 years. The start of the 2020s has not been an exception, with analysts predicting everything from a roaring bull market to a global recession, in some cases sequentially.

This isn't to say the analysts are always right, with the stock market fall on March 9 taking many by surprise. The largest since the 2008 recession, trading was temporarily halted to prevent panic selling, and the price of oil had fallen by as much as 30%, kicked off largely by the threat of a price war between Russia and Saudi Arabia. At the final tally, the US was down by 7% and the UK was down by 8%. However, in typical market fashion, bouncing back didn't take

long, exemplifying just how volatile and unpredictable the markets can be.

On March 12, trading on the New York Stock Exchange was again suspended as the Dow Jones Industrial Average fell by 2,000 points following the announcement by US President Donald Trump that all travel from Europe will be suspended in response to the coronavirus pandemic. The S&P 500 fell by 7%, while the London Stock Exchange was down to below its 2016 EU referendum drop.

Almost all observers, however, point to two factors — technological change and the importance of emerging markets — as critical to the success (or otherwise) of the stock market in the coming decade. Both of these factors could lead to an unprecedented boom in the price of stocks. Simultaneously, however, the global political climate has never been so volatile. The US faces the rise of China as an economic superpower and a possible trade war with Europe, both left unconstrained by a relatively weak International Monetary Fund.

The Tech Boom?

Technological advancements, and the markets they are transforming, are likely to be one of the primary driving forces of the stock market in the next few years. We have already seen the impact of distributed technologies that are making individual consumers huge contributors to the global economy, and a number of technological advances, such as internet of things (IoT) devices, that could transform consumer markets.

Many have seen, in the rise of tech, similarities between the 2020s and the 1920s — or even the 1720s. Every '20s decade has brought roaring bull markets catalyzed by technological advances, and each has ended with a widespread collapse of share prices. It is important to be cautious when making this analogy, of course, especially considering the unparalleled events of the last 10 years. On the other hand, there are certainly similarities between the 2020s and these earlier periods. Government debt is at an all-time high in Europe, Japan and the United States, and

is still increasing. Emerging markets are also becoming a key driver of growth.

Other analysts are looking to other periods for analogies. UBS, an investment bank, predicts that the 2020s will offer a similar investment landscape to the early 2000s, during which period “the global internet ... opened up vast opportunities.” It’s certainly true that the biggest winners from the past 20 years have almost all been internet-focused. Companies that make CMS systems, as well as infrastructure providers such as web hosts, are now major players in the world economy.

While these sectors are likely to remain important areas of growth in the 2020s, investing in them presents unique challenges. Many of these businesses are built on a relatively novel model, in which products and services are not bought outright. Instead, in the last few years, many companies have moved to a subscription model, in which software, business consultancy and even transport infrastructure is offered as a service. The implications of this shift are explored in a recent analysis of the software as a service (SaaS) model by BlueTree, which points to benefits for stock market investors. On the other hand, as these complex networks get harder to secure, cybersecurity is also going to be a huge concern for the economy of the 2020s.

The End of the Stock Market?

At the other end of the spectrum, there are those that predict that the 2020s will witness a dramatic decline in the value, and the importance, of the stock market — or at least stock markets in the West. Curiously, these analysts have looked at precisely the same trends — the rise of tech and the growing importance of emerging markets — and come to precisely the converse conclusion: Rather than these factors driving growth in Western stock markets, they argue, they will undermine it.

Investor surveys support this view, to a degree. Nexthash Group commissioned nationally representative research, reports Finance Monthly, that reveals a clear mandate for

change. The research sought the opinion of over 2,000 UK-based investors, and a third of them reported that they would like to see more flexible ways to invest in businesses than stocks, shares or venture capital investments. Data like these have focused minds on novel investment instruments, such as digital exchanges and cryptocurrency, that have been seen as a way to break the monopoly of IPOs and the expensive exchange fees charged by traders and fund managers.

At the same time, it is worth noting that the same research found that 68% of UK investors would only trade or invest where there is security or protection against fraud for their investment.

Emerging Markets and the Next Generation

More flexible investment instruments are also likely to play a key role when it comes to investing in emerging markets. Markets outside the West have been depressed in recent years, largely due to fear of slow global growth. This has led many to see these shares as undervalued and likely to increase in importance as international tensions ease and populations continue to grow.

“There’s huge growth potential in Asia,” Rich Sega, global chief investment strategist at asset manager Conning, told USA Today. “The geopolitical stress in Hong Kong has opened up opportunities for other areas in the region for Vietnam, Thailand and Singapore.”

Alongside the growing importance of emerging markets, there is also a widespread feeling that the emerging generations — both millennials and Gen Z — will be major agents of growth and change across the global economy. Baby boomers still hold the majority of the world’s wealth, but that will shortly change. According to a study by Coldwell Banker Global Luxury, by 2030, millennials will hold five times as much wealth as they do today, and in this period they will inherit a staggering \$68 trillion from their predecessors.

This shift in wealth could certainly boost US economic growth. Young adults are likely to use

these liberated funds to buy expensive items like houses and cars, giving a boost not just to these sectors but also those that are now inherently implied within them: tech, e-commerce, the IoT and artificial intelligence.

On the other hand, the last 20 years can also stand as a warning that new consumer trends, and especially the growing importance of new generations, can hugely affect the value of company stocks. Few investors, for instance, predicted the rise of the “community brand” — companies that used careful reputation management to build strong consumer communities, especially among Gen Z consumer groups. In short, shifts in consumer behavior are not going to stop this decade and, as with any decade, we are likely to see some unusual new forms of commerce arising.

***Dan Fries** is a freelance writer.

Fintech: Embracing the Digital Age in the Time of Social Distancing

Glenn Ojeda Vega & German Peinado Delgado
April 28, 2020

The stress of COVID-19 on the global economy will expand the market for fintech and accelerate the pace at which it is adopted.

The COVID-19 global pandemic has become a make-it-or-break-it moment for many businesses, particularly startups and industry disruptors. With market forces and rules being reshaped daily at lightning speed, large swaths of the world have been forced to adopt technology and embrace the digital age in order to keep the lights on.

The new socioeconomic order and redefined market priorities will be a fire test for businesses of all sizes to prove the sustainability of their

model and the uniqueness of their value proposition. Shaky shops will unfortunately collapse, particularly in the small and mid-sized markets, while compelling innovation, much-needed disruption and quick adaptability will soar.

Now, this doesn't mean that all businesses that make it through the COVID-19 crisis are destined to succeed in the long run. Nor does it mean that all business concepts that fold during the pandemic were destined to fail. The unpredictability and suddenness of this global emergency are such that a stroke of either cash-flow luck or an unfortunately-timed investment makes a difference between the liquidity needed to stay afloat or the next payday simply being one bridge too far on the cash runway.

The Fintech Landscape

In developed free market economies, 2018 and 2019 were good years for the fintech software as a service (SaaS) space. For both acquisition and capital raise transactions, startups that have proven their model's worth in the marketplace were valued at six to nine times their annual revenue. Depending on maturity, cash flow and revenue growth metrics some outstanding companies even secured valuations over 10 times their annual revenue. Similarly, in emerging markets, the use of proliferation of financial technology has allowed entire populations to discover the use of cashless payments, leverage crowdfunding platforms, microloans and parametric insurance.

For at least half of the fintech market, a correction was overdue, and valuations will certainly constrict in the midst of the socioeconomic crisis. However, once the COVID-19 crisis has passed, small and midsize businesses that manage to weather this tempest and survive the market shock will procure premium valuations for several reasons.

Firstly, businesses still standing after months of tight liquidity, stretched sales cycles, tested employee morale and teleworking challenges will warrant a force majeure survival premium on

their enterprise value. Moreover, most of these companies will face a leaner, more favorable competitive landscape once the storm has passed and former peers have left the market.

Likewise, pandemic-induced physical distancing has served, in some regards, as a marketing equalizer. Forcing would-be customers into the digital space and increasing the amount of time individuals spend online, global quarantine measures have turned the already robust social media presence — which tends to favor small and dynamic market players — into an even more valuable corporate asset.

On the supply side of capital and acquirers, however, the future is more uncertain. In the United States, aggregate demand will increase slowly as everyday consumers prioritize savings and purchasing power remains low due to increased unemployment. Likewise, an increased global demand for US dollars will decrease national exports and hurt manufacturing.

Therefore, investors not fixated solely on asset liquidity and capable of taking long positions will focus on positive cash flows and significant margins over revenue growth, particularly with the prospect of a second wave of COVID-19 and a slow macroeconomic recovery. In this regard, startups in emerging markets seeking foreign capital injections will find themselves competing for fewer resources as investors turn toward established and developed economic environments.

Unstoppable Trend

To comply with distancing guidelines and health regulations, banks and commercial stakeholders around the world will continue to promote and implement fintech applications facilitating cashless and virtual transactions. In this sense, fintech will also play a decisive role in reaching individuals currently outside the formal financial sector, such as rural communities without banking infrastructure in emerging markets. Likewise, it will allow socially and economically vulnerable populations greater access to game-changing resources and financial literacy tools.

For instance, the mass propagation of new digital payment methods such as PayPal, Square, Apple Pay, Google Pay, Alipay and Samsung Pay is a unique opportunity for fintech developers and entrepreneurs to reach customers in new and uncharted jurisdictions. Simultaneously, established industry players such as Mastercard, Visa and American Express are now finding themselves with new competitors hungry to gain market share. On the lending front, small banks and non-traditional players, like the payroll software provider Quickbooks, have become key actors in implementing federal incentives and loan programs in the US.

These transformations also open a new regulatory landscape. Governments and corporations will have to address new sets of challenges, such as preventing money laundering, tax evasion and terrorist financing. Due in part to current lockdown measures, criminal activity in Latin America — drug dealing, human trafficking, contraband, and cybercrime — has also found a way to adapt, leveraging fintech platforms as channels to receive and make payments while avoiding conventional regulatory controls and oversight. Consequently, criminals are gaining liquidity and finding ways to launder illegal funds onto platforms and even into the financial ecosystem.

For instance, the use of fintech platforms and other third-party intermediaries renders the job of regulators more difficult as they seek to determine how the funds were generated or where they are derived from. Likewise, the use of non-bank financial institutions such as Western Union, as well as cryptocurrencies, helps illicit organizations avoid legal controls.

Nonetheless, the introduction of dynamic and bespoke regulation into the fintech space can both enhance the user experience and help oversight authorities with due diligence and compliance as required by law. Responsible governance and transparency in this sector are essential to ensure that governments and individuals are protected amid growing concerns around user data privacy, particularly as

cyberattacks become more common, thus elevating digital risk.

Consolidation and Competition

Sectors of the global market that were deemed essential a few weeks ago and had experienced steady growth trajectories for decades are now facing a challenging change in the paradigm. From higher education and international travel to lodging and hospitality, many aspects of modern life will be forever transformed by the realization that, in a tele-business world, classrooms and boardrooms can be accessed from a home office for a fraction of the cost. Thus, commercial real estate can expect to feel the sting of an increasingly digitized economy and adapting businesses seeking to reduce fixed costs.

With established and emergent players struggling in a variety of markets, and with the capital needed to fuel competition shrinking, another trend in impacted industries, like retail and air travel, will be consolidation. Some sectors are becoming more competitive as a new economy takes shape, but startups and entrepreneurs might struggle with operations and funding as recapitalization investments are put on hold or down-rounds become the only option. Beyond the obvious enablers of the digital 2.0 economy (such as teleconferencing and web-streaming platforms), food and grocery delivery services, as well as healthy-living enablers, are seeing their markets grow.

In the fintech space, large strategic acquirers will be careful about their investments as they see the crisis reflected in their income statements and thus focus on targets that generate proven efficiencies through reduced costs. Meanwhile, financial funds will be looking to capitalize on fire-sale exits in the fintech space before the dust settles and the coronavirus premium ups enterprise value.

In short, the stress of COVID-19 on the global economy will expand the market for fintech and accelerate the pace at which it is adopted. It is up to established market players and government regulators to keep lockstep with technological

innovation and increased user demand for efficiency.

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Only Losers Pay Taxes: Apple and the Ingenuity of Tax Avoidance

Hans-Georg Betz
July 24, 2020

Engaging top law firms, the new tech giants such as Apple, Amazon and Google have mastered the fine art of avoiding as much of the tax burden as possible.

July 15 was a very good day for Apple. Not so much for the European Commission, nor for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). What happened? In 2016, the European Commission (EC), following a lengthy investigation, ruled that Ireland had granted Apple “illegal tax benefits” that “substantially and artificially lowered the tax paid by Apple in Ireland since 1991.” The taxes “saved” Apple some €13 billion (\$15 billion). The Irish government set up an escrow account at the cost of €3.9 million in consultancy and other fees as Apple appealed to courts in Luxembourg.

On July 15, the EU General Court rendered its landmark verdict. In a stinging rebuke of the European Commission, the court charged that the EC had failed to demonstrate “‘to the requisite legal standard’ that Ireland’s tax deal broke state-aid law by giving Apple an unfair advantage.” The Apple case was supposed to be a hallmark for the EU Competition Commissioner Margrethe

Vestager’s “crackdown on preferential fiscal deals for companies” by member states. In the words of a tax lawyer quoted in the Irish Times, the decision marked a “comprehensive defeat for the Commission.”

At the same time, it was a significant setback for the OECD’s initiative on “base erosion and profit shifting” or, put in less arcane terms, tax avoidance. Engaging top law firms, the new tech giants such as Apple, Amazon and Google have mastered the fine art of avoiding as much of the tax burden as possible. There are numerous reasons for this development, greed probably topping the list. On a more structural level, however, it is to a large extent the result of the process of financialization, which has been the dominant game worldwide over the past several decades.

Part of the Package

Financialization fundamentally changed corporate rationale, with shareholder value becoming the new doctrine. Shareholder value holds that the primary metric of success lies in the ability of managers to increase shareholder return. Forget about corporate responsibility, forget about corporate outreach to the community: The only thing that counts is raising a company’s stock value no matter what.

Tax avoidance is part of the package. Over the past few decades, Fortune 500 companies have devised a range of ingenious strategies that allow them to legitimately avoid paying taxes. Many are so opaque that even specialists have a hard time figuring out what is happening, how and where. One of the more exotic strategies is the “double Irish with a Dutch sandwich.” Investopedia defines it as a tax avoidance scheme that “involves sending profits first through one Irish company, then to a Dutch company and finally to a second Irish company headquartered in a tax haven.”

A second scheme that was popular in the United States a few years ago is corporate inversion. This “occurs when a U.S.-based multinational corporation restructures itself so

that the U.S. parent is replaced by a foreign parent and the original U.S. company becomes a subsidiary of the foreign parent.” Ireland, Bermuda, England and the Netherlands were among the popular destinations.

The case of Apple provides a perfect illustration of the ingenuity behind tax avoidance. The scheme hinges on Ireland’s sweetheart deal with Apple, which allowed the US-based company to avoid Ireland’s corporate tax of 12.5%. Instead, Apple paid as little as 0.005% in taxes. The profits Apple made in Europe were transferred to Apple subsidiaries located in Ireland — perfectly legally — and the taxes were paid on the basis of Ireland’s rate instead of the country where Apple products were actually purchased. This saved Apple billions of euros.

It needs mentioning that Ireland joined the Apple lawsuit. After the verdict, the Irish government hailed the outcome as a victory for Ireland, which, in the process, lost €13 billion in tax revenue — a rather perverse sense of accomplishment, given the dramatic impact COVID-19 has had on the country’s economy and public life. Like elsewhere in Europe, the measures introduced by the Irish government caused a dramatic surge in unemployment and drove the economy into a recession. It is likely to take years to recover from the pandemic. Under the circumstances, the money would have been quite welcome.

The Curious Case of the Netherlands

Over the past several decades, avoiding taxes has become big business. Estimates from 2017 suggest that tax avoidance and profit shifting by multinational corporations amounted to a global loss of somewhere around \$500 billion. Not surprisingly, tax havens have multiplied throughout the world. To be sure, there are exotic offshore locations that have specialized in sheltering money, such as the Cayman Islands, Samoa, Mauritius or the British Virgin Islands.

This, however, is only half of the story. The case of Ireland shows that advanced capitalist countries are hardly innocent. In fact, Europe —

and even the European Union — abounds in tax havens, from the British island of Jersey to Luxembourg, Liechtenstein and Malta to the Netherlands.

Recently, the Dutch have provoked much resentment among the EU’s southern members. At the height of the pandemic in Italy and Spain, both countries called on the member states to show solidarity with its southern neighbors. One of the ideas was to issue so-called corona bonds, which would have combined securities from different countries and “mutualized” debt. The idea was vigorously promoted by Italy but equally vigorously rejected by Germany and the Netherlands, alongside Finland and Austria, collectively known as the “Frugal Four.”

The connotation was obvious. The fiscally responsible members were loath to subsidize countries they considered frivolous spenders — even in a situation that brought Italy to its knees. The Germans are accustomed to suspicion and hostility from other EU members. But the Dutch? After all, the Netherlands is a small country, known for their openness and liberal attitudes on sex and drugs. COVID-19, however, has changed these perceptions, at least in the southern parts of the EU.

And for good reasons. Not for nothing, one of the most egregious tax avoidance schemes has “Dutch” in its title. It turns out that the Netherlands is an important tax haven right in the heart of the EU — a tax haven that has done considerable harm to other member states. Earlier this year, the Tax Justice Network claimed that the Netherlands “cost EU countries \$10bn in lost corporate tax a year.” Analysis revealed that US firms in Europe, instead of declaring profits in the EU countries where they were generated, “shifted billions in profits into the Dutch tax haven each year (\$44 billion in 2017) where corporate tax rates in practice can be under 5 per cent.” In fact, “the Netherlands’ low effective tax rate and its frequent use as a conduit for profit shifting to other corporate tax havens like Bermuda, results in a huge transfer of wealth out

of Europe and into the offshore bank accounts of the world's richest corporations and individuals.”

Estimates for Italy alone were that the country had lost €1.5 billion in revenue a year, “equivalent to more than twice the annual cost of running San Raffaele Hospital, one of the largest hospitals in Italy with approximately 1350 beds.” Under the circumstances, Italian ire and disenchantment with the EU at the height of the pandemic, which cost the lives of thousands of Italians and paralyzed life in the country, are more than understandable. In this sense, the Apple verdict is nothing more than a Pyrrhic victory for Ireland and like-minded members of the European Union.

The pandemic has drastically illustrated the importance of solidarity. Strategies that cater to the narrow interests of shareholders systematically subvert solidarity. Under “normal” circumstances, that might be fine. These days, it is disastrous, not least because the notion of shareholder value (aka individual egoism) has penetrated every aspect of social life. Margaret Thatcher once remarked that society did not exist — there were only individuals and families. The disastrous current state of the US and Britain is a blatant indictment of this kind of thinking.

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What Has COVID-19 Done to Small Businesses?

Vinay Subramanian
July 27, 2020

Governments must enact policies judiciously to keep small businesses alive because they provide jobs, economic dynamism and social stability.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are businesses with revenues, assets or employees below a certain threshold. SMEs are important to the health of any country as they tend to form the backbone of the economy. When compared to large enterprises, SMEs are generally greater in number, employ far more people, are often situated in clusters and typically entrepreneurial in nature. They drive local economic development, propel job creation and foster growth and innovation.

According to the World Bank, SMEs represent about 90% of businesses and 50% of employment worldwide. In the United States, 30 million small businesses make up 44% of GDP, 99% of the total businesses and 48% of the workforce, amounting to 57 million jobs. In India, the SME sector consists of about 63 million enterprises, contributing to 45% of manufacturing output and over 28% of GDP while employing 111 million people.

SMEs in China form the engine of the economy comprising 30 million entities, constituting 99.6% of enterprises and 80% of national employment. They also hold more than 70% of the country's patents and account for more than 60% of GDP, contributing more than 50% of tax collections.

Different Countries Define SMEs Differently

Though most experts agree on the crucial role SMEs play in any economy, the definition of an SME varies by country. In the US, the Small Business Administration (SBA) defines SMEs

broadly as those with fewer than 500 employees and \$7 million in annual receipts, although specific definitions exist by business and sector. Annual receipts can range from \$1 million for farms to \$40 million for hospitals. Services businesses such as retail and construction are generally classified by annual receipts, while manufacturing and utilities are measured by headcount. In June, the Indian government revised its SME definitions, expanding the revenue caps on medium and small enterprises from \$7 million and \$1.5 million to \$35 million and \$7 million respectively. In the United Kingdom, a small business is defined as having less than 50 employees and turnover under £10 million (\$12.7 million), whereas a medium business has less than 250 employees and turnover under £50 million.

Proper definitions matter. If SMEs are classified well, their access to capital and other resources can improve. They can apply for grants, get tax exemptions, collaborate on research with governments or universities or access other schemes. This gives SMEs better opportunities to survive and thrive.

Since SMEs tend to be the biggest employers in most economies, a good policy to promote them creates jobs and develops worker skills. Furthermore, proper definitions enable governments to focus their efforts regarding SMEs and level the playing field for them vis-a-vis large corporations.

Given the scale and nature of their business models, SMEs operate at the mercy of vagaries of the economy, geopolitical events and local policies. They battle competition from multinational giants, volatile cash flows, fickle customers, demanding suppliers and constantly churning employees. But the COVID-19 pandemic has crossed all boundaries. While the 2000 crisis was a dot-com bust and 2008 was a collapse of the financial systems, 2020 is clearly the SME crisis. It is Murphy's Law at its extreme — anything that can go wrong has indeed gone wrong.

The coronavirus crisis started off in early 2020 as a supply shock, which has now turned into a demand shock, impacting customers, employees, markets and suppliers alike. The consequences can be potentially catastrophic with the International Monetary Fund estimating that SME shutdowns in G20 countries could surge from 4% pre-COVID to 12% post-COVID, with bankruptcy rates in the services sector increasing by more than 20%.

SMEs are bearing the brunt of the economic and financial fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic, not least because many were already in duress before the crisis. This could have a domino effect on the economy, given the pivotal role played by SMEs. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that most governments have sought to intercede legislatively with their fiscal might to ameliorate the predicament of SMEs.

Indian and American Response

It is instructive to note how different countries have responded to the economic crisis. India is a good country to start with. In early May, the government announced a 20-trillion-rupee (\$250 billion) stimulus package called Atmanirbhar, equivalent to 10% of India's GDP. It was a mixture of fiscal and monetary support, packed as credit guarantees and a slew of other measures. The centerpiece was an ambitious 3-trillion-rupee (\$40 billion) initiative for SMEs, including instant collateral-free loans, subordinate debt of 200 billion rupees (\$2.5 billion) for stressed micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), and a 500-billion-rupee (\$6.5 billion) equity infusion. Perhaps the largest component of the stimulus was the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) that provides additional working capital and term loans of up to 20% of outstanding credit.

Although the scheme received positive feedback, the initial uptake was slow. On the supply front, bankers fretted about future delinquencies arising out of such accounts as the credit guarantees only covered incremental debt. On the demand side, SMEs were worried about

taking on additional leverage when there is uncertainty about economic revival. Moreover, a 20% incremental loan may not suffice to service payrolls and operating expenses and keep business alive.

Also, while this scheme addressed existing borrowers, the fate of those who are not current borrowers is unclear. While initial traction for the scheme was low, the recent momentum has been encouraging. The finance ministry reports that as of July 15, banks have sanctioned 1.2 trillion rupees (\$16 billion), of which 700 billion rupees (\$9 billion) have been disbursed largely by public sector banks, although private sector banks have joined in lately.

Meanwhile, even the largest global economy has struggled with its SME relief program. In mid-March, US President Donald Trump approved a \$2.2-trillion package under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act to help Americans struggling amid the pandemic. One of the signature initiatives under the act was the \$660-billion Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) aimed at helping small businesses with their payroll and operating expenses. This program was distinct from its peers in its loan forgiveness part, in which the repayment of the loan portion used to cover the first eight weeks of payroll, rent, utilities and mortgage would be waived.

The program, though well-intentioned, has struggled with execution issues exacerbated by labyrinthian rules. Matters came to a head when the initial tranche of \$349 billion ran out in April. The program had to be refinanced but, by June, it was closed down with \$130 billion of unused funds in its coffers. The program was restarted again and extended to August by Congress.

Worse, the program saw refunds from borrowers who were unclear about the utilization rules. Loan forgiveness would be valid only if the amount was utilized within eight weeks. This stipulation made SMEs wary because their goal was to use cash judiciously and optimize the use of the borrowed amount to last as long as possible. These rules have since been amended

by the Small Business Administration. It now gives SMEs 24 weeks to use the borrowed funds and allows them more flexibility on the use of funds. In any case, questions have been raised about capital not reaching targeted businesses and unintended parties benefiting instead.

Despite the changes in SBA rules, the jury is still out on whether more SMEs will take out PPP loans. Some are lobbying for full loan forgiveness. However, dispensing of repayment requirements essentially creates handouts that could lead to the lowering of fiscal discipline and increasing incentive for fraud. A recent proposal by two professors, one from Princeton and the other from Stanford, suggests “evergreening” of existing debt, a practice that involves providing new loans to pay off previous ones. Though innovative, it is not quite clear how such a policy would provide better benefits compared to a loan repayment moratorium, especially when it comes to influencing future credit behavior.

In addition to the PPP program, the SBA has announced the Economic Injury Disaster Loans (EIDL) program. This offers SMEs working capital loans up to \$2 million to help overcome their loss of revenue. The program was closed down on July 13 after granting \$20 billion to 6 million SMEs. Maintaining equitability and efficacy in the distribution process has been a challenge, though.

European Responses

Europe’s largest economy, on the other hand, has fared relatively better. In early April, German Chancellor Angela Merkel announced a €1.1-trillion (\$1.3 trillion) stimulus termed the “bazooka.” This constituted a €600-billion rescue program, including €500 billion worth of guarantees for loans to companies. The German state-owned bank KfW is taking care of the lending. The program also includes a cash injection of €50 billion for micro-enterprises and €2 billion in venture capital financing for startups, which no major economy has successfully managed to execute. Notably, the centerpiece of the German program is the

announcement of unlimited government guarantees covering SME loans up to €800,000. These loans are instantly approved for profitable companies.

Berlin's relief measures were specifically targeted at supporting Germany's pride, the Mittelstand. This term refers to the 440,000 SMEs that form the backbone of the German economy. They employ 13 million people and account for 34% of GDP. Many of these firms manufacture highly-specialized products for niche markets, such as high-tech parts for health care and auto sectors, making them crucial to Germany's success as an export giant. Not surprisingly, these companies have seen a contraction in revenues, especially the ones that depend on global supply chains.

The swift implementation of these initiatives, coupled with the resilience of the Mittelstand, is demonstrating that SMEs can survive and thrive in this environment. The Germans have also been preaching and practicing fiscal prudence in normal times, which has now worked in their favor. Germany can afford to inject capital and do whatever it takes to save its SMEs.

Since its first stimulus, Berlin has followed up with an additional €130-billion package consisting of tax, SME loans and spending measures aimed at stimulating demand. This included a €46-billion green stimulus focused on innovation and sustainable projects such as e-mobility and battery technology. In keeping with the German tradition, the SMEs who make the Mittelstand have stayed agile as well. They are diversifying their customer base and pivoting their business models to more recession-proof sectors.

The UK, another major world economy, also launched an array of relief measures, including the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS) worth £330 billion (\$420 billion). This was designed to support British SMEs with cash for their payroll and operating expenditure. It also announced the Bounce Back Loan Scheme (BBLs) focused on smaller businesses. This enjoyed a better launch than

CBILS because the latter, with its larger loan quantum, required more vetting and paperwork.

Loans from the CBILS initiative, although interest-free for a year, are only 80% guaranteed by the government. This makes banks less willing to lend during these troubled times because they are afraid of losing 20% of the loan amount. This slows credit outflow and starves SMEs of much-needed capital. As of July 15, less than 10% of the allotted capital had been utilized, which banks blame on an inadequately designed scheme. By mid-July, only £11.9 billion had been disbursed to 54,500 companies through the CBILS and £31.7 billion to 1 million smaller firms through the BBLs.

Businesses have sought modifications from policymakers to existing schemes. These include hiking government guarantees for loans to 100% and waiving personal guarantees for small loans. The Treasury has agreed to some of these demands. Critics also point to structural deficiencies in the system. They believe the administrative authority for SME loans should be a proper small business bank instead of the British Business Bank, which was not designed for SMEs. Already, the UK government has warned that £36 billion in COVID loans may default. More drastic measures seem to be on the way, including a COVID bad bank to house toxic SME assets.

Responses Elsewhere

Economies around the world have been responding to disruption by COVID-19. It is impossible to examine every response in this article, but Japan's case deserves examination. The world's third-largest economy had been battling a recession even before the pandemic. Declining consumption, falling tourism and plunging exports were increasing the pressure on an aging society with a spiraling debt of over \$12.2 trillion. The pandemic has strained Japan's fiscal health further.

In response to the pandemic, the Bank of Japan announced a 75-trillion-yen (\$700 billion) package for financing SMEs, which included

zero-interest unsecured loans. Additionally, the National Diet, Japan's parliament, enacted a second supplementary budget, which featured rent payment support and expanded employment maintenance subsidies for SMEs.

The execution of these programs has been tardy. The government's 2015 digitalization drive is still incomplete, impacting the distribution of subsidies and the implementation of other relief measures. Of the more than 400,000 applications for employment adjustment subsidies, only 80,000 companies received aid by mid-June. Application procedures are unnecessarily complex, adding to the woes of SMEs.

Any discussion on SMEs in the global economy would be incomplete without examining China, which was the first country to deal with the COVID-19 disease. In February, the government announced a 1.2-trillion-renminbi (\$174 billion) monetary stimulus. Large state-owned banks were ordered to increase lending to SMEs by at least 30% in the first half of 2020. Three of these banks alone were supposed to lend 350 billion renminbi (\$49.7 million) to small businesses at preferential rates. In addition, Beijing encouraged local policymakers to provide fiscal support to keep SMEs afloat.

China's stimulus seems more understated compared to other major economies and their own 2008 bailout package. After controlling the first COVID-19 wave in March, the Chinese have focused on restarting the economy and reopening businesses instead of relief measures and bailouts.

In February, surveys in China showed that 30% of SMEs had experienced a 50% decline in revenue. Surveys also found that 60% of SMEs had only three months of cash left. At the end of March, almost half a million small businesses across China had closed and new business registrations fell by more than 30% compared to last year. The resumption of work has been an uphill struggle. In April, the production rate of SMEs had crossed 82% of capacity, but the sentiment had remained pessimistic. Notably, the

Small and Medium Enterprise Index (SMEI) had risen from 51.7 in May to 53.3 in June, indicating that SMEs are slowly reviving.

With the easing of lockdown measures, domestic demand in China has picked up, driving SME sales. In turn, greater demand is increasing production activity and accelerating capacity utilization, causing a mild rise in hiring. The green shoots of recovery of Chinese SMEs should encourage authorities worldwide.

Policy Lessons for the Future

Governing nation-states is an arduous task at the best of times and especially so in a nightmarish year of dystopian proportions. No wonder governments worldwide have appeared underprepared to combat the COVID-19 crisis. Whilst predicting a global pandemic of this scale would be next to impossible, there were early warning signs that severe disruptions to global health care, supply chains and business models were imminent. Yet scenario planning and stress testing of economic models has been flawed, impacting the swift rollout of relief measures.

The crisis has also underlined the importance of fiscal discipline when economies are doing well. Countries that do so can build a robust balance sheet to leverage during troubled times. This crisis also brings home the importance of evaluating and reevaluating the efficacy of the entities that deal with SMEs. Policymaking is an iterative process, especially when it comes to SMEs and bodies that oversee them must be overhauled periodically.

Importantly, policies pertaining to SMEs must have inputs from those with domain expertise. Structures must take into account execution capabilities and speed of delivery. Instant loan approvals with suboptimal due diligence have to be constantly balanced against longer vetting but slower turnarounds. Similarly, policymakers have to analyze the various types of instruments, fiscal and monetary, that can be used for SMEs. What works in one country may not work for another.

It is important to remember the nuances of different policy measures, such as guarantees,

forgiveness, monitoring and moratoriums. Guarantees are a sound instrument for relief but are potential claims on the government's balance sheet and contingent liabilities. They also have little economic value if capital is not promptly delivered to SMEs. Forgiveness provisions have their own issues. They may be important in a crisis but could incentivize subpar credit behavior in the future. Similarly, monitoring is important but is impractical when millions of SMEs are involved. There is no way any authority can keep a tab on the intended usage of funds. Finally, moratoriums have their own problems. Businesses could misuse moratoriums, putting pressure on banks and making accounting difficult. They were cheered at the onset of the crisis but further extensions could be costly to the ecosystem.

Going forward, governments need to prepare for the long haul. The consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic will stay with us for the foreseeable future. What began as a liquidity crisis might well become a solvency crisis for SMEs despite the best attempts to avoid that eventuality. If that does happen, governments will need to plan for efficient debt restructuring. They will have to institute insolvency management processes while figuring out how to handle bad asset pools. In simple language, governments will have to make tough decisions as to distributing gains and losses not only among those living but also future generations.

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Will China's Digital Currency Revolutionize Global Payments?

Daniel Wagner
October 5, 2020

China's Digital Currency/Electronic Payments system promises to be the first global digital currency.

China is well on its way to becoming a cashless society. More than 600 million Chinese already use Alibaba's Alipay and Tencent's WeChat Pay to pay for much of what they purchase. Between them, the two companies control approximately 90% of China's mobile payments market, which totaled some \$17 trillion in 2019. A wide variety of sectors throughout China have since adopted Blockchain to pay bills, settle disputes in court and track shipments. The Chinese government understands that, via Blockchain, the issuance of its own cryptocurrency is an excellent way to track and record the movement of payments, goods and people.

The unsexily named Digital Currency/Electronic Payments (DCEP) is intended to be used by anyone around the world to purchase anything. It has the potential to revolutionize the global payments system. Assuming it succeeds, many other countries will want to emulate it. Some other governments have already launched similar initiatives, but not on the scope or scale of the DCEP, which promises to be the first global digital currency.

Digital Wallets

What appears to have spurred the Chinese government to actively pursue the DCEP in 2019 was the birth of an organization that also has the potential to revolutionize the global payments system, the Libra Association. Libra is a grouping of more than two dozen organizations creating the world's first Blockchain-derived

global payment system, specifically founded on best practices in regulation and governance. Its stated objective is to transparently bring access to financial services to billions of people who either have limited or no access to the existing global banking system.

Given that it is an American-led initiative that will use the US dollar to determine its benchmark value, Beijing viewed Libra as an attempt to establish US dominance over the global cryptocurrency marketplace. It previously viewed other cryptocurrencies as a threat to its own hegemony over capital controls in China.

Although its motivations to counter the US are clear enough, much remains unknown about the DCEP. One has to wonder just how much focus it will have on transparency, governance or best practices. It will not be available on cryptocurrency exchanges, nor will it be available for speculative purposes. Embracing Blockchain and creating a DCEP ecosystem will give the Chinese Central Bank unprecedented power over capital movements — certainly in China, but also around the world.

Like Alipay and WeChat, the DCEP will require a digital wallet, but it will not require a bank account. Commercial banks will issue the digital wallets, but no internet connection will be required to conduct transactions via the DCEP. All that will be required is that a phone has battery power. While a certain degree of anonymity will be present with the DCEP, the Chinese Central Bank will still be able to track who spent or received funds, when, where and from whom. The Chinese government calls the concept “controllable anonymity” and will rely on Big Data to identify behavioral characteristics of the individuals and businesses using DCEP. Doing so will help the government identify money laundering, tax evasion and terrorist financing. It will, of course, also permit a higher degree and quality of state surveillance of Chinese citizens and citizens of any other country that may use it.

Since the Chinese government will be the first to launch a global digital currency, it will gain a

considerable lead over the world’s nations and provide it with the ability to perfect its surveillance capabilities in China and around the world for any country that chooses to adopt the DCEP. It will also help to internationalize the yuan and simultaneously create less dependence on the US dollar. So, the Chinese government intends to stay a step ahead of the competition, enhance its ability to monitor its citizens, broaden its soft power and increase China’s appeal to other countries while countering the supremacy of the US dollar in the process.

Alternative System

By issuing the DCEP, the Chinese government hopes that demand for yuan reserves will follow, facilitating a digital version of the yuan as a global alternative to dollar reserves, especially in Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) member nations seeking to modernize their financial sectors. It could also help internationalize China’s e-payment systems, which are not used outside of China. In the absence of an American cryptocurrency, which seems to be a long way off, doing so could in theory make the DCEP the cryptocurrency of choice among BRI (and other) countries.

Such an alternative system may be particularly appealing for countries under US sanctions, which may wish to avoid using the US dollar entirely, or for countries or businesses engaged in trading, investment or lending with Chinese companies. But the yuan remains not fully convertible, with just 1% of international payments using it. That could have a significant impact on the government’s implementation strategy. In addition, the Chinese government is attempting to centralize what is a decentralized technology by requiring that all “nodes” using the Blockchain register with the government and provide information about their users.

While the Chinese people are accustomed to having their government pry into, and try to control, their private lives, most of the world’s population wants nothing of the sort. It remains to be seen just how broadly the DCEP will be

adopted, or whether it will turn out to be a net positive for the nations that choose to use it, but having the first-mover advantage will surely serve Beijing well. Despite its apparent flaws, if it also helps to bring some of the world's poorest nations with the least access to basic and global financial services on par with the world's developed nations in that regard, Beijing will have done much of the world's population a great service in the process.

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ECONOMICS

The Gig Economy Takeover: Will It Last?

Beau Peters
February 6, 2020

There is a seriously dark side to the gig economy and how it affects American workers.

The gig economy has exploded over the last decade, and now it seems like you can't throw a rock without hitting someone who makes a living through it. Companies like Uber and Lyft rely on gig workers as an integral part of their business model, and increasingly more businesses are starting to shift toward using contractors and freelancers to do work that has been traditionally done by salaried or hourly employees. While this new sector of the economy does provide its workers with a decent amount of

flexibility, there is a seriously dark side to the gig economy and how it affects American workers.

One of the benefits touted by those who back the gig economy is that, because workers don't have a set schedule or a direct supervisor telling them what to do, it offers unprecedented freedom compared to traditional work. While this is true in a sense, it is also what makes the gig economy a quagmire for many of those working within it. The gig economy provides no upward mobility, and those who work within it have to deal with the instability that comes with only being able to work when work is available.

Gig workers are also responsible for far more than they would be in a traditional job. Not only do they have to fill out invoices for the work they accomplish and maintain a variety of working relationships with companies issuing the contracts they take up, but they are also solely responsible for making sure that they remain tax-compliant. There is no one taking money out of their checks in order to pay into Social Security, Medicare or federal and state taxes. When these workers are trying to live paycheck to paycheck from their gig work, this puts extra financial stress on their shoulders.

Cui Bono?

All of these things that make the gig economy terrible for those who actually participate in it are the same things that make it so appealing to companies. The gig economy allows businesses to forgo the hiring and training of specialists like writers, graphic designers or anyone with a skill set that they don't want to invest resources into long term. The companies that rely on the gig economy to function benefit even further by not having to pay payroll taxes, as contractors and freelancers are not considered employees and have that burden shifted over to them.

There is no shortage of articles highlighting how the gig economy negatively impacts workers by showing the struggles that it puts on them. For example, since gig workers aren't employees of a company, it is their duty to procure their own health insurance and make sure that they don't

fall behind on their tax obligations. Additionally, they forgo the discrimination protections, family leave protections, paid time off, unemployment insurance benefits and worker's compensation protection that traditionally employed workers benefit from. So, cui bono? Who benefits?

The gig economy is structured in such a way that it massively benefits the companies that engage in it over the workers who participate in it. Freelancing and contracting work currently makes up 4.8% of the current GDP, more than either transportation and warehousing or construction, and there are projections that American workers engaging in the gig economy will reach 50% over the next decade. That would mean 50% of America's workforce would not be able to take advantage of health care provided through employers or the slew of other benefits that companies are currently legally required to offer employees.

In a nutshell, the gig economy has gained so much ground because it dismantles workers' rights that have been fought for over the last decade, effectively killing the labor movement while promising so-called "flexibility" to America's working class. By slowly convincing people that their labor is only needed on-demand, companies and businesses are able to sidestep the legal protections put into place to help workers, taking the working world back into a system reminiscent of what was in place during the Industrial Revolution.

How It Will Affect the Future

The gig economy has become a veritable giant, with nearly 1,000 companies operating in over 100 countries, disrupting a variety of industries from transportation to staffing. Uber raked in \$1.6 billion in revenue during Q4 of 2016, showing that the gig economy is certainly a viable business model that can generate a huge amount of profit at the moment. However, it is important to ask whether or not the growth that the gig economy has shown can remain stable going forward, or if the entire gig economy itself has any real longevity.

Where mechanization replaced employees within companies do to their inherent efficiency and lower cost over time, the gig economy is replacing traditional employees with other humans, many of whom are participating in the gig economy out of sheer desperation, as they are unable to procure the traditional employment that they are replacing. It is an ouroboric system wherein workers are consistently left with the short end of the stick.

How long is this system likely to last? Already, companies like Uber are running into trouble and are quickly approaching the limits of what the gig economy can be. As the gig economy enters the national spotlight, with California seeking to enact legislation that would require Uber — and other companies that rely on gig workers to make their business model function — to treat their workers more like traditional employees, the future of the gig economy is on shakier ground than previously thought.

However, as long as businesses are able to shift economic risks on to the workforce through the use of freelancers and independent contractors, we are unlikely to see the gig economy fade into nothing. It may simply become a very niche application for those looking for some supplemental income and businesses that don't need to rely on collaborative efforts from its workforce to operate. Only time will tell.

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Will a Struggling Global Economy Survive the Coronavirus?

Atul Singh
February 25, 2020

The coronavirus outbreak is putting a clearly unsustainable global economy to the test.

On February 24, the World Health Organization declared that the world should prepare for a possible coronavirus pandemic. Outbreaks in South Korea, Iran and Italy have caused alarm. Clearly, the virus has traveled widely and rapidly. Authorities have canceled concerts, carnivals and football matches as well as closed schools, imposed curfews and restricted travel. Despite these measures, COVID-19 has now spread to about 30 countries and infected tens of thousands of people.

Stock markets from New York and London to Hong Kong and Mumbai have crashed. They are waking up to the fact that the Chinese economy is in big trouble. Zhu Min, a former official of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), estimates that the Chinese GDP might have lost \$196 billion this year already.

Tourism has been hit badly. Consumer spending has decreased. Factories are struggling to keep up production. As a result, the global supply chain has been disrupted. Stores might run short of both clothes and iPhones, as well as face masks and essential pharmaceuticals.

Epidemic Woes

The coronavirus outbreak has turned out to be what Nassim Nicholas Taleb calls a black swan event. It was unpredictable. Its effect on the global economy, however, might be a touch more predictable. In July 2019, Nouriel Roubini, an economist popularly known as Dr. Doom, foresaw “the trade and tech war and cold war” between the US and China leading to

deglobalization, decoupling of the global economy and a global recession.

Roubini was not alone predicting doom and gloom. In October 2019, an article in Bloomberg reported that the global economy was wobbling. It worried that the first recession since 2009 might be nigh. After all, bond traders were bearish, and \$14 trillion of bonds were yielding negative rates.

The main worry for the writers at Bloomberg was the trade war US President Donald Trump had unleashed on China. This war had led to a manufacturing malaise, with businesses cutting back investment. Brexit and other geopolitical issues also muddied waters. Central banks seemed to have run out of ammunition. After all, there are limits to pumping money into the economy.

The article went on to reassure readers that the risk of recession for the US economy was just 25%. So, even if the rest of the world went belly up, the US would be alright. Hiring sprees had boosted consumer confidence, and the Fed had cut rates twice in 2019. Other central banks were also flushing money into the global economy through more quantitative easing.

A month after the Bloomberg piece, Raghuram Rajan, the former governor of the Central Bank of India, argued that the biggest threat to the economy came from the White House. He saw uncertainty over trade dampening investment and growth. Rajan worried about geopolitical risk such as a crisis in the Middle East that could spike the price of oil, triggering inflationary pressures. In a wishy-washy end to an underwhelming article, he claimed that “If the world had fewer wannabe strongmen, the global economy would be much stronger.” Presumably, they were the villains who could bring bubonic plague and the death of the firstborn to an otherwise wonderful world.

On February 17, Roubini argued that white, not black, swans would cause predictable global crises before the US presidential election. A deeply divided US would face four horsemen of the apocalypse: China, Russia, Iran and North

Korea. This would lead to chaos, conflict and financial collapse. Like astrologers' tales, Dr. Doom's prognostications must be taken with a healthy pinch of salt. Yet he does have a point even if the white swans to worry about are different to the ones he names.

The Straw That Breaks the Camel's Back

There have been plenty of signs that all is not well with the global economy. Japan is teetering on the brink of recession. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's "three arrows" — monetary easing, fiscal stimulus and reforms to revive private investment — have not hit the target. After seven years, Abenomics is also looking at failure in the face. Japan's lost decades after the bursting of the stock market bubble in 1990 look set to continue. The economy seems to be sinking because of two millstones around its neck — an aging population and gargantuan national debt.

Germany, another aging country and Japan's former ally, is in trouble too. Its economy flatlined in the final quarter of 2019, growing at 0%. Exports and spending, both consumer and government, have declined. It is fair to say that this exporting economy was a victim of Donald Trump's assault on global trade.

Even as populism, political polarization, trade wars and geopolitical tensions have continued to raise concerns, most Wall Street savants have been optimistic that the global economy will chug along. Continued consumer demand and low interest rates by central banks will avoid banana peels. Gita Gopinath, the chief economist of the IMF, has gone further. She sounded almost bullish when she said that, despite the coronavirus causing a global pandemic, China could have a V-shape recovery.

Gopinath is wrong. The post-World War II global rules-based order of which she is a high priest is dying before our eyes. It might have delivered great benefits to many millions in the past, but it has now lost its way. The debt-fueled orgy driving global trade cannot last forever. Trump has taken a sledgehammer to Gopinath's idols and smashed them to smithereens.

Instead of singing paeans to free trade, both Democrats and Republicans worry about China. The Middle Kingdom is the new Soviet Union. Some find it even more dangerous than the "Evil Empire" given its population, technological progress and economic might. China's grand projects such as the Belt and Road Initiative are causing unease all the way from New Delhi and Tokyo to Berlin and Washington, DC.

Machiavellian power politics and mercantilism are now back in fashion. The inequities of globalization, where a tiny elite has siphoned off most benefits, are causing anger around the world. So much so that a democratic socialist named Bernie Sanders is doing rather well in the US, the veritable Mecca of capitalism.

Furthermore, quantitative easing (QE) is reaching its limits. It did not quite work for Japan and is not really working elsewhere either. As the amount of money in the economy increases much faster than the amount of goods, services or assets, QE is causing asset bubbles. The likes of Jeff Bezos and Mark Zuckerberg might be fine, but the proverbial Tom, Dick and Harry are not. That is why they are voting to smash the status quo.

Now the coronavirus black swan has joined other white swans to put a clearly unsustainable global economy to the test. It adds to the rising paranoia of the Middle Kingdom. When the pandemic inevitably goes away, the fear will not. The structural imbalances have now been laid bare for everyone to see. The global economy will not go back to status quo ante whatever its high priests say.

Coronavirus is China's Chernobyl. It is finishing what Trump's trade wars started. Global supply chains will change. Trade will slowdown. The decoupling of China and the US will continue. Even as these tectonic changes unfold, a global recession has become more probable.

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COVID-19 Makes Johnson and Trump Reject Thatcher and Reagan

Atul Singh
March 31, 2020

With wartime deficits and historic economic stimulus, the era of unleashing markets and rolling back the state has come to an end.

In 1978-79, the United Kingdom experienced the winter of discontent. Trade unions around the country went on strike. On January 22, 1979, the UK experienced the largest strike action since the General Strike of 1926. Even gravediggers and waste collectors joined in, leaving corpses and rubbish piling up. A bitterly cold winter with blizzards and heavy snowfall dampened animal spirits further. To quote one of this author's former tutors, "the country was in the gutter."

Throughout the 1970s, the British economy had been ailing. The 1973 oil crisis had triggered a global recession and high inflation. The British government tried hard to be fiscally responsible, control inflation and avoid a large increase in unemployment. The only way to achieve all three goals was to curb wages. Sadly for Jim Callaghan, the then British prime minister who hailed from the Labour Party, the workers revolted and the economy wilted.

Sensing Labour's weakness, Margaret Thatcher, the Conservative leader of the opposition, pounced. She tabled a motion of no-confidence that Callaghan lost by a single vote on March 28, 1979. A general election followed in May. Thatcher won a historic victory with 5.2% of British voters swinging from Labour to Conservative. Not since 1945, when Clement Attlee became prime minister, had so many voters switched sides.

No Such Thing as Society

Unlike Tony Blair or David Cameron, Prime Minister Thatcher was a conviction politician. As an undergraduate at Oxford, she was deeply influenced by "The Road to Serfdom," a 1944 classic by the Austrian economist Friedrich von Hayek, a friend and rival of the legendary John Maynard Keynes. Von Hayek made a sophisticated case against socialism, arguing that it "tends always to totalitarian outcomes, regardless of the intentions, professed or real, of its proponents." Thatcher was one of von Hayek's true believers.

It is easy to forget today that von Hayek was largely forgotten after 1945. World War II marked the triumph of Keynesian ideas. The commanding heights of the economy were occupied by the state in an all-out war effort. As a result, a full employment economy emerged that left the ravages of the Great Depression behind. Attlee's 1945 victory led to the establishment of the National Health Service (NHS). Henceforth, regardless of whether a Labour or Conservative prime minister occupied 10 Downing Street, the British economy was run on Keynesian ideas.

In von Hayek's words, "Keynes died and was raised to sainthood" while he was discredited and forgotten. It was only the economic crises of the 1970s that brought von Hayek back into fashion. Thatcher went on to put his ideas into practice. The grocer's daughter believed in enterprise, thrift and self-reliance, not handouts from or dependence on the government. She did not want people to cast "their problems on society." In fact, she forcefully argued that "there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families."

In the Thatcherite worldview, obligations came before entitlements, governments can do nothing except through people, and people had to look after themselves first. As per the Iron Lady, "It is our duty to look after ourselves and then, also, to look after our neighbours." The fact that some people did not work because they could go on state benefits infuriated her.

Thatcher's moral clarity set the UK on a fresh course. She broke the back of unions, rolled back the state, let uncompetitive British industry die and brought in "Big Bang" reforms that made the City of London a rival to New York. Thatcher pulled not only her fellow Conservatives but also the rival Labour Party to the right. In the 1990s, Tony Blair and Gordon Brown created New Labour by abandoning their party's cherished old principles. The duo became Thatcher's children and venerated markets when they ran the government between 1997 and 2010.

Government Is the Problem

In 1980, the US emulated the UK in moving to the right by voting in Ronald Reagan as president. Throughout the 1970s, the US suffered from low economic growth, persistent inflation and high unemployment. The Iran hostage crisis of 1979-80 destroyed faith in the government and in Jimmy Carter's credibility, paving the way for Reagan.

The new president believed in supply-side economics. As per this theory, economic policy must focus on increasing the supply of goods and services for consumers. This can best be achieved by lowering taxes and decreasing regulation. Once businesses produce more goods and services that consumers purchase, employment rises, wealth increases and the economy booms.

Unlike Thatcher, Reagan was not an educated man. He is not known to have read many books. Yet this Hollywood actor for whom Franklin D. Roosevelt was a "true hero" had a Damascene conversion and turned against government. Like Thatcher, President Reagan believed in individual enterprise and free markets. In his view, reforms that "get government off our backs" and "out of our pockets" lead to more jobs and a better economy.

In his inaugural address, Reagan declared that "government is not the solution to our problem, government is the problem." Now, Reagan is venerated by American conservatives as a prophet. Along with Thatcher, he changed the global zeitgeist. For him, the mighty Soviet

Union was the "evil empire" and free markets were the best way to protect individual liberty. To this day, his iconic words hold sway: "The nine most terrifying words in the English language are: I'm from the Government, and I'm here to help."

The Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, vindicating Reagan's faith in markets, not government. When Bill Clinton became president in January 1993, he acted as Reagan's dutiful son, signing off on welfare reforms and on the repeal of the Roosevelt-era Glass-Steagall Act of 1933. This monumental legislation separated investment banking from retail banking and was a reaction to the terrible stock market crash of 1929. Yet despite warnings of dire consequences from the likes of Byron Dorgan, the North Dakota senator at the time, Clinton gave Glass-Steagall an unceremonious burial.

There Really Is Such a Thing as Society

Unlike the financial crisis of 2007-08, the current coronavirus pandemic has changed the trajectory of politics and economics. The response to the 2007-08 crisis was fiscal stimulus and monetary easing. The global economy did avoid collapse, but the gains of the bailout ended up in the pockets of the wealthy. In fact, \$1.6 billion of US taxpayer money went to top executives in the form of salaries, bonuses and other benefits.

The bailouts were nothing but socialism on the downside and capitalism on the upside. The wealthy kept all their returns while the public was left with the risk. Unlike Roosevelt, President Barack Obama proved too pusillanimous to take on Wall Street. As a brilliant PBS documentary has chronicled, the Obama administration prosecuted small fry but steered clear of the big fish. It is widely whispered that Obama did not want to be seen as an angry black man and prized stability over reform.

The failure of the US president and the legislators to act left a searing sense of injustice that fueled both the Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street movements. Eventually, it paved the path to the White House for Donald Trump in 2016.

At the time, the government just made the big banks bigger and business went on as usual. Central banks hosed economies with cash, which boosted the price of assets. The rich became richer. Even as stock markets surged, inequality soared.

In 2020, the coronavirus pandemic has brought markets around the world to their knees. Governments have imposed lockdowns and the global economy is in recession. Instead of individuals taking care of themselves and their neighbors, governments are stepping in. The Conservatives have announced a £350 billion (\$433 billion) stimulus for the British economy.

On March 17, Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak declared: “This is not a time for ideology and orthodoxy, this is a time to be bold, a time for courage. I want to reassure every British citizen this government will give you all the tools you need to get through this.” British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who is self-isolating due to contracting the coronavirus, has gone further. In a video message, he said the “coronavirus crisis has already proved ... that there really is such a thing as society.”

Unlike Blair and Cameron, Johnson has an acute sense of history. He studied classics at Oxford, has written a biography of Winston Churchill and began his career during the Thatcher era. Like the Iron Lady, Johnson has won a historic election. Now, this politician of “blundering brilliance” has publicly buried Thatcher.

Instead of the austerity that Cameron and George Osborne imposed on the country in 2010, Johnson and Sunak have opened all taps to give people relief. From paying workers’ wages and giving businesses grants to tax holidays and mortgage relief, the Johnson government has decided to run wartime deficits to combat a public health crisis. Johnson is proving to be the child of Clement Attlee, not Margaret Thatcher.

The US has emulated the UK by passing its own stimulus package of over \$2 trillion. It is the largest bailout in US history. With a record 3.3 million people claiming unemployment

insurance, no Republican senator or congressman is now arguing that government is the problem. Instead, they have sanctioned one-time \$1,200 payment for every American earning less than \$75,000 per year and another \$500 per child. More importantly, the Congress has increased unemployment insurance by an extra \$600 per week. Americans expect relief and the government, not Goldman Sachs or Bill Gates, is answering their call.

President Trump has done what Obama was reluctant to do. He has ordered “time-wasting” General Motors to make ventilators for coronavirus patients after attacking the company’s chief executive. He invoked the Defense Production Act, a legislation from the era of the Korean War, which gives the president the power to force companies to make products for national defense. In a land where elections cost an arm and a leg, politicians are wary of taking on companies. Trump has done so publicly.

Obama once remarked that “Ronald Reagan changed the trajectory of America in a way that, you know, Richard Nixon did not and in a way that Bill Clinton did not.” Abandoning Reaganomics, Trump and Congress have gone back to Roosevelt’s economics. The coronavirus has achieved what Clinton or Obama did not.

The two Anglo-Saxon democracies, the superseded and the predominant superpower, have largely created the world we live in. In both these lands, the mighty winds unleashed by Thatcher and Reagan have now changed direction. Make no mistake: A new world is about to be born.

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COVID-19 and Populism: A Bad Combination for Europe's Banks

Gary Buswell
July 13, 2020

Economic effects of COVID-19 may be intensified by populist political decisions in many CESEE countries, where governments see punitive measures on banks as an easy way of shoring up popular support.

As Germany takes over the EU's rotating presidency, Chancellor Angela Merkel noted that the bloc is facing a triple challenge: the coronavirus pandemic — in retreat but still requiring constant vigilance — the EU's steepest-ever economic downturn and political demons waiting in the wings, including the specter of populism. With the pandemic somewhat under control, European policymakers' focus is shifting toward the knock-on effects of months of lockdown.

Economies in Central, Eastern and Southeast Europe (CESEE) are in a particularly precarious situation, as a number of factors, from bad debt to populist legislation, are cramping the ability of the banking sector — which performs a vital role in stabilizing the economy through loans, payment holidays and other forms of financial support to local businesses in times of crisis — to withstand a potential economic downturn.

Bad Loans on the Rise

A troubling report recently released by the Vienna Initiative (created during the 2008 financial crisis to support emerging Europe's financial sector) has indicated that CESEE banks are facing a wave of bad loans, or non-performing loans (NPL), caused by the COVID-19 pandemic that could last past 2021. The issue of bad debt is by no means limited to CESEE countries, but the problem is exacerbated by

populist political decisions in many nations in the region.

European banking regulators had previously estimated that EU banks had built up adequate buffers to withstand a certain number of bad loans, with “strong capital and liquidity buffers” that should allow them to “withstand the potential credit risk losses.” But many banks in the CESEE region, operating in more volatile economies and with their reserves already whittled away by populist measures, are uniquely vulnerable if hit by too many NPLs.

At the heart of the problem is the fact that an excess of NPLs can drain banks' capital reserves, making them reliant on support from governments and central banks. If the regulators and politicians don't then put the necessary measures in place to support banks, the entire economy could be in danger of collapsing.

Lenders in countries including Hungary, Czech Republic, Croatia, Slovakia and Bulgaria have sought reassurance from national authorities in recent months that they will receive the necessary protections should restrictive COVID-19 measures last much longer, particularly if the continent is hit by a second wave of the virus before a vaccine or an effective treatment is found. At present, it is unclear whether governments across Europe will be willing to continue with the same level of support packages to businesses and employees.

It's not just a matter of renewing special coronavirus provisions. In return for providing additional financial support to businesses, lenders understandably expect reciprocal measures from governments and central banks. These include favorable tax measures, or the relaxation of excessive levies, so that banks are able to maintain their reserve levels, a lowering of countercyclical capital buffers and a guarantee of emergency financial support from central banks if necessary.

Populist Measures Exacerbate Financial Strain

In the wake of COVID-19, banking sector outlooks have already been revised to negative in several countries including Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Croatia. These problems are in danger of being intensified by populist political decisions in many CESEE countries, where governments have a tendency to see punitive measures on banks as an easy way of shoring up popular support.

In particular, many CESEE countries' financial sectors are still suffering from 2015 decisions to convert loans taken out in Swiss francs into loans denominated in the euro or the local currency. The conversions came in response to a sudden surge in value of the Swiss franc, which had previously allowed lenders to offer low-interest loans. The forced conversions benefited borrowers but left the country's banks to pick up the tab, making it difficult for them to build up capital buffers.

While some countries which carried out the forced loan conversions, like Hungary, at least provided lenders with euros from the central bank to ease the blow, others, such as Croatia, left banks to shoulder the full loss. Croatia's loans conversion, pushed through quickly ahead of the 2015 parliamentary elections, was applied retroactively, foisting a bill of roughly €1 billion on the country's banks, many of which are subsidiaries of financial institutions from elsewhere in the EU. A pending court ruling on whether or not Croatian borrowers who had taken out Swiss franc loans could apply for further compensation could impose another €2.6 billion in losses on the banks at the worst possible time.

Nor is the controversial loans conversion the only policy sapping CESEE banks' capital reserves. As part of its coronavirus recovery plan, the Hungarian government announced a special tax on both banks and multinational retailers back in April. The additional banking tax was worth HUF 55 billion (\$176 million). Prime Minister Viktor Orbán had already announced the toughest COVID-19 measures of any central or eastern European country, including a suspension of all loan payments until the end of the year. The

move ignored a call from Hungary's OTP Bank for a reduction in taxes to help banks deal with the pandemic's fallout.

A number of other countries in the region, including the Czech Republic and Romania — though Romania later eliminated the levy — have raised banking taxes in recent years, making it harder for the financial sectors in these emerging economies to respond to the crisis and has left it in a more precarious position should the effects of COVID-19 continue into 2021.

The CESEE region's financial sector suffered greatly in the wake of the 2008-09 global financial crisis, and much work has been done in the intervening years to shield the sector from future downturns. The Vienna Initiative report, however, makes it clear that the region's banks still face headwinds due to the COVID-19 crisis. Hopefully, policymakers across CESEE will take heed of the report's findings and realize that trying to scapegoat banks in these uncertain times will only make them more vulnerable, leaving them ill-equipped to deal with the onslaught of loan defaults expected over the next 12 months.

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The Unintended Economic Impacts of China's Belt and Road Initiative

Daniel Wagner
September 4, 2020

It certainly does not appear that Beijing put sufficient effort into contemplating the likely economic impact of the BRI prior to commencing it, either upon host nations or upon itself.

China's footprint in global foreign direct investment (FDI) has increased notably since the launch of the Belt and Road

Initiative (BRI) in 2013. That served to bring Chinese overseas FDI closer to a level that one would expect, based on the country's weight in the global economy. China accounted for about 12% of global cross-border mergers and acquisitions and 9% of announced greenfield FDI projects between 2013 and 2018. Chinese overseas FDI rose from \$10 billion in 2005 (0.5% of Chinese GDP) to nearly \$180 billion in 2017 (1.5% of GDP). Likewise, annual construction contracts awarded to Chinese companies increased from \$10 billion in 2005 to more than \$100 billion in 2017.

Interestingly, however, the American Enterprise Institute's China Global Investment tracker recorded \$420 billion worth of investment and construction in BRI countries versus \$655 billion in other countries between 2013 and 2018. So China actually invested more in countries outside the BRI during the period, given that Chinese investment in developed countries tends to have larger market values, particularly for mergers and acquisitions.

Additional Pain

Based on other measures, however, Chinese investment in BRI nations was much larger as a percentage of its total investment for the period. For example, greenfield investment represented almost half of all investment in BRI countries, but only 13% in other markets. Chinese firms were awarded \$268 billion worth of construction contracts in BRI countries versus \$166 billion elsewhere. Greenfield investment and construction in BRI countries amounted to \$340 billion versus \$230 billion in non-BRI countries.

The subsidies that Beijing contributes to its state-owned enterprises implies that many of the BRI projects actually cost it far more than the face value of the construction and investment, meaning that loan defaults — a common occurrence — add that much more additional pain to Beijing's coffers.

Asia attracted the majority of BRI-related investment and construction contracts between 2013 and 2018, receiving just over half of such

activity, with Southeast Asia taking 46% of that amount. Africa received 23%, followed by the Middle East at 13%. Overall, approximately 38% of total investments and construction contracts were targeted at the energy sector in host nations, with 27% ending up in transport and 10% in real estate.

The largest BRI project as of 2018 was the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which links Kashgar in China's Xinjiang province with the port of Gwadar in Pakistan. Investments and construction contracts worth nearly \$40 billion had been devoted to the project, with total spending likely to reach in excess of \$60 billion by the time it is finished, equivalent to about 20% of Pakistan's nominal GDP. The country endured a large increase in imports of materials and capital as a result, which aggravated its trade imbalance. By 2018, its current account deficit had expanded to more than 6% of GDP from less than 2% in 2016.

Expensive Membership

While Pakistan's economic challenges were not and are not entirely attributable to the BRI, the strains added to it by the BRI became highly problematic. That turned out to be a common byproduct of the initiative among the countries receiving the largest amounts of investment. Large debts in countries with limited financial resources and means of generating revenue often undermine governments' ability to successfully manage their economies. Rather than benefiting from the infrastructure investments made by China, they sometimes end up perpetually treading water.

Rising debt service often increases a country's borrowing costs, can raise doubt about its solvency, contribute to a depreciating currency and increase the local currency value of the external debt burden. Consequently, the macroeconomic fallout of being a recipient member of the BRI "club" can be severe, particularly for the smallest and poorest countries.

A 2018 study from the Center for Global Development has noted, for example, that in the case of Djibouti, home to China's only overseas military base, public external debt had increased from 50% to 85% of GDP in just two years — the highest of any low-income country. Much of that debt consists of government-guaranteed public enterprise debt owed to China's Export-Import Bank (EXIM).

In Laos, the \$6-billion cost of the China-Laos railway represents almost half the country's GDP. Debt to China, Tajikistan's single largest creditor, accounted for almost 80% of the total increase in Tajikistan's external debt between 2007 and 2016 period. And in Kyrgyzstan, China EXIM is the largest single creditor, with loans of \$1.5 billion, or about 40% of the country's total external debt.

It certainly does not appear that Beijing put sufficient effort into contemplating the likely economic impact of the BRI prior to commencing it, either upon host nations or upon itself, for all concerned have borne the consequences of excessive and imprudent lending. Could it be that that Communist Party of China did not care, and that all that mattered was rolling the Initiative out as quickly as possible once it decided to do so?

It is truly surprising that Beijing did not do a better job of envisioning the multiplicity of potential outcomes. That is undoubtedly the overriding reason why the Chinese government decided to pivot in 2018 and adopt a seemingly more rational, moderate and achievable approach to unleashing the remainder of the BRI upon the world. It now realizes that its reputation and legacy are at stake, never mind the hardship it has placed on scores of developing countries around the world in the process.

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“Human Work” Is the Key to Ending Income Inequality

Jamie Merisotis
November 23, 2020

Even before the pandemic, growing income inequality had become a stubborn feature of global economies. That doesn't mean we should accept it.

A new report from the International Monetary Fund says that COVID-19 will increase income inequality in emerging markets and developing countries, “further widening the gap between rich and poor” and increasing the urgency for “investment in retraining and reskilling programs [that] can boost reemployment prospects for adaptable workers whose job duties may see long-term changes as a result of the pandemic.” For many years, these countries have been challenged by disaffected youth along with “wide inequality in education, and large gaps remaining in economic opportunities for women.”

The report further warns that “COVID-19 is expected to make inequality even worse than past crises since measures to contain the pandemic have had disproportionate effects on vulnerable workers and women.” Even before the pandemic, growing income inequality had become a stubborn feature of global economies, but that doesn't mean we should accept it — or the social devastation it's likely to cause.

Tragic Rise in Inequality

The rise in inequality isn't just tragic for the millions who are directly affected. We see it reflected in the growing allure of authoritarianism, in the fearmongering directed at lower-income groups, and in the despair and hopelessness of those who feel left out and left behind. The accelerating increase in inequality is

dangerous for the future of societies and for the planet.

Ironically, the two groups who have fared best in recent decades are the very poor and the very rich. The global decline in extreme poverty is one of the most important developments of recent times. Between 1990 to 2015, the extreme poverty rate dropped from nearly 36% to 10%. At the other extreme, the very rich have done quite well. In the last 10 years, the number of billionaires around the world has nearly doubled. In 2018, the 26 richest people in the world held as much wealth as did the entire bottom half of the global population — some 3.8 billion people. More to the point, from 1990 to 2015, the share of income going to the top 1% increased in four out of five countries around the world.

This massive redistribution of wealth means that the world can no longer be neatly sorted into “developed” and “developing” countries. The global distribution of wealth is now more of a continuum. But the good news ends there, and the trend is inescapably clear: Wealth inequality is growing around the world. In the United States, it’s rising not just because the rich are getting richer, but because since 2000, incomes at the lower end of the scale have stagnated or fallen. Inequality in the US is the highest among the G7 countries, and the wealth gap between America’s richest and poorest families more than doubled from 1989 to 2016. Between 2007 and 2018, median income in black households fell from 63% to 61% of median white household income.

COVID-19 has worsened things considerably. The pandemic has hit poor countries particularly hard, with experts estimating that as many as 115 million people could fall back into extreme poverty in 2020 alone. Unemployment in most countries has risen the most for people in lower-paid jobs. In the US, unemployment among those with less than a high school diploma reached 21.2% in April, while for those with a postsecondary degree it peaked at 8.4%. According to the World Economic Forum, the impact of COVID-19 on workers with lower

levels of education will be even worse than the global financial crisis of 2008.

Human Work

While COVID-19 has accelerated the shift, the transformation of work — especially the automation of a much wider array of tasks through the use of artificial intelligence — is a major driver of inequality. For decades, as low-skill jobs were automated, we have seen an increase in the knowledge and skills demanded of workers. Of course, this is reflected in the rising demand for higher learning and the credentials that represent such learning.

This long-term shift reflects the emergence of human work — work that demands uniquely human traits and capabilities. A human worker takes traits such as compassion, empathy, and ethics, combines them with developed capabilities such as critical analysis, interpersonal communication, and creativity, and then applies them, often in highly interactive settings. Much human work involves helping and serving others, using technology and other resources to understand and help solve people’s problems.

Today, and even more so in the future, holding a good job and doing meaningful work depends on people’s ability — and opportunity — to prepare themselves for human work. Sadly, these opportunities are unavailable to many, which means inequality will continue to increase. But we can change that — first, by changing our approach to education, training and employment.

To begin with, we must abandon the outmoded idea that education, training and employment are different activities that occur in discrete systems. We still see learning and work as separate and sequential: People go to college or technical school, and then they go to work, maintaining their skills through experience and occasional training on the job. This approach has been obsolete for a long time, yet it is still how most education and training systems are designed, certainly those in the US.

But in reality, “student” and “worker” are no longer two different kinds of people, if they ever

were. In most cases today, people play both roles simultaneously. Learning and working are done concurrently and continuously, and both are necessary throughout one's career. For today's economy, and even more for tomorrow's, the concept of "once and done" education is dead. In an era when people can be thrown out of the labor market suddenly with little chance to prepare, all workers need opportunities to keep learning throughout their lives and careers. And all of that learning, however and wherever it is obtained, needs to be recognized to count toward credentials that open the door to meaningful work.

The true tragedy of the rise in inequality is that it reflects a society coming apart at the seams. But changing the trajectory of inequality to build a more just and open society isn't an insurmountable challenge. Indeed, if 2020 has taught us anything, it's that massive change can come very quickly. Now is the time to work toward such change. We can do that by applying the three interrelated aspects of human work — learning, earning and service to others — toward reducing economic and social inequality. Indeed, our only way to eliminate these inequities is to ensure that everyone has the capacity and opportunity to do human work.

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INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

Cyberspace Needs Global Norms — Here's Where to Start

Sabina Frizell
February 4, 2020

Weaving together the best elements of existing foundations on cybersecurity can help make the internet safer.

Cyberspace is a realm in dire need of global norms. Despite the growing number and staggering impact of cyberattacks — across both private and public sectors — cyberspace remains largely ungoverned. Most cyberattacks, like the technology they ride on, cut across borders, rendering national laws and regulations inadequate. The threat is transnational — rules and frameworks must be as well.

As striking as the need for global norms are the challenges in developing them. Global norms will have to bridge ideologies and sectors, as well as to contend with states' sharply divergent interests and visions of the internet. The most formidable cyber powers aren't incentivized to yield to global governance frameworks that would have them fetter their own operations. And while some nations recognize the need for global cooperation on cyber governance and security, others have adopted an approach rooted in sovereignty and state control.

Meanwhile, states aren't the only, or even most important, players in the cybersecurity field. Much of the infrastructure and expertise of cyberspace lies in the hands of private companies. Norms will need their buy-in.

In the face of these challenges, major world powers have yet to agree upon a viable, global agreement on cyber. But nonprofit, multilateral and private sector actors have made progress developing frameworks for navigating

cyberspace. Any global, comprehensive effort to develop norms should build on these existing initiatives, capitalizing on their strengths and heeding their shortcomings.

UN Resolutions

Since 2004, the United Nations has periodically convened meetings to develop cyber norms. The meetings from 2012 to 2015 yielded some important but measured steps forward, with the working group arriving at a consensus that international law does apply to cyberspace — a conclusion that China and Russia publicly signed onto.

However, in the years since, discord among member states has stalled progress and led to equivocal, vague statements and resolutions. The UN itself has not established any norms. It has instead recommended that states do so. It has also failed to draw conclusions on precisely how international law applies to states' operations in cyberspace. Most recently, during the 2018 General Assembly, the UN approved two separate and divergent resolutions to form further cyber working groups — one tabled by Russia and backed by the likes of China and Cuba, and the other tabled by the United States.

Taking a two-pronged approach risks splintering cyber discussions into groups of like-minded nations and negating the core value of UN resolutions — a truly universal consensus from a globally recognized authority.

Tallinn Manual

The Tallinn Manual is the product of a NATO-led effort to develop an authoritative view on how international law applies to states' use of cyber force. The manual is intended to serve as a guidebook for governments, providing detailed analysis of when and how laws — including those covering use of force and peacetime espionage — apply to cyber conflict. It pays particular attention to the question of when it is legitimate for a state to retaliate in response to a cyberattack, using either cyber or traditional military means.

The manual finds that, in some cases, a state may be legally entitled to take countermeasures in response to an illegal cyberattack. But the countermeasure must be levied against a state, not a private actor, and the initial attack must be attributed to the state itself, and not another entity acting on its behalf.

Unlike many international collaborations on cyber, the Tallinn Manual is both thorough and specific. As a guidebook without signatories committing to the conclusions, authors did not need to equivocate and dilute content to win diverse buy-in. However, the manual is quite security-focused and addresses government challenges. It does not deal with several contentious but important issues of concerns for companies, like intellectual property and trade law.

GCSC Norm Package

Two think tanks — the EastWest Institute and The Hague Center for Strategic Studies — created the Global Commission on the Stability of Cyberspace (GCSC) with the goal of “supporting policy and norms coherence” on security in cyberspace. The Norm Package, published in 2018, is the product of consultations with governments, companies, civil society and various branches of the UN. The GCSC norms are comprehensive, covering areas of concern across sectors, with both state and non-state actors encouraged to implement the norms.

Some of the norms are quite straightforward. For instance, they call for commitments to reduce significant cyber vulnerabilities and avoid tampering with online products and services. More complex (and of particular interest for the private sector) is a norm calling for states to “enact appropriate measures, including laws and regulations, to ensure basic cyber hygiene” — a sound concept, but the devil will lie in the details.

The document leaves important questions unanswered. For instance, should states develop voluntary frameworks, along the lines of the US NIST Cybersecurity Framework, or create binding regulations with enforcement

mechanisms? Many thorny issues will get punted to states, whose approaches are likely to diverge. So while the norm is a strong start, it doesn't go far enough in supplying a detailed, thorough foundation on which globally harmonized regulations can be built.

Budapest Convention on Cybercrime

The Budapest Convention on Cybercrime, drawn up by the Council of Europe in 2001, is the first international, legally binding treaty to address cybercrime. It aims to harmonize national laws on cybercrime and establish an efficient regime for international cooperation in cybercrime investigations.

Its signatories — over 60 in total — extend beyond Europe to include the United States, Canada, Japan and others. But global inclusivity has proven a challenge. Russia opposes the convention on the grounds that it violates state sovereignty by allowing signatories to access data housed in other jurisdictions during cybercrime investigations. It has instead proposed a UN global treaty that would not allow for cross-border access to data without a license from national security agencies.

Other large nations, like India and Brazil, have also declined to sign on. They protest not being included in the drafting process, reflecting the ongoing tension between rich and middle-income nations in developing international agreements.

Paris Call

The Paris Call for Trust and Security in Cyberspace is an attempt to solve the challenge of norms fragmentation and the proliferation of sector, and even industry-specific, initiatives. It is the most ambitious state effort to engage all major actors in cyberspace, across various sectors, and create a broad, overarching umbrella agreement that assimilates existing agreements and norms. It has been largely successful on these counts, with over 50 nations and hundreds of private companies, universities and nonprofits endorsing the Paris Call.

However, some of the world's greatest cyber powers — the US, Iran, Russia, China and Israel — opted out. And the content of the call is more a series of high-level aims than specific norms or rules for signatories to adhere to.

Microsoft Cybersecurity Tech Accord

Given that many, if not most, of any country's attack surfaces are in private hands, it is unsurprising that some companies have championed collaborative efforts to strengthen security, and none more so than Microsoft. Brad Smith, Microsoft's president, has called for a "Digital Geneva Convention" that would commit governments to following norms for protecting civilians online.

In the meantime, Microsoft has led cybersecurity efforts among private actors, corralling fellow tech companies to develop the Cybersecurity Tech Accord. Signatories commit to core principles, including pledging to protect users and customers around the globe from cyberattacks, such as by delivering products and services that prioritize security and privacy, and agreeing not to help any governments launch cyberattacks against innocent civilians or companies.

Nearly 100 companies have signed on since Microsoft launched the accord in 2018. But several major players, like Google and Amazon, have held off, not wanting to preclude the possibility of future government contracts that might run afoul of the accord's stance against assisting state cyberattacks.

Many of these efforts are high-level and ambiguous. Some are more symbolic than substantial. And the efforts that do offer robust guidance and specific norms tend to represent only subsets of actors (like the Budapest Convention or Microsoft Tech Accord) or serve as resources, not sign-on agreements (like the Tallinn Manual).

Nevertheless, cumulatively, these frameworks begin to lend structure and "rules of the road" to cyberspace. Broader, cross-sector global norms that move the world closer to a common standard

should build upon these initiatives. Greater proliferation of disparate norms will not make the internet safer. Weaving together the best elements of an existing foundation can.

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China's Influence Dampens International Response to Coronavirus Outbreak

Daniel Wagner
February 24, 2020

China's influence at the WHO — and the WHO's susceptibility to being influenced by Beijing — are putting lives at risk around the globe.

China has not exactly had difficulty projecting its power within the existing system of multilateral organizations. A Chinese national is now in charge of four of the 15 specialized agencies of the United Nations: the Food and Agriculture Organization, the International Civil Aviation Organization, the UN Industrial Development Organization and the International Telecommunication Union. By comparison, a French national leads two specialized agencies, the International Monetary Fund and the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; the United Kingdom leads one, the International Labor Organization; and the US leads the World Bank Group, UN Children's Fund and the World Food Program.

The US contributed between 22% and 28% of the UN's various agency budgets in 2018. By contrast, China contributed just 8% of the UN's regular budget from 2016 to 2018, which will rise to approximately 12% by 2021. So why does

China have more leadership roles and receive more recognition for its smaller contributions? Unlike China, US contributions have been large, consistent and taken for granted by other member states. Unlike the US, China rarely demands budgetary restraint or reforms that inconvenience the UN or member states, which may account for at least part of its appeal.

It is also worth noting that China has not hesitated to use its veto power at the UN, even on issues that other nations find particularly sensitive. China has used its vote to block Security Council resolutions 12 times since 1971. All but three of those vetoes have occurred since 2007 and served to prevent Security Council action against such states as Myanmar, Syria, Venezuela and Zimbabwe.

Since 2013, China has become increasingly assertive in UN human rights institutions, promoting its own interpretation of international norms and mechanisms. Beijing appears to be interested in expanding its influence within the UN, not because it supports the organization's founding principles, but rather to alter UN programs and policies in ways that will benefit Chinese priorities in the future.

Raising Eyebrows

The same appears to be true with the World Health Organization. Earlier this month, the WHO director general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, sat next to President Xi Jinping in Beijing and offered effusive praise for Xi's and the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) transparency and management of the COVID-19 outbreak. This is despite the fact that the Chinese government initially tried to hide the outbreak from its people and the rest of the world as the virus spiraled out of control, and criticized numerous other governments for trying to prevent its spread beyond China's borders by cutting off travel to and from the country.

Quite apart from the many concerns that have been expressed about the wisdom and efficacy of the WHO following its poor response to the West African Ebola crisis in 2014-17, Ghebreyesus'

eyebrow-raising public statements about the Chinese government's response to COVID-19 raise questions about both his and the organization's own transparency and allegiances. According to the WHO's website, its total funding is just over \$6 billion. The US is the largest national contributor to the WHO's budget, at approximately 15%. The next largest national contributor is the UK, at about 7%.

By contrast, Chinese funding of the WHO jumped 58% between 2014 and 2019, from \$12 million to \$19 million, which amounts to just 0.23% of the agency's budget. That has not stopped Beijing from exerting influence and punching well above its weight at the WHO.

A Chatham House report has noted that the WHO is highly politicized and bureaucratic, and is dominated by medical staff seeking medical solutions to what are often social and economic problems, and are often too timid to approach controversial issues, too overstretched and too slow to adapt to change. If any multilateral body needs to be nimble and sure-footed, it is the WHO, which relies on its member states to provide the essential data necessary to make critical decisions impacting the lives of millions of people around the world. Given its current performance and that during the SARS outbreak in 2002-03, relying on Beijing to provide that information is a particularly dangerous proposition.

Tightrope Walking

The fact that the Ethiopian government is Marxist, that Ghebreyesus has served as its health minister, that China is Ethiopia's largest foreign investor and that Beijing plans to build new headquarters for the African Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Addis Ababa has apparently prompted Ghebreyesus to walk a tight rope between requesting accurate and timely information from Beijing versus upsetting Xi and the CCP. Doing so is potentially imperiling the lives of tens or hundreds of thousands of people around the world. Ethiopian Airways continues to fly to Beijing.

During the SARS epidemic, the Chinese government did not report the outbreak for months and refused to provide access to WHO experts. The WHO did not declare a global health emergency for COVID-19 until January 30, nearly two months after the outbreak began and 10 days after it had been confirmed that human-to-human contact was a source of infection. It still has not declared the virus a global health pandemic despite the fact that it has spread to more than two dozen countries, with serious recent spikes in South Korea, Japan and now Italy.

Beijing's influence at the UN prevented Taiwan from becoming a UN member state, and its influence in the WHO has prevented Taipei from becoming a member of the organization. That not only potentially imperils the health of 23 million Taiwanese citizens, but also the more than 50 million foreigners who travel to or from Taiwan each year.

The Chinese government's influence in a variety of multilateral organizations, whether the UN, the WHO or multilateral development banks, is putting at risk the concepts of good governance and the rule of law. Its influence at the WHO — and the WHO's susceptibility to being influenced by Beijing — are ultimately putting many lives at risk around the globe. It is incumbent upon these organizations to recognize the gaps, inconsistencies and flaws that make them susceptible to such influence and to do something meaningful about it. Regrettably, at this time of great need, the world cannot rely on either China or the WHO to act based on transparency and accurate information. The world's other governments will have to rely on themselves for that.

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Han and Hindu Nationalism Come Face to Face

Atul Singh, Glenn Carle & Vikram Sood
July 9, 2020

If geography is destiny, then China and India seem fated to clash.

As dusk fell on June 15, a bloody clash broke out between Chinese and Indian soldiers in the Galwan Valley on the northwest China-India border, where a tributary of the Indus flows westward from Aksai Chin to Ladakh. In line with China's recent expansionist policy elsewhere, its military had been pushing forward into territory claimed by both nations, altering facts on the ground. In line with India's status quo policy to maintain its territorial integrity, its troops moved against Chinese intrusion, and a clash ensued. It was a throwback to the past. No one used guns, grenades or bombs. Men fought hand to hand, with fence posts, clubs wrapped in barbed wire, rods studded with nails, knives and even bayonets.

The fight took place on craggy cliffs at icy Himalayan heights. At least 20 Indian soldiers died, including a colonel. China has not revealed its casualties, but reliable sources estimate them to be higher than India's. Satellite images show that China had been building bunkers, tents and storage units for military hardware near the site of the clash. The Chinese struck the first blow at a time and place of their choosing. They were surprised by the ferocity of the Indian response. Clashes between troops of both countries have occurred regularly along the contested border, but this is the first deadly one for 45 years.

For thousands of years, empires based in China and India did not clash. The mighty Himalayas acted as an insurmountable barrier. The bitter cold and low oxygen levels of the highest mountains in the world were too high even for a Hannibal or a Napoleon. Chinese

armies that conquered Tibet were already at the limits of their supply lines, and the Himalayas were more forbidding than the Great Wall of China even for the dreaded Mongol hordes. For the Indian armies, the fabled riches of spice-laden south India were more alluring than the barren, frosty peaks of the north. Hence, many independent Himalayan kingdoms survived until relatively recently. The Buddhist Kingdom of Bhutan is the last of the Mohicans and still acts as a buffer state between two Asian giants.

Tensions between China and India are a recent phenomenon. Both are new postcolonial states. The former is heir to the expansionist Qing Empire and is a revisionist power. It seeks to rewrite the rigged rules of the game of the international order. European powers and the United States forced this order down Chinese gullets when it was going through decline, disorder and disgrace. India is the child of the British Empire that seeks to preserve the status quo. It no longer identifies with the Mughal Empire, Britain's predecessor.

Hindu India now sees the Mughals as Muslim oppressors who smashed temples, killed spiritual leaders, made Farsi the language of their empire and looked to Central Asia or the Middle East for inspiration. Today, India's official language is English. Its laws, political systems and bureaucratic structures are legacies of the British, not of earlier empires. It has inherited the British conflict with the Qing.

At its essence, tensions between the two Asian giants boil down to one simple fact: India seeks to preserve British boundaries, while China seeks to reassert Qing ones. To make sense of what is going on and what might happen next, we have no choice but to go back into the past.

String of Pearls

China and India share a 3,440-kilometer border. Each claims territory controlled by the other. This territorial rivalry has led to only one war, in distant 1962, when Jawaharlal Nehru was India's prime minister, Zhou Enlai was Nehru's Chinese counterpart, and Mao Zedong was the chairman

of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). India lost that war ignominiously.

Since then, India and China have been uncomfortable neighbors. In 1963, Pakistan ceded Shaksgam Valley to China and commenced a relationship that has strengthened over time. Starting from 1969, Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger used Islamabad as a backdoor to Beijing. In July 1971, Kissinger made a secret trip to China while on a visit to Pakistan. Islamabad was receptive to American blandishments, while New Delhi started the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) at the height of the Cold War. Its Marxist-tinged view of Western imperialism clashed with the American Cold War view of international relations. Naturally, the US sided with Pakistan against India when the two countries fought later that year.

Things have come a long way since 1971. The Soviet Union has fallen. China has become the workshop of the world. Pakistan is perceived more as the hiding place for Osama bin Laden than an entryway to Beijing. In 1991, India began a political, economic and philosophical transformation. Until recently, it was progressively rejecting statism. In its own gradualist manner, India has become less fearful of American neocolonialism and evolved into a more confident world power. India and the US have now made up. Both increasingly fear the rise of the Middle Kingdom.

In fact, India has real fears of a two-front war. What happens if Pakistan and China gang up against it? There are also concerns about the “string of pearls” China has built around India — ports in the Indian Ocean in Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan. New Delhi fears that Beijing might use its string to garotte India. Then there is another tiny little matter: In remote Tibet, looming high above the Indian plains, lies the source of the Brahmaputra, the Indus and other important rivers. Chinese dams could pose an existential risk to hundreds of millions living downstream.

Just as India fears China, the Middle Kingdom fears an alliance of India, Japan, Australia and the

US — the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD), also known as the Quad. The Chinese still face what then-president Hu Jintao termed “the Malacca Dilemma” in 2003. About 80% of their oil goes through the Strait of Malacca. A visit to this strait is shocking for a geostrategist: At any given time, dozens of ships are visible, funneling their way for 900 kilometers through a body of water that at its narrowest point is no more than 2 kilometers wide.

If geography is destiny, then China and India seem fated to clash. After all, how can two rising giants with competing strategic interests fail to clash? Graham Allison of the Harvard Kennedy School has popularized the term “the Thucydides Trap.” As per Allison’s argument, the probability of bloodshed runs high when a rising power confronts a ruling power. Allison posited that the US and China might be facing the Thucydides Trap. In the Asian context, China and India might be walking into the very same trap.

History Matters, Especially for Dragons and Elephants

If we were to view the world through Samuel Huntington’s prism, both China and India have laid claim over Tibet’s soul. After the Tibetan Empire collapsed by the 9th century, Lhasa frequently fell under Beijing’s yoke. Both the Mongol Yuan and the Manchu Qing dynasties exercised suzerainty over Tibet. However, Tibet has always been connected to India culturally. The founder of Tibetan Buddhism arrived from Nalanda, the legendary university of the fertile Gangetic plains. Nalanda no longer exists — the Turks sacked it. Buddhism is a religion practiced in certain regions and limited sections of Indian society. Yet Tibetan philosophy has more in common with its Indian counterpart than with the philosophies of Confucius, Mencius or Lao Tzu.

Indian philosophy might have found fertile ground in the barren Tibetan Plateau, but it was China that took charge of this territory. Often confused as a nation-state, the Middle Kingdom was, in more ways than one, an empire. In 1998, Nicola Di Cosmo published an iconic paper

analyzing Qing colonial administration in Inner Asia. He concluded that “the modern notion of China as a timeless union of many ‘nationalities’” obscures “the tensions and internal contradictions inherent in the process of Chinese empire building.”

The Qing were Manchus. Like the Mongols, they were outsiders who seized control of Beijing in 1644. A peasant rebellion led by Li Zicheng gave these northern barbarians their chance. They purported to ride in to rescue the Ming and promptly took over. Like previous conquerors, the Qing made enormous efforts to assimilate into Chinese culture, retained Han officials who served the Ming and promoted Confucian values.

Remembering how they had taken over Beijing, the Qing recognized the threat of a Mongol-Tibetan alliance. They embarked on an empire-building project of territorial expansion, which “was accompanied by military occupation and a new administrative structure.” The empire of the Qing came to comprise thrice the size of the empire of the Ming. Its population grew from about 150 million to over 450 million.

Mongolia, Central Asia and Tibet were all annexed. In 1720, the Kangxi Emperor sent troops to Lhasa. The Lifan Yuan, the court for the outer provinces of Mongolia, Tibet, Qinghai and Xinjiang, sent two ambans, or frontier specialists, to Lhasa. The powers of the ambans gradually increased through the 18th century, but the Qing ruled Tibet with a light touch.

Even as the Qing were expanding, the mighty Mughals were declining. Akbar died in 1605, and his successors did not prove as able. His grandson Shah Jahan took charge in 1628 and is famous for building the Taj Mahal, but it was paid for by oppressive taxation. The English traveler Peter Mundy observed “putrefying corpses of the victims of famine” and paints a sorry picture of the Mughal realm during his journey through the country.

In 1658, Shah Jahan’s fanatical son, Aurangzeb, killed his brothers and imprisoned his father. He smashed temples, persecuted non-Muslims and triggered widespread rebellion.

Until today, Aurangzeb is one of the most hated names in Hindu and Sikh families with children told tales of his cruelty. The last of the mighty Mughals died in 1707, and the empire disintegrated. Just five decades later, Robert Clive won the historic 1757 Battle of Plassey. An expansionist British India replaced a crumbling Mughal India.

The Many Games and the Great Game

In Rudyard Kipling’s “Kim,” the eponymous hero of the novel becomes the chela, the Hindi word for disciple, of a Tibetan lama. Together, they wander through dusty plains and the invigorating Himalayas. Indeed, it is the lama who pays for Kim’s education. The former seeks enlightenment while the latter learns the art of espionage, a sine qua non to play a role in the Great Game. The spellbinding yarn of Kim has some basis in reality. Like the Ottomans and the Mughals, the Qing were declining precipitously by the 18th and 19th centuries. Internal disorder and external invasion threatened the dynasty. The Qing military had become pathetic and its mandarins useless. Corruption stalked the land, and the peasants were grossly overtaxed.

During this period, Warren Hastings, the first governor general of India, dispatched George Bogle to Tibet. The Scottish adventurer met the third Panchen Lama in 1775 and established friendly relations. He purportedly went on to marry a close relative of the lama. Bogle’s mission was not followed up by much. The British had the rest of India to conquer and consolidate. The 1857 uprising and transferring sovereignty from the British East India Company to Queen Victoria put Tibet off their agenda in the 19th century.

Even as the British kept themselves busy in India, they eyed China. The British thrashed the Middle Kingdom in the First Opium War of 1839-42. The war was fought on the principle of free trade. The British insisted that they have the right to export opium to China. Naturally, they grew poppy in India to make the opium. As spoils of victory, the Chinese ceded Hong Kong to

Great Britain to serve as a comptoir to China. The British extracted a hefty indemnity as well. More importantly, they now had the legal right to export opium to the Middle Kingdom — perversely about the only “good” the Chinese seemed willing to buy from the “barbarian” British.

The Chinese capitulation to British arms demonstrated that the Qing emperor had no clothes. The Taiping Rebellion, with its fanatical local version of Christianity but fundamentally a manifestation of a China in utter disarray and decay, broke out in 1850 and lasted until 1864. Even as this revolt raged, China lost the Second Opium War of 1856-60. Both Britain and France teamed up to carve out the Chinese carcass.

It was the era of mercantile imperialism, and the Europeans rivaled with each other even as they cooperated to divide up the hopelessly self-absorbed and utterly sclerotic but potentially lucrative Chinese empire. The Europeans wanted to expand the opium trade to the interior and, of course, more reparations. At home, European leaders justified much of their expansion to their own peoples by demanding freedom to preach Christianity. Sometimes, they were even sincere about advancing the word while planting the flag. In 1860, the two reigning European superpowers, Britain and France, achieved total victory in what The New York Times called a “dashing little campaign.”

Lord Elgin, the son of the man who took away the Elgin Marbles from Greece and later the viceroy of India, commanded an overwhelming British-French force that involved some Indian troops. When his messenger was killed by the Chinese, the great lord responded in a manner befitting none other than the great Genghis Khan. European troops torched the magnificent Summer Palace to the ground and engaged in an extraordinary orgy of loot. Patriotic Chinese still feel a burning sense of shame about this incident. Many still “resent and distrust” the West.

Barely had the dust settled on the ruins of the palace when the Dungan Revolt broke out in 1862. This time it was Muslims instead of

Christians who struck out against Beijing. Riots broke out between the Hui minority and Han majority in many areas after Taiping rebels invaded the northwest province of Shensi. Ethnic cleansing became par for the course, and the rebellion lasted 15 years. What the scholar Weng-djang Chu wrote in 1958 stands true today: This revolt covered 3,191,680 square kilometers and is still “greatly underestimated.” The surge of Muslim revolts in the far west of China in fact was more responsible for the final collapse of the tottering Qing dynasty than the red-haired barbarians from the West.

Ripe for the Picking

Like the Ottoman Empire, the Qing Empire was ripe for the picking. Internal revolt was the order of the day. Foreign powers sensed their chance. After the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Japan joined the party. The First Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95 ended in calamity for China. Japan’s British-trained navy and Prussian-modeled army crushed the Qing forces, altering the balance of power in East Asia and whetting Japan’s appetite for empire. Now, the land of the rising sun was the rising Asian power.

Tibet increasingly enjoyed *de facto* independence after the First Opium War, as China struggled to stay afloat. This was also a time when Tibetans had to deal with invasion from the west, not the east. A new Sikh Empire emerged in the east. Its Dogra generals conquered Kashmir. Zorawar Singh Kahluria, the most dashing of the Dogras, led audacious campaigns in high altitude to conquer Buddhist Ladakh, a tributary of Tibet.

Kahluria tried conquering western Tibet but in 1841 ended up with a lance in his chest. The Dogras avenged their general by winning the 1842 Battle of Chushul and then signed a treaty establishing the status quo ante bellum. The Sikh story did not last long — by 1849, the British crushed them. The new masters of India’s northwest gave Kashmir to the Dogras for having stabbed their Sikh overlords in the back. Notably,

the Dogras still retained some territory in Tibet, especially in areas holy to the Hindus.

The British seemed to reach the limits of their power of expansion to the north of India in the disastrous First Afghan War of 1839-42. The Afghans killed the entire British expeditionary force of 4,500 soldiers and 12,000 camp followers under General Elphinstone. Only one person survived. He was an army doctor who rode into Jalalabad to tell the sorry tale. Despite this disastrous British defeat, the Great Game continued without. Both Britain and Russia continued to expand their influence into Afghanistan. Eventually, the Second Anglo-Afghan War broke out in 1878. From the British point of view, it was an opportunity to avenge the rout of 1842 and contain Russian expansion.

Now, the theater of the Great Game shifted to Tibet. Ngawang Dorjee, a Russian-born monk, was received by Tsar Nicholas II at St. Petersburg as Tibet's special envoy in 1901. Naturally, this made the British nervous. In 1904, Colonel Francis Younghusband appeared at the gates of Lhasa with a significant body of troops on a so-called diplomatic mission, designed primarily to forestall Russian inroads to Britain's sphere of interest extending north from India, Britain's "crown jewel." The 13th Dalai Lama, the predecessor to the current one, fled to Mongolia.

The British did not build upon their success in Lhasa. They did not want an international incident. Tensions in Europe were rising, and Britain was coming to view an alliance with Russia as desirable. Therefore, the British government ignored Younghusband's Anglo-Tibetan Convention of 1904. Instead, they took the indemnity China offered on Tibet's behalf and signed an Anglo-Chinese convention in 1906, recognizing Chinese sovereignty over Tibet. A year later, an Anglo-Russian agreement on Tibet affirmed the 1906 accord.

The European intervention in Tibet provoked a response. After nearly two centuries of ruling with a light touch, the Manchu Qing, even though it was on its last legs, decided to reassert control

over Tibet. Ethnic Tibetan areas east of the Yangtze River were put under Beijing's direct administrative control. They are now a part of Sichuan Province. In 1909-10, an army led by Zhao Erfeng arrived in Lhasa.

The 13th Dalai Lama fled to exile again, this time to Darjeeling, a lovely hill station in British India. He developed a close friendship with Sir Charles Bell, the British political officer in the then Himalayan kingdom of Sikkim. It was here that the 13th Dalai Lama organized a military force to win back power. Destiny would smile on him soon. The 1911 Revolution led to the end of the Qing dynasty by 1912. The very next year, the 13th Dalai Lama expelled Chinese troops and officials from Lhasa. He also declared complete self-rule, and Tibet achieved *de facto* independence. It was to last nearly four decades.

Han Nationalism Replaces Manchu Empire

It is important to note that none of the Chinese leaders of the 1911 Revolution accepted Tibetan independence. Yuan Shikai, the man who took over from the Qing, claimed "the Five Races [Han, Tibetan, Manchu, Mongol, Muslim] deeply united into one family" were all part of "the Yellow Church." Sun Yat-sen, the "father of the revolution," called for "the creation of a strong Chinese state that would expel the Japanese from Manchuria, the Russians from Mongolia and the British from Tibet."

Thanks to the 1911 Revolution, the Han were back in the emperor's palanquin. The Manchus were out after a 268-year rule. It was time to restore China to its millennial greatness. Regaining control of Tibet became an article of faith. Luckily for the Tibetans, the Chinese disintegrated into yet another civil war and then had to deal with a brutal Japanese invasion. Tibetan elites ran the country the way they deemed fit.

However, Tibet was unable to gain formal independence. Unlike Sikkim or Bhutan, Tibet did not end up as an Indian protectorate. The British summoned Chinese and Tibetan representatives to Simla, the *de facto* capital of

British India in 1913. After months of discussion, the Simla Convention was signed in July 1914 by Tibet and Britain. China refused to sign this agreement even though it acknowledged Chinese suzerainty over Tibet.

Like most British treaties, this one was rather advantageous to them. It obtained for British India a vast territory east of Bhutan that now forms the state of Arunachal Pradesh. Tibetans lost Tawang, a large Buddhist monastery they revere greatly. Only in 2008 did the Dalai Lama finally accept Tawang to be a part of India. In 1914, Britain was curiously willing to accept vast territory from Tibet without Chinese approval but was unwilling to recognize Tibet's independence.

Such lack of formal recognition came to haunt Tibet, starting on October 1, 1949, when the People's Republic of China (PRC) was founded. Mao's communists were good Chinese nationalists and wanted to reunify the disparate parts of China under a strong central government. The Red Army invaded Tibet's eastern province in October 1950, posing as an army of liberation from Western imperialism. This was roughly as accurate as European claims about 90 years before that Christ must accompany the flag into China. In May 1951, the Dalai Lama signed the Seventeen Point Agreement with the Chinese. For the first time, an agreement formally recognized Chinese sovereignty over Tibet.

Initially, the CCP followed the Soviet Union's nationality system. As Melvyn Goldstein observed in 2004, the communists even "allowed the feudal system, with its serflike peasantry, to persist," allowing the Dalai Lama to rule with relative autonomy. The CCP officials presented themselves to Tibetans as the "new Chinese," who were in the country to develop, not exploit. As soon as it had consolidated its power, however, the CCP reverted to its guiding principles. In 1955-56, officials launched socialist land reform in the Kham and Amdo regions of Sichuan and Qinghai provinces. This effectively meant the abolition of private property. Bloody rebellion followed. Starting in 1957, Tibetan refugees streamed into Lhasa. By

this time, the Cold War had been defining international relations for over a decade. The US had fought China in Korea from 1950 to 1953. It sensed an opportunity to create a problem for the Chinese.

The CIA began training and arming Tibetan guerrillas. Despite the fact that monasteries and feudal lords still controlled their estates and serfs in Tibet, an anti-Chinese uprising erupted in March 1959. The Chinese government crushed the Lhasa uprising. The Dalai Lama renounced the Seventeen Point Agreement and wearisomely fled Tibet yet again — to India, where he remains to this day.

This was a bad time for China. The Great Leap Forward resulted not in progress but in the Great Chinese Famine of 1959-61. As Cormac Ó Gráda wrote in 2015, it was "the greatest famine in recorded history." Like Joseph Stalin's first five-year plan of 1928-32, Mao's forced collectivization resulted in cataclysm. Estimates vary widely but, as per modern demographic analyses, between 20 and 30 million died.

Han nationalism did not die, however. The more "revolutionary" CCP cadres blamed Mao's moderation in Tibet for the Dalai Lama's duplicity. They remembered how his predecessor had also fled to India and plotted to overthrow Chinese rule. They feared an encore. Emulating the Dalai Lama, the CCP abandoned the Seventeen Point Agreement, terminated traditional Tibetan government, confiscated monastic and aristocratic estates and closed down thousands of monasteries. Out went the gradualist policy of accommodation, in came domination by Han CCP apparatchiks promoting class warfare and proletarian solidarity. Under Mao, this was inevitable. Like the laws of physics, Maoist ideology has proven to be totalitarian, inexorable and inescapable over time.

A Historically Undefined Border

Just as the CCP is the inheritor of the Qing empire, India is the successor to British India, the jewel in the crown of the once-global British Empire. Neither the British nor the Qing came to

an agreement over the border. Once the Qing fell, its successors rejected the Simla Convention of 1914, which the British and the Tibetans agreed upon.

The British themselves were never clear as to the border. To begin with, W.H. Johnson drew an expansive line in 1865 that included all of Aksai Chin in what was then the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. In 1873, the British drew a Foreign Office Line, which stands largely forgotten. In 1897, Major-General Sir John Charles Ardagh followed suit. In the light of China waning and Russia waxing, he proposed a boundary line along the crest of the Kunlun Mountains north of the Yarkand River. This line is now known as the Johnson-Ardagh Line.

Barely was the ink dry on the map, when George Macartney, the consul general at the oasis city of Kashgar in Xinjiang proposed a revised boundary to the Qing in 1899. Lord Elgin, the sacker of the Summer Palace turned viceroy of India, took a fancy to Macartney's idea. The new border was to run along the Karakoram Mountains, forming a natural boundary. British India and its allies would control the Indus River watershed, while the Chinese would be in charge of the Tarim River watershed. Colonel Sir Claude Maxwell MacDonald, Queen Victoria's minister in China, authored a diplomatic note proposing the new border to the Chinese. This line is now known as the Macartney-MacDonald Line. Notably, the Qing court never responded to MacDonald's note.

After the 1911 Revolution, the British reverted to using the Johnson-Ardagh Line as the border in official documents. However, they did not attempt to establish posts or exercise actual control over Aksai Chin. As if these lines were not confusing enough, the Simla Convention that led to an Anglo-Tibetan agreement forged a new boundary named after Lieutenant Colonel Sir Vincent Arthur Henry McMahon, a swashbuckling multilingual military man-turned-diplomat in charge of the British delegation. This line lay to the east of the Foreign Office Line and the west of the Johnson-Ardagh Line, which

India claims as its rightful border on the northwest. Each of these lines matters because choosing one or the other as a reference point might make China or India gain or lose valuable strategic territory.

McMahon went on to serve in the Middle East as World War I raged. His career ended when the newly formed Soviet Union revealed the secret Anglo-French Sykes-Picot Agreement to carve up the Ottoman Empire. This revelation came when Colonel Thomas Edward Lawrence — the famous Lawrence of Arabia — was promising independence to the Arabs to get them to fight the Turks, and McMahon himself was championing a pro-Arabist policy. His reputation was now tarnished. Therefore, the British quietly dropped references to the McMahon Line with Tibet, which now enjoyed de facto independence. Lhasa even controlled territories such as Tawang that the Simla Convention had deemed a part of India.

Only in 1935 did the colonial British government resuscitate the McMahon Line. It feared renewed Chinese interest in Tibet. When Tibetan authorities arrested English botanist Francis Kingdon-Ward for entering the country illegally, the British made their move. In 1937, the Survey of India published a map showing the McMahon Line as the official boundary. As if on cue, Captain Gordon Lightfoot marched to Tawang in 1938 but met fierce Tibetan resistance. For the moment, Tawang remained in Tibetan hands. This changed during World War II. In 1944, James Philip Mills, a noted colonial administrator, took charge of the area south of Tawang.

After India became independent in August 1947, Tibet protested British acquisitions. In October 1947, it demanded that India return Ladakh, Sikkim and Darjeeling. It did not. In October 1950, Chinese troops routed Tibetan forces at Chamdo. When India demurred, China brushed aside its protests. This led to a rift in the Indian government. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the deputy prime minister, wrote a letter to Nehru expressing anxiety over “the problem of Tibet.”

Patel's views mattered. He was a close associate and friend of Mahatma Gandhi. Under Patel's leadership, India had assimilated the more than 500 princely states that comprised 40% of the area of pre-independence India and 22% of its population. It had earned the deputy prime minister the epithet of the "Iron Man of India."

A month after the People's Liberation Army (PLA) invaded Tibet, Nehru categorically declared, "Our maps show that the McMahon Line is our boundary and that is our boundary — map or no map." With this parliamentary statement on November 20, 1950, the die was cast. In February 1951, Indian troops took over Tawang town and removed the Tibetan administration.

Line of Actual Control

Patel saw Chinese action against the Tibetans as "little short of perfidy." Chinese officials had assured India they would settle the Tibetan question peacefully but had gone back on their word. Patel felt betrayed because India had been the first non-socialist country to recognize the new communist regime and was championing China's entry into the United Nations. He worried about China as a threat to India's borders and that it was encouraging communists within the country to foment a revolution.

Even at that early stage, India was facing insurgency from armed communist groups, and many in its intelligentsia were seduced by the success of the communist revolutions first in the USSR and then in the PRC. Presciently, Patel warned against "Chinese irredentism and communist imperialism." He took the view that the Middle Kingdom's "ideological expansion concealed racial, national or historical claims. Patel recommended a "reconsideration of [India's] retrenchment plans to the Army in the light of the new threat" as well no longer advocating Chinese entry into the United Nations.

Nehru disagreed with his older deputy. On November 18, two days before declaring the McMahon Line as the international boundary, the

prime minister responded that India could not lose its "sense of perspective and world strategy and give way to unreasoning fears." The idealistic, anglicized Kashmiri Brahmin and the realpolitik-oriented, earthy member of a Gujarati landowning caste seemed headed for a showdown over China. Patel's death on December 15, 1950, averted this crisis. From now on, the Nehruvian view occupied the commanding heights of Indian foreign policy.

In 1954, India published maps showing Aksai Chin as part of the country, setting the Ardagh-Johnson Line as its northwest border with China and adding 37,244 square kilometers to its territory. The Middle Kingdom had never accepted this to be its border and claimed this territory as its own. In 1957, India was incensed to discover that China had built a road through Aksai Chin, connecting Xinjiang to Tibet. China National Highway 219 is a marvel of civil engineering. The Chinese began work on it in 1951 and completed it in 1957. Today, this 1,455-kilometer road runs from Yecheng in Xinjiang to Shiquanhe in Tibet and is known as the Sky Road because it goes through vertigo-inducing elevation of 5,248 meters above sea level. Right from the start, this road had a military purpose and increased India-China tensions.

To cool down these tensions, Zhou Enlai wrote to Nehru on September 8, 1959, about "the Sino-Indian boundary question." He argued that the current boundary was a result of British imperialist aggression and was "therefore decidedly illegal." Zhou declared that the Chinese government "absolutely [did] not recognize the so-called McMahon Line." He complained that Indian troops were trespassing into Chinese territory and harboring Tibetan rebels. Instead, Zhou proposed maintaining "the long-existing status quo of the border" and resolving the issues step by step over time. This disputed border has come to be called the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

It is poorly defined. Indian and Chinese troops constantly patrol it and occasionally clash over

what neither Beijing nor New Delhi accepts as a legitimate boundary. Writing on June 22, 2020, Lieutenant General P.J.S. Pannu observed that both India and China are still “defending a historically undefined border line.” Both sides still control the territory that the other claims. At stake are thousands of square kilometers of the Himalayas.

Realpolitik Versus Romance

A simple question arises: Why was Nehru so naive about China and communism? In a magisterial piece, M.J. Akbar explains the basis of the Nehruvian view. India’s first prime minister was a passionate anti-imperialist who believed in the solidarity of the subjugated peoples. Very early, he saw India and China as two ancient civilizations emerging as modern nations and acting as harbingers of a more just world. Nehru romanticized not only China but also communism.

During a 1927 visit to the USSR, he was deeply impressed by Soviet economic policy, which became an exemplar for Nehruvian socialism. Notably, Nehru considered Vladimir Lenin to be the greatest man of action in the 20th century — and the most selfless. In contrast to Patel, Nehru was fascinated by communism and thus blind to its dangers.

The key to understanding Nehru’s benign view of China comes from his youth. As a student at Cambridge and a barrister in London, he had sought inspiration from thinkers of the Fabian Society. In an age of empires, he felt the pull of the left. In 1927, Nehru attended the International Congress against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism in Brussels. It rightly discussed Britain and presciently warned against American exploitation of Latin America. The conference designated three nations to lead the world out of oppression: China, Mexico and India.

Nehru was a member of the presiding committee and an inaugural speaker. It was a heady experience for this Harrow-educated dreamy-eyed idealist. For most anti-imperialists

of the late 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries, communism was the obvious champion for colonized peoples. More importantly, Nehru made some Chinese friends in Brussels. One of them was Soong Ching-ling, the widow of Sun Yat-sen. Soon, Nehru became friends with Chiang Kai-shek, Sun Yat-sen’s successor. Nehru saw China as “India’s sister in ancient history” and closer relations between the two countries as a civilizational imperative. In 1937, he declared September 26 to be China Day. In opposition to Japan’s invasion of China, he called for the boycott of Japanese goods and for donations to support the Chinese war effort. He went on to visit China in August 1939 as Chiang Kai-shek’s guest.

When Nehru became the head of the interim government before independence in September 1946, the first conference he organized was not on national unity but on Asian relations. It was here that Indian romance would first crash against Chinese reality. When Nehru’s old friend Chiang Kai-shek learned that Tibetan delegates were attending, he threatened to pull China out of the conference. Nehru promised that Tibet’s status would not be raised and instructed Tibetan delegates to hold their tongues.

Nehru’s generosity to the Chinese soon turned excessive. In 1950, the US offered India China’s permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council. In 1955, the Soviet Union made a similar offer. Nehru spurned both offers because he did not want a break between India and China. In the 1954 Sino-Indian Treaty on Tibet, Nehru agreed to withdraw Indian troops from the country. He also gave away postal, telegraph and telephone facilities that India had operated in Tibet. China gave India precious little in return.

In 1954, India and China signed the Panchsheel Treaty, which comprised five principles of peaceful coexistence. Zhou Enlai showed up in New Delhi to sign some form of peace treaty and to rally India against a potential American invasion of Vietnam. The slogan “Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai,” which means “Indians and Chinese are brothers,” was in the air. Nehru

visited China later that year and was cheered in the streets. It did seem that India and China would lead an Asian resurgence together as per Nehru's statesmanly vision. Everyone loves a parade.

Yet trouble was brewing. Noted historian Neville Maxwell records that neither side raised the boundary question. China did not bring it up because it wanted to avoid any discussion about Tibet. India assumed that the "boundary was well-known and beyond dispute, and there could be no question regarding it." In 1954, its maps showed Aksai Chin as part of Indian territory. As mentioned above, the discovery of the road through Aksai Chin in 1957 and the Dalai Lama's flight to India in 1959 hardened positions on both sides. India's romance with China started souring. The first border clash occurred at Longju in August 1959. Nehru's romance was dead, Patel's realpolitik was back.

War and Peace

In 1959, Zhou proposed maintaining the status quo in his famous letter proposing the LAC. He followed up with a visit to India in 1960 with an offer: China would recognize India's claim to the 84,000-square-kilometer area that now comprises Arunachal Pradesh despite its historical connections to Tibet if India accepted China's claim to the 38,000-square-kilometer area of Aksai Chin. Nehru rejected Zhou's offer.

In 1961, Nehru took two bold decisions. On November 2, 1961, he kicked off the so-called "forward policy." Indian troops were to patrol as far forward as possible toward the international border recognized by India. The next month, he ordered troops to liberate Goa after years of diplomacy had failed. Portugal had conquered this coastal state in 1510 and held it for 451 years. Western powers such as the US and the UK condemned Indian action, but African and Asian countries supported it wholeheartedly. Nehru's stock was flying high.

In 1962, Nehru continued with his foreign policy. Once inconvenient generals were replaced by pliant ones, he no longer met any opposition

from the army high command. Indian troops set up forward posts on the China border, some even north of the McMahon Line. This riled Beijing, and by mid-summer tensions were running high. Domestic criticism of Nehru was rising by the day. Many accused him of being too conciliatory with China. So, Nehru put a key precondition to talks: India's boundaries were non-negotiable.

Yet even as Nehru took what he believed to be a hard line, every Indian forward post was being outmatched by more numerous Chinese garrisons. India's position was increasingly untenable. China called India's bluff. After a limited action on October 20, 1962, Chinese troops waited for a few days. Then, between November 15 and 19, they destroyed or broke up every organized Indian force in the disputed areas at key points across a front more than 3,000 kilometers wide. Then, Beijing announced a unilateral ceasefire on the same terms as Zhou had suggested in 1959.

The 1962 war is still a source of shame in India. Its troops were ill prepared and lost badly. Nehru made far too many blunders. He first viewed China romantically and gave it a carte blanche. Then, Nehru embarked on an ill-advised forward policy, with insufficient force that left Indian troops exceedingly vulnerable. Perhaps the biggest blunder of all was Nehru's appointment of Vengalil Krishnan Krishna Menon as defense minister in 1957.

Energetic, eloquent and brilliant, Menon had made a name for himself in London and New York as a passionate advocate for India's independence, Nehru's policy of non-alignment and freedom for long-oppressed colonies. Like Nehru, Menon was a great champion of China and was convinced that India's only threat came from Pakistan. This line of thinking proved to be disastrous. He sidelined outstanding officers like General Kodendera Subayya Thimayya and Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw. Menon shamelessly promoted sycophants like Pran Nath Thapar and Brij Mohan Kaul, both relatives of Nehru. Menon also weakened India's defense production, which had been the best in Asia when the country won

independence in 1947. After India's defeat along the McMahon Line, Menon resigned but Nehru did not. Like Mao and unlike George Washington, this Harrow and Cambridge man would die on the throne.

Only five years after the 1962 war, Indian and Chinese troops clashed again at the passes of Nathu La and Cho La connecting Sikkim to Tibet. In 1967, India had increased the number of its mountain divisions, improved equipment and beaten Pakistan in 1965. Indian troops held the higher ground, and China had just embarked on the Cultural Revolution. As a result, China came off worse in this brief battle, bolstering Indian morale. In the 1971 Indo-Pakistani War, China sided with Pakistan. Its support for Pakistan was, and remains, an obvious way to put pressure on India. In 1975, India absorbed the Himalayan kingdom of Sikkim as an Indian state. Soon thereafter, the Chinese ambushed an Indian patrol, killing four soldiers. Those were the last soldiers on either side to die for 45 years — until the evening of June 15, 2020.

Starting from 1978, relations between the two countries improved. That year, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, then foreign minister and later prime minister, visited Beijing to reestablish diplomatic ties. China softened its stand on both Sikkim and Bhutan. Tensions flared in 1986 when Indian troops encountered Chinese occupation of Sumdorong Chu Valley. The following year, India created the new state of Arunachal Pradesh, angering Beijing in the process.

Tensions eased in 1988 when then-Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi visited China. The two sides established better relations, which improved further after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. In 1993, India and China signed a peace and tranquility border agreement. For the next two decades, India and China avoided any major confrontation. In 1996, both sides even agreed not to “conduct blast operations or hunt with guns or explosives within two kilometers from the Line of Actual Control.” Leaders visited each other's countries, increased trade and signed mutual cooperation agreements. Yet despite 22

rounds of talks, they have failed to settle the boundary question.

National Renaissance

In recent years, confrontations between Chinese and Indian troops have been on the rise. Scuffles, fistfights and stone-throwing often break out between patrolling platoons. Both sides have embarked on infrastructure projects such as roads, tunnels and bunkers along the poorly defined LAC. Each side views the other's steps as threatening the “correlation of forces” and capabilities. Both sides refuse to accept the other's measures. This has led to three major confrontations: at Depsang in northern Ladakh in 2013, at Chumar in eastern Ladakh in 2014 and at Doklam on the China-Bhutan border in 2017. Now, in 2020, Indian and Chinese tensions are at their highest since 1962. Two questions arise: Why, and why now?

China has become more assertive globally since Xi Jinping took charge in 2012. Xi has consolidated power and launched a personality cult reminiscent of Mao. Indeed, he is the son of a Maoist and has dethroned Deng Xiaoping's more moderate acolytes from the CCP throne. Xi had the rubber stamp congress in Beijing remove term limits for the numerous positions he occupies. He is modernizing the military and adopting a more muscular foreign policy. In 2013, Xi launched the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and has invested billions into projects in numerous countries. China is becoming a great power once again. However, for the first time in history, China is seeking to assert its power beyond its traditional borders.

In 2018, former Australian prime minister Kevin Rudd gave a lecture at West Point on understanding China's rise under Xi Jinping. Rudd is a career diplomat, speaks Mandarin and studies China closely. He made a very important point: Xi looks closely at the past for inspiration. Since the very day Xi came to power, he has declared China's national mission to be *guojia fuxing* — a national renaissance. This red engineer, an alumnus of the fabled Tsinghua

University, has concentrated enormous power in his hands and in his party. The CCP now plays a bigger role in daily life, business and even the military than at any time since perhaps the death of the Great Helmsman in 1976. Xi has “cleaned up” the government and, in the process, eliminated all his political opponents.

Superficially, Xi may appear to be a technocrat. Importantly, however, Xi’s father was aligned with the “left” revolutionary wing of the CCP. This leftist faction opposed the economic and political reforms implemented by Deng Xiaoping and his allies. Xi’s views on the role of the state and the supremacy of the CCP are far closer to his father’s and to Mao’s than to any of his post-Mao predecessors. Additionally, there is the weight of China’s history and culture, despite the CCP’s often murderous efforts to stamp it out. Xi’s views on the role of the state, harmony, and social and personal hierarchy are closer to those of a mandarin or an emperor in the Forbidden City than to reformists like Deng.

For 40 years following the death of Chairman Mao, all Chinese leaders have moved away from the cult of personality. But, in a touch of hubris, Xi has formally enshrined Xi Jinping Thought in the constitution. Xi is now chairman of everything and the great atheist god of China. In this brave new China, blasphemy does not go unpunished. Those who post seemingly innocuous photos online comparing Xi to Winnie the Pooh find themselves in jail for “creating a negative social impact.” After decades of incremental liberalization, Xi has turned back the clock. He has destroyed any alternative power or authority to that of the CCP. It seems that Xi and the CCP fear that their communist state lacks legitimacy. Also, like all previous Confucian leaders, they believe that the exercise of power by the masses would disturb the harmony of the state and could destroy it.

The solution, again as with all totalitarian states, is to identify the legitimacy of the regime with that of the nation. Chinese nationalism is now arguably the essential component of CCP ideology. Confucius has been incongruously

married to Marx to legitimize a strong, modern, authoritarian hierarchical state. Xi’s CCP subjects people to constant propaganda and consummate censorship.

In Xi’s and the CCP’s version of the world, China is “encircled” by revanchist imperial powers. Chinese greatness and strength will return by rectifying all the wrongs to China’s borders, and that government and society suffered during the century of humiliation. China has always been the Middle Kingdom, the center of the world, and has to resume its rightful place in it. To do so, China cannot be passive. It must extend its direct influence beyond its borders. This will win Xi the support of China’s population, affirm the leadership of the CCP and assure the stability and increasing strength of his country so that in the coming decade or two China assumes its rightful place as the world’s greatest power.

Emperor Xi

Yet something is not quite right in the realm of Emperor Xi. The domestic security apparatus has a larger budget and employs more people than the PLA. Like the Qing, the CCP worries deeply about separatism, disorder and downfall because it seized and continues to maintain power through the barrel of a gun. It remembers the lesson of 1989, when on the night of June 3, tanks rolled into Tiananmen Square, crushing student protests and massacring some 10,000 pro-democracy protesters to preserve communist rule. In contrast, German and Soviet communists capitulated on November 9, 1989, when millions flocked to the Berlin Wall.

The specter of communist collapse and Soviet disintegration haunts the CCP to this day. Rudd tells us that the CCP’s top two priorities are to continue its stranglehold on power and maintain the unity of the motherland.

Under Xi, the CCP has tightened screws on Tibet, Xinjiang and, most recently, Hong Kong. Human Rights Watch tells us that “new regulations in Tibet now criminalize even traditional forms of social action, including

community mediation by religious figures.” In Xinjiang, over 1 million people have been detained in China’s infamous “reeducation camps.” They are mainly Uighurs. Under Chinese communism, reeducation is merely a sick totalitarian euphemism for the destruction of Muslim Uighur culture that is seen as a threat to the unity of China.

Xi’s CCP has been forcibly “Han-icizing” the entire Uighur population, which simply put is a policy of cultural genocide. As per a recent report by China scholar Adrian Zenz, the Chinese authorities have been forcibly sterilizing Uighur women or fitting them with contraceptive devices. Zenz also calls China’s coercive birth control a “demographic campaign of genocide” against the Uighurs.

For quite some time, China’s security services have been kidnapping book store owners, journalists, students and other dissenters from Hong Kong. Selling books or sponsoring gatherings or making speeches that the CCP considers threatening to its primacy brings swift and severe retribution. Beijing has passed a security law giving it new powers over Hong Kong. In the name of national security, the CCP can now curb free speech, the right to protest and undermine Hong Kong’s largely independent judiciary. Hong Kong’s autonomous status no longer exists. Winnie the Pooh is no more safe in Hong Kong now than in what used to be called mainland China.

Even as China tightens the screws at home, it is now acting more aggressively abroad. There is a new nationalism in and an excessive prickliness to Xi’s China. The Middle Kingdom now squabbles more with its neighbors. A new “wolf warrior” diplomacy has emerged. It is building artificial islands and air bases in the South China Sea. It is making all sorts of territorial claims and alienating its neighbors. China now challenges more openly and aggressively the legitimacy of international agreements, boundaries or conventions when they do not serve its national objectives. Beijing denounces them as unjust impositions by an imperialist West. International

rules were made without China’s fair input and, therefore, are invalid. Thus, woe to states with border or maritime disputes with China and to any state that dares challenge a position that the CCP takes on Chinese domestic issues such as Hong Kong’s civil rights or international issues such as the sovereignty of the South China Sea. To be fair, China has resolved some border disputes peacefully, but that was in the pre-Xi era.

Perhaps increasing economic pressures also contribute to China’s new nationalism. China’s phenomenal growth has been centered on global integration and strong exports. The Middle Kingdom became the workshop of the world because of three key factors. First, China’s leaders have allowed the Chinese to engage in de facto private enterprise and investment. Second, the state invested heavily in public infrastructure in the form of telecommunications, broadband, road, rail, port, power generation, transmission and distribution. Third, small enterprises took to low-wage, labor-intensive manufacturing.

This Chinese model can no longer drive economic growth as it once did. When Deng Xiaoping embraced market economics in 1979, wages were low. Today, China has become a higher wage economy with numerous low-wage rivals and has a declining, aging workforce that peaked in 2011. By 2018, it had shrunk by 2.8%. Besides, the country has now reached economic and scientific maturity in many sectors. Its high catch-up growth rates are bound to slow down.

In manufacturing, Vietnam, Bangladesh and Indonesia are emerging as new rivals. They have lower wages than China, making them more competitive for labor-intensive industries. Also, a new form of smart manufacturing is emerging in Europe and the US, threatening Chinese dominance. High-quality products are increasingly manufactured through a combination of research, robotics, new materials, additive manufacturing and cheap computing. A new economy based on interdisciplinary collaboration, international talent and cutting-edge technologies has emerged.

In geopolitical terms, China threatens the US, and the ruling superpower is determined to stay top dog. President Barack Obama negotiated a gargantuan trade deal in the form of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). He sought to create a free-trade regime to strengthen the economic system that has underpinned international economic relations since 1945. Pointedly, the Middle Kingdom was not part of the TPP because the trade deal was meant to counterbalance China's rise and to pressure China to adhere to and embrace these hard-won free trade, free market norms. Obama's Asia Pivot was also designed to check China.

Unlike Obama's collaborative, multilateral effort, Donald Trump has opted for a bar fight by unleashing a full-fledged trade war on Beijing. He is following mercantilist and isolationist policies. Trump has steadily withdrawn the US from the Pacific, weakening its post-World War II role as global hegemon. Nonetheless, Trump has directly, if in a ham-fisted way, called China out on decades of intellectual property theft and unbalanced domestic market protectionism. It is increasingly clear that the US-China trade war has rattled the CCP leadership. As if these pressures were not enough, there are persistent fears that China's gigantic debt bubble might burst. This could cause huge numbers of bankruptcies, a crash of the renminbi, a fall in growth rates and a potentially destabilizing surge in unemployment.

Ratcheting Up Pressure

Xi might appear serene, but he must be deeply worried about the stresses and creaks in his realm. With many nations, internal tensions have often led to external aggression. This phenomenon might be contributing to China's aggressive actions against India. There are six other proximate reasons why China might be ratcheting up the pressure on India's borders.

First, China has been touchy about Tibet, Aksai Chin and its border with India since the days of Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai. In 1962, it taught India a lesson after it refused to back down

on its forward policy and turned down its boundary deal. Last year, India ended the special status for Jammu and Kashmir. New Delhi also carved out a brand new union territory of Ladakh. Official maps show Pakistani-held Gilgit and Baltistan as well as China-held Aksai Chin to be a part of Ladakh. In 1954, Mao's China was not pleased with India's maps. In 2019, Xi's China is similarly displeased.

Furthermore, India has built the world's highest airfield at Daulat Beg Oldi, a spectacular feat of effort and engineering. Once this was an old campsite on the base of the strategic Karakoram Pass that leads to the Tarim Basin in southern Xinjiang. It lies on the fabled Silk Route where travelers rested on their long journeys from Beijing to Constantinople. Located at 5,065 meters above sea level, this airfield is close to Siachen Glacier, where Indian and Pakistani troops face off. After 20 years of work, engineers also have built the 255-kilometer Darbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldie road that offers India far better access to the LAC.

India has been belatedly building its border infrastructure to match its Chinese counterpart. Naturally, the CCP wants to preserve its advantage. Ma Jiali, an India analyst at the China Reform Forum, a think tank affiliated with the CCP's elite Central Party School, blames the June 15 clash on India's "forward-moving posture" in the disputed area. He claims India's infrastructure development triggered a Chinese response.

Second, Pakistan was incensed by India's fait accompli in Jammu and Kashmir but wishes to avoid a full-out war in response. For decades, China has maintained close relations with Pakistan, which it uses as a lever to pressure India. China's increasing pressure on India along the border is a way to help Pakistan meddle in Kashmir, and both China and Pakistan want to make India pay some price for its unilateral action.

Third, China is always touchy about Taiwan. Under Xi, Beijing has been increasing pressure on Taipei and on all other nations to hew to

China's claims to Taiwan. In May, two Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) members of parliament virtually attended Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen's swearing-in ceremony. This was an affront to the CCP's "One China" policy.

Fourth, India opposed the BRI last year on the grounds of territorial sovereignty. The Doklam confrontation in 2017 occurred when India did not attend the first BRI summit earlier that year. In 2019, not only did India categorically oppose BRI, but it also won American support for its stance.

Fifth, India has questioned China's suppression of information and China's influence on the World Health Organization (WHO) in the global spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Indian health minister is now the chairman of the WHO's executive board. So, India's stand and comments on the pandemic gall China.

Sixth, India has made noises about attracting manufacturing away from China in the post-COVID-19 world. It has made a big deal about a higher trust factor. It is a democracy with a free press. It has a multidecade experience of peaceful transfer of power through the ballot box, and foreign investment has lower long-term risk. China is particularly sensitive to this argument.

Why Is the Asian Teapot Boiling Again?

On the Indian side, New Delhi has grown tired of Beijing undercutting it repeatedly. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has met Xi 18 times. He has visited China five times, more than any other prime minister in the past. Modi has personally invested in a good relationship with Xi. Now, critics are painting him to be another Nehru. China's actions have inflamed Indian public opinion. Modi has no option but to stand up to the Middle Kingdom.

India also sees China's behavior on the LAC as yet another betrayal. Over the years, the Chinese have been developing their infrastructure on the Tibetan Plateau as well as the LAC, expanding their operations and following salami-slicing tactics to claim more territory. In the words of Ashley Tellis, the Chinese have been

"singularly mischievous" not only by gobbling up strategic territory on the LAC but also reneging on their commitment to exchange maps that define each country's positions. Since last year, China has also belligerently backed Pakistan in international forums against India's policy in Kashmir — an issue as sensitive for India as Tibet is for China.

There is another matter that irks Indians. All sorts of Chinese goods flood the Indian market, from active pharmaceutical ingredients to cell phones. As a result, China had a significant trade surplus of over \$58 billion with India in 2018, accounting for 16% of China's 2018 overall trade surplus. Only the US and the EU account for greater shares of China's trade surplus. Indians feel they have contributed to making China richer only to be maltreated again. All these events have occurred at a time when the Indian government has adopted more clearly nationalistic policies than at any time since India won its independence.

Over the last few years, India has been going through a democratic version of a political revolution. After decades of dominance, the Congress Party led by the Nehru family lost power in 2014 and was replaced by the Hindu nationalist BJP. It believes Hindus have been soft for centuries, and numerous invaders have taken advantage of them. The BJP disdains the Congress for being soft on national security. It has promised to end decades if not centuries of national diffidence. Modi, who styles himself as a strongman, has claimed to have a 56-inch chest. His willingness to use military force against Pakistan has made him wildly popular and contributed to his resounding reelection in 2019. Modi has brilliantly tapped into a new mood of nationalism. Hindu India no longer wants to roll over when invading armies appear. To maintain its winning brand, the BJP must appear strong, so it wants to fight back. Hence, a call to boycott Chinese goods has proved immensely popular.

Partly in response to public sentiment, the Indian government has restricted Chinese investment, and Indian Railways has canceled its

contract with a Chinese company. It has banned 59 Chinese apps, including TikTok, Helo and WeChat. Global Times estimates the total number of active users of the 59 Chinese apps in India to be over 800 million, with TikTok alone claiming an estimated 120 million. This ban is a big blow, and a bigger one may be about to come. India might soon bar Chinese 5G equipment and join the US in checking Huawei's global ambitions. China cannot be too pleased.

Some say that India's trade war on China was long overdue. Chinese firms had access to cheaper capital, government subsidies and other unfair advantages, dumping its cheap goods in India. While India opened its market for goods where China has an advantage, the Middle Kingdom never reciprocated for services where its southern neighbor is a better choice. The trade war will cut India's trade deficit, force it to focus on manufacturing instead of the opiate of cheap Chinese goods and perhaps emerge with more robust domestic industries.

This argument has some merit but overlooks the pain, even if only short term, that the Indian consumer will experience as a result of higher prices of everyday goods such as cell phones and nail cutters. Furthermore, it ignores the fact that Chinese investment in Indian startups grew from \$381 million in 2016 to \$4.6 billion in 2019. India is short on capital, and cutting off a growing source of capital will hurt. Yet China will suffer too because it is the country running a trade surplus and, if China keeps turning the screw militarily, India will keep responding economically.

What Happens Next: Trade War, War or Peace?

Many believe that the two nuclear-armed neighbors could not possibly go to war. The threat of uncontrollable escalation is appalling. Others think that India is no match to China. India's GDP is just under \$3 trillion and China's has crossed \$13 trillion. India's per capita GDP is a little more than \$2,000, while China's is a bit under \$10,000. When it comes to defense, India's

budget this year is about \$57 billion while China's is almost \$179 billion. In a long war, Chinese economic might, industrial production and defense superiority would guarantee victory.

The Belfer Center of the Harvard Kennedy School and the Center for a New American Security (CNAS) make a different argument. India has an advantage in the air because of superior aircraft, better bases and greater combat experience. Chinese air bases are at high altitudes in Tibet and Xinjiang. Their fighters can only carry half their fuel and design payload. Furthermore, geographic and weather conditions are difficult. Indian jets can take off from bases at lower altitudes in better conditions.

Many soldiers and intelligence professionals in Israel, the UK and the US have a similar view to the Belfer Center and CNAS. So do Indian military men who are confident that 2020 is not 1962. India has fought low-intensity conflict for decades. Its infantry is battle-tested, seasoned and hardened. Its officers lead from the front in keeping with their British colonial tradition. With their rural roots, Indian soldiers are tough, hardy and brave. India's all-volunteer army is professional and well trained, which does not suffer from political interference. Also, modern wars between sophisticated militaries may be of higher intensity but shorter duration than past wars, given changes in the technology of weapons and doctrine. That may give India an edge.

In contrast, the PLA suffers from politicization. Loyalty to the CCP is often more important than mastery of warcraft. Many soldiers are conscripts and have little combat experience. Their performance under pressure and the ability to take casualties is untested. Furthermore, conscription and corruption often damage morale. Officers in the PLA tend not to lead from the front.

The last time China experienced conflict was in Vietnam. In 1979, David gave Goliath a bloody nose. When it comes to 1962, however, there is an argument to be made that China was David. At that time, it had just experienced a

terrible famine. India was faring better economically, and its top officers had been trained by the British. Like the 1979 Vietnamese forces, the PLA of 1962 was battle-tested. It had the experience of the Long March, combat with the Japanese, the conquest of Tibet and war in Korea. The fervor of the revolution still ran strong in 1962 and Chinese soldiers were willing to die. That fervor has abated in 2020.

It is on sea where India commands the most advantage. Its navy has been the most professional of India's three armed forces. Its size is small and the scale of its operations is limited. However, it has one major geographical advantage. The Strait of Malacca lies within striking distance. It is here that India could cause China most pain, severely disrupting its energy supplies. To escalate the decades-old border dispute to the Malacca Straits, however, would have powerful national and global repercussions, and is hard to imagine. Yet Mars is known for his fury, not his judgment.

China's aggression on the border demonstrates a staggering lack of understanding of its southern neighbor. This is a classic error in diplomacy. The BJP, India's ruling party, and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), its parent organization, have constantly viewed Pakistan as India's mortal foe. Buried deep in their consciousness is the memory of Islamic invaders sacking temples, seizing women and imposing jizya, the infamous poll tax that Hindus paid their Muslim rulers until the 18th century. The BJP and the RSS have never seen China as a foe. Culturally, they see the Middle Kingdom as a kindred civilization and would prefer trade over war with it. Some even dream of adopting China's Xinjiang policy in Kashmir. The CCP has been unwise in alienating, instead of cultivating, the BJP and the RSS.

The CCP might have overestimated India's internal weaknesses. Protests are common in India's rambunctious democracy. Demonstrations against a new citizenship law continued for months. Riots broke out in New Delhi during Donald Trump's visit. COVID-19 is spreading

fast as the economy continues to shrink. With 50% of the population under 25, protests could have erupted against the government. Instead, an enemy at the gates has unified a nation and given its people purpose.

From COVID-19 to border transgressions, many Indians now blame China for everything, and a significant number of nationalists want to go to war with it. Ominously, the government has permitted ground commanders to use firearms in "rare" cases. The 1996 agreement not to use firearms or explosives at the LAC stands suspended.

On July 3, Narendra Modi has given a rousing speech to troops on the border. He has declared an end to the era of Chinese expansionism, vowed not to cede an inch of territory and saluted "Mother India" as well as the mothers of valiant soldiers. Using a Sanskrit phrase, "Veer Bhogya Vasundhara," which literally means "the brave enjoy the earth," Modi evoked Lord Krishna and declared India was ready for war.

Despite rising nationalism and angry public sentiment, both countries know that war would be expensive. They would lose blood and treasure. Both have lost face during the recent border tensions. The Chinese have gobbled up territory Indians believe to be theirs. In response, the Indians have given the Chinese a bloody nose in a brutal brawl. Since 1962, tensions have never been higher. Han and Hindu nationalism have come face to face. Yet peace is still possible. It would involve a quid pro quo of the sort Zhou proposed to Nehru in 1960 in closed rooms over endless cups of tea.

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The Future of the Iran Nuclear Deal

Elif Beyza Karaalioglu
October 19, 2020

For nuclear nonproliferation, the remaining parties to the JCPOA must continue with constructive dialogue to help keep the deal alive.

The future of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) — the Iran nuclear deal — is uncertain. In the absence of US leadership, representatives of the United Kingdom, Germany, France, China, Russia and Iran met on September 1 in Vienna to discuss the accord.

The deal, which imposes limitations on Iran's civilian nuclear enrichment program, was agreed in July 2015 between the Iranians and the P5+1 group — China, Britain, France, Germany, Russia and the United States — and implemented six months later. The deal was struck when the Obama administration was in the White House following years of negotiations. The JCPOA gave Iran relief from international economic sanctions in return for dismantling major parts of its nuclear program and giving access to its facilities for inspection.

Yet ever since Donald Trump was elected president of the United States in November 2016, the future of the JCPOA has hung in the balance. Trump made it a campaign promise to pull out of the Iran deal. He kept his word and officially withdrew the United States from the JCPOA in May 2018, saying the deal is “defective” and did not address Iran's ballistic missile program or its interference in the affairs of other countries in the Middle East.

Washington has since reinstated US sanctions on Iran and sought to penalize any nation doing trade with the Iranians, which has led to widespread criticism. In response, Iran has

resumed its uranium enrichment at the Fordow nuclear plant, which is banned under the JCPOA.

The events surrounding the Iran deal have seen their ups and downs, but one thing is for sure: The collapse of the JCPOA is in no one's best interest.

A Rocky Year

Several incidents have marked 2020 as a critical year for Iran. In January, the US assassinated Iranian General Qasem Soleimani in an airstrike in Baghdad, which led to a further escalation in tensions. In response, Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, said, “Severe revenge awaits the criminals.” The Iranians later revealed they would no longer comply with the limits set to uranium enrichment under the nuclear deal.

In July, a fire broke out in Natanz, Iran's enrichment site. The Iranian Atomic Energy Organization claimed the explosion was the result of “sabotage,” and officials further stressed that the incident “could slow the development of advanced uranium enrichment centrifuges.” Both the assassination of Soleimani and the explosion in Natanz have rocked the nuclear deal, which is standing on its last legs.

Making Promises and Breaking Them

The JCPOA is not the first international agreement the US has withdrawn from under the Trump administration. In August 2019, the US officially pulled out of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, an agreement signed by Washington and Moscow in 1987 that sought to eliminate the arsenals of short and intermediate-range missiles of both countries. Russia reciprocated and called the INF Treaty “formally dead.” Just months later, in May 2020, the US announced its decision to withdraw from the Open Skies Treaty, an accord that allows unarmed aerial surveillance flights over dozens of countries.

When it comes to bilateral agreements, the world has experienced challenges with enforcing arms control and nonproliferation agreements, particularly since Trump was elected. The New

Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) — which, despite its own uncertainty, is the last remaining arms control pact between the US and Russia — is one clear example. The fact that Trump wants to strike a new deal with Iran but is quick to pull the trigger at torpedoing international agreements — including the 2015 Paris Climate Accord — does not bode well for building trust with the Iranians.

Considering that US–Iran diplomatic relations are a nonstarter under the Trump administration, the result of the US presidential election on November 3 will be critical. President Trump has promised to reach a new deal with Iran “within four weeks” if he is reelected. If he wins, his administration would have to reshape its approach toward Iran in a constructive way to meet the timeline he has set. On the other hand, if Democratic nominee Joe Biden wins, his administration would likely rejoin the JCPOA, as well as seek additional concessions from Tehran. In a recent op-ed for CNN, Biden stated, “If Iran returns to strict compliance with the nuclear deal, the United States would rejoin the agreement as a starting point for follow-on negotiations.”

Biden served as the vice president under the previous Obama administration, which, together with the P5+1 group, negotiated the JCPOA back in 2015. Therefore, it is safe to say that the future of the nuclear deal might just rest on the outcome of the US election.

A Regional Arms Race

For now, however, the US withdrawal from the JCPOA has weakened the impact of the accord. More importantly, the near-collapse of the deal could have a direct impact on the next Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons Review Conference in 2021, potentially drawing criticism from non-nuclear-weapon states that may wish to pursue civilian programs of their own.

The JCPOA is not only important for global nonproliferation efforts, but also for stability in the Middle East. The complete failure of the deal would have severe implications. It would make neighboring countries feel less secure. As a

result, this would encourage not just states but potentially non-state actors — such as terrorist groups — to focus on developing nuclear weapons. This would lead to an arms race in the geostrategic Middle East.

Developing a civilian nuclear program is a long and expensive process that involves extensive oversight by international bodies. Therefore, while it may be an unlikely scenario, regional states like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates may think that nuclear weapons are essential for national security due to their rivalry with Iran and start building their own arsenal. The potential collapse of the JCPOA clearly has global ramifications that could be catastrophic for nuclear nonproliferation.

Sanctions on Iran

On August 20, France, Germany and the UK issued a joint statement saying they do not support the US request for the UN Security Council to initiate the “snapback mechanism” of the JCPOA, which would reimpose the international sanctions against Iran that were lifted in 2015. As the US is no longer a party to the JCPOA, it has limited influence over its enforcement. Therefore, the Security Council rejected the US move.

The Iranian economy was already fragile before President Trump withdrew from the JCPOA, and US-enforced sanctions are further complicating the situation. High living costs, a deep recession and plummeting oil exports are just the tip of the iceberg.

The Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX) is seen as an important mechanism to organize trade between Germany, France and Britain on the one side, and Iran on the other. INSTEX allows European companies to do business with Iran and bypass US sanctions. On March 31, these three European countries confirmed that INSTEX had “successfully concluded its first transaction, facilitating the export of medical goods from Europe to Iran.”

Although INSTEX can be helpful for Iran, US sanctions have dealt a fatal blow to the country’s

economy. According to the World Bank, Iran's GDP "contracted by 7.6% in the first 9 months of 2019/20 (April-December 2019)," mostly due to a 37% drop in the oil sector.

For the US, sanctions are a strategic way to deter Tehran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. Yet they can also be counterproductive. Iran is aware of the strategic benefit the JCPOA has for other states. This includes global and regional security. In this regard, the joint statement on upholding the nuclear deal during the recent meeting in Vienna came as no surprise. But if multilateral sanctions are reimposed, that could be the final straw for Iran. This may lead the Iranians to walk away from the JCPOA and up the game with its nuclear program.

Nuclear Nonproliferation

With all of this in mind, it is vital that the remaining parties to the JCPOA continue with constructive dialogue to try to uphold the agreement. Everyone benefits from the deal, and its success depends on each side's fulfillment of their responsibilities and commitments, particularly Iran's full compliance.

Most importantly, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action is necessary for the future of nuclear nonproliferation. If the deal collapses, then the world enters uncharted territory.

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25 Years On, The Dayton Peace Agreement Is a Ticking Time Bomb

Emir Hadzikadunic
November 20, 2020

If the perilous trajectory in Bosnia and Herzegovina is allowed to proceed unrestricted, the West needs to fasten its seatbelts and brace for impact.

Throughout Danis Tanovic's Oscar-winning film "No Man's Land," a viewer waits distressingly for the bouncing mine to explode below the body of Cera, an injured Bosnian soldier lying in a trench. The last moments of this antiwar satire do not capture a real ending for the story — or the Bosnian war: Cera was left behind motionless by the departing UN blue helmets.

Tanovic's movie also depicts the disheartened departure of a curious TV crew, hungry for breaking news. Unlike the UN peacekeepers, reporters were oblivious to the fate of the soldier left behind in a ditch. In a non-fiction plot, Bosnia and Herzegovina is kept equally alive and motionless with the real ticking time bomb that can explode and blow everything in the vicinity.

Two Paths

For a dozen years now, the Balkan state has been plodding along two gloomy paths, heading for a dangerous collision. On one hand, Russia's collusion with local proxies is destabilizing the liberal vision of collective security within the context of future Euro-Atlantic integration. Russia also continues to be the only state opposing the Peace Implementation Council (PIC) in Bosnia and Herzegovina and its steering board's communiqués, including the last statement from June 3 this year.

On the other hand, the Bosnian Serb-majority entity, Republika Srpska, is reversing the peace process while simultaneously courting Russia as

an ally. Its nationalism, kept away like a genie in a bottle due to pressure from the European Union and American unipolar dominance, has managed to free itself from captivity. Thus, the Serb member of the rotating Bosnian presidency, Milorad Dodik, once hailed as a “breath of fresh air” by former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, has held at least 10 official consultations with Vladimir Putin over the last several years.

During his second consecutive meeting with the Russian president in the midst of the 2014 Ukraine crisis, Dodik shared his unequivocal affiliation with Moscow: “Naturally, there is no question that we support Russia. We may be a small and modest community, but our voice is loud.”

This trajectory with opposing power dyads within the Bosnian state is often lamented as a nightmare for the Dayton Peace Agreement that put an end to the bloody Yugoslav War in 1995 and kept the country in one piece. Dayton is dead; Bosnia and Herzegovina is “sleepwalking” into another Balkan crisis; it is on the brink of collapse; its president wants to break up his own country; goodbye Bosnia and Herzegovina, welcome Republika Srpska’s exit — these are just some grim headlines that suggest nightmare scenarios.

However, most experts on the subject rarely discuss wider security dilemmas of this critical geopolitical divergence, namely the Bosnian Serbs’ effective breakaway from both Bosnia and Herzegovina and the West. Unlike the two times Russia played a limited hand effectively — and, as some would argue, defensively — in Georgia and Ukraine, the Kremlin’s subversion of Europe’s soft underbelly is essentially an offensive posture that possibly inflicts fatal damage on the already shaken Euro-Atlantic pillars: liberal order, Euro-Atlantic integrity and European security.

Should the EU fail to protect its mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, ensuing turmoil will eventually turn into a great-power rivalry. If the perilous trajectory in Bosnia and Herzegovina is

allowed to proceed unrestricted, the West needs to fasten its seatbelts and brace for impact.

Slippery Slope

The Bosnian Serbs’ secessionist direction is not a given, but the slope is a slippery one. A unilateral breakaway would effectively tear apart Bosnia’s postwar constitutional order of two entities, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska, and other political and institutional arrangements that have gradually restored peace and security over the last 25 years. The Serb secession would also signal an existential threat to the survival of a multiethnic state and the Bosnian people in particular.

Similar past attempts to impose Serb hegemony over Bosnia and Herzegovina in the early 1990s had disastrous consequences and resulted in more than 100,000 deaths, 2.2 million refugees and displaced persons, culminating with genocide in Srebrenica in July 1995. Since pro-Bosnian authorities in Sarajevo want to protect the liberal multicultural order and see the EU and the US as preferred allies, it is only natural for them to expect appropriate reactions from the Euro-Atlantic community.

On the other hand, a secessionist party would also face a critical struggle. Its immediate insecurity stems from the NATO-trained Bosnian army across the Inter-Entity Boundary Line (IEBL) that currently subdivides Bosnia and Herzegovina into two administrative units. As Republika Srpska’s political leadership largely opposes the liberal multicultural order and looks to Russia as a preferred ally, it would also rely on Moscow for political and military support.

Republika Srpska’s collision with a Bosnian-led government would probably escalate from threats and barricades along IEBL to larger-scale clashes that a small number of UN-mandated EUFOR troops will hardly deter. In a vicious cycle, Bosnia could eventually end up in pre-Dayton chaos that, in the early 1990s, also included the Bosnian Croat component and its own secessionist aspirations.

Serbia, which shares a long border with Bosnia and Herzegovina and nationalist sentiments with the secessionist movement, is probably the first contender to be caught in the Bosnian fire for both internal and external reasons. In its substance, patronizing Bosnian Serbs has continued since the time when Slobodan Milosevic was at the pinnacle of his power in the early 1990s. Patriarch Irinej of the Serbian Orthodox Church, for example, proclaims that borders between Serbia and Republika Srpska do not exist. Serbia's academics also view Serbia's national borders as temporary frontiers.

As Serbia's confidence grew over time, emboldened by the return of Russia to the Balkan theater and by China's global rise, Belgrade became more assertive in its behavior. Within months of the joint Serbian-Russian Slavic Shield military display in October 2019, Serbia's defense minister, Alexander Vulin, announced, among other strategic objectives, the intent to defend the Serb entity in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Serbia's new national defense strategy thus transcends national boundaries, marking a shift from defensive sovereignty to a more offensive approach.

At the same time, Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic is the only politician from the region, if not the whole of Europe, who has held more bilateral consultations with President Putin than Dodik. The Kremlin's transcript from the last meeting between Vucic and Putin on June 23 exposes Russia's views that two countries were developing "pragmatic but still very special and very good allied relations."

Structural Realities

What Serbia does in Bosnia and Herzegovina pales in comparison with a much larger geopolitical dilemma. For Belgrade, now is a turning point to choose a side between the liberal West and the authoritarian East. Its official policy of neutrality and simultaneous flirting with NATO on one hand, and Russia and China on the other, may no longer be sustainable. As the

rationale goes, other powers besides the United States, primarily Russia and possibly China (to a lesser extent), will enlarge their soft-power or military footprints in the regional subsystem sooner rather than later.

Other structural realities also encourage a more aggressive trajectory from Belgrade. First, Serbia has accelerated its military build-up at a faster rate than its neighbors. According to Global Fire Power, its current defense budget is almost twice that of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Northern Macedonia, Montenegro and Kosovo combined.

Second, Serbia's reliance on the Russian and Chinese military to balance neighboring NATO members such as Croatia, Bulgaria or Romania has also been reinforced. In 2019, Serbia received Russian donations of MIG-29 fighter jets, T-72 tanks and BRDM-2MS armored vehicles. A short deployment of the S-400 air defense system on Serbian soil also raised American eyebrows. This year, Serbia purchased, at Putin's suggestion, the Pantsir S-1 air defense system. It also bought CH92-A drones and FK-3 surface-to-air missiles from China and kept talking about new arms.

Third, Serbia can hardly benefit from the liberal European order in the Balkans except through EU membership, which seems to be a third-rate priority at the moment according to some academic voices in Belgrade. By siding with Russia and the Slavic Shield, however, Belgrade still aspires to redefine its borders, reclaim Kosovo (or at least part of it), possibly reestablish preponderance in Montenegro, Northern Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and, eventually, become a Balkan hegemon.

Turkey would also become entangled in the nightmare of a new Bosnian disorder. On one level, the foreign policy objectives of Turkey and other NATO allies are compatible with almost all critical issues in the western Balkans. Turkey maintains its policy that international borders of the newly independent states in the region, following declarations of independence by Montenegro in 2006 and Kosovo in 2008, have

become definite. In Bosnia in particular, Turkey is among 20 contributing countries of EUFOR, providing deterrence and contributing to a safe and secure environment. Ankara is also on the same page with the US and EU members in the PIC and its steering board's communiqués that Russia usually opposes.

On another level, Turkey projects its soft power throughout the Balkans, particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina, relying on historical, cultural and personal ties. This year, it allocated €30 million (\$36 million) to revamp and modernize the Bosnian armed forces. Turkey can also leverage its strategic partnership with Serbia to deter the latter from taking a more belligerent stance.

However, in the event of a collision in Bosnia, having military spending 10 times that of Serbia, Turkey would probably oppose Serbian offensive behavior in the region. Ankara also represents an important geopolitical substitute for the Bosnian people should the EU, EUFOR and NATO decide to abandon their commitments to safeguarding peace, security and liberal order in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Their immediate and complete withdrawal from Bosnia, which is less probable, would also invite other extra-regional actors to fill the vacuum, in which case power relations would inevitably become subject to reconfiguration and different visions for both Bosnia and Herzegovina and southeastern Europe would have to emerge.

This scenario could set Turkey and Russia on a collision course because Vladimir Putin perceives Republika Srpska and Serbia as natural, historic and strategic allies. At a minimum, the Turkish double track toward Russia would have to pass an additional test. At the same time, these two countries possess formidable mediation capacity with confronting parties in the Bosnian theater that some European powers would oppose on geopolitical — and the more liberal ones on ideological — grounds.

Our European Home

As Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov tweeted this summer, "Our common European home needs serious reconstruction if we want all of its residents to live in prosperity." The Kremlin, so the perception goes, seeks to reshape the liberal Euro-Atlantic order in Russia's image and for its own benefit. Second, Moscow is also interested in replacing the US-mandated hierarchic order in Europe with an unknown, but certainly more anarchic, multipolar structure. But Bosnia and Herzegovina is not on the Russian border, and its inclusion in the NATO structure does not pose any meaningful threat to Moscow.

However, Republika Srpska's secession from a country that lacks NATO's Article 5 mutual defense guarantee presents yet another opportunity for Russia to become more influential on the European stage at the cost of the Euro-Atlantic order.

At first sight, a local collision in Bosnia and Herzegovina would bear a striking resemblance to what transpired in Ukraine in 2013-14. Ukraine was forcefully divided along similar geopolitical and domestic lines between pro-European aspirations in Kyiv on one hand, and secessionist tendencies by the pro-Russian minority in the east on the other. However, Bosnia's instability is far more dangerous than the crisis in Ukraine for two structural reasons, largely ignored so far. First, in Republika Srpska, Putin's prospects are of the highest geopolitical value, namely having a loyal proxy ready to do Moscow's bidding, not in Russia's near abroad like Ukraine, but deep within the EU's external borders.

Second, Russia's penetration within NATO's eastern borders also challenges Pax Americana and a 70-year-old alliance system in Europe. The latter represents a deep incursion into the system protected and deeply rooted in American and European liberal values. In that context, the nature of Russia's disruptive behavior in Bosnia no longer remains defensive but becomes an offensive act against the West.

Some may argue that Russia's aims are less relevant. What matters is Moscow's capability to

project soft and hard power. In this regard, skeptical analysts largely question Russia's ability to challenge the United States in the Balkans. Their typical reference is domestic weakness and Russia's stagnating economy, with an annual GDP that is smaller than Italy's. However, other great power credentials such as its sheer size, nuclear weapons capability, vast natural resources and an impressive cyber weapons arsenal enable Russia to punch above its weight on the world arena, keeping Europe and NATO vigilant.

As Russia has shown with the annexation of Crimea in 2014, it won't shy away from using its extraordinary military readiness for limited ends without fear of unintended consequences. Eventually, it was effective at projecting military power in areas where the Euro-Atlantic community was reluctant to do so. Bosnia and Herzegovina, vulnerable as it may be, provides an easy target for Russia, offering Moscow the best chance to keep the West in retreat.

Opposing Power Dyads

This trajectory with opposing power dyads within the Bosnian state brings challenging dynamics for the European Union too. From the inside, the EU's multitasking operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina would have to pass their stress test. From the outside, likely incursions of other illiberal powers in Brussels' backyard would ostensibly place the two opposing sides on a collision course.

A major dilemma for the EU lies between a strong multilateral reaction to protect a collective peace-building legacy and unilateral moves by individual member states to pursue their national interests. The EU's first viable option would be to increase EUFOR's symbolic military mission to protect order and address the grievances of local communities. As Kurt Bassuener wrote in *Foreign Affairs* last year, the current mission can't defend itself against any growing uncertainty with "an institutional fig leaf of 600 troops," "much less fulfill the mandate of the Dayton accords."

Should the EUFOR contributing states strengthen their capacity and act decisively within NATO's interoperability mechanisms, the Bosnian crisis would probably not escalate. In this regard, EUFOR's annual military exercises — which airlift reserve forces and combine them with EUFOR's permanent troops, armed forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina and local law enforcement agencies — are of critical importance.

An alternative scenario with dire consequences would be to evacuate EUFOR troops from Bosnia altogether. This is what happened when the Dutch battalion, under the jurisdiction of the United Nations Protection Force, pulled out from Srebrenica in July 1995, mocking the UN resolutions on safe heavens and allowing Serb extremists — today convicted war criminals — to proceed unabashedly with genocide. Such a reaction would deprive Bosnia of European military presence and set in motion a rapid geopolitical change, allowing regional and extra-regional actors to take advantage and fill the vacuum.

If that happens, the ability of Brussels to extend stability and project soft power in the region would be severely weakened, if not completely diminished. This prospect, before long, compels particular EU member states that simultaneously live in two parallel worlds — one liberal and one increasingly illiberal — to make their final ideational preference. It also provokes complex and dangerous dynamics given opposing threat perceptions between those member states that border Russia and a few others that explore interest-based partnerships with Moscow.

Undercurrents of this anxiety might have already surfaced when French President Emmanuel Macron spoke of the necessity to reopen "a strategic dialogue" with Russia, tweeting that Russia was a "threat" but "no longer an enemy" and "also a partner on certain topics." Things may get extremely complicated if populist EU leaders choose to decouple from the US and the transatlantic security umbrella. Hungary's decision to permit the transit of

Russian military equipment to Serbia last year signaled an early warning that some member states are ready to circumvent common rules and jeopardize common security.

Hence, a powerful trigger such as a new Bosnian crisis would elevate Europe's threat perceptions to such proportions that the United States would have to rescue the alliance and its central position within it. This resonates with the poor historical record of the EU in conflict management in ex-Yugoslavia, despite much more favorable geopolitical realities in the early 1990s. With an exception of a short war in Slovenia, the EU demonstrated neither effectiveness nor capacity in preempting the bloodshed in 1991.

Eventually, European leaders failed miserably in Bosnia, prompting a peace treaty to be negotiated and drafted in the US rather than Europe. Should this failure be repeated, the third consequential choice for the EU will be to pass the buck on to Washington, in which case this regional small-nation turmoil would transform into a great-power rivalry.

Most Dangerous of All Moods

Addressing the US Senate on the American mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina at the end of 1995, then-Senator Joe Biden made a powerful statement: "Europe cannot stay united without United States. There is no moral center in Europe. When in the last two centuries had the French, or the British or the Germans ... moved in a way to unify that continent to stand up to this kind of genocide?" He went on: "I am not here to tell you if we do not act, it will spread tomorrow and cause a war in Europe or next year, but I am here to tell you within the decade, it will cause a spread of war and a cancer and the collapse of Western alliance."

Human agency aside, structural forces would also be at play and would likely determine Washington's preferred move. First, the US is still — by all realist and neorealist accounts, such as annual defense spending, global GDP share, population growth rate and geography — more

powerful, wealthier and more influential relative to any potential competitor in the international system. Even by the logic of those who support a more restrained foreign policy, with US primacy still intact in Europe, American policymakers would continue to be attracted to liberal hegemony and more so to the existing grand strategy in the European subsystem where the US is not only unchallenged but is largely accepted as benevolent.

The US is also a rational actor that makes calculations regarding its position in a changing regional and international order. Washington understands well that Russia's unchecked incursion so close to NATO's eastern border would damage American-led liberal order and alliance structure and, at the same time, change the regional — and possibly even the European — balance of power to the detriment of the United States.

This brings us to what the historian Michael Howard calls "the most dangerous of all moods," in which the US would not accept a relegation "to the second rank" in the European subsystem. So far, no US administration has shown any intention to leave Europe as a vital area of America's global footprint in which it had invested a vast amount of blood and money over the past century. In reality, US military presence has essentially increased in Europe in recent years, bringing in more troops, investment and exercises.

The US military also supports the peace-building process in Bosnia and Herzegovina. On this 25th anniversary of the Dayton Accords, it conducted a bilateral air support exercise with Bosnian military forces using two F-16 fighter planes. So, locking, loading and bombing the party that disrupts American-led order in southeastern Europe on Russia's behalf is not only possible, but could even become probable.

Great powers usually do not show much interest in fighting over the squabbles of small nations. However, history is full of exceptions, when minor disputes over isolated issues have dragged great powers into quagmires.

Interestingly enough, such regrettable dynamics are best illustrated in the Balkans. A minor dispute in 435 BC between the city-state of Corinth, allied with Sparta, and the city-state Corcyra, allied with Athens, soon led to a larger conflict, eventually trapping the great powers of Athens and Sparta into the Peloponnesian Wars that devastated the Athenian empire, exhausted Sparta and shattered the cultural landscape of Ancient Greece.

What took place in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914, was another striking incident that triggered a chain of adverse reactions that set the whole of Europe, and then the world, on fire. Bosnia and Herzegovina is again a danger zone on the European geopolitical map where competing opponents face the pressures of being bogged down in protracted rivalries due to rapidly shifting power dynamics. Such settings create a space for a modern-day Gavrilo Princip to fire his bullet and trigger a chain of regrettable events.

Hence, not stemming the Serb breakaway from the Dayton mandate, from both Bosnia and Herzegovina and the wider Western liberal order, would be tantamount to allowing a ticking time bomb to go off. Paradoxically, this threat comes at a time when the Balkan region has a good chance to institute a viable order, secure lasting peace and fulfill its Euro-Atlantic aspirations. The decision is there for the taking.

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Turkey Must Be Held Accountable for Its Abuse of Syria's Yazidis

Philip Kowalski
December 9, 2020

While the 2014 Yazidi genocide in Iraq brought attention to the group and spurred a US military intervention, Syrian Yazidis remain ignored.

An August report by the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) on the Turkish occupation of northern Syria did not mince words, testifying that there has been a dramatic increase in killings, kidnappings, unlawful transfers of people and seizures of land and properties by the Turkish military and its local Syrian allies. Yet while all segments of northern Syrian society are suffering under Turkish occupation, it is the Yazidis who are most disproportionately affected.

The Yazidis are a non-Muslim, Kurdish-speaking religious minority native to Syria and Iraq. The existence of the Syrian community, numbering roughly 10,000 members mostly along the Turkish border and the city of Afrin, is severely endangered by Turkey and its allies. According to Dr. Sebastian Maisel, author of "Yezidis in Syria," "although there is an Afrin community that goes back to almost thousands of years, this is now erased with the removal of all Yazidis from Afrin" due to Turkey's attack of the city in 2018.

Those who have not been fortunate enough to escape the Turkish occupational zone have suffered severe abuse by the Turkish military and its Islamist allies, including rape and in some cases even enslavement. While the 2014 Yazidi genocide in Iraq brought attention to the group and spurred a US military intervention, Syrian Yazidis remain ignored.

Although the Yazidi community of Syria is small, the horrific abuses that it has suffered

under Turkish occupation are a microcosm of a larger story of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's increasing tendency to use military force to achieve his nationalist world vision — all while abusing his relationship with NATO, Europe and the United States by openly contesting, sometimes aggressively, the will of other member states in Libya, Iraq and the eastern Mediterranean.

Yet while Europe and the Trump administration have a habit of appeasing Erdogan, allowing near-total impunity for Turkish military operations in Syria, European leaders have begun to act against the rising threat that Ankara's leadership poses to regional peace. In April, Germany began its first trial to bring the charge of genocide against a former Islamic State (IS) member who took part in the trafficking and abuse of Yazidi women for crimes against the Yazidis. In May, the European Union's Genocide Network, established to coordinate member state action against perpetrators, began urging all EU members to prosecute former IS members within their borders as war criminals. This offers one possible model for how Turkish and Syrian abusers of the Yazidi population of northern Syria can be brought to justice.

In September, the Netherlands announced that it would hold the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad accountable for a wide range of human rights abuses, applying the standards of the UN Convention Against Torture in an ongoing effort to bring the case to the International Court of Justice (ICJ). If the Netherlands' attempt to hold the Assad regime accountable succeeds, it would open the way for litigation against Turkish abuses of the Yazidis in Syria. The ICJ route is important because neither Syria nor Turkey is a state party to the International Criminal Court, which can exercise jurisdiction over crimes only when the persons or location involved pertain to a state party.

The plight of Yazidis in Syria has not received as much attention as those of Iraq, but the UN report shows that the UNHRC is monitoring Turkey and its local allies. It may be that if the

conflict dies down, abusers and their ringleaders will attempt to relocate to Europe and reinvent themselves — as many former jihadists who fought in Syria have already done. Europe must not let this happen.

While the prosecution of war crimes that occurred in Iraq offers a possible blueprint to use against Turkey's local Syrian allies, holding accountable the ringleaders, particularly those high up in the Turkish government, may prove to be trickier due to Turkey's NATO membership. America's use of Global Magnitsky sanctions earlier this year against Chinese officials responsible for the abuses against the Muslim Uighur minority in Xinjiang offers one possible framework that Washington and Europe can use to hold Turkish officials accountable.

The Magnitsky sanctions against China served two purposes. First, they punished individual human rights abusers (as opposed to an entire country). Second, and perhaps more importantly, they drew international attention to the specific individuals and organizations that commit human rights abuses against Uighurs, helping to turn the Uighur struggle from a relatively obscure issue to a pressing moral question at the forefront of the global public's attention. The Magnitsky sanctions could help achieve similar results for Syria's Yazidis.

The time has long passed for Erdogan and his allies to receive any benefit of the doubt. The United States and Europe should impose Magnitsky sanctions on Turkish officials and consider moving to hold them accountable at the ICJ. Failure to act will only further embolden Erdogan and his allies, and send a signal to religious extremists that they can oppress vulnerable minority communities with impunity so long as they have powerful friends like Erdogan on their side.

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Are the Windsors the New Kardashians?

Ellis Cashmore
January 14, 2020

The queen agrees to a "transition" for Meghan and Harry — but what are they transitioning to?

You can understand Meghan Markle's frustration. There she is, half of one of the most illustrious, acclaimed and renowned couples on the planet. Practically every time she switches on the TV, she's reminded of what could be.

"All that money, publicity and influence — and what do they actually do?" Meghan might ask herself. "Sit around eating salads and talking about fad diets. And do you know how it all got started? A sex tape. We're royals! Not just any old royals either. We're the Windsors, for fuck's sake!"

Then, as if some celestial life force was listening, Uncle Andrew surged into the world's headlines at the center of a sex scandal like no other. When Virginia Roberts Giuffre accused the duke of York of having sex with her years ago, when she was underage, she detonated a charge with explosive power far greater than Kim Kardashian's sex tape.

That fateful tape propelled Kim and, later, her extended family, straight into our collective consciousness and ultimately turned them into the most influential family since the Borgias. Worlds are made and destroyed as a result of a remark from the family. I mean consumer worlds, of course. Their whims determine which products stay on the shelves and which ones move off at the speed of light.

Own Brand

We have no way of knowing whether Meghan Markle aspires to lead the Windsors to the same cultural plateau as the Kardashians. But, if she does, her timing is almost too perfect. Within four months of the apparent suicide in prison of Andrew's friend Jeffrey Epstein — a wealthy financier and convicted sex offender — Giuffre's damning allegations and Andrew's maladroit denial, Meghan and her husband Harry announced they were scaling back their royal duties and relocating (probably) to Toronto, though, I imagine, with plenty of time in southern California during the freezing Ontario winters. That doesn't mean they intend to transform into not-so-hidden persuaders à la Kardashians.

All the same, the revelation that, over the past several months, the duke and duchess of Sussex have registered commercial trademarks for more than 100 commodities, including clothes and magazines, does suggest they have a marketing project in mind. They've also registered the domain name *sussexroyal.com* and have been in talks with the likes of Givenchy. It appears that a brand — probably something like *SussexRoyal™* — is going to be the platform of the couple's attempt to extricate themselves from the British royal family and become "financially independent," as they put it.

Harry and Meghan's income currently comes from the prince of Wales and was, last year, thought to be about £5 million, or just over \$6.5 million — a decent wedge for most people, but small change compared to what it might be in a few years if the project proceeds. Celebrity couples, in particular, seem to mesmerize markets. Victoria and David Beckham, for example, have built a merchandising and marketing empire worth a billion US dollars. Kim Kardashian West and her husband Kanye West — often abbreviated as Kimye — are collectively worth \$295 million.

But will Buckingham Palace let it happen? Like every other living organism, the royal family has adapted to changing environments. Since the 1990s, it has been obliged to make

several rapid adjustments due largely to the conduct of Diana, princess of Wales. Compared to her one-time husband and other members of the Windsors, Diana was emotionally incontinent. Her 1995 interview with Martin Bashir — in which she confessed “there were three of us in the marriage so it was a bit crowded” — was one of the least restrained in royal history.

Diana was caught in a maelstrom of cultural change: Private lives were being exposed by the media, and a new generation of celebrities was able to capitalize on public fascination for any details, no matter how trivial, of the lives of others. Diana was part of the change and helped drag the royal family into the whirlpool. Queen Elizabeth II and her family have been struggling to swim to safety ever since. Recent lapses of restraint have excited some commentators into predicting the most serious constitutional crisis since 1936, when Edward VIII abdicated and married an American commoner, Wallis Simpson.

Consumer World

Since Diana’s death in 1997, our fascination with celebrities has grown, and a consumer world — in which any recognizable face can name a product and persuade us to buy it — has been fully realized. No one doubts that, if Harry and Meghan push ahead with their project, they could mobilize their social media accounts, images and endorsements in a way that would rival the Kardashians. But there is an obvious difference.

Unlike the Kardashians, who are enthusiastically and expertly managed by the sisters’ mother, Kris Jenner, Harry and Meghan have an altogether different woman as their head of family. Queen Elizabeth is known to adopt a policy of “say nothing” to minimize difficulties in such situations. Her displeasure with Diana was barely concealed, so her reaction to Diana’s son’s new venture is predictable. She may even exact a brutal retribution, stripping Harry and Meghan of their royal highness designation. It would be excruciating for the queen to witness an

official rank used as a gimcrack method of selling merch. So it’s unlikely she would stand by and watch her family being — to use a term of today — monetized.

Where some of us see a moneymaking project, others see a couple desperately escaping a racist British population buttressed by an equally racist media. This is an interesting hypothesis, but there is little hard evidence — just unsubtle hints, perhaps — that the traditional broadcast or print media have cast racist aspersions. Social media is different, of course. In this lawless domain, racism flourishes. But how does a move west address this?

Harry and Meghan may not be trying to recreate the Kardashians, but, let’s face it, celebrity culture is nothing if not capricious, and Kim and the others have held sway at the top for over a decade — “Keeping Up With the Kardashians” first aired in 2007. I’m sure HaMeg (excuse my premature celeb contraction) won’t chase a reality TV deal or go viral with lip-enhancing techniques, as Kylie Jenner did in 2015. And, while there’s been talk of a TV show deal, it would seem crass of Meghan to jump at this. At least at the moment: Down the road I surmise there will be plenty of well-paying TV appearances.

But I don’t think they’ll sit and listen obediently while the queen tells them to remember who they are and what they’re representing. Sometimes, the best policy in these matters is that no matter how preposterous and far-fetched something sounds, it could still happen. Keeping up with the Windsors is getting tougher.

***Ellis Cashmore** is the author of “Kardashian Kulture.”

How Zoom Can Make Videoconferencing More Human-Friendly

William Softky
April 12, 2020

The popular video-conferencing platform could be the world's first example of neuro-safe technology.

The good news about COVID-19 is that being forced into physical social separation and remote interaction is teaching people how precious real life is, and which remote technologies preserve reality best. Of those, videoconferencing has the most potential to do good, or harm, because it merges our highest-bandwidth external senses of sight and sound. The four biggest platforms — Skype, GoToMeeting, Google Hangouts and Zoom — are all tempted more by making money than by connecting human beings. Yet any technology will benefit humans only if it obeys the laws of nature governing how nervous systems interact.

I'm familiar with Zoom, and I believe it might pull this off. From what I've heard, almost uniquely in Silicon Valley, Zoom has a corporate culture, founder and workforce more people-centered than money-centered. So, uniquely, Zoom might be able to avoid the siren-song of giving customers what they say they want and instead give humans what nature says we need. Implementing that principle will require saying "no" to the short-term wishes of both customers and investors, and saying "yes" to nature's long-term plans.

In particular, operating Zoom as a public utility optimally connecting human beings with each other — as opposed to optimally extracting revenue from them — will require principled commitments to audio fidelity, remote resonance, algorithmic neutrality, non-adversarial business models and videoconference etiquette. Lucky for

us, Zoom has already started on some of those projects. If this works, people will look forward to Zoom calls as "special," the way they used to look forward to long-distance phone calls back in the day. And global loneliness might finally, finally decrease.

Zoom is on the right track. Because of global work-from-home and school-from-home rules due to the novel coronavirus, Zoom's user base recently grew twenty-fold, from 10 million to 200 million, most of whom aren't even business customers.

I'm one of them. In the last weeks, I've participated in Zoom-enabled parties, yoga classes and meditations. Serving as a real-time gathering spot makes Zoom the closest to a global social lifeline we have, and the technology best poised to reconnect human nervous systems according to the laws of nature. (This conclusion might seem odd, given that I've spent the last several years stumping for non-screen human connection.)

Audio Fidelity: Stereo and Microtime

The challenge: Humans connect emotionally through unconscious timing signals that can't be noticed, digitized or monetized.

It is beyond question that the human nervous system creates perception and trust from ultra-high-precision interactions (see: Sensory Metrics of Neuromechanical Trust). Likewise, humans' remarkable abilities to hear where a sound came from depends on microsecond sound signals, as do our abilities to read emotional nuance. Those "microtime" signals are why LPs and copper-wire phones create so much better emotional experiences than CDs and digital audio.

These facts create three problems for Zoom. First, Zoom's core brand is not audioconferencing but videoconferencing, so people using Zoom naturally pay more attention to screens than sound, although they should do the opposite because sound is wired deeper into us than screens. Second, computer sound as digitized by cheap built-in microphones is nothing like the sound from a good freestanding

microphone. Third, while the sound from a good stereo microphone pair has much higher quality than from just one, Zoom's most recent software release paradoxically makes stereo sound harder to use. I hope that decision is reversed soon because audio connection synchronizes people better than video and stereo synchronizes better than monoaural.

My back-of-the-envelope calculations suggest that the single improvement of using stereo microphones, all on its own, would increase human re-synchronization at least tenfold, merely due to better audio signal quality. That solution is available to anyone for about \$20. There is one other semi-secret sauce solution — a proprietary analog circuit that approximately reconstitutes the microtime structure of the original source, even after that structure has been erased by digitization.

I have been experimenting with one such circuit courtesy of the patent owners (US 7,564,982). Most simply, this circuit measures the left-right channel microtime difference, amplifies it and re-inserts it into the headphones or speaker pair. To me, it sounds like the source is a living breathing person nearby, as if whispering next to me in the dark. That personal experience, along with biophysical understanding, tells me that such microtime amplification could improve remote connection dramatically.

Algorithmic Transparency: No Tracking or Photoshopping

The challenges: Enhanced self-presentation undermines communication, while eliminating tracking improves communication.

The baseline protocol for human communication was burned into our nervous systems way back in paleo times, before clothes and words. Everyone could see every inch of your body and hear your every grunt, and you couldn't do anything to stop it. Contrast that case of "too much information" with Apple's technology called "Facetime effects," the image-processing trickery providing extraordinarily

unnatural control over users' appearance, all the way to replacing oneself with a boring but attractive cartoon avatar.

The problem is that if everyone gets to hide parts of themselves, then no one gets any honest information, and authenticity degrades into mere performance, absent genuine signals. Cartoon communication isn't human communication, even if it's what each separate individual might like to do.

There was no privacy in paleo times, but also no recording and tracking. Paleo people didn't even have words or cave paintings to record anything, much less up-to-the-millisecond biometric data including your gaze, heartbeat, skin temperature and anxiety level. Humans communicate most naturally, and trustingly, when they know they are not being recorded. Zoom has already been in trouble over privacy concerns, and it has responded by disabling invisible data-tracking and attention-tracking technologies.

On the visible user interface, Zoom is doing two things right and one wrong. On self-photoshopping, for example, Zoom allows only modest airbrush-like "touch up" effects, powerful enough to let someone feel comfortable enough, in close-up videos under bright lights, not to worry about makeup. Minor algorithmic makeup makes real facial expressions easier for everyone to see, so it's just the right amount. But self-photoshopping could go too far, for example, if customers were offered a powerful "attractive and engaged" appearance via paid algorithmic trickery. (Once a platform starts monetizing fakery, it's game over for an ecosystem of authentic communication).

Zoom users can also airbrush their backgrounds, using a virtual green-screen to block views of messy kitchens. That means you don't need to clean up the house before your call, which is also just the right amount of user-control. Unfortunately, Zoom allows users to replace messy kitchens with moving backgrounds, such as flames, which on the Zoom interface distract horribly from the grid of tiny,

barely-visible human faces (in front of the flames) that I'm trying to look at. Gratuitous moving backgrounds are a perfect example of how a legitimate preference of one user undermines communication for everyone.

Remote Resonance: Winner-Takes-All Audio vs. Symmetry

The challenge: Unlike "presentations" (such as webinars) in which one person talks and everyone else listens, human social resonance requires all-to-all transmission of subconscious signals.

Zoom's current platform is designed for broadcast. When one person speaks, that sound stream is automatically selected for everyone to hear, while all other microphones are automatically muted. That's the perfect solution for one-way communications.

But humans are two-way because we resonate. Or at least we try to. On my Zoom-enabled "group meditation," I attempted to lead a minute's worth of what primatologists call co-vocalizing, or what yoga people call "OM-ing." I would chant a long vowel like "ahhh... ohhh... mmmm," and in principle the others would hum along. But it didn't work. First, I couldn't hear them because, of course, their microphones had been turned off while I was humming the sound.

But, weirdly, they couldn't hear me either. It turns out that Zoom's audio algorithm only detected a long, boring hum from my own microphone, decided the hum was background noise and then canceled it. So, my fellow meditators saw me with eyes closed and open mouth, yet they heard nothing. My own humming sound had been automatically erased. So much for interpersonal resonance.

A solution promoting resonance would be for Zoom to include a "resonance mode," in which everyone's microphone is on just a little bit, with no single sound stream dominating. The exact opposite of the current default, and for the exact opposite purpose: for unifying and synchronizing vibrations instead of separating spoken words.

I am collaborating with one team dedicated to human sonic resonance, the people running the Integratron "sound bath" center in the California desert. We are hoping to find ways to link resonant experiences like their sound baths remotely using stereo audio, Zoom and the microtime amplifier circuit.

A Non-Adversarial Business Model

The challenge: When carriers like Zoom pay for variable bandwidth but collect fixed subscription revenue, perverse financial incentives reduce the bandwidth customers receive and thus damage human communication.

Communication doesn't need to be so bad. Over 40 years ago, even long-distance calls connected people well because voices were carried by dedicated copper wires the entire way, with an implicit service-level agreement of microtime phase fidelity. That was expensive, so Ma Bell invented computers to digitize and packetize voices, thus birthing much of the computer revolution. I was there: In 1985, during "divestiture," I worked at ATT Bell Labs Murray Hill.

Once human bandwidth could be compressed into more cheaply recognizable packets, the race was on to minimize network bandwidth costs by ever-more-efficient voice compression. Unfortunately, that dynamic creates perverse network incentives to reduce bandwidth between communicating humans, although the humans themselves need as much bandwidth as possible. That incentive structure nearly guarantees that our (expensive) need for high-bandwidth interaction will fall victim to the network's ever-present need for lower costs.

To operate in the best long-term interests of human communication — as opposed to any short-term metrics, especially monetary ones — Zoom needs to establish a long-term revenue model designed to enhance human communication. That is, a model which provides as much bandwidth as people need, in the form they need it, with transparently auditable metrics to prove it's working. No one knows the structure

of such a business yet, but that's what innovation is for.

Better Videoconference Etiquette

The challenge: Human conversational habits evolved for in-person interaction and fail in various ways through screens.

Attending to screens for hours on end is really hard on us. It also doesn't work very well because screen interaction is so unnatural. The thousands-fold discrepancy between our high-bandwidth 3D needs and the puny trickle of pixelated "content" is why telecommuting is so hard. Our social instincts need to know who said what, who laughed and who stayed silent. On video calls, it's hard enough just to hear the words at all.

Here's one example of rules of the road (aka "etiquette") that might keep our conversations from crashing: stop looking at faces and concentrate on audio.

Here's why. At first, the video image of someone talking is the perfect way to recognize their face, mannerisms and mood, and to prove to yourself that this is a real live person talking. But once that truth is established, and you trust them, it makes more sense to close your eyes and listen to the words than to look at their face, because our circuits synchronize much faster on audio frequencies (milliseconds) than on screen refresh rates (tens of milliseconds).

Nature's rules for optimum communication tell us to start with video, then move to audio while checking a face only occasionally. As long as everyone agrees on that solution, no one will even worry if you're not looking at them on-screen. And that reduced expectation of on-screen "performance," more than anything, will let people relax during video exchanges, which are one of the weirdest human interactions ever invented by humans.

Let's hope we learn how to use these weird tools right and that their makers make them right for us to use.

***William Softky** is a biophysicist who was among the first neuroscientists to understand microtiming.

Should Schools Rely on Ed Tech?

Criscillia Benford
August 12, 2020

The pandemic upended education as we know it. The ed-tech industry says its "innovative" products can ease our pain. Research says otherwise.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, schools closed their doors this spring, impacting the lives of 1.5 billion students around the world and sending teachers and school administrators scrambling to keep students connected to learning opportunities. To do this they deployed a range of old and new technologies, including radio, television, USB drives, CDs, cellphones, tablets, laptops and even paper packets. Some called it "crisis schooling," and rightly so.

Crisis schooling surfaced an always-important yet little-discussed fact about so-called brick-and-mortar schools: As physical spaces, schools provide far more than academic instruction. When children attend school, teachers and other support staff have an easier time identifying abuse, neglect, psychosocial distress and suicidal ideation. Children interacting with peers and teachers in school have an easier time developing social and emotional skills. Schools also provide stability, reliable nutrition, opportunities for physical activity, special education services, and mental health and physical/speech therapy. And, of course, public schools are safe, free settings for child care.

As I write, schools worldwide are developing their learning plans for the fall, and they are facing immense pressure to resume in-person

instruction. The United Kingdom's Royal College of Pediatrics and Child Health has warned that keeping schools closed "risks scarring the life chances of a generation of young people." A statement by the American Academy of Pediatrics reminds decision-makers that the "importance of in-person learning is well documented, and there is already evidence of the negative impacts on children because of school closures in the spring of 2020."

School closures pose particularly fierce challenges for families with primary care-givers who must work away from home, as well as families without homes. UNESCO affirms that disruptions caused by school closures "exacerbate already existing disparities within the education system" and are "particularly severe for the most vulnerable and marginalized" children and their families.

In some countries, schools remained open despite the COVID-19 outbreak, and more than 20 countries reopened schools just months after closing them. Researchers at Science magazine looked to schools in these countries for patterns that could indicate likely best practices for keeping students and school staff safe. What they found is not surprising: masks, smaller class sizes, hand washing, adequate ventilation, testing and physical distancing help reduce the spread of the COVID-19 disease in learning environments. And it appears that younger children are less likely to transmit the disease or become infected.

Yet despite this promising news, it is likely that many schools will remain closed or deploy a mix of in-person and remote instruction for the foreseeable future. There are many reasons for this, mostly having to do with space, planning, time, money and uncertainty. To follow physical distancing guidelines, a school would need access to more physical space, or mandate that students attend physical school in shifts. In many jurisdictions, schools still lack comprehensive plans for safely opening buildings, as well as the time and financial resources needed to implement such plans. And because there remains so much uncertainty regarding COVID-19, many parents,

teachers and staff believe that returning to school buildings is too risky to tolerate.

In the midst of our collective anxiety and grief, pixelated "vampires" have appeared. These dangerously virtual substitutes for physical schools, made glamorous by the ed-tech industry's rhetoric of innovation, efficiency and cost-savings, promise to save us from the disruption caused by the pandemic. All we need to do is invite them in. But please don't. I wrote this article to explain why.

What Is Ed Tech?

Education technology — known as ed tech — is a global industry serving the full spectrum of the education market. This includes pre-school, K-12, higher education, corporate/enterprise/continuing education, assessment and verification, and informal learning. Venture-backed ed-tech companies worth hundreds of millions of dollars are based in the United States, China, India, Indonesia and the European Union.

These firms sell content and hardware such as interactive whiteboards, laptops and tablets. They also provide software designed to mediate communication between stakeholders (e.g., students, teachers, parents, administrators), and they extract or accept hand-entered data in order to algorithmically manage student behavior and/or deliver algorithmically-generated reports, instruction and guidance. The poster vampire (ahem, poster child) of the industry is a software-enabled, data-driven (and sometimes gamified) instructional approach called "personalized learning."

What does gamified personalized learning look like in action? Personalized learning transforms teachers into guides on the side who assist students as they interact with YouTube-style recommendation algorithms that select assignments and determine when a student moves on to the next level of the curriculum. Gamified personalized learning seeks to increase student engagement through the incorporation of game-like elements, such as badges, avatars, storylines,

competitions, progression bars, “power-ups” and even the ability to earn in-game cash.

Products like these are being touted by advocates for the ed-tech industry as one-stop solutions to all COVID-related educational challenges. Dissatisfied with your school’s reopening plan or worried that physical schools are unsafe? Try virtual schools! Lack space for physical distancing? Try blended learning! Baffled by disengaged students with varying preparedness levels? Data-driven personalized learning to the rescue! Worried about your students’ psychosocial distress? Let tech-enabled emotional surveillance help with that! Facing budget cuts or teacher shortages? Let artificial intelligence (AI) teach the kids! Crazy by platform overload? Come buy! Come buy! Sounds great, right? Not so fast. While ed tech’s marketing rhetoric is appealing, its track record is dismal.

More often than not, ed tech fails to deliver on its promises to improve equity and learning outcomes. Many platforms ignore children’s real needs, and some may even violate children’s rights. Others simply waste (or even steal) funding that could have been used for more impactful initiatives. While anecdotes describing ed tech’s shortcomings abound, research seeking to understand the industry’s impact supports unfavorable individual verdicts: ed tech disappoints.

Since 2013, the National Education Policy Center (NEPC) has published an annual report documenting the growth of the ed-tech sector in the United States and examining the year’s research on virtual education. Each year, researchers find that full-time virtual schools and blended schools produce worse outcomes than brick-and-mortar public schools, and that industry claims regarding cost savings are not supported by available research. Research evaluating instructional models used by virtual schools and describing student experiences is sparse, and what is available is methodologically questionable and, in other ways, subpar. Accordingly, the NEPC recommends that

policymakers “slow or stop the growth in the number of virtual and blended schools and the size of their enrollments until the reasons for their relatively poor performance have been identified and addressed.”

NEPC researchers aren’t alone in their skepticism. A June 2020 report by McKinsey warns against “uncritically” accepting ed tech as a solution to COVID-related educational challenges, and it urges careful planning and preparation to increase the probability that an initiative will be successful. “These lessons hold true regardless of geography,” the report states.

The World Bank makes a similar claim in its “knowledge map” of the impact of information and communication technology (ICT) on learning and achievement. “In general, despite thousands of impact studies, the impact of ICT use on student achievement remains difficult to measure and open to much reasonable debate,” the bank states. Writing for the fifth volume of the “Handbook of the Economics of Education,” George Bulman and Robert Fairlie, who are researchers based at the University of California, Santa Cruz, state that evidence of ed tech’s effectiveness “appears to be strongest in developing countries” and the outcome depends upon the “characteristics of the intervention.”

So, what does a successful ed-tech intervention look like? Tusome, a USAID-funded program adopted by the Kenyan government and described in a 2018 article for *The Economist*, offers clues. Tusome means “let’s read” in Kiswahili, a Bantu language spoken in East and Central Africa and the official language of Kenya.

As an ed-tech intervention, Tusome consists of more than hardware and software. Tusome includes a custom-reading curriculum, custom books and detailed lesson plans. Human teachers deliver the lessons in physical classrooms, while coaches log information about the teachers’ and their students’ performances into the Tusome platform using a tablet. Coaching advice based on data entered by the coach is dispensed through the tablet. All entered and processed information

can be reviewed by the county offices that run the local schools. The program costs about \$4 per child a year, and research shows that thanks to Tusome, the portion of Kenyan grade 2 students who could read 30 words-per-minute doubled, rising from one-third to two-thirds.

Programs like Tusome succeed because they are designed to specifically address local educational challenges — in this case, insufficient teacher training, lack of teacher oversight and teacher absenteeism.

Ed-tech initiatives usually fail to live up to their hype. This is in large part because the characteristics of such initiatives are neither aligned with established research explaining how children learn, nor with local reality. Unsuccessful initiatives are hobbled by core design assumptions that are simply wrong for usage contexts, assumptions regarding things like cultural norms, relevance to existing curriculum, relevance to student experience, connectivity availability, available time on tasks, prior student knowledge and available teacher-training resources.

Consider, for example, the One Laptop Per Child (OLPC) initiative. Nicholas Negroponte, the founder of the MIT Media Lab, launched the program in 2006 with the intention of putting inexpensive but durable laptops in the hands of poor children around the world. “We will literally take tablets and drop them out of helicopters,” *The Economist* quoted him as saying.

The program got a lot of people excited. However, it was ultimately a failure in more ways than one. The laptops were more expensive and less durable than Negroponte had predicted, and his plan for selling them was blinkered by Western hubris and lack of global perspective. Most importantly, however, the OLPC laptops did not lead to improved learning outcomes in math and language, though such improvements were the declared objective of the program.

Negroponte’s initiative is a classic example of hardware dumping, a presumptuous and ultimately wasteful way of “improving” education through the introduction of technology.

Hardware dumping assumes that hardware and connectivity access alone will improve learning outcomes. Research and experience show that this is simply untrue.

Tech for tech’s sake in educational settings diverts money, time and attention from meeting the learning needs of students. Arguments supporting this approach wrongly imply that mere exposure to today’s technology will translate into tomorrow’s upward mobility.

The Los Angeles Unified School District learned the hardware dumping lesson the expensive way in 2013. The district introduced a \$1-billion initiative to give every student an iPad loaded with a curriculum developed by Pearson, a textbook and standardized test publisher. Before the roll-out period was over, students had figured out how to circumvent security locks, allowing them to exit Pearson’s walled garden and visit non-educational sites. The district eventually demanded a refund from Apple, citing what *WIRED* described as “crippling technical issues with the Pearson platform and incomplete curriculum that made it nearly impossible for teachers to teach.”

Michael Trucano, the global lead for innovation in education at the World Bank, decries hardware dumping in a 2010 article entitled “Worst Practice in ICT Use in Education.” Though the article is a decade old (ancient in internet years), it remains relevant. In addition to hardware dumping, three additional worst practices are particularly relevant to the COVID era.

First, it is common to assume technology alone can make equity issues disappear. Second, we are failing to estimate the total cost of operation of an educational technology initiative. This estimation ought to include not just the purchase price of hardware and software, but also maintenance costs, training costs and more, including a calculation of the difference between the cost per participant and cost per graduate. Finally, we are failing to ask what else could be done with the financial and other resources

potentially allocated that would have a greater impact on educational goals.

Let Them Eat Tablets

These are the kinds of questions that ed-tech advocates sidestep with rhetoric. Such rhetoric appeals to our collective desire to remain relevant in the future, our intuitive sense that something is deeply wrong with education in its current form, and our moral sense that all children have the right to a good education.

Consider, for example, how the following rhetorical pyrotechnics front-load the old saw that education today is outmoded while obscuring ed tech's other agenda items. First up, a few lines from a statement called "The Future of School" by the Center for Education Reform (CER), an ed-tech advocacy group based in the United States: "We must change the way we educate and in myriad ways strive to deliver education using the very technologies that are tracking and delivering our food, our supplies, and so many other necessities of life." (Translation: Education today is old fashioned. Let's update it by treating students like Amazon packages.)

A sponsored article in *Forbes* more directly connects the case for ed tech to the case for closing the digital divide, describing the internet as the portal to "new tools" for interacting with students in "new ways that both enhance the teacher's ability to teach and gives students the flexibility to learn in ways more suitable to the 24/7, always-on society we live in today." (Translation: Education today is old-fashioned. Let's update it so that even children regard the boundaries between online/offline life as blurred.)

Writing for *The Washington Post*, Jeb Bush, the former governor of Florida, suggests that if public funds intended to help schools become COVID-ready were instead used to pay for laptops and connectivity, "students would be better prepared for the learning platforms of college and the workforce. Teachers would be able to deploy more innovative and personalized instructional strategies." (Translation: Education

today is old-fashioned. Let's update it so that teachers can help children, no matter their income, become accustomed to taking orders from the kinds of machines that will sculpt their lives as adults.)

Such visions of the future give me goosebumps, and not in a good way.

Ed tech has long used rhetoric laced with technophilia and future-proofing to lay the groundwork for increasing its share of the education market. This rhetoric casts ed tech's products in a rosy light while simultaneously disparaging teachers, their unions and brick-and-mortar schools. Deploying such anti-teacher/anti-school rhetoric while the world still reels from COVID-19 to lobby for the use of public funds to further the industry's growth agenda — funds that could go to purchasing personal protective equipment (PPE), hiring additional staff to support physical distancing, and adopting other measures that would improve the safety of physical schools — reeks of disaster capitalism. As defined by activist and author Naomi Klein, disaster capitalism involves the use of "large-scale crises to push through policies that systematically deepen inequality, enrich elites, and undercut everyone else."

To be clear: I am not against closing the digital divide. What I am against is reckless profiteering, especially in the form of hardware dumping and a privatized version of public education that pretends to serve the needs of children while, in fact, invading their privacy, treating them like lab rats, impairing their academic achievement and undermining their development as humans.

Temptations to recklessness are great. The ed-tech industry receives little oversight and continues to grow, despite a history marked by startling amounts of waste. Moreover, as the 2019 NEPC report makes it clear, lack of regulation isn't the worst problem. To date, nobody has even imagined how to regulate the industry in ways that "will increase accountability, identify efficient and cost-effective best practices, and eliminate

profiteering.” Policies at the state, local and federal levels regulating the collection, use and storage of student data do not always align. Moreover, ed-tech companies know that schools do not always read terms-of-use statements closely, introducing yet another moral hazard. Effectively, the ed-tech industry operates in a 21st-century Wild West.

When people think about education, they see children and perhaps even themselves preparing for the future. When investors in the ed-tech industry think about education, they see “a critical source of human capital for global growth” and a large market ripe for digital disruption. Publicly-available estimations of the size of this market vary, from HolonIQ’s 2018 figure of \$5.9 trillion to TechCrunch’s 2019 projection of \$10 trillion. According to GSV Ventures, the ed-tech industry currently represents 2.3% of the global education market. Due to COVID-driven changes in market conditions, the ed-tech industry is now projected to capture 11% of the market by 2026 — up from a pre-COVID 4.5%. The pandemic is boosting the sector’s growth from 100% to 400%.

Why are venture capitalists so excited about the education market? In addition to the size of the market, there are several reasons, including scalability opportunities, a relative lack of competition (especially in mobile-first) and relative ease of identifying “pain points.” Business models vary. Most of us are familiar with freemium platforms that ask users of a free product to upgrade to a paid version. These platforms are used in a bottom-up strategy whereby the company pursues early adopters who then help market the platform by word of mouth. Expensive ed tech is usually part of a top-down business model, whereby a company’s products are marketed directly to the administration.

But when it comes to profit sources for tech companies — even ed tech companies — the elephant in the room is big data. Ed tech is an exciting sector because machine-mediated student/teacher relationships and student/curriculum relationships produce new and

valuable data resources. Of course, personalized learning relies on data extraction and analysis. However, educating children is only part of the picture when it comes to ed tech as a for-profit industry.

As students use ed tech platforms to learn, those platforms collect what author Shoshana Zuboff calls “collateral data.” Such data points might include (depending on the product) a student’s location, click patterns, dwell times, time to complete a task, browsing and search history, biometric data, photos, textual, and voice communication content and history — the list goes on. A given platform may collect 50,000 data points or more per student per hour.

In addition to feeding the platform’s recommendation algorithms, this data can be used to make informed budget decisions and “optimize” the platform. Most importantly, it can be used to inspire and guide the development of new, more futuristic platforms. That’s why, along with the new opportunities for data collection portended by future school closures, ed-tech investors anticipate the advent of highly-adaptive ed tech in the form of AI tutors, immersive games that teach subliminally, Hollywood-style educational videos, and even à la carte university degrees whereby students purchase individual courses from a predetermined group of separate online institutions.

What is unlikely to motivate investors is the selling of personally identifiable data for marketing purposes. Ed-tech companies don’t need to. (Although, Google used to mine student emails to sell targeted advertising, and other ed-tech companies have been caught abusing student data.) These days, there are more sophisticated ways to use big data.

Ed-tech companies don’t need to sell personally identifiable data to make big money because they can use the troves of aggregate data they collect to create and sell “prediction products” designed to forecast how children in a given demographic will think, feel and behave. Such forecasting products are useful to any industry seeking to maximize profit and minimize

risk — e.g., advertising, insurance, health care, entertainment, finance, retail, transportation. Hello, disaster capitalism! Meet surveillance capitalism.

When Children Become Users

I say surveillance capitalism. Ed tech says personalized learning. Rhetorically, the term personalized learning is meant to position recommendation algorithms that match students to learning material as an “innovative” solution to old-fashioned, clueless teachers who are unwilling or unable to connect with students as individuals with individual needs.

In addition to what it calls personalized learning, ed tech also uses gamification to solve what it imagines as problems caused by bad/overwhelmed teachers. Gamification is a type of persuasive technology that is player-centered, rather than user-centered. The term refers to the application of game elements and design principles to non-game contexts.

Together, the terms personalized learning and gamification allow ed tech to conjure visions of delighted, motivated students interacting with data-driven technology that knows what they need to learn and meets those needs in a timely fashion.

But here’s what’s really happening: Under the banner of “innovation,” gamified and data-driven personalized learning platforms are engineering the behavior of children. Gamified platforms are everywhere, not just in ed tech. They work similarly. Like any behavior-change app — from diet apps to social media platforms like Facebook — gamified ed-tech platforms create an absorbing human/computer interaction made all the more attractive by the dispensing of “rewards” on a variable schedule.

Variable reward schedules are a proven way to orchestrate the release of dopamine in humans and animals. Dopamine is the neurotransmitter that makes learning possible. It is key to goal-directed behavior, motivating us to act by helping us make associations between actions and outcomes. It is triggered even when we simply

anticipate a “reward” that we never receive, or when a reward is not as satisfying as we anticipated.

The behavioral psychologists and user-experience (UX) designers who work together to create gamified ed tech understand all of this quite well. They also know that human brains are wired to crave the instant feedback that gamified platforms provide. And they know that we humans — especially when we’re feeling uncertain or overwhelmed — are attracted to the explicit goals, objectives, and paths to mastery (e.g., “skill trees”) that characterize game-like learning environments.

Advocates for gamified ed tech like to imply that such platforms can help a student build self-esteem because they minimize the impact of “failure” while “rewarding” the completion of target behaviors and the adoption of target attitudes.

Researchers at Ohio State University found otherwise. Over time, students receiving a gamified curriculum felt less motivated, less satisfied and less empowered. No wonder. Engineering engagement through automated, instant feedback risks reducing intrinsic motivation by triggering what psychologists call the “overjustification effect.”

Enterprise/corporate ed-tech companies already incorporate into their pitches this understanding of the negative impacts of gamified platforms. They tell potential corporate clients that they need them, because younger workers have spent so much time on games and gamified platforms that traditional motivators don’t work on them.

Here’s an example of this kind of logic at work in a pitch that proposes gamification as a solution to (as well as a cause of) millennial demands for constant feedback. Here’s an example of that kind of logic at work in a pitch that proposes gamification as a solution to “bad parenting” as well as the millennial “need for engagement” and demand for constant feedback and fun in the workplace.

We can do better than rely upon gamified platforms to “engage” our children in school. It’s one thing to play a game for fun, or use a gamified informal learning app now and again. It’s quite another (and frankly a quite terrible thing) for schools receiving public funds to participate in engineering into students an intolerance of complexity, an inability to set their own goals and a profound need for external motivators. All students deserve an education that supports, rather than stunts, their intellectual and personal development.

Students understand this kind of critique. In New York, Pennsylvania, Connecticut and Kansas, students have organized to protest against the Summit Learning Program, an ed-tech platform developed by Facebook engineers and backed by the for-profit Chan Zuckerberg Initiative. In a letter to Mark Zuckerberg published by The Washington Post, students attending Brooklyn’s Secondary School for Journalism wrote: “Unlike the claims made in your promotional materials, we students find that we are learning very little to nothing. It’s severely damaged our education, and that’s why we walked out in protest.”

In her award-winning book, “Race After Technology,” Ruha Benjamin wrote: “[T]hese students have a lot to teach us about refusing tech fixes for complex social problems that come packaged in catchphrases like ‘personalized learning. They are sick and tired of being atomized and quantified, of having their personal uniqueness sold to them, one ‘tailored’ experience after another. They’re not buying it.” And neither should we.

Let’s Go Outside

Today’s ed-tech marketing taps into collective fears about sharing space with humans, as well as the frustration with the hodge-podge usage of technology that characterized many crisis schooling efforts. Yet there is a better path: Making use of outdoor space on school grounds, nearby land, public spaces (like football stadiums) or at home with guidance from schools.

Schools with plans to open full-time and those with plans for a mixture of in-person and remote instruction could walk this path.

Outdoor learning environments offer solutions to many COVID-related educational problems. Research suggests that COVID-19 is less likely to be transmitted outdoors. Other studies indicate that being outdoors reduces children’s stress levels and improves their motivation and wellbeing. Outdoor learning environments also provide children with much-needed opportunities for movement and play as well as a chance for place-based learning activities. Moreover, exposure to outdoor environments helps human brains stay in calibration because brains are optimized for high-bandwidth, three-dimensional, continuous-time processing of sensorimotor inputs. Outdoor schools can provide everything that brick-and-mortar schools can and much more.

Outdoor education is an old idea, traditionally practiced across Asia and Africa. It gained popularity in Europe and North America during the tuberculosis epidemic of the early 20th century, spawning the Open Air School Movement. Schools were set up in repurposed structures, tents, prefabricated barracks and purpose-build pavilions. Some schools consisted simply of rows of desks outside.

Today, schools in Denmark, Finland, Singapore, New Zealand, Scotland, and Bangladesh have turned to outdoor learning environments as a way to meet COVID-related educational challenges. In Bangladesh, children have been involved in the redesign of their school courtyard for outdoor learning. That intervention was a success, improving not just the children’s engagement with the curriculum, but also their attainments in math and science.

In the US, outdoor learning tied to public schools could make up for the pandemic-driven loss of outdoor programs conducted by nature centers, parks and outdoor science schools. Facing budget shortfalls, many of these programs are in danger of closing. Those that remain open have plans to freeze subsidized programming,

scholarships, grants and fee waivers. It is estimated that by the end of the year, 11 million children in the US will have missed out on outdoor learning opportunities, about 60% of them from communities of color or low-income communities. Around 30,000 outdoor educators across the country have already lost their jobs. Advocates recommend that using public funds to redeploy these educators to K-12 public schools would be a boon to children and their families.

Say No to Vampires

Traditionally, schools have been oriented toward extrinsic motivators: grades, test scores, teacher approval, status, little prizes and rewards. When I was an elementary student, one of my teachers gave the student with the highest spelling score that week a tiny ceramic animal that my teacher had made herself.

Ed tech's gamified personalized learning platforms turbo-charge this strategy. In this sense, such platforms are not innovative at all. Rather, they are simply new ways to do old things — old things that don't work very well.

Pairing data-driven "personalization" with gamification is a quick fix solution to a problem that sits at the core of public education today. Groaning under the weight of high-stakes testing, today's public schools crush student excitement in learning for its own sake.

What if we did away with high-stakes testing? These tests have many problems, from baked-in cultural bias to an overemphasis on those curricular standards that are easy to test at the expense of less-quantifiable ones. What if we just got rid of them? Surely there are other ways to assess performance. High-stakes tests have already been canceled all over the world this year.

And while I am sharing my dream of public education truly reimaged, I would like to also pose this question: What if during this time of uncertainty and fast change, we, in our various localities, determined from the ground up the role that technology ought to play in our public school systems? By "from the ground up," I mean

asking students and teachers about their own technology use. How has tech helped them? How has it gotten in the way? I suspect the answers will surprise many.

It's time to shift the focus of education away from the needs of corporations (workforce needs and others) to the needs of children. What do children need to thrive? We know the answer. Children thrive when they experience shared attention, build life skills through developmentally-appropriate challenges, experience a sense of belonging, and are allowed to personally contribute to learning activities.

Let's help children thrive by making outdoor learning available in public schools. And let's not stop there. Let's help children thrive by hiring more teachers and support staff for our public schools. Let's help children thrive by giving teachers the support they have asked for to translate live, onsite instruction to remote instruction. That support need not take the form of an ed-tech initiative. It can take the form of training, increased time for planning and uniform policies regarding what remote instruction should look like.

I realize all of this will cost money. But then again, so does ed tech. Let the vampires go to the workplace. Don't invite them into our schools.

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Sex Abuse Is the Moral Downfall of the Catholic Church

Hans-Georg Betz
November 27, 2020

The avalanche of revelations about sexual abuse in the Catholic Church has severely undermined its authority, especially when it concerns matters of morality.

My mother passed away a few years ago. She spent the last years of her life in a home for the elderly in a small town in Bavaria, where she and my father had spent most of their lives. In their younger days, both my parents were devout Catholics, initially taking at face value what the church taught. Later on, confronted with the daily hypocrisy and outright nastiness inherent in the institution, they gradually distanced themselves from the Catholic Church, disillusioned, disenchanted, if not worse. But that is a different story.

I myself spent eight years in a Catholic boarding school, initially with great enthusiasm, in later years increasingly disenchanted, seeking to get out. My parents would not hear of it, for good reasons which had nothing to do with the Catholic Church. I stuck it out until I was old enough to transfer to a different school.

A few months before my mother passed away, during one of my last visits with her, she suddenly, out of the blue, asked me a question that initially stunned me: “Why were you so eager to leave the boarding school?” Her eyes were insistent, her voice sounded almost desperate, looking for an answer that would alleviate her concerns and anxieties. At the time, I did not understand. Only a few weeks later, when I recalled the incident, it dawned on me: My mother was afraid that I had experienced sexual abuse, that my asking for being allowed to leave the place was a plea for help, and that, by

refusing to take me out, my parents had been accomplices in abetting abuse.

I had the opportunity to alleviate my mother’s fears. I never experienced sexual abuse nor am I aware of any of my fellow students ever having been subjected to it. Yet this episode showed me to what degree the criminal behavior of legions of members of the Catholic clergy was causing mental anguish among ordinary believers like my mother.

Facing the Facts

Over the past few decades, the Catholic Church has been forced to face the facts in the wake of investigations that revealed the full extent of the depravity and corruption endemic to some of its institutions. In the process, once-eminent icons such as Pope Benedict’s brother, Georg Ratzinger, once the all-powerful director of the famous Regensburg Domspatzen (boys’ choir), have fallen hard. In some cases, even members of the Catholic Church’s gotha were convicted of crimes and sent to jail by worldly courts unimpressed by the status of the accused.

And yet, the McCarrick report recently released by the Vatican suggests that previous scandals have done little to bring about a fundamental change in the way parts of the Catholic hierarchy have been dealing with the question of sexual abuse that has fatally undermined the Catholic Church’s claim to represent a moral authority.

For those unfamiliar with the case, until his forced resignation in 2018, Theodore McCarrick was the cardinal of the Archdiocese of Washington, which encompasses the District of Columbia and surrounding areas in Maryland. This is of particular significance given that Maryland has an extensive history of Catholic settlement in the United States, dating back all the way to the 17th century. McCarrick was appointed cardinal of Washington by Pope Paul II, despite allegations that McCarrick had engaged in questionable behavior involving young aspiring priests — he slept in the same bed as seminarians.

Paul II did not believe the allegations. They reminded him of allegations against priests in his native Poland, promoted by the “communists” to discredit Poland’s Catholic Church. It was only under Paul’s successor, Pope Benedict XVI, that the allegations were taken seriously. But by then, it was too late.

By now it is established — and the report makes it quite clear — that Cardinal McCarrick has a long track record of sexually-inspired coercion, largely ignored and hushed up by the Catholic hierarchy, including the entourage of Paul II. As a result, as *The New York Times* recently put it, Paul’s image has been severely tarnished, his canonization (the elevation to the status of a saint) put in question. Pope Francis, under whose aegis the report was assembled, has made it entirely clear that he “Intends to rid the Catholic Church of sexual abuse.”

I, for my part, believe in his sincerity. The reality is, however, that he is confronted with a hierarchical structure which, in the past, has gone out of its way to dismiss, downplay and cover up reports of abuses, if only to uphold the authority of the church.

Absurd Theater

A recent prominent case is the absurd theater provoked by the Catholic Church of Cologne. Its cardinal, Rainer Maria Woelkli, had commissioned a law firm from Munich to investigate allegations of sexual abuse by priests in the archdiocese. The Cologne prosecutor’s office recently brought charges against one of them. He is accused of sexual abuse of his underage nieces in the 1990s.

Once the expertise was delivered to the Cologne archdiocese, it was kept under lock and key by the cardinal’s office, which charged that it was methodologically faulty and therefore useless. The real reason, critics suggest, is that the report implicates one of Woelkli’s closest aids, today archbishop of Hamburg, put in charge to make sure that the affair would be covered up. The result has been a perfect example of mutual recriminations and mud-slinging. Those opposed

to the way the diocese has handled the affair allege that Woelkli is more interested in protecting the perpetrators than the victims of abuse. In the meantime, church authorities have gone out of their way to censure and silence critics. A few days ago, they turned off the webpage of the archdiocese’s Catholic University Community, in charge of looking after the wellbeing of Catholic students at various universities in the region. The reason was, according to a Cologne newspaper, the community’s continued criticism of the “backward and evasive” attitude of Church officials with regard to controversial issues, including sexual morals.

In the meantime, the recent start of an official investigation by the Vatican has put additional pressure on Cardinal Woelkli. The investigation concerns a priest active in three dioceses in the greater Cologne area. Tried and convicted of sexual abuse of children and dependents, the priest had been sent to jail in the early 1970s. After his release a short time later, church officials reinstated him. In the late 1980s, he was once again convicted of sexual abuse. And, once again, he was allowed to continue his active service. It was not until 2019 that he was retired, most likely as a result of the expertise commissioned by the archdiocese.

In sharp contrast to the Cologne church authorities, the Diocese of Aachen, whose cathedral was the site of the coronation of German kings between 936 AD and 1531, recently announced it would no longer privilege the perpetrators of abuse — an independent report established numerous cases of abuse by priests in the diocese — over the rights of their victims. Unlike hushing up abuse, church authorities in Aachen launched a newspaper campaign asking victims of clerical abuse to contact church offices.

Not Draining the Swamp

What all of this suggests is that a significant segment of the Catholic hierarchy has absolutely no interest in “draining the swamp,” to borrow a

term from an entirely different source. The reality is that the avalanche of revelations about sexual abuse rampant inside the Catholic Church has not only severely undermined its authority to speak on matters of morals, particularly when it comes to sexual mores, but its authority in general. In late 2019, a mere 14% of the German population said they trusted the Catholic Church; 29% said they trusted the pope. In contrast, 36% expressed trust in Germany's Protestant Church.

You don't have to be a prophet to suggest that the most recent revelations about sexual abuse and the way these have dealt with will further tarnish the church's already dismal image and its moral authority. And for good reasons. The Catholic Church's position on homosexuality is a joke given the prevalence of homoerotic endeavors within the church itself. As Shakespeare put it so eloquently, the priest "doth protest too much, methinks."

The Catholic Church's position on birth control is also risible, given the fact we no longer live in an age where the survival of the tribe depended on replenishing its membership. Those who don't know what this means might want to read the story of Onan, famous (wrongly so) for being the father of masturbation. Onan's crime — in the eyes of the Lord — was not that he masturbated, but that he preferred to "spill his seed" outside of the vagina of his late brother's betrothed rather than fathering an offspring that would be credited to his dead brother.

Today, we are no longer subject to archaic tribal rationale. Yet the Catholic Church still pretends that we are. Unfortunately enough, President Donald Trump has managed to stuff the US Supreme Court with prominent legal minds stuck in a pre-Middle Age way of thinking. Most of them are Catholics, Amy Coney Barrett the most recent one. In a world where the moral authority of the Catholic Church has been debased to a degree that even in Poland, the home of Pope John Paul II, a mere 10% of young people see the Catholic Church in a positive light, with 47% viewing it negatively, the Catholic

Church and its representatives would do well to keep a low profile.

In reality, the opposite is the case. High-ranking Catholic officials continue to take the moral high ground while pretending that sexual abuse is negligible. As Arthur Serratelli, a retired bishop from New Jersey, put it last year, "Is the terrible crime of child abuse limited only to Catholics? Today's media would even have people believe that abuse of minors is becoming more frequent within the Church. Patently false. But, too often facts do not matter when a villain is needed."

Serratelli should know. During his time as an active bishop, the New Jersey dioceses were a hotbed of sexual abuse by priests. In 2019, New Jersey's bishops listed some 200 priests "found credibly accused of sexually abusing a child." To be sure, sexual abuse of minors is hardly limited to the Catholic Church. Quite the contrary. But given its claim to be the ultimate yardstick of moral authority, it should be held to the highest standards. The notion that the Catholic Church is not any worse than any other institution, as Serratelli implies in his defense of his own institution, does not cut it.

Luckily for the Serratellis and Woelklis of this world, Jesus is no longer around. As he once said, "If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea" (Matthew 18:6). Those concerned are advised to study Houdini. His tricks might come in handy.

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Britain's Commitment to Retaining the Spoils of History

Peter Isackson
December 17, 2020

Britain's most powerful Tory and the wealthiest Tory seem to share the same approach not only to contemporary politics, but to history itself.

This past weekend, The Guardian unearthed a story from the past that throws an oblique light on the present. It began with an odd couple and led to the creation of a real one. The odd couple is the American actor George Clooney and the current UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson. Their conflict aired in public at the time marks the origin of the making of a real couple: Clooney and his future bride, the human rights lawyer Amal Alamuddin.

In 2014, Clooney made a public statement about a controversy that had been raging for decades over the presence in London of what are called the Elgin Marbles or, more properly, the Parthenon Sculptures. These are a collection of ancient Greek statues and carvings removed from the most famous monument of ancient Athens by the Scottish aristocrat, Thomas Bruce, earl of Elgin.

This transfer of ancient artwork took place at the beginning of the 19th century, when the Ottoman empire controlled Greece. Lord Elgin was Britain's ambassador to the Ottoman empire, who clearly was more interested in Greek history and art than the Ottomans themselves. He requested permission to sketch the remains of what had been left in partial ruin and even obtained weakly formulated permission to "to take away any pieces of stone with old inscriptions or figures thereon."

He employed artists to do the sketching but took on board personally the business of taking away the pieces with inscriptions and figures. As traditional Muslims, the Ottomans were not

merely iconoclasts, but aniconists, denouncing the representation of sentient beings. They may have felt relieved that some of the "graven images" were being removed from a territory they controlled. Bruce dutifully collected what interested him and sent them to England, where for nearly two centuries they have been on display in the British Museum.

While promoting the release of his film "The Monuments Men," about the Nazi theft of great European artwork, consistent with the theme of the movie Clooney voiced his support for the Greek claim that the artwork should be returned to Athens. Clooney's remarks drew the attention of London's mayor at that time, a certain Boris Johnson. Boris felt very strongly that the town over which he presided should be recognized as the rightful owner of the Greek artwork.

Summoning up his patented talent for stale puns and personal put-downs, Johnson told The Telegraph: "Someone urgently needs to restore George Clooney's marbles." This turned into a public scandal as Johnson went further, accusing Clooney of "advocating nothing less than the Hitlerian agenda for London's cultural treasures."

Today's Daily Devil's Dictionary definition:

Cultural treasures:

Valuable items produced by one culture that are considered even more valuable when pilfered from their original setting and possessed by another culture, in part because they stand as a symbol of former dominance.

Contextual Note

Since those events in 2014, several things have happened. Johnson eventually became Britain's prime minister, thanks primarily to a series of shambolic episodes surrounding the still ongoing dog-and-pony show Boris put together in 2016, known as Brexit. Clooney married later that year. The actor explained to The Observer that, after Johnson's outburst, he needed to be briefed on the status of the controversy surrounding the Parthenon marbles. He accordingly arranged to meet the lawyer who was pleading the case for

the return of the artwork. The lawyer's name was Amal Alamuddin. Without Johnson's denunciation of an American interloper in London's business, the now happy couple might never have met.

In the same edition of *The Guardian*, a casual reader could have happened upon another article, with the title "Wealthy MP urged to pay up for his family's slave trade past," which is also about the British habit of plundering the riches of other regions of the world in the days of empire. The authors, Paul Lashmar and Jonathan Smith, recount how Richard Drax, the Conservative MP for South Dorset, recently inherited a plantation in Barbados that owed its prosperity in former times to the brutal exploitation of African slaves.

Modern voices, including the Barbadian historian of slavery, Sir Hilary Beckles, are now demanding "reparatory justice" for the crimes of Drax's ancestors. Beckles reminded Drax of the historical truth that "Black life mattered only to make millionaires of English enslavers and the Drax family did it longer than any other elite family." *The Guardian* notes that Drax recognizes these facts from his family's past. But like many Britons, he has been taught to think of history as a subject of study that serves primarily to fascinate schoolchildren with inspiring stories of heroism from the past.

Serious people, as the MP clearly understands, must focus on the issues of the day. Brexit for instance, which Drax has consistently voted for, as well as aggressive Britain's military combat operations overseas. After all, all modern combat engaged by Britain, essentially in the Middle East, aims at telling darker-skinned people who's boss. It's in his family's tradition.

Historical Note

The Guardian notes that Drax "is probably the wealthiest landowner in the House of Commons, with 5,600 hectares of farmland and woodlands. The estate's finances are largely opaque to the public gaze and involve at least six trusts and other disconnected financial entities." With such resources, Drax has had plenty of time to reflect

on the logic of history and to develop an understanding of his own position in it, both as the scion of a colonial family and a legislator in a modern democracy.

Drax explains the state of his understanding: "I am keenly aware of the slave trade in the West Indies, and the role my very distant ancestor played in it is deeply, deeply regrettable, but no one can be held responsible today for what happened many hundreds of years ago. This is a part of the nation's history, from which we must all learn." With his repeated "deeply," Drax appears to echo the Lewis Carroll's Walrus feasting on the oysters he had earlier befriended.

*I weep for you, ' the Walrus said:
I deeply sympathize.'
With sobs and tears he sorted out
Those of the largest size.*

By "we must all learn" Drax appears to be suggesting that, despite his deep, deep regret, if there is a reckoning to be had, it should be shared by all and not attributed to those who thrive today thanks to the crimes of their forebears. The fact that the wealth he enjoys today derived from a historical crime, the consequences of which are felt by the vast majority of descendants of slaves, has no importance. No one can accuse him of having slaves today, though it might be interesting to review the employment conditions of his servants and the workers on the existing plantation in Barbados.

In a separate and lengthier article, Lashmar and Smith provide a detailed description of Drax's wealth and current possessions. Reviewing the Drax family's history in the West Indies, dating back to the 1620s, they remark that his enterprising ancestor acquired a reputation as an innovator by creating a successful model for a commercial sugar plantation that was imitated elsewhere in the Caribbean. Though the comparison is purely anachronistic, the MP's 17th-century ancestor appears to have been the Elon Musk of colonial slavery.

Musk's own occasional statements concerning how to treat regions around the world with exploitable resources ("We will coup whoever we want! Deal with it") underscores a certain cultural continuity with the Drax clan. They seem to share a similar mindset.

The article cites Beckles' estimation "that as many 30,000 slaves died on the Drax plantations in Barbados and Jamaica over 200 years." In its effects, that sounds somewhat similar to the kind of "Hitlerian agenda" that Boris Johnson, the leader of Drax's political party, accused George Clooney of having for daring to suggest a crime of the past might require a gesture of reparation. And so, the most powerful Tory and the wealthiest Tory seem to share the same approach not only to contemporary politics, but to history itself. Can't these eternal complainers like Beckles and Clooney just let bygones be bygones?

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Foreign-Language Entertainment Is Having Its Soft-Power Moment

Franthiesco Ballerini
December 18, 2020

As foreign-language entertainment grows in popularity, audiences from all over the world can finally enjoy a much broader and immersive experience of other cultures.

Since the first Academy Awards ceremony in 1929, non-English films from all over the world used to compete for a nomination in one single category, best foreign film, as all the other Oscars traditionally went to American and, sometimes, British productions. But in 2019, Netflix's Spanish-language "Roma" was

nominated for best picture. It won for best director and, as predicted, best foreign film. This year, the first non-English feature won best picture, Bong Joon-ho's Korean film "Parasite."

The Oscars may be just following a much bigger trend in entertainment in the past few years, with non-English-language shows becoming international hits even in markets like the US and the UK that don't consume a lot of dubbed or subtitled content. The American review website Rotten Tomatoes chose Netflix's first German-language show, "Dark," as the best Netflix Original series among 63 competitors, getting 80% of the 2.5 million votes, against English-language hits like "Mindhunters" and "The Crown."

Bound to Lead

Latin and, much later, French, were the international languages for diplomacy, the theater and literature. British imperial power put the English language at the center of world affairs and, right as that empire faded, American dominance reinforced its importance. But it was Hollywood's soft power over the 20th century that made the English language seductive and attractive the world over.

In his 1990 work "Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power," political scientist Joseph Nye used the term "soft power" to define the ability to get something by persuasion, not coercion or payment. Governments need to spend much less money when national culture, ideals and values appeal to the wider world, generating revenues in tourism, arts and entertainment. In other words, soft power is a smart tool for any nation to reach its worldwide goals instead of opting for threats, guns and war.

Hollywood shaped the preferences of a large number of audiences for English-language films and TV shows since the creation of the studios in the 1910s. Other countries took advantage of that. The British Council, established in 1934 and currently presented in over 100 countries, invests in keeping the English language a powerful

medium in which the arts, diplomacy, entertainment, science and technology are conducted. With a budget of £1,3 billion (\$1,6 billion) in 2019-20, the organization views English as a way to communicate culture, allowing the British Council to frame culture and language as political tools through which soft power can be garnered, strengthening the UK's reputation across the world.

But quality entertainment like “Dark” can make even a difficult language like German more appealing to a global audience. The second season of Iceland's “Trapped” was watched by 10 million people in the UK, Germany, France and across Scandinavia. It focuses on a series of mysterious murders in a freezing small town where policemen never fire guns — a cultural shock for audiences accustomed to violence in Hollywood productions. Distribution demand for the Spanish “La Casa de Papel” soared for its fourth season: From April 3 to 5 this year, the show was 31.75 times more in demand than popular English-language series like “The Walking Dead,” “Westworld” and “Game of Thrones.”

The show not only broke the aversion to foreign languages among audiences, but also made popular other forms of expression instead of repeating well-worn Hollywood formulas. John Doyle writes in *The Globe and Mail* that “La Casa de Papel” is a “heist-centric multipart drama that upends most clichés of heist movies and celebrates others. It is also deliciously melodramatic at times, riffing on the telenovela style of telling one concentrated storyline that has outrageous twists and much passion.”

Leaving the Telenovela Behind

Netflix, which is represented in 190 countries, has become one of the main producers of foreign-language hits, with other shows breaking the English barrier, such as the Turkish “The Protector,” French “Osmosis,” Polish “The Woods” and South Korea's “Kingdom.” According to Louis Brennan, a professor at Trinity College, Dublin, who researches Netflix's

international expansion, the success of non-English language shows can be explained by the natural appeal of local products, together with a tendency toward broader and more diverse tastes of consumers in the 21st century.

As John Hazelton writes in *Screen Daily*, American programmers feel a growing appetite for foreign-language shows despite the fact that foreign films are being watched less in the cinemas, suggesting a migration from the big to the smaller screen, and streaming. Hazelton quotes Jan Diedrichsen, the general manager of Sundance TV, saying that “Back in the day, if audiences wanted something adventurous they would go to arthouses and see those independent or foreign films. Now on television we're providing that adventure and a window into some of the best stories from around the world.”

In the US, the viewership of non-English titles on Netflix increased 50% this year compared with 2019 and the consumption of dubbed films and shows is rising 120% every year, according to some of the very few audience statistics the company shares.

Known for exporting its telenovelas for more than 130 countries for the past 30 years, with 100 million daily viewers worldwide, Brazilian TV Globo is aware that the telenovela format may become less relevant as streaming subscriptions soar all over the world. In 2015, the company launched GloboPlay, its own streaming service. This year, TV Globo released the terror thriller “Desalma,” with clear intention to overcome the image of a telenovela channel, aiming at international markets.

To compete with major players like Netflix and Amazon Prime, GloboPlay announced a partnership with Disney Plus, launched in Brazil this November, with subscriptions for both streaming services starting at 37,90 reais (\$6,99). US-based network HBO recently announced six new local productions for the following years as Brazil is fast becoming one of the key global streaming markets.

Just a few years ago, producers who wanted to reach an international audience needed to

embrace English-language soft power even if that caused cultural distortions in the final product, like in Fernando Meirelles's 2008 film "Blindness," the English adaptation of the Portuguese book of Nobel Prize winner José Saramago, or "Love in the Time of Cholera," directed by Mike Newell, adapted from Gabriel García Márquez's novel of the same title. In both cases, the original language — Portuguese and Spanish, respectively — are key elements to the charm and beauty of the novels. The slang, local accents and neologisms were all the elements that helped both authors win the Nobel Prize for Literature but were, unfortunately, partly lost in translation to film.

With local artists and producers getting the taste of English soft power, audiences from all over the world can finally enjoy a much broader and immersive experience of other cultures from the comfort of their own homes — and with good entertainment, of course.

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ENVIRONMENT

Canada's Indigenous Communities Fight to Protect Their Environment

Gary Buswell
January 22, 2020

Canada has a troubled history of reconciling its ideas of liberal democracy and economic development with the fair treatment of its indigenous population.

Canada isn't one of the first nations that comes to mind when thinking hotspots of racism and mistreatment of social groups

across the globe. Above and beyond Canadians' legendary reputation for being "nice," the country is widely seen as an open and liberal place. Indeed, it scores highly in most international classifications in terms of freedom and quality of life, ranking an impressive 4th on the 2019 Human Freedom Index.

However, this rosy picture masks a history of tensions between Canadian authorities, large corporations and the 5% of the Canadian population that is made up of indigenous peoples. The extent to which indigenous Canadians' interests diverge from that of the country's government and industrial lobbies has been brought into light in recent weeks by the furor surrounding a gas pipeline project in the western province of British Columbia that has been dubbed "a defining moment ... in the evolution of Indigenous rights."

Environmental Racism

Plans by Coastal GasLink to construct a pipeline running from Dawson Creek in British Columbia to Kitimat on the western Pacific coast will run across ancestral lands — including important archaeological and cultural sites — belonging to First Nation communities. The project has divided the community, with elected councils in the area giving approval, but hereditary Wet'suwet'en chiefs opposing the construction and claiming no informed consent has been given.

In an argument that could have far broader implications for indigenous law in Canada, the hereditary chiefs are insisting that elected chiefs only have jurisdiction over official reserves — and that they themselves maintain control over any land not ceded under the Indian Act.

Things came to a head at the end of December when a group of First Nation environmental activists were given 72 hours by the British Columbia Supreme Court to clear the way for construction workers to access the site. This latest injunction comes after last month's troubling revelations that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) had been authorized to use lethal

force and separate children from families during previous protests.

British Columbia Premier John Horgan, whose reputation has taken a hit over his handling of the crisis, has vowed that the pipeline will go ahead despite native leaders' protests. Activists continue to occupy the site, but the RCMP remains present, and the Wet'suwet'en have spoken of their fears that the violent raids of last year will be repeated. Coastal GasLink and the Canadian authorities maintain that they are looking for a peaceful resolution.

In terms of conflicts between authorities and indigenous groups, the Coastal GasLink pipeline episode is far from an isolated case. In fact, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination has flagged up three projects — Coastal GasLink, plus the TransMountain Corp pipeline and the Site C hydroelectric dam — where necessary prior and informed consent has not been given by indigenous First Nation groups.

Another particularly egregious case of environmental racism is being played out in Nova Scotia, where a paper mill has come under fire for polluting local waterways and affecting First Nation communities settled in the area. The Northern Pulp mill — run by Paper Excellence, a global company linked to environmental degradation and human rights abuses in Southeast Asia — was established in the 1960s and has been polluting waterways in Pictou Landing with its waste for decades.

Activists from the Pictou Landing First Nation had argued for a long time that any financial benefit they gleaned from the mill was not worth watching their once-pristine harbor be replaced by toxic brown sludge. The dispute escalated, however, when Paper Excellence was fined a mere \$225,000 by the Pictou provincial court in 2014 for leaking 47 million liters of toxic effluent that spilled into Boat Harbour and surrounding wetlands in the Northumberland Strait.

Troubled History

The serious leak led to the provincial government passing the 2015 Boat Harbour Act, ordering the mill to cease dumping waste into Boat Harbour by January 31, 2020, and find alternative waste disposal solutions. Northern Pulp's proposed "solution" was to erect a pipeline to transfer around 85 million liters of effluent into further reaches of the Northumberland Strait on a daily basis. Although the company claimed that this wouldn't affect marine life or the sustainability of local communities, there was, unsurprisingly, considerable opposition from local First Nation residents, fishermen and environmental campaigners.

In December, the provincial government in Nova Scotia rejected Northern Pulp's plans and refused to extend its license to use Boat Harbour as a dumping location. Although this has come as good news to the locals and activists, problems aren't over. The controversial mill is looking to stay operative post-January, and claims that no more chemically-treated waste will be spilled into the Strait. To make matters worse, the mill's impending closure — and the 350 lost jobs it will entail — has caused tensions among locals, with reports of death threats to First Nation chiefs in the wake of the December decision.

Both the Coastal GasLink and the Northern Pulp Boat Harbour cases cast a light on the ongoing issues Canada faces when it comes to respecting the rights, wishes and wellbeing of its indigenous groups. The Boat Harbour situation in particular — although it seems to have reached a more satisfactory conclusion — is the culmination of 50 years of deception and broken promises.

Since its founding as a nation in 1867, Canada has had a long and troubled history of reconciling its ideas of liberal democracy and economic development with the fair treatment of its indigenous population. From the original 1876 Indian Act, which placed restrictive controls on indigenous ways of life, to the 2015 Anti-Terrorism Act, which criminalizes indigenous environmental activism, the authorities have

often sought to sideline local interests in favor of those of big business.

If Canada truly wants to live up to its global reputation in terms of rights and freedoms afforded to all, its policymakers and corporations need to ensure that the environmental wishes of its First Nation communities are properly respected and upheld.

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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.

Two-fold 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 cross border 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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Plastics Threaten the Himalayan Environment

Satya Prakash Negi
July 28, 2020

Only when tourists change their habits and mountain folks are more prosperous will the tragedy of plastic trash end.

In India, many people blame the communities living in and around the forests for exploiting natural resources. They are held responsible for forest degradation and deforestation. Communities who live in the Himalayas are no exception. Today, the once-pristine Himalayan mountains are littered with plastic. Even remote villages with age-old traditions have not escaped the plastic menace. As a result, we are witnessing one of the biggest environmental tragedies in the world.

Solar radiation heats up plastic, a natural heat absorbing material. In a world where climate change is accelerating, plastic further exacerbates the heating up of the mountains. This increase in overall temperature at high altitudes is melting glaciers and creating glacial lakes. The threat of glacial lake outburst flood, popularly known as water bombs, is rising by the day and could affect millions downstream.

Plastics also clog innumerable streams, rivulets and rivers. Animals can ingest them and die. They increase the incidence of cancer. They ruin delicate mountain ecosystems for decades if not centuries to come.

Governments have responded by regulating or banning the use of plastic. Their measures have not worked effectively. The public are now increasingly aware of the pitfalls of plastics. They also have a better understanding of how to dispose of them. Yet few bother about the proper disposal of plastics. What is going on?

Tourism and Pollution

About two decades ago, I visited the Kedarnath Wildlife Sanctuary in Uttarakhand in India. It was part of specialized training on wildlife management at the premier Wildlife Institute of India in Dehradun. A group of officers set off for Kanchula Kharak, a scenic spot in the sanctuary, nestled amidst dense forests and verdant vegetation.

As the bus climbed the mountain at a steady speed, we would occasionally stop for tea and snacks as well to engage in photography. At one point, the bus stopped at a cluster of roadside tea shops near a small village. The coolness and freshness in the mountain air were invigorating. In a typically Indian custom, we decided to enjoy the view with chai and pakora, a typically Indian combination of tea and freshly fried food.

We were not alone at the spot. Some tourists were also enjoying the spectacular view of mountain landscapes while quenching their thirst and slaking their appetite. As we were sitting on the benches waiting for our chai-pakora combination, we observed that some of the

tourists were drinking soft drinks and eating potato chips. A senior colleague in our group quipped: “See, here also, they are selling soft drinks and chips. They should not sell these items here. The shops should keep local products only. See, the empty plastic bottles and packets are strewn all around, polluting the beautiful mountain forest and environment.”

Our chai-pakora was served soon enough, but my colleague’s words set me thinking. Empathizing with the poor tea shop owners, I instinctively responded, “They are selling soft drinks and chips because tourists are buying.” Although I did not articulate it at that moment, I saw the poor tea shop owner merely supplying what his customers demanded. Not doing so could have meant not making enough money to feed his family.

Suffice to say, my senior colleague differed with me. He offered the supply-side argument. If tea shop owners did not sell soft drinks and plastics, the tourists would not have been able to buy them. These owners were at fault. They had to be stopped.

Being a man of the mountains myself, I know how hard life can be for my people. So, I demurred: “Sir, why do you blame these mountain folks? They are poor and their poverty compels them to sell whatever the tourists demand. It is an opportunity for these mountain folks to earn a livelihood during the brief tourist season before snow and winter set in.” This argument did not wash with my senior who retorted: “Poverty, poverty, poverty ... what is poverty? I do not see them starving. In any case, they are destroying the environment everywhere selling these city products.”

Like my colleague, I too am appalled by the pollution. It is disgusting to see the beautiful Himalayan mountainside ruined by plastic. Yet my senior’s condemnation of the tea shop owners does not quite sit easily with me. The old ways of life in Himalayan villages are dead. Communities have weakened. Subsistence farming no longer meets local needs. Money talks. In a market economy, mountain folks have to earn a living.

Tourism is the most obvious way for them to make money. A tea shop at a scenic spot brings in regular cash flow that often pays for the year's expenses. During the snowy days of the harsh winter season, no tourists come and mountain folks make no money. So, why blame these mountain folks?

Just as mountain folks have their needs, so do tourists. They escape to cool and green mountains from hot and dusty cities. They have developed a taste for soft drinks and chips. Lest we forget, these are advertised incessantly on their television sets or computer screens. They want to soak in the scenery while partaking in something they enjoy. Surely that is a natural human instinct.

After my conversation with my senior colleague, I kept mulling through the rest of the journey. My contemplation ended when the bus screeched to a halt at Kanchula Kharak. I stepped out into one of the most beautiful landscapes in Uttarakhand and the memory of it is still fresh today. Humanity owes a duty to future generations to preserve such landscapes. They bring us peace, joy, inspiration and much more.

Acting Responsibly

For nearly 20 years, I have been musing on the incident. Neither the tea shop owners nor the tourists can be condemned outright. Today, when I go to remote villages in the mountains, I see more tea shops, tourists and plastic. I think of Adam Smith's invisible hand of the market that balances supply and demand. Perhaps the answer lies in changing the nature of demand. If tourists were to realize that soft drinks may raise the risk of diabetes, chips to heart attacks and their plastics to ecological destruction, they might reduce their consumption.

Of course, reducing the poverty of mountain folks and generating diverse livelihood options as well as providing incentives to set up environmentally-friendly businesses might also help. Teaching those who run tea shops the art of reducing, reusing and recycling plastic might also

help. So would innovative and creative ideas along with determined and persistent action.

Casting blame either on mountain folks or the tourists from the plains is unhelpful and unwise. We can do much better. All of us need to act responsibly.

***Satya Prakash Negi** is an Indian Forest Service officer. He is currently working as the head of the extension division at the Himalayan Forest Research Institute (HFRI) in Shimla.

How Will the UAE Cope With Growing Environmental Insecurity?

Kristian Alexander & Giorgio Cafiero
August 3, 2020

The UAE has the world's highest per capita environmental footprint, a result of the unsustainable megaprojects that began amid the oil boom of the 1970s.

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the world is "living through an unrivalled drop in carbon output." According to the International Energy Agency, global use of energy will drop 6% in 2020, an amount that equals India's total energy demand. Worldwide demand for electricity has already fallen 5%, which is the largest amount since the Great Depression of the 1930s. The dramatic decline in pollution resulting from economic lockdowns was apparently visible and recorded by numerous satellites. However, it will take a decade of this kind of economic lockdown to make a significant impact on global warming and truly curb carbon emissions.

Environmental pollutants are indifferent to national boundaries. Addressing climate change requires long-term international cooperation. All countries must make serious and collective

efforts to stop irreversible damage caused by climate change.

The Environment-Security Nexus

The United Arab Emirates is among the world's biggest per capita emitters of greenhouse gases. In fact, the World Wide Fund for Nature has ranked the UAE as having the world's highest per capita environmental footprint, which largely has to do with the unsustainable megaprojects that began in the Emirates amid the oil boom of the 1970s.

Other factors such as the desert country's climatic conditions are in the picture too. There are also the popular modes of transportation within the Emirates: According to a survey conducted by the Department of Transport in 2014, "60 percent of Abu Dhabi and Dubai residents who owned a car said they never used public transport. Only two to three percent use public transport frequently." This is in part due to the long-standing car culture in the Emirates and relatively cheap fuel as well as car prices, but also because of connectivity problems to certain destinations.

As outlined by Jon Barnett in his 2013 essay "Environmental Security," environmental problems pose threats to the national well-being as well as the quality of life of the inhabitants of any state. Analysts and scholars refer to environmental security when discussing the threats and dangers emanating from the environment. The principal source that threatens ecological security is human activity. The environment is one of the seven sectors outlined in the United Nations Development Program's early definition of human security, and environmental change has long been identified as a human security issue.

The Emiratis have been struggling with a number of environmental threats for decades. Today, numerous environmental issues — including pollution, waste, land degradation, desertification, biodiversity loss, etc. — all impact the UAE. Waste and air pollution constitute major challenges, in particular outdoor

air pollution. The UAE ranks in the bottom fourth globally in exposure to particulate matter — tiny particles of sand, dust or chemicals registered at elevated levels that are highly dangerous and associated with risks of numerous diseases such as cancer, as well as respiratory and heart diseases. In 2017, the Environment Agency of Abu Dhabi considered poor air quality to be a "primary environmental threat to public health."

In terms of water, the UAE continues to have highly unsustainable groundwater extraction rates. Being largely a desert country, the contamination of its fresh groundwater reserves and seawater endangers the UAE's future. Some experts have warned of the imminent depletion of groundwater sources by 2030.

In the area of biodiversity conservation, the UAE boasts a number of protected areas both on land and in the sea. But its fish stocks are in a critical state. Overfishing and heavy commercial maritime shipping across the Persian Gulf have also contributed to a potentially irreversible decline in the health of fragile coral reefs off the coast. Silt from shoreline construction has had a negative impact on coral.

"Greening" the Emirati Economy

The UAE has long acknowledged climate change as a serious threat multiplier to the country and is ahead of the curve when compared to other countries that are still debating the seriousness of the issue or even outright denying its reality. Recognizing these environmental threats, the UAE has been in the process of "greening" its economy by developing a solar energy sector along with a nuclear energy sector and managing its scarce water resources with an emphasis on conservation and efficiency. It has been at the forefront of the renewables revolution with its solar farms while very slowly transforming its thermal desalination plants into reverse osmosis desalination facilities that produce far fewer greenhouse gas emissions.

The UAE Vision 2021 document contains as one of its wide-reaching goals a "well-preserved natural environment" and seeks to address

various environmental threats to the country. The Emirate of Abu Dhabi has put in place its Environment Vision 2030 strategy, which lists five priority areas, namely climate change impacts, air and noise pollution, water resources, biodiversity and waste. The UAE government has set up various institutions and initiatives to address environmental issues in the previous decades such as the Environment Agency — Abu Dhabi, the Abu Dhabi Global Environmental Data Initiative and the Arab Water Academy, and has signed and ratified numerous international and regional environmental conventions. The government has launched a variety of awareness campaigns pertaining to environmental issues in order to educate different sectors of society.

According to Dr. Taoufik Ksiksi, a plant biologist and climate change researcher at the United Arab Emirates University at Al Ain, these awareness campaigns were not quite sufficient: “More needs to be done to raise the awareness levels, especially at the lower levels, in schools with young people, and there have to be substantial changes to the curriculum to incorporate courses on environmental sciences, native ecology and conservation in general,” he said in a phone interview. In addition, Ksiksi suggests that “more robust climate modeling approaches that focus primarily on the region need to be developed with increased processing power that take into account regional circumstances and are not geared towards climate conditions prevalent in Europe.”

Ksiksi thinks that UAE’s advantage is that it enjoys “the benefit of resources than can fund technology and new initiatives.” Yet the lack of synergy in terms of regional cooperation in the area of green economy building in the Arabian Peninsula somewhat hampers such efforts.

The UAE has for some time now incorporated narratives of sustainable development into the country’s national policy aims. Masdar City, described as a city of the future, is perhaps the best known and most ambitious example of an avowedly green megaproject. Other projects such as Sustainable City and Desert Rose City are

additional examples of green cities that emphasize technological innovation in Masdar City’s manner.

The greening of the Emirates takes on a central aspect of the modernization narrative. The main gist is that the existing ecological challenges can be measured, and existing institutions and policies find solutions to the problems. According to Dr. Gökçe Günel, the UAE is making a serious effort to maintain its status quo while offering up “technical adjustments” to environmental challenges. Sustainable development juxtaposes intense economic development along with high consumerism coexisting with an environmentally friendly and responsible society. This reveals a paradox in the greening process currently in place.

These projects are small in scale and only take on a tiny space in the overall urbanity of the country. They take place in a bounded environment and constitute living laboratories that pioneer green technology. But they cannot be replicated on a larger scale or implemented and applied across the whole territory.

Inevitably, rapid urban growth and transnational migration flows have massively enlarged the ecological footprints of countries such as the UAE. It will be very difficult to achieve sustainable development while Arab Gulf states subsidize massive energy consumption, continue to expand urban sprawl and expansion, and allow for traffic congestion while remaining careless about water and electricity consumption.

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When Is Hot Too Hot?

Arek Sinanian
August 10, 2020

Who will be affected the most by prolonged heat waves in summer, and how will we adapt?

One of the many difficulties in understanding global warming and climate change, and their impacts, is that they are complicated. Climate change is not linear over time and it is inconsistent across different regions.

As I explain in my book, “A Climate for Denial,” the nonlinear characteristics of climate change mean that, over time, its impacts will not take place in a linear fashion. For example, heatwaves will not increase in frequency by, say, one every year. Likewise, the average global temperature will not rise by one degree each year. In addition, the effects will not be the same everywhere around the world, not even around the same region.

Another problem in understanding climate change is that it is — and will be — difficult to predict accurately due to the many variables involved. Global greenhouse gas emissions will depend on things like economic growth, population growth, technological changes, solar activity and climate feedback loops. This is why highly-sophisticated predictive models that, in fact, include a huge array of variables provide an upper case, a lower case and the most likely case.

What we know with a high degree of certainty is that the planet is getting hotter. Given the levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and our current emissions, it will continue to get hotter. But the increase in heat and intensity of heat waves, as well as their frequency, will not occur equally and consistently throughout the year or around the globe. And to complicate the impact on our lives, some people will be more

prepared and more resilient to the increased heat than others.

Human populations, including the infrastructure and services that support them as well as the ecosystems, have inbuilt resilience and can, to varying degrees, adapt to climate change. But those with less adaptive capacity may suffer dramatically.

We also know, with a great degree of certainty, that some areas of the world will experience more heatwaves and, in particular, intense ones with significantly higher temperatures. This could be exasperated with increased humidity due to more rainfall.

So, for example, a region may have historically experienced an average of three consecutive days of temperatures above 95° F (35° C) each year. Now, assume that due to climate change, the same region experiences five consecutive days of temperatures above 100° F. The consecutive aspect in this example is significant because systems and our bodies are less able to recover from the stress of extreme heat over long periods.

How will this hypothetical scenario affect people and the essential services they receive? Let's take a simplistic look at a few groups of people in this hypothetical situation and how heat waves will impact them and the infrastructure in their region:

a) White collar workers and students in air-conditioned offices and schools; b) house-bound people, including the elderly and dependent people, living in places without air conditioning; c) people who work outside in urban areas (council workers, gardeners and landscapers, builders, trades workers); d) farmers and workers in external rural areas; and e) health care workers

Group A

Office buildings and their mechanical services (air conditioning, elevators, security systems) will most likely cope with prolonged higher temperatures. But some air-conditioning units may struggle to attain comfort levels, some systems may stop operating completely and air

conditioning will also consume significantly higher levels of energy.

The regional area infrastructure will also probably cope with higher temperatures, although the electricity supply may struggle, depending on the level of peak energy supply availability. This is because the hotter temperatures will mean a higher demand for power and, therefore, put more stress on the power supply system. There may be blackouts when the supply of electricity is not able to cope.

In times of prolonged high temperatures, other infrastructures are known to suffer, including public transport. Rail lines have been known to buckle, resulting in prolonged delays in services and disruption to the national economy. Blackouts may also result in water supply and communication system failures, again disrupting the economy.

The workers will, therefore, cope depending on the likelihood of blackouts. In which case, they will have to work under conditions with no air conditioning and possible heat stress.

Children in schools where there is no air conditioning may close due to the risks of heat stress on children. Outside activities for children may be stopped.

This scenario will increase the likelihood of wildfires. In turn, this will pose risks to lives and livelihoods and could result in property damage, and it will put more pressure on emergency services such as firefighting and health care.

Group B

This group is more vulnerable than Group A, mainly because those affected are less resilient and less able to cope with extreme conditions. If there is no air conditioning in a home or facility with physically or mentally disabled, dependent and elderly people, these individuals are particularly vulnerable to heat stress.

Less developed and remote communities who lack the support services and backup systems are also more vulnerable, particularly when they are unable to cope with extended hot days. Heat stress on the elderly and other vulnerable people

may put additional stress on the health care system, which could struggle to keep up with the additional demand.

As with Group A, power, water and communication systems may also be affected. And there is an increased risk of wildfires breaking out, with added pressure on emergency services as well.

Group C

People who work in the field and in unprotected external areas are particularly vulnerable to extreme temperatures and prolonged heatwaves. Working conditions significantly affect those who work outside, and people may need to take additional measures and protective strategies against heatwaves. These include taking more breaks, working fewer hours and, in extreme cases, stopping work altogether.

Group D

Farmers are used to working outside and for long hours in the field. But heatwaves put pressure on their crop, their machinery and, of course, their own health and safety. Prolonged, extreme heat and heat waves may significantly affect their production, livestock and crop yields. This is particularly the case in the event of coincident drought, which is another impact of climate change.

Group E

As heat waves increase, more pressure is put on health services and workers due to increased admissions, particularly of elderly and vulnerable people who are less able to cope with heat stress. If remote areas are struck with heatwaves and this leads to increased demand for health services, depending on their capacity, these facilities may not be able to operate effectively. This situation is particularly the case in underdeveloped countries and regions of the world.

In sum, as the climate continues to change and extreme weather events such as heat waves increase in frequency and severity, all the above conditions will worsen. Adaptive capacity and

resilience are terms often used in climate change risk assessments. Infrastructure, essential services and our own bodies have inbuilt resilience and adaptive capacity. Yet these may be stretched to their limits when heat waves occur, particularly in places and on populations that are less resilient, especially as heatwaves are expected to become more extreme and prolonged.

***Arek Sinanian** is the author of “A Climate for Denial” and an international expert on climate change, greenhouse gas abatement and carbon accounting.

We Can Still Win the War on Plastic

Michael K. Dorsey
September 12, 2020

As with so many other things in 2020, the full-out war against plastic has abated.

For many years, even decades, before the current global pandemic, environmental advocates have waged a war against single-use plastic. We’ve been winning that war. More and more consumers are carrying reusable bags for groceries and other shopping items, asking restaurants to use more sustainable materials for take-out containers, and using fewer plastic straws. Homeowners are even rethinking and replacing plastic PVC (polyvinyl chloride) in everything from home siding to piping.

As with so many other things in 2020, the full-out war against plastic has abated. To be sure, some plastic personal protective equipment is utilized by medical professionals and others to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. Some recent scholarly research used by the plastics industry to bolster its claim that reusable grocery bags somehow spread the coronavirus is “of questionable applicability.” Nevertheless, states,

cities and various municipalities have either suspended or put on hold implementation of bans on single-use plastics. Accordingly, there have been several articles about how the plastics industry is one of the few winners from the ravages of COVID-19.

Our Environment, Our Livelihoods, Our Health

More than 120 environmental leaders are asking food delivery companies to help restart our efforts to reduce single-use plastic by giving consumers the option in mobile apps and online ordering systems to make utensils, straws, condiments and napkins opt-in only. This is a great first step, and the Center for Environmental Health (CEH), on whose board I sit, is proud to have signed that letter.

I am concerned about the environment and what we will leave for our future generations. There are tens of millions of people who think more like I do than like the plastics industry. The days of ignoring piles of debris littering beaches worldwide and pretending there aren’t islands of trash floating in the oceans have long passed. The plastics industry is scrambling because it knows how bad it looks having conducted what amounts to tobacco and asbestos-like schemes from the late 1970s to purposely manipulate consumers to use more plastic with campaigns based on lies. The plan to make plastics seemingly indispensable to our lives sadly has traction, yet it comes at the great adverse expense against our environment, our livelihoods and our health.

Peer scientists and environmentalists have worked tirelessly to bring to light the lasting damage that single-use plastic does, and our efforts have resulted in hard-won bans and other actions as consumers realize the real price they are paying. Yet the ecological, economic and public health costs of plastics are not limited to just bags.

Many municipalities still consider plastic PVC pipes to be an acceptable option to use in the infrastructure systems that deliver drinking water to our homes. Consider that right now, the water

that comes from your faucet may have traveled through miles of plastic pipes to get there. Who knows what it's brought along with it.

I have studied and read the research into the effects of plastics on human health and the environment. Specifically, peer-reviewed research has found over the years polyvinyl chloride to be among the most harmful of plastics. PVC pipes are made from volatile chemicals such as hydrogen, carbon and chlorine, which is a common disinfectant for water supplies, and are known to cause harm to humans and the environment. The federal government and state of California have long warned of the potential human health risks from exposure to one of the core ingredients in PVC pipes, ethylene dichloride, which has been described as a cancer-causing carcinogen since 1980.

The report, "Our Health, PVC and Critical Infrastructure," the production of which I supervised, examines in detail the consequences of plastic PVC pipes. Specifically, it considers four critical topics: harmful chemicals associated with the production of PVC pipes; long and short-term costs associated with PVC pipes; health and safety hazards of PVC exposure; as well as moving beyond PVC and passing legislation to reduce PVC and educate consumers about its presence in their lives.

Melting Pipes

Across the United States, melted PVC piping destroyed by intense fires has long threatened communities by exposing groundwater supplies to a litany of carcinogens and poisons, from benzene to toluene and much more. Analysis by municipal authorities following the catastrophic 2017 Tubbs fire that destroyed over 3,000 residential and commercial buildings across California found that "Benzene was detected at levels above the allowable regulatory limit (Maximum Contaminant Level, MCL)" in local drinking water.

Beyond benzene, investigators also identified "a suite of contaminants that include (but are not limited to) aromatic hydrocarbons (including

benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene, and the xylenes), polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbons, chlorinated compounds (not related to water chlorination), ketones, furans, and thiophenes." Similar groundwater contamination has been found following intense fire in 2018 and 2019 — and the contamination lingered long after the fires.

The heat from the August 2020 CZU Lightning Complex fire in the Santa Cruz Mountains melted a 7.5-mile-long plastic water pipe. The pipe was part of a water system, and an official for the San Lorenzo Valley Water District said that "They found that there was a lot of water quality contamination from that melting plastic. The polyethylene put out volatile organic chemicals, benzene. So those are concerns that we are monitoring and we will be sampling for."

It could take months to determine the full scope of the damage, but one thing is certain: People returning home after evacuating may very well find themselves without certified clean, fresh water to drink. The 2018 Camp Fire, which similarly melted plastic pipes in Paradise, California, forced residents there to rebuild their entire water distribution system due to widespread contamination by toxic chemicals like benzene.

We've been fighting the war on plastic for decades, and at times, it can feel like we're losing. Big Plastic is a global behemoth — consistently misleading consumers and communities with industry-backed "studies" and corporate-funded "research." Its latest ploy, led by major oil companies, is to "flood Africa with plastic" since it can no longer send plastic waste to China. The keystone country in this plan is Kenya, which currently has the strictest plastic bag ban in the world. What a masterstroke for the industry if it's successful in overriding this ban. What a shame for the world if we allow that to happen.

As numerous viable alternatives to single-use bags, PVC pipes and the litany of other plastic products abound, we can and must draw a line in the sand against this harmful concoction before

more communities, ecosystems and livelihoods are compromised.

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