

# Fair Observer

Monthly



MAY 2023

Fair Observer<sup>o</sup>  
Independence, Diversity, Debate

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# Fair Observer Monthly



May 2023

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## ABOUT FAIR OBSERVER

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

Our digital media platform has more than 2,500 contributors from 90 countries, cutting across borders, backgrounds and beliefs. With fact-checking and a rigorous editorial process, we provide diversity and quality in an era of echo chambers and fake news.

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

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

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## From Upstart to Start-Up Nation, Israel at 75 Faces New Challenges

Gary Grappo  
May 01, 2023

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**Israel has triumphed over its foes in a rough neighborhood. Still, Palestinians present a new challenge, or rather an old challenge in a different guise. Also, internal strife over the future of democracy presents an unprecedented challenge to Israel.**

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Seventy-five years ago, the State of Israel announced its independence on former British Mandate territory that the UN Partition Plan of 1947 had delineated. Arab states never recognized that partition plan, which also marked territory for the Mandate's Arab residents. Armies of five Arab nations struck the nascent Jewish state less than one day after its independence declaration. Despite having no formal army (or navy or air force) and being vastly outnumbered, the upstart state defied all predictions, defeating the combined Arab armies and shocking the world.

It wouldn't be the first time. Again in 1956, 1967 and 1973, Israel would square off against Arab armies, emerging victorious every time, though battered in the last conflict. Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, realizing the futility of constant war against his neighbor, called it quits after the 1973 war and, with the extraordinary help of US President Jimmy Carter, negotiated the Camp David Peace Accords with Israeli Prime Minister Menachim Begin, ending the era of Arab-Israeli wars.

To the former Mandate's other inhabitants, the Palestinians, however, Israel's "War of Independence" came to be known as the "nakba," or catastrophe. This coming May 14, as Israelis celebrate their independence, Palestinians will commemorate "Nakba Day." They haven't forgotten the trauma of that time, and their conflict with Israel continues unabated.

The upstart nation, on the other hand, has prospered, defying all expectations. Accepting Jews from all over the world, Israel capitalized on its greatest resource, its people, to move from near poverty to first-world prosperity. By the late 1990s, Israeli engineers, scientists, doctors, and technicians were moving into the big leagues of the global economy. It became the "start-up" nation, birthing new tech and finance companies regularly, often to be quickly snapped up by big American, British, and European corporations hungry for new ideas, technology, and products.

### Internal Strife Over the Future of Democracy

As it celebrates the many achievements of its 75 years, Israel today also must confront new and unprecedented challenges. The first may be the most difficult. In the weeks leading up to the recent celebration of Passover, Israel was convulsed by massive public demonstrations throughout the country, some exceeding 200,000 participants. Demonstrators, who straddled all elements of Israeli society – from active and reserve military personnel to academia, youth, and techies – took to the streets. They were protesting actions of the most right-wing government in Israel's history to undermine the independence of the state's judicial system.

Critics of the government's move argue that it would upset Israel's balance of powers. Supporters assert the move is intended to right a heavily weighted elitist and liberal court system. Former



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PM Ehud Barak described Netanyahu and the conservatives' efforts as "regime change" by attempting to manipulate Israel's democratic system. Former Defense Minister Benny Gantz accused Netanyahu and his coalition of carrying out "a constitutional coup."

With no formal constitution and no effective executive branch and its presidency largely a ceremonial and symbolic office, Israel is a two-branch government, the Knesset (its parliament) and its judiciary. As a parliamentary system, the prime minister is chosen by the Knesset. A coalition made up of Likud and five extreme Zionist conservative and ultra-orthodox parties voted to return Likud's Benjamin Netanyahu to the prime ministry. It was Bibi's deal with the devil. The right wingers seek to dilute the authority of the judiciary, i.e., the Israeli supreme court, maintain military service exemptions for Haredim Jews, expand settlements in the West Bank, and erase previous court rulings protecting LGBTQ+ rights. Israel's large secular class, those who defend the nation in the IDF and comprise its highly productive labor force, was having none of it and took to the streets.

Pressured as he never has been in his 15 years as Israel's prime minister, Bibi blinked. Facing rebelling military reservists, armies of university students, the all-powerful tech and financial sectors, his intelligence chiefs, and hundreds of thousands of defiant citizens, he agreed to suspend legislation pending in the Knesset that would have undermined the supreme court's independence. For now, the matter has been referred to discussions and dialog led by Israeli President Isaac Herzog to search for compromise. Israelis remain wary, nonetheless. Smaller demonstrations continue and some Israelis say they will return to the streets if the government attempts to introduce changes that alter the independence of the courts and the judicial branch. That is to say, this internal struggle for the nation's democratic future is not over.

## **External Enemies Coalescing**

Israel's trials don't stop at its borders. It faces an array of external threats as well. It's distant nemesis, Iran, now appears to be working with closer enemies of the state. According to recent statements of Defense Minister Yoav Galant, Iran is supporting these foes through funding, weapons, advice and other means. They include Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad in the West Bank and Gaza. Meanwhile, Iran is continuing its ongoing support for Hezbollah, Syria, and anti-Israeli militias in Syria. Iran's backing for this multi-front assault, per Galant, likely exceeds one billion dollars. It may also be funneling assistance to the many small militia gangs that have cropped up in the West Bank (see below).

The combined destructive might of these disparate enemy forces likely tops well over one-hundred thousand rockets and missiles, not including Iran's own formidable arsenal. For Iran, that means that even without its long-sought nuclear weapons, it presents a genuine and serious threat to Israel – perhaps not an existential threat, but one nevertheless capable of inflicting massive destruction and casualties on Israel.

In Israel's storied history of conflict, multi-front wars are nothing new. It has often had to contend with enemies on all sides of the postage-stamp sized nation. It has proved that betting against Israel was never a winning bet. But multiple barrages of rockets and missiles coming from all directions are a different scale of challenge than Arab tank battalions and feeble Soviet-era aircraft attacks. The nation's advanced defensive systems like Iron Dome, Iron Beam (scheduled for a 2025 introduction) and soon-to-be-introduced David's Sling, unquestionably are a mitigating factor, not to mention the continued support from its most vital ally, the US. Nevertheless, Israel may require more than ingenuity and innovative weapons to counter this threat.

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## The Enduring Challenge Persists

Finally, there is the region's most enduring conflict. Israel's co-inhabitants in the region between the sea and the Jordan, the Palestinians, present a new challenge, or rather an old challenge in a different guise. The West Bank has been wracked by violence for more than a year. In 2023 alone, 80 Palestinians and more than 20 Israelis have been killed as a result of violence. Should this continue, it would be the worst year of violence since the Second Intifada of 2000-2005, now widely acknowledged as a disaster for the Palestinians. Palestinian attacks against settlers and other Israelis have become too familiar, as have IDF reprisal raids into the West Bank, including Area A where the Palestinian Authority nominally maintains administrative as well as security authority.

What makes the current situation different is that the Palestinian attacks appear to be not only indiscriminate but also aimless, i.e., without an apparent overarching purpose other than to inflict harm. In fact, they are carried out mostly by boys and young men exasperated with the current situation. The attackers are members of small, localized, militia-like gangs, principally from the areas of Nablus and Jenin in the territory's north. They are groups like the Lion's Den, Balata Brigade, and the Hornets' Nest and enjoy surprising popular support among Palestinians, who share their many frustrations. They likely have loose connections to the more established Palestinian organizations and parties like Fatah, Hamas, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

Unlike previous Palestinian groups, however, these new groups lack an overarching political ideology. They are a new generation of young Palestinians simply at war with the status quo. That means not only Israel's occupation but also the incompetent, ineffective, self-serving, and corrupt Palestinian Authority, whose aging

President, Mahmoud Abbas, is in the 18th year of a four-year term and has canceled multiple elections. A toxic cocktail of PA fecklessness, little prospect for change, and despair for a better future only aggravates frustrations and the rage of these youth. They act out of desperation, perhaps the most insidious of motivations.

The attacks present little significant threat to Israel, though Israelis must exert greater caution to avoid these episodic occurrences of violence. More than anything, however, they point out the 75 years of continuing frustration and anger of Palestinians. The nakba continues to simmer.

Israel has demonstrated remarkable ability to overcome hardship, danger, and challenges throughout its brief history. How will it meet the new challenges of today? Might it be best served by returning to address the unresolved problem of 1948. That won't resolve its internal political problems nor the external challenges entirely. Those might be the lesser of the challenges. It's addressing the challenges of the Palestinians that may be most critical.

For the Palestinians, commemorating 75 years of the nakba, there are perhaps even graver challenges. The current system, if one can use that term, is not working. If it isn't the PA, which desperately needs fresh and innovative leadership, then they will have to find another way to prove to themselves and to Israelis that they are capable of self-government and of becoming a true negotiating partner of their neighbor.

One hopes, the Palestinians won't have to wait 75 years.

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## **"We need help from God," Say Migrants in Paris Camps**

Isabella Crispino  
May 03, 2023

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**Migrant camps have gripped no other Western European capital as viciously as Paris. This winter, a wave of political mobilization signaled that this marginalized group was at the end of its tether.**

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**F**or four nights in December, 400 migrants occupied the bustling square in front of the Council of State in central Paris, the highest public administration court in the country. The group, made up mostly of isolated minors, had been living under a bridge on the outskirts of the city in a makeshift camp of battered tents.

The youth had been homeless for up to six months, despite advocacy groups' repeated calls for their shelter. So, during the night of December 2, 2022 volunteers assisted in the relocation of the migrants, their few belongings, and their dilapidated lodgings to where they would be impossible to ignore.

"People don't know how we live," Ali, who is from the Ivory Coast and had been sleeping in the camp for three months, told me. "So, we have come here".

Joseph, who came to France from Liberia, had no other option but to live under the bridge. Like many of his fellow campmates, he was waiting for a meeting with the authorities to receive refugee status. But the process can take months, leaving asylum seekers in a precarious limbo. "That is the problem. If you don't have anyone to help you, you just have to stay outside."

As he spoke, he warmed his hands and feet with a subway grate blowing hot air from below. The air offered a brief respite from the cold.

### **A chronic problem**

"We reached a critical point" Nikolaï Posner, a representative of Utopia 56, a migrant aid nonprofit who helped organize the protest, said of their decision to occupy the square. Given the state's failure to provide shelter, he told me, they had no other choice. Amid freezing temperatures, the situation had become desperate. The camp was rife with illness, and someone, he said, had tried to take their own life.

On the fifth day of the protest, the youth were placed in temporary emergency housing. But the city's inability to implement a long-term solution faced with a steady influx of migrants has resulted in a chronic problem.

The first camp in Paris was established in 2015. Since then, the city received thousands of migrants in the spillover from the gradual dismantling of the Calais Jungle. Faced with extremely limited temporary shelter options, migrants are forced to pitch tents to survive. Gradually, a steady stream of new arrivals pitch tents too, forming a camp. This then attracts the attention of local aid organizations who provide food, water and medical assistance. When the camp becomes too large, the police are called to demolish the camp and evict migrants. At times, thousands of

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inhabitants are offered temporary emergency accommodation.

But Alexandre François, a legal assistant at La Cimade, a non-governmental organization, explains that sometimes migrants are only given shelter for a few days. Furthermore, the shelters are often in deplorable conditions. Also, the authorities cannot account for everyone. Those who arrive at the camp just hours after the evacuation are left homeless. Those in government accommodation are also forced back on the street when the clock runs out.

Many migrants have their asylum claim refused on the basis that France was not the first EU country they landed in. They end up remaining undocumented, without the possibility of stable housing or steady work.

And so, the cycle—which has gripped no other Western European capital so viciously—continues.

### **At the end of their tether**

Many camps have erupted into spontaneous protests. Last year, the police cleared central Paris of hundreds of protesting migrants. For Oriane Sebillote, a member of migrant advocacy group Paris d'Exil, both instances are part of a wider pattern: facing difficult conditions, the migrants are increasingly refusing to stay silent.

The camp, pitched underneath the overground rail lines near La Chapelle metro station, was 2022's last. Late last year, it was razed by the police. They expelled more than 700 migrants, most of them from Afghanistan.

Daoud, from Sudan, had been living there for two weeks. He told me the living conditions were tough, and that he lacked basic provisions. "The smallest things that I need, I can't get them," said

this migrant. The highly contagious scabies disease ripped through the camp because of terrible sanitary conditions. "When I wake up, I don't even have a place to brush my teeth," he added.

"I don't want to be homeless." Daoud began to cry and said, "We need help from God."

Before the evacuation, Daoud told of daily friction with the police. Despite the freezing temperatures, they systematically extinguished small fires throughout the camp. Posner says his organization is aware of routine police violence, a staple of life in the camps.

"There is no solution because the French government doesn't want a solution". For Posner, the issue—and what blocks its resolution—is entirely political. From the heavily funded Frontex, the EU border agency mired in scandal, to the very real barrier of needing a mobile phone to set up asylum appointments, migrants get a clear message. Posner says the message to those who are already here is simple: you are unwelcome. To those who are thinking of coming, the message is don't come.

Between 2015 and 2020, one mega-camp operated at a time. It grew over months to house thousands of migrants. However, things have changed since French police cleared more than 2,000 people from a makeshift migrant camp in the northern Paris suburb of Saint-Denis near the Stade de France. This November 2020 police operation has led to the formation of smaller camps that appear and disappear quickly. Migrants are now playing a cat and mouse game with the police.

As a result, migrants do not know where to find shelter. In the hours after La Chapelle's demolition, around a dozen migrants arrived, each clutching a few bags in their hands. They stood amidst the debris not knowing where to go. Clearly, they had

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no options but to sleep rough in the cold. Sadly, they had become part of the cycle of misery and insecurity for migrants in Paris that seems to have no end in sight.

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**\*Isabella Crispino** is a master's student and researcher who focuses on human rights, environmental issues and geopolitics. She studies in both Paris and New York, and has worked in the Middle East.

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## **India's G20 Summit in Kashmir Is a Big Deal**

Sajid Yousuf Shah  
May 05, 2023

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**The G20 summit in Kashmir showcases the region's great progress over the last few years. It will also trigger a virtuous economic cycle of greater investment, growth and employment generation, which will benefit the region as a whole and the youth in particular.**

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**T**he Group of Twenty (G20) is now “the premier forum for international economic cooperation.” The G20 comprises 19 countries and the European Union. Founded in 1999 and upgraded after the 2007-08 financial crisis, “it plays an important role in shaping and strengthening global architecture and governance on all major international economic issues.”

Most in the US and many in the West are unaware that India holds the presidency of the G20 from 1 December 2022 to 30 November 2023.

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This is a matter of great importance for a diverse democracy of over 1.4 billion people. Kristalina Georgieva, the managing director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), has rightly argued that “India is uniquely positioned to bring countries together.”

In 2023, India stands as an engine of global growth. As per Georgieva, “In a world facing multiple challenges and rising geopolitical tensions, this leadership is critical—and beautifully captured in the theme of India's G20 presidency: One Earth, One Family, One Future.” One earth means conserving the planet; one family means protecting the vulnerable; and one future means ensuring everyone can prosper. As a Kashmiri, I am delighted and excited that India is hosting the G20 summit in Srinagar, the capital of Jammu and Kashmir. That this event can be held in the heart of Kashmir Valley is hugely significant. Although long-disturbed, this land has become remarkably more peaceful and is increasingly integrated with the rest of the nation.

### **G20 Summit Showcases Kashmir's Progress**

For Kashmiris, hosting the G20 summit is a matter of great pride. Kashmir Valley can showcase its stunning beauty, its rich culture and extraordinary tourism potential to the rest of the world. In particular, young people are excited to be the center of world attention in a positive manner, and they relish the idea of engaging with world leaders and top thinkers.

Beyond momentary engagement, Kashmiris see the G20 summit as a milestone on the path of economic development. In the past, Kashmir was linked to troubled hotspots in the world such as Palestine and Chechnya, but that story is changing dramatically. Kashmir is now largely peaceful, has an educated population and grew by 14.64% in the 2021-22 fiscal year when many economies were reeling from COVID-19. Note that India's fiscal

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year begins on 1 April and ends on 31 March. Growth in the 2022-23 fiscal year is expected to be higher. Kashmiris want the jobs and prosperity, not to mention momentum for peace, that growth will bring.

National Public Radio (NPR) and other Western media have painted a grim picture of Kashmir. In August 2022, NPR carried a story, which claimed that “resolution to decades of conflict remains a distant dream.” As a Kashmiri, I am saddened by these stories. The population of Kashmir Valley is youthful, and the young are no longer mired in conflict. They care more for the environment, the pollution in Dal Lake, the sustainability of economic growth, climate change that is melting the Himalayan glaciers and the delicate ecology of their uniquely beautiful valley. Fundamentally, the young want to get on with their lives and know a better future can come only with peace, not conflict.

Since 1947, Pakistan has played a pernicious role in Kashmir, sent jihadis across the border and stoked a bloody insurgency. This role is well chronicled and does not bear repetition here; however, Pakistan’s actions have setback a generation of Kashmiris. Growth does not thrive in turmoil and uncertainty, and peace and stability are necessary preconditions for businesses to thrive. Thankfully, the Indian government has provided the right conditions for entrepreneurship, business activity and growth since 2019. By repealing Article 370, it has allowed non-Kashmiri Indians to own land in Jammu and Kashmir, causing investment to flood into the region. This has made Kashmiris like me optimistic about the future.

### **G20 Summit Provides Economic Stimulus and Hope**

The G20 summit has been a godsend to Kashmir Valley. To prepare for the event, New Delhi is building infrastructure, investing significant sums

and training local people. The multiplier effect of the summit is likely to be significant. People now forget that Delhi was a sleepy provincial city before the 1982 Asian Games. That event converted Delhi into a national engine of growth, and it is hoped the G20 summit will similarly transform Srinagar. The Kashmir Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) has rightly said that this event “will give a massive boost to the economy of the region.” Notably, the G20 Kashmir summit will add to the IMF’s bullishness about the Indian economy.

The G20 summit is a global signal that Kashmir is open for business. It will be a great advertisement for tourism, which was a driver of the Kashmiri economy before troubles broke out in 1989. Kashmir is the crown of India with snowclad mountains, pine trees, lakes, landscapes, saffron fields and exquisite gardens. It is home to sophisticated cuisine, refined crafts and rich culture. For good reason, it has been called the Switzerland of India. Now it will have an opportunity to achieve its tourism and economic potential.

Once the G20 summit ends and tourism takes off, it will amplify the earlier-stated multiplier effect and generate jobs. These new jobs will lead to higher consumption. In turn, this will boost business confidence and lead to greater investment. This virtuous cycle will benefit the region, especially its youth. After a long period of trials and tribulations, we Kashmiris are finally hopeful about the future.

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**\*Sajid Yousuf Shah** is a well-known lawyer, political commentator and activist based in Srinagar, the capital of Jammu and Kashmir. He is a prominent Indian expert on geopolitics, national security, terrorism and extremism. Shah appears regularly on Indian and international television.

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## Bottom Line: Erdoğan's Reign Is Not Over

Nathaniel Handy  
May 06, 2023

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**The first round of Turkey's presidential election is set to begin shortly. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the current president, has been in power for 20 years. Despite the opposition's attempt to unite to fight the ruling party, it will not be enough to end Erdoğan's reign.**

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**P**redictions of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's demise in the upcoming election have been pouring in for months. Since first becoming a member of the Turkish parliament in 2003, Erdoğan has been the defining politician of his generation. In 2014, he won the first Turkish presidential election, and has held the position ever since. Today, however, Erdoğan's position has never seemed so precarious.

Erdoğan represents the ruling political party in Turkey, known as the Justice and Development Party (AKP). The AKP is infamous for its unorthodox economic policies, which have resulted in skyrocketing inflation rates and crippling increases in the cost of living for Turkish citizens. The AKP's dysfunction is further exacerbated by nepotism and widespread corruption. During the decades-long reign of Erdoğan and the AKP, many of Turkey's foreign relations have deteriorated, leaving the country isolated. At the same time, the administration is struggling to manage the huge influx of Syrian and Afghan refugees seeking asylum in Turkey.

To make matters worse, Turkey was hit with two high magnitude earthquakes in February 2023. The devastation wrought in southeast Turkey afflicted an already poor and neglected region of the country. The inadequate response from government agencies quickly piled pressure onto the shoulders of the embattled president. Turkish citizens took to social media to criticize Erdoğan and his administration's response to the disaster. Erdoğan countered by placing a temporary ban on Twitter and allegedly arresting citizens accused of making "provocative posts" concerning the earthquakes.

The Turkish media has also criticized Erdoğan for his aloof response to the devastation. While surveying the aftermath in Pazarcık, the president stated that, "What happens, happens, this is part of fate's plan." His focus on God's hand and destiny was hardly surprising. Erdoğan is a devout Muslim, and his connection to a religiously conservative base has been key to his success.

International media has deemed the recent earthquakes the final straw that will break the back of Erdoğan's long grip on power. However, regardless of the ineptitude of disaster response and the degree to which the president is responsible, the earthquakes will not be the deciding factor of the presidential election. A focus on this as an election decider neglects the wider context in which Turkish elections take place. It is the wider context that will determine the outcome.

### Winner Takes All

A long-running complaint against Erdoğan is that he is a majoritarian politician – meaning that when he wins, he governs not for the whole electorate, but for the constituency that voted for him alone. While there is much truth in this analysis, it is only half the story. It fails to acknowledge that Erdoğan is a majoritarian politician in an essentially majoritarian system.

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It is easy for Western media to complain about the majoritarian instincts of faith-based politicians such as Erdoğan, yet it is striking how silent the same media outlets become when secular forces operate with the same majoritarian instincts. Majoritarian rule has existed as long as the Turkish Republic itself. The founding father of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and his ruling party, the Republican Peoples' Party (CHP), maintained majoritarian control even after single party rule ended in the mid-1940s.

Either elections returned a secular nationalist party to power, which served a secular nationalist agenda, or the military stepped in to dictate a secular nationalist agenda. For decades, these were the only two choices, until the rise of the AKP in the 21st century.

The undeniable electoral success of the AKP has transformed the political landscape in Turkey, after retaining two decades of concentrated power. Unsurprisingly, this has resulted in many power struggles within the conservative establishment itself.

One such power struggle concerns the exiled religious leader, Fethullah Gulen, who Erdoğan openly blames for the orchestration of a failed coup in 2016. In the wake of the coup, Erdoğan's politics turned sharply and decisively towards Turkish nationalism, and away from any accommodation of the country's largest ethnic minority, the Kurds. This shift not only alienated the European Union and many of Erdoğan's supporters in Turkey, but also angered some within the Islamist establishment.

Former prime minister Ahmet Davutoglu, former minister of foreign affairs Ali Babacan, and AKP founder and former president Abdullah Gul have all left the AKP, forming rival, smaller conservative political movements. Unease about

the direction of the AKP is not reserved for liberals and secularists alone.

### **A Weak Opposition**

Erdoğan has always benefitted from a weak and divided opposition. No matter how irascible a politician the president has been, he has managed to stay in power simply by remaining the most popular choice.

As that popularity has diminished, Erdoğan has turned to uglier tactics. One example is the continued harassment and imprisonment of Kurdish politicians connected to the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP). However, the main opposition has remained the Republican Peoples' Party (CHP), the traditional secularist party.

The trouble is, the CHP has a finite appeal. The party consistently returns from elections with about a 25% share of the vote. This number fluctuates only slightly from year to year. This could be because the CHP is the old establishment party, and often seems devoid of new ideas. Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, long-term leader of the CHP, has now held the position for 13 years. Regardless, Kılıçdaroğlu is not known for his charisma. On the campaign trail, he is consistently outshined by Erdoğan. When the opposition bloc, known as the Nation Alliance, was trying to agree on a leader, the name of Ekrem Imamoglu was mentioned before that of Kılıçdaroğlu.

Imamoglu holds the position Erdoğan once held: Mayor of Istanbul, Turkey's largest city. He is a CHP politician, but younger and hungrier. However, in December 2022, a Turkish Court banned Imamoglu from politics and sentenced him to three years in prison for insulting election officials. The Nation Alliance – a disparate group of six parties – has instead turned to the CHP leader, Kılıçdaroğlu, as their presidential candidate. While Kılıçdaroğlu may be the obvious



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compromise candidate, he is not an obvious winner.

Regardless of who the opposition chose, the same majoritarian dynamic will persist in Turkish politics. Erdoğan knows that for the socially conservative electoral majority, the risks of not voting for him are too high. Even if many in his traditional constituency are unhappy with the economy, the arrival of Syrian refugees, or the direction of Erdoğan's nationalist coalition, they are more unhappy with the thought of a CHP-led government.

In the majoritarian world of Turkish politics, there are only two sides, and whoever wins takes all. It is a pattern of democracy that is becoming increasingly familiar across much of the democratic world, and it will play a key role in the Turkish election on the centenary of the nation's birth.

[Hannah Gage edited this piece.]

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\***Nathaniel Handy** is a writer and academic with over ten years of experience in international print and broadcast media. He has published many scholarly articles on the evolution of Turkey's political structure.

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## **India Boldly Asserts Independence with New Technology**

Wes Kussmaul  
May 08, 2023

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**After centuries of colonialism, India is looking to recent technological advances in their country to carve out global independence from the West. India's cutting-edge digital payment system and mobile operating system, BharOS, represent a long awaited opportunity for users desiring more freedom and privacy.**

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**I**ndia is one of many nations looking for ways to assert their independence from past and present Western colonialism. This desire can result in projects that have an air of petulance that is successful locally, but not particularly productive.

Sometimes, an independence effort is made in a more positive spirit. One shining example is India's plan to build a digital environment that is independent of "Silibandia", or Silicon Valley and West-dominated media and broadband industries.

This new endeavor, called BharOS, is a fork of Android built with the sponsorship of India's government, now a nation of 1.4 billion people. This also includes its topnotch developer community, led by alumni of the distinguished IIT.

### **What Google Doesn't Want You To Know**

Android is built on the completely open source Linux operating system originally developed by Linus Torvalds. Thanks to this technology and free software pioneers like Richard Stallman, anything built on their open source platforms is required to be similarly open source. This means that it is free for the public to copy, re-brand, and make their own operating system.

A number of attempts have been made to develop forks of Android that allow for more user

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privacy than what Google builds into Android systems. BharOS will presume that its user is part of the Aadhaar identity platform, but developer documentation suggest they are eagerly looking towards creating a Google-free version of BharOS for Western users.

Building a complete mobile operating system usually requires more resources than even a well-funded entrepreneurial team can typically muster but BharOS is a unique undertaking in a few ways.

### **The Future Is BharOS**

The BharOS platform is ripe with potential. BharOS is well funded, concerned about the overreach of Silicon Valley and will attract the attention of app developers given its large user base in India.

However, the mobile operating system is just a start. Today, since most people conduct business and shop online in our location-independent digital world, a payment system is necessary.

In this regard, India has a unique edge. In 2016 India launched a payment system which, unlike “Silibandia”’s balkanized patchwork of competing systems, is integrated and unified. The Unified Payment Interface (UPI) is powered by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) under the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). UPI built a real-time payment system that allows users to pay directly from their bank accounts without a credit or debit card, running contrary to many “Silibandia” payment systems that require a middle entity.

UPI is also a fairly low cost producer. This allows savings for merchants and users while the system keeps its profitability. With this strategy, UPI could steadily eat into the market share of competing systems as users desire more control

over their finances than other competitors can offer.

Like the Chinese retail economy, India was dominated by cash while the rest of the world absorbed the overhead of moving to plastic substitutes. This enabled China and India to eventually move seamlessly into integrated digital payment systems, while Western payment systems were slowed by the complexity of their old plastic-driven economy.

This seamless integration from cash to digital payment systems is responsible for a significant surge in digital payments across India. In March 2023, UPI reached a record breaking 8.65 billion transactions. The elimination of friction by reducing the number of “moving parts” in the payments system has generated 2021 cost savings of 12.6 billion dollars.

UPI is not resting on its laurels. UPI 2.0, launched on 16 August 2018, enabled users to 1) link their overdraft accounts to a UPI handle; 2) pre-authorise transactions by issuing a mandate for specific merchants; 3) view and store the invoice for the transactions; and 4) set up AutoPay for recurring payments.

The Indian expatriate diaspora, along with an increasing number of Indian tourists abroad, are major factors in the use of UPI in other countries. For those who welcome the tools to build a publicly governed world information and commerce infrastructure, the rapid internationalization of UPI will be a welcome development.

While China attempts, in spite of their looming financial crisis, to encourage the renminbi replacing the US dollar as the world’s reserve currency—could the rupee be in the running as the successor to the dollar in that role? With BharOS and UPI and other developments energizing the

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development of India's infrastructure, that seems more plausible than ever.

[Lane Gibson edited this piece.]

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\***Wes Kussmaul** created the world's first commercially available online encyclopedia in 1991. It quickly morphed into the Delphi social network. In 1993, Delphi was sold to Rupert Murdoch's News America Corporation.

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## **The US Must Act Now To Overcome Chinese Cyber Threat**

Zachary Wright, Amelia Snyder  
May 11, 2023

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**The US internet infrastructure is aging and vulnerable to espionage and sabotage operations, an acute weakness in a time of mounting tensions with China. This problem is exacerbated by the Chinese state's ability to disclaim responsibility and the US public's sluggishness to recognize the threat and support countermeasures.**

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**T**he technological capabilities of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) are a top threat to the United States as the CCP is expanding its interests at the cost of US influence and power worldwide. This has been made possible by a whole-of-government approach that begins with the Chinese state and spreads overseas through cyber-espionage, attacks, and influence operations. This approach is based on opportunities made

exploitable by cyber technology, exacerbated by its ubiquitous presence and enabling of plausible deniability. Differing views which civilian populations hold of cyber threats are another supporting factor for the CCP's approach.

### **The extent of US cyber vulnerability**

Despite the relatively recent creation of cyberspace in the history of national security, its impact has quickly become ever-present. The United States military depends on internet technology for tasks that run the gamut from maintaining satellites and directing missiles, to checking email, increasing the number of potential cyber risk vectors for the country. In the future, this could even expand to cases such as the technology aims the rifles US soldiers use, as in the case of auto-focusing rifles. Looking beyond military applications alone, both military and civilian Americans depend on cyberspace for their everyday lives, with recent research estimating over 8.4 billion internet-connected items in use around the world in 2017, and 49% of the world's population online, up from a mere 4% in 1999.

The internet is an easy way to infiltrate the lives of billions and is integral to processes such as communications, financial management, industrial innovation, and national defense. This already ubiquitous but still growing presence gives cyber-actors an ever-increasing reach, allowing them access to both military and civilian targets. The focus of these attacks is not confined to any one size: individuals and larger entities, such as corporations and government agencies, are equally at risk. These risks are especially felt in a country where outdated laws and infrastructure have created a dearth of protection for citizens.

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## **The Chinese administration enjoys plausible deniability**

Due to the overwhelming availability of the internet, and the unregulated and outdated infrastructure in the United States, cyber actors can often obscure their true identity and location, making it extremely difficult for authorities at the state or federal level to react to these malicious actors in a timely manner. Anyone can claim to be “John Smith from Topeka, Kansas.” While non-standard language use or that user’s IP address could indicate that to be untrue, language use is highly variable even among native English speakers, and IP addresses can be faked using VPNs to support whatever geographic mask the user wishes to wear. The structure of cyber-attacks can make them hard or impossible to identify.

Even when an operation or an attack can be identified and then traced back to adversary country, like China, foreign governments can easily deny that a cyber-attack originated from someone acting on behalf of the government. Instead, the CCP may claim that the attack came from a “lone-wolf citizen-hacktivist”—meaning that the perpetrator was not authorized or condoned by the Chinese government—and that they would turn the bad actor over to the United States if they could be identified. The plausible deniability that an attack occurred and who conducted it is another reason cyber attacks are such a threat from the CCP.

## **US public opinion underprepared to respond to cyber attacks**

It is, however, technological factors alone that render the United States especially vulnerable. The views of the populace within the US make it harder to respond seriously to cyber threats. Cyber-attacks and cyber-espionage, while causing significant economic and national security damage, are often not viewed as “real” attacks in the United

States. By contrast, the Chinese population is more likely to view as a threat cyber attacks which the US public might dismiss as insignificant. Cyber attacks can persist in the background for years, not causing tangible damage for the American citizen to see or feel and without a direct correlation to loss of life, severely hampering the ability to engender support from the average American for a counter-action.

What is more, China is not the sole perpetrator of spying over cyberspace—the United States has been caught exploiting cyber vulnerabilities, just as its allies and adversaries have. A kinetic response to non-kinetic Chinese attacks would be viewed as over-the-top in the United States, undermining public support for politicians’ actions. The United States thus finds itself hamstrung, and its inability to respond to cyber-attacks in a way that deters its adversaries sends the message that these attacks are an acceptable risk. Indeed, the perception is that the United States is unable to prevent unwanted access—an open invitation to continue.

On the Chinese side, this situation is markedly different. Many Chinese nationals are willing to support their government via cyber-attacks on the United States, something often seen as their civic duty. [1] These cyber-attacks can be carried out by as paid hackers working for the government, but are often carried out as a hobby, conducted by people who think of themselves as defending their homeland. Thus, the views of the Chinese populace allow for many more and farther-reaching cyber-attacks with legitimate plausible deniability for the CCP, a potent combination of the various factors that make the prospect of cyber-attacks so dangerous for the US.

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## **Chinese cyber operations are already causing damage**

In just the past few years, China has been linked to penetrating United States companies and government entities, hacking private German technology firms, targeting Southeast Asian nations in dispute with China over the South China Sea with malicious software, and possibly intercepting sensitive communications from United States defense and technology firms. This range of public, private, US and other government targets in a brief span of time indicates the wide extent of cyber-espionage that the People's Republic is supporting. These, it bears noting, are only the efforts that have been caught and linked back to China.

Even if the perpetrators are identified, however, cyber espionage is harder to punish than more traditional espionage techniques which may require direct contact, as the physical location of hackers can make extradition all but impossible, and, besides, the adversary government can easily claim that perpetrators operated of their own accord. Despite the United States government identifying CCP cyber-espionage, the current administration has not sanctioned China over the actions of their hackers.

The threat posed by China to the US, furthermore, does not stop with espionage. Physically destructive operations utilizing cyber technology are an increasingly feasible option for the People's Republic. As critical US infrastructure is increasingly networked, yet still outdated, the threat from attacks on American infrastructure is increasing. The CCP is already capable of conducting cyber-attacks that temporarily disrupt critical infrastructure within the United States. Due to the age and design of the American power-grid, one of these attacks on a legitimate military target could cause cascading effects through the grid, knocking out everything

from railroads to grocery stores and to hospitals. Because of the United States' inability to counter these attacks, cyber operations in a military context could play a much larger role if China and the US find themselves on opposite sides of a war in the future. If America goes to war to defend Taiwan from China, and China targets the American power-grid as a response, the American people may quickly remove their support for a far-away war that does not directly benefit them but does cost them lives and livelihood on home soil.

Offensive operations need not be limited to outright destruction of US assets. The CCP already has deployed other mechanisms of influence that are currently ongoing and which depend in a large part on Chinese cyber prowess. Recent examples include Chinese shaping of the narrative on COVID-19, promoting CCP-preferred policy, and a contemplated, though not completed, information operation to change the outcome of the 2020 presidential election. These operations threaten the structure of American democracy, support for a national agenda, and mislead American citizens about what global outcomes support American needs.

In addition to national information operations originating from the government itself, the CCP has additional resources from what American would consider the "private sector." In China, the 1993 Company Law mandates that all companies based in China allow specific groups in their company to operate on behalf of the CCP. In 2018 over 50% of private companies in China had members of the CCP, but for China's largest 500 companies' membership was over 92% and increasing. Two examples are TikTok and WeChat. These companies have data on millions of customers and potential access to millions more, which could potentially be used to manipulate those who interact with Chinese products.

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## What can the US do

There are two distinct strategies which the United States must pursue to reduce the cyber risk posed by the CCP. The first strategy is improving American cyber infrastructure; the second is ensuring effective punishment of malign cyber-actors who harm the United States.

To improve American cyber infrastructure, both government and private entities must secure systems, ensure data fidelity, and protect infrastructure. In 2020, the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) recommended ten critical actions that US public and private entities need to take in order to address cyber risks. These actions range from “develop[ing] and execut[ing] a comprehensive strategy for national cybersecurity” to “strengthen[ing] the federal role in protecting the cybersecurity of critical infrastructure (e.g., electricity grid and telecommunications networks),” and would reduce the vulnerabilities in American cyberspace, denying access to nefarious actors and decreasing the damage that these bad actors can do if they are able to penetrate cyber defenses. The Biden Administration has expanded on these goals in their National Cybersecurity Strategy, released March 2023. Simply put, if United States cybersecurity is stronger, it will be harder for the CCP to exploit.

In addition to hardening American cyberspace, the United States must also begin punishing nefarious actors for attempted and successful penetrations of American cyberspace. Cases of hacking which are linked back to the CCP must result in sanctions against the Chinese government. Sanctions limiting the transfer of American intellectual property (IP) to Chinese companies would be one way to make a dent in the effects of hacking, since many instances of cyber-espionage against American companies result in stolen IP, reduced profits, and lost American jobs. By

penalizing the same industries that benefit from hacking, the United States can avoid escalating the standard set for in-kind retaliation in the case that American companies are caught committing espionage against Chinese corporations.

Cyber-espionage, while difficult to track, is not untraceable. Although CCP cyber-espionage takes advantage of ubiquitous connectivity, anonymity, and the United States’ reluctance to react, it can be detected and dealt with. Attackers are not always capable of entering and exiting networks without leaving a trail of evidence. This may ultimately lead to their arrest or, at the very least, the discovery of their identity and employment by state actors.

In summary, the Chinese Communist Party’s cyber capabilities are currently a severe threat to the United States through cyber-espionage, the risk of attacks, and influence operations. Without increasing American cyber defenses and sanctioning malign actors, the United States will remain vulnerable to CCP cyber operations. The United States government has already proposed specific steps for reducing cyber risk and strengthening the nation against a top threat. But actions must follow these statements. By following through on these recommendations, the United States can begin to defend itself against a dangerous adversary.

[Anton Schauble edited this piece.]

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## **Long Covid Shines Spotlight Now on Other Long Diseases**

Ranjani Iyer Mohanty  
May 13, 2023

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**COVID-19 can have long-term effects and so can other diseases. The time has come for us to accept that seemingly short-term diseases can have long-term consequences, and help millions of patients to attain more complete treatment and support.**

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**L**ong Covid. Chronic Covid. Post Covid. Long-haulers symptoms. Over the past two years, we've learnt that the fiery comet head of COVID-19 can come with a long tail of impact. Perhaps for the first time in our human history, the long-term effects of a short-term disease are being so thoroughly researched all over the world by such a large number of scientists, using such advanced technology, and with such numerous subjects.

However, the concept of Long Covid also raises a broader question. If we can have Long Covid, can we also have long versions of other supposedly short diseases? What about Long Malaria? Long Pneumonia? Long Shingles?

## **A look at Long Covid**

When people first started reporting symptoms after the acute stage of covid had passed and they were testing negative, the initial response of the medical community was to label it as either 'anxiety' if the patient was young and particularly female, or as 'natural aging' if the patient was elderly. Not only did doctors dismiss the post-Covid symptoms of the general public, they also dismissed the post-Covid symptoms of their fellow healthcare workers. Then the research began and the results started coming in—first in a trickle and then in a torrent.

COVID-19 has been generally viewed as a severe acute respiratory disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus. Long Covid refers to its after-effects, which can be broad in nature, evolving, and continue for an indefinite time. Mayo Clinic defines it as “an inflammatory or host response towards a virus that occurs approximately four weeks after initial infection and continues for a yet uncharacterized duration.” One meta-analysis looking at 14 to 110 days after infection listed 55 Long Covid symptoms, with the most common ones being fatigue, headache, attention disorder, hair loss, and shortness of breath.

Another study involving patients six months after 'recovery' found “functional mobility impairments, pulmonary abnormalities, mental health disorders.” Other studies also refer to brain fog, cognitive dysfunction, loss of taste and smell, pain in muscles and joints, depression, autoimmune diseases, and neurological impairments. A recent 2023 review says the following: “More than 200 symptoms have been identified with impacts on multiple organ systems. At least 65 million individuals worldwide are estimated to have long COVID, with cases increasing daily.”

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Such after-effects of covid should not have been a surprise to the medical community given the documented after-effects of previous pandemics.

### **Long-Term effects of 1918 Influenza Epidemic and other illnesses**

After the 1918 Influenza Epidemic, many people suffered for weeks, months, and years. And some were never quite the same again. Fatigue, insomnia, and depression were common post-flu symptoms. Admissions in psychiatric hospitals increased significantly for six years following the pandemic. People born during or just after the 1918 flu pandemic were on average slightly shorter as adults, and, some 60 years later, they showed a greater incidence of heart disease and diabetes.

Given the past documented long-term effects of the 1918 Flu, not to mention SARS and MERS, and the current well-researched COVID-19, long-term effects of other illnesses seem not only plausible but probable.

The discovery of Long Covid has led to the recent development of the term “post-acute sequelae of Covid-19” (PASC) — a medical term for the lingering after-effects of COVID-19. And by association, we’ve seen a renaissance of older, more general, terms such as ‘post-acute sequelae’ (PAS) and ‘post viral syndrome’.

The PAS of some illnesses are easy to believe because they affect the same primary organ and present similar symptoms as during the acute stage – only much later in life. Early childhood Pneumonia can result in adult conditions of lung function deficits as well as “an increased risk of adult asthma, non-smoking related COPD, and bronchiectasis.”

Tuberculosis comes in two forms: active or latent. This means we can carry the tuberculosis

bacteria within our body and it becomes active when our immunity is low. This can happen years or even decades into our life. Shingles is defined as an acute viral infection, but it could be said to be chronic on two counts. First, after the rash has disappeared, the pain can linger on for months or even years. And second, even once all symptoms are gone and the patient is said to have recovered, “the virus remains latent in the dorsal root ganglia.” And so, similar to tuberculosis, shingles can recur, even years later, in times of stress.

The PAS of other illnesses are more difficult to accept because they are more varied.

Malaria is a parasitic mosquito-borne disease and has been found to be complex in its progress. After the mosquito bite, it can have an incubation period alone of anywhere from six days to one year before any symptoms show. Then, there is chronic malaria, which can continue for years. We seem to think that we have an illness and an infection only as long as we have a fever—but a silent infection can linger. Chronic malaria causes anemia, increased susceptibility to other infections, and even maternal complications. Furthermore, children who get the more dangerous version, cerebral malaria, have been shown to suffer from lifelong neurological issues such as “cognitive, motor skills, and visual coordination impairment, as well as seizures and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.”

Dengue is a viral mosquito-borne disease. It is lesser known than malaria but equally or more prevalent. And since it is lesser known in the western world, dengue is relatively under-researched. Its febrile period is about a week, but its PAS—body pain, fatigue, and depression—continue much longer. Most studies did follow-ups for only a maximum of six months. But a Cuban study covering two years actually showed an increase in fatigue after the one-year mark.



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A study looking at patients who had had Ebola more than two years earlier found they still struggled with impairment of vision, hearing, swallowing, sleeping, and arthralgias as well as memory loss, mental confusion, and chronic health problems.

For more than the past 50 years, research has shown how viral infections in general can have a long lasting impact. A 1970 study showed that neonatal virus infection in mice affected their behavior and weight, which in turn affected their aging process. A 1985 study showed exposure to viral infections in utero increased risk of cancer and diabetes in adulthood. And now it's known that acute infections of respiratory and gastrointestinal systems can initiate long-term inflammatory disorders.

Even a condition very limited in time and space like burns can have a “long lasting impact on the quality of people’s lives, with persisting problems related to scarring, contractures, weakness, thermoregulation, itching, pain, sleep, body image and psychosocial wellbeing.”

Three hurdles seem to be limiting our imagination to see these illnesses in their entirety and therefore our complete treatment of them: we seem desperate to see all illnesses as short duration, implying fully curable; if illnesses cannot all be curable, then we want to at least neatly categorize them as acute versus chronic; and we wish to clearly allocate each illness to a single organ.

### **How long is long?**

We like to see people as either well or sick. And if we're going to be sick, we want to be sick only for a limited and well-defined number of days. So we haven't wanted to think of the long-term effects of diseases. But unfortunately, they exist. With coronaviruses, a study found fatigue in 60% of so-

called recovered patients at the 12-month mark. With dengue, a study found clinical symptoms in patients two years after infection. With SARS, a study found fatigue in 40% of the subjects at the four-year mark. And the 12 months, 2 years, and 4 years did not signify the end of the PAS – merely the end of the studies.

How long is “long”? Why should a disease that has somehow remained active in the body for so long suddenly subside at the 4-year mark? It may not work in accordance with our hope, our calendar, nor our attention span. A 2021 study of post viral syndrome shows how the viral load and inflammation often subside immediately after the acute stage but then gradually increase years later, bringing in their wake old and new symptoms. Some posit that the 1918 Flu may have been responsible for the surge in coronary disease in the 1960s—some 40 years later.

Doing longitudinal studies of 10, 20, or even 40 years requires time, money, a long attention span, not to mention a historical bent. And we'll have to wait to do truly long-duration studies of COVID-19. But in the meantime, we would be unhelpful and irresponsible to dismiss patients' post-illness symptoms just because we can't prove them, we don't understand them, or we don't yet have research evidence. What we don't yet know about diseases and medical science will fill many textbooks in the future. We need to be humble and open-minded.

### **Rethink “acute” versus “chronic” and “single system” versus “multi system”**

We also like to neatly categorize things. With illnesses, our practice has been to categorize them into chronic and acute. A chronic illness is slow developing and long lasting: like diabetes or hypothyroidism. An acute illness is sudden in onset and short in duration: like a broken bone or a heart attack or influenza (flu). But a broken bone

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can be the result of slowly evolving osteoporosis and a heart attack can be the result of plaque slowly building up in the blood vessels. And even a flu can have long PAS.

Perhaps there are no such distinct categories as acute and chronic. Perhaps it's more of a spectrum. And perhaps one leads to another. An acute condition can be the result of a chronic illness. And what begins as an acute infection may have a chronic avatar. And furthermore, that chronic avatar may or may not be identical to the original disease.

We are prone to thinking of one illness as affecting one organ or, in other words, a single system. But this perspective is being questioned. Many autoimmune diseases—and even diabetes and hypertension—are now viewed as multisystemic.

Furthermore, Dr. Barbara Starfield, a physician and an academic, has said that many diseases themselves are not distinct entities, but rather heterogeneous entities, which are all associated with each other. She gave the example that “people with hypothyroidism are four times more likely to have rheumatoid arthritis and cardiovascular diseases.” Dr. Debby van Riel, a virologist at Erasmus University in the Netherlands, sees even the flu as a multisystemic disease that affects not just the respiratory tract but many parts of the body.

And while COVID-19 is thought of as primarily a respiratory illness, Long Covid is considered “a multisystem disorder that commonly affects the respiratory, cardiovascular, and hematopoietic systems,” not to mention the neurological, cognitive, and musculoskeletal systems.

A recent German study gives a list of over 25 ‘non-persistent viruses’ and an even longer list of their associated PAS. These PAS concern not only

the primary infection organ, but also various other organs – making the long-term effects multisystem in nature.

### **Getting a fuller picture**

The reason we're not getting the full picture of illnesses is primarily due to our refusal to see it. And our refusal to see the full picture is contributing to the partial treatment and persistence of such illnesses, not to mention the frustration and continuing disability of patients.

A 1939 study said the following: “Malaria is a chronic disease, not alone an infection of the blood stream characterized by chills and fever”. And yet, even today, the World Health Organization (WHO) labels malaria as “an acute febrile illness.” That 1939 study also warned that “Failure to comprehend or detect its insidious course and its strong tendency to relapse, even after months or years, accounts for the fact that it still ranks as one of the serious social and economic problems.” And yet an article in the Lancet just last year was titled “Malaria: (still) a global health priority.” A 1987 study presented the term ‘post-viral syndrome’ and hoped that “awareness of the syndrome will lead to an increase in its diagnosis in general practice”. More than three decades on, we're still waiting.

In the spirit of optimism, our society likes to see diseases as short, clearly defined, and easily curable. Speedy onset, obvious symptoms, crisp diagnosis, a magic potion, and fast resolution. Long-term chronic conditions that do not arrive in a dramatic fashion, that have no clearly visible symptoms, and that dribble on are – let's face it – boring. Doctors lose interest and sometimes even the families lose interest. The patients may not lose interest but they get exhausted by their struggle to be heard and believed over a course of weeks, months, and sometimes years. But with such myopic and dismissive behavior, we will continue

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to see only the fiery heads of the comets and miss their debilitating long tails. And in doing so, we're failing to fully treat these diseases and we're doing a huge disservice to the sufferers of PAS—leading to economic costs to our society as well as costs in lives only partially lived.

If we are to fully and effectively manage the long tail of diseases, we need an evolution in the perspective of the academic research community as well as the practicing medical community to view illnesses more holistically both in terms of time, encompassing years, and space, encompassing multiple body systems.

Today, we can use the unprecedented opportunity thrown up by the current discovery of, attention to, and momentum concerning Long Covid to finally do three things: ignite researchers to look into the long-term effects of other illnesses, convince medical practitioners to accept the possibility that seemingly short-term diseases can have long-term consequences, and help millions of patients to attain more complete treatment and support, giving them the opportunity to live fuller lives.

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## **New 21st Century World Order: Nation State vs Civilizational State**

James M. Dorsey  
May 14, 2023

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**US President Joe Biden has put forth the autocracy vs. democracy paradigm. Chinese President Xi Jinping**

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**U**S President Joe Biden positions the Ukraine war as a battle between autocracy and democracy. That reduces what is at stake in the war. The stakes constitute a fundamental building block of a new 21st-century world order: the nature of the state.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine represents the sharp end of the rise of a critical mass of world leaders who think in civilizational rather than national terms. They imagine the ideational and/or physical boundaries of their countries as defined by history, ethnicity, culture, and/or religion rather than international law.

Often that assertion involves denial of the existence of the other and authoritarian or autocratic rule. As a result, Russian President Vladimir Putin is in good company when he justifies his invasion of Ukraine by asserting that Russians and Ukrainians are one people. In other words, Ukrainians as a nation do not exist.

Neither do the Taiwanese or maritime rights of other littoral states in the South China Sea in the mind of Chinese President Xi Jinping. Or Palestinians in the vision of Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's coalition partners. Superiority and exceptionalism are guiding principles for men like Turkey's Recep Tayyip

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Erdogan, India's Narendra Modi, Hungary's Victor Orban, and Netanyahu.

In 2018, the Knesset, the Israeli parliament, adopted a controversial basic law defining Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people. “Contrary to Israel’s Declaration of Independence, the nation-state law was seen as enshrining Jewish superiority and Arab inferiority, as bolstering Israel’s Jewish character at the expense of its democratic character,” said journalist Carolina Landsmann.

Israeli religious Zionist writer Ehud Neor argued that “Israel is not a nation-state in Western terms. It's a fulfillment of Biblical prophecy that Jewish people were always meant to be in the Holy Land and to follow the Holy Torah, and by doing so, they would be a light unto the world. There is a global mission to Judaism.”

Similarly, Erdogan describes Turkey as “dünyanın vicdanı,” the world's conscience, a notion that frames his projection of international cooperation and development assistance. “Turkey is presented as a generous patriarch following in the steps of (a particularly benevolent reading of) the Ottoman empire, taking care of those in need—including, importantly, those who have allegedly been forgotten by others. In explicit contrast to Western practices described as self-serving, Turkish altruism comes with the civilizational frame of Muslim charity and solidarity reminiscent of Ottoman grandeur,” said scholars Sebastian Haug and Supriya Roychoudhury.

In an academic comparison, Haug and Roychoudhury compare Erdogan’s notion of Turkish exceptionalism with Modi’s concept of “vishwaguru.” The concept builds on the philosophy of 19th-century Hindu leader Swami Vivekananda. “His rendition of Hinduism, like Gandhian Hindu syncretic thought, ostensibly espouses tolerance and pluralism. With this and similar framings, the adoption of an allegedly

Gandhi-inspired syncretic Hindu discourse enables Modi to distance himself politically from the secularist civilizational discourse of (Indian nationalist leader Jawaharlal) Nehru,” the two scholars said. “At the same time, though, Modi's civilizational discourse, with its indisputable belief in the superiority of Hinduism, has begun to underpin official rhetoric in international forums,” they added.

In a rewrite of history, Putin, in a 5,000-word article published less than a year before the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, portrayed the former Soviet republic as an anti-Russian creation that grounded its legitimacy in erasing “everything that united us” and projecting “the period when Ukraine was part of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union as an occupation.”

In doing so, Putin created the justification civilizationalist leaders often apply to either expand or replace the notion of a nation-state defined by hard borders anchored in international law with a more fluid concept of a state with external boundaries demarcated by history, ethnicity, culture, and/or religion, and internal boundaries that differentiate its superior or exceptional civilization from the other.

Civilizationalism serves multiple purposes. Asserting alleged civilizational rights and fending off existential threats help justify authoritarian and autocratic rule.

Dubbed Xivilisation by Global Times, a flagship newspaper of the Chinese Communist Party, Xi has redefined civilisation to incorporate autocracy. In March, Xi unveiled his Global Civilization Initiative at a Beijing conference of 500 political parties from 150 countries.

Taking a stab at the Western promotion of democracy and human rights, the initiative suggests that civilisations can live in harmony if

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they refrain from projecting their values globally. “In other words, ” quipped The Economist, “the West should learn to live with Chinese communism. It may be based on Marxism, a Western theory, but it is also the fruit of China’s ancient culture.” Xi launched his initiative days before Biden co-hosted a virtual Summit for Democracy.

The assertion by a critical mass of world leaders of notions of a civilisational state contrasts starkly with the promotion by Nahdlatul Ulama, the world’s Indonesia-based largest and most moderate Muslim civil society movement, of the nation-state as the replacement in Islamic law of the civilizationalist concept of a caliphate, a unitary state, for the global Muslim community.

Drawing conclusions from their comparison of Erdogan’s Turkey and Modi’s India, Haug and Roychoudhury concluded that civilizationalist claims serve “two distinct but interrelated political projects: attempts to overcome international marginalization and efforts to reinforce authoritarian rule domestically.”

Like Biden, Xi and other civilizationalist leaders are battling for the high ground in a struggle to shape the future world order and its underlying philosophy. Biden’s autocracy vs. democracy paradigm is part of that struggle. But so is the question of whether governance systems are purely political or civilizational. Addressing that question could prove far more decisive for democracies.

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## Why Royalty Still Works in the UK and Elsewhere

Nathaniel Handy  
May 15, 2023

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**Hereditary rule removes the notion of someone having more merit than someone else, so problematic to our tastes. In doing so, it ironically allows monarchy a backdoor into the meritocratic, democratic age.**

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Everyone loved Queen Elizabeth II. ‘No one had a bad word to say about her’ is the defining phrase of the moment. Her popularity and success is usually ascribed to who she was, rather than what she was. But is that really so?

### Birth or Merit?

Royalty is generally regarded as anathema to the meritocratic, democratic age. How can we possibly accept people being born to rule? It flies in the face of all we are taught to believe.

If that’s true, then the only way the queen can have been so great in her role as a born ruler is by dint of her being a truly wonderful person, on an individual, human level, in spite of the unsavory task of hereditary rule.

There are two other choices: our rulers either rule us due to corruption or merit. Depending on whether we live in an autocracy, a weak democracy or a strong one, the sliding scale between corruption and merit will be different.

Queen Elizabeth’s United Kingdom is generally regarded as more meritocratic than corrupt. By that

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rationale, our politicians rule us because they are better than us through merit.

The trouble is, meritocracy is hard to swallow. When you ask an individual: do you think a political leader is ruling you because they are better than anyone else, you soon hear arguments about the innate corruption of the system.

### **The Queen's (or King's) Magic**

Hereditary rule removes the notion of someone having more merit than someone else, so problematic to our tastes. In doing so, it ironically allows monarchy a backdoor into the meritocratic, democratic age.

Queen Elizabeth II was not the queen through merit. She was just born to it. That makes her no better than anyone else at being a queen – if you were born to it. This notion puts people at their ease.

Sure, the whole edifice of royalty is deeply unedifying to the modern mind. But if in our hearts we don't truly believe the utopia of meritocracy can exist, then monarchy becomes a fallback against worse corruption.

And so most people become happy with the queen, or indeed, the king.

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## **Will Democracy Survive the Rise of China?**

Dr. Reza Parchizadeh  
May 17, 2023

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**The US is becoming increasingly isolationist as it gradually withdraws from conflicts around the world. With the withdrawal of the US and decline of democratic ideals, China is swooping in to secure the role of global hegemon.**

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**T**hese days, China is trying to play the role of the global peacemaker. However, China's terrible record of human rights and democracy since the 1949 Communist Revolution forebodes the emergence of this leviathan on the world stage.

With Beijing acting more assertively as an international actor and challenging the US-centered world order, questions arise as to what might happen if China becomes the global hegemon and whether democracy will survive worldwide when that happens.

Some experts refer to the 21st century as the "Chinese Century," because Beijing has shown the material potential, strategic patience and determination to become a hegemon. China has subtleties that its closest allies, namely Iran and Russia, lack. Without firing a shot or starting a war so far, China has projected its power on the world stage through diplomacy, economy and technology, albeit with a lot of political arm-twisting, military muscle, infiltration and espionage behind that conventional façade.

More recently, China has raised its profile by grafting itself into peacemaking efforts within

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several longstanding conflicts across the globe. Beijing has sponsored a Saudi-Iranian rapprochement, and is doing a great deal to resolve the conflict between Riyadh and Tehran over the civil war in Yemen. China's successes in peacemaking deal a blow to the prestige of the US and the United Nations (UN), whose joint efforts to put an end to the decade-long bloody conflict have proved fruitless so far.

In the absence of a strong American presence in the region, more neutral or Western-friendly nations are likely to lean towards China for security. Since the stability of the Middle East is aligned with the newfound interests of Beijing, we can expect that the China-centered emerging order will calm the turbulent waters in the Arab-Iranian theater of conflict for a while, of course with the obvious exclusion of Israel.

### **China's Role in the Russia-Ukraine War**

After the end of World War II, the Middle East was primarily an American sphere of influence. However, since the end of the Cold War, the US has been gradually withdrawing from the region. For many in Washington, the Middle East simply does not have the strategic value that it did during the Cold War. That's why the US has been trying to pivot to Asia to counter the rise of China in the Far East. Ironically, Beijing looks eager to fill the "vacuum of superpower" in the Middle East.

China has also been trying to broker a peace deal between Ukraine and Russia. So far, Beijing has only been paying lip service to peace. For example, while claiming to mediate between Kyiv and Moscow, China has reportedly been providing Moscow with arms, drones, and economic aid. But if it perceives that playing the role of the peacemaker in the European theater of war will further raise its global profile, China might act accordingly. Especially if the West backs off from the Russia-Ukraine war, as evidence suggests,

China's role as a global peacemaker could further grow.

The peace that Beijing establishes between Russia and Ukraine will naturally be in Moscow's favor, but it might not be so unfair as to kill any incentive for Kyiv to come to the table. After all, Russian President Vladimir Putin is now relying heavily on Chinese President Xi Jinping. Therefore, Beijing can demand concessions for Ukraine that the Kremlin cannot ignore. It should be noted that China's intentions here go far beyond appeasing Russia, its long-time ally. Beijing is keen on presenting itself as a fair and reasonable superpower that the West and the rest of the world can trust as the new sheriff in town.

As for a head-on confrontation with America, China is currently trying to avoid that, for the US is the world's leading military and economic power and still holds a significant edge over China. Currently, the US and China are engaged in a new Cold War, while discussions over Taiwan are also intensifying between the two global superpowers. But, this will not necessarily lead to a military conflict. However, as America's global engagement continues to dwindle, things might take a different turn in the future.

### **The Erosion of Democracy**

Judging by what we see today, democracy is at risk of deteriorating worldwide. In today's world, authoritarian regimes are willing to invest heavily in their ideological and material war on democracy. On the other hand, democratic countries generally refrain from standing up for their values, and instead resort to the myopic and short-term logic of "cost-benefit" to avoid an imminent conflict. As a result, democratic countries are leaving much less of an assertive mark on global events. If this continues, democracy is bound to decline.

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So far, China has restrained itself from explicitly interfering in the internal affairs of the countries under its influence. However, there is no guarantee that China will stick to that policy once it has achieved global hegemony. Indeed, it will likely try to cast its satellite states in the same mold. This can already be seen in Iran, which is already aligned with China. But Beijing will likely try to do the same in many South Asian, Middle Eastern, African, and South American countries as well.

The rise of China and its allies on the world stage is also partly predicated on some of the internal workings of the West. Far-right, populist politics have already contributed to the erosion of democracy in the West. An increase in right-wing, isolationist tendencies in the US and the EU is likely to lead to a power vacuum around the globe that China will race to fill.

Right-wing politicians in the West tend to adopt a conciliatory approach to dictators around the world. This is due to their strong bias in favor of local and national concerns over global matters. As a result, they tend to de-prioritize human rights and democracy elsewhere. As such, the West, both in its conservative and progressive manifestations, is becoming less interventionist and more isolationist with each passing day.

The prospect of an inexorable onslaught of authoritarianism against an entrenched and confused West does not bode well for the future of democracy worldwide. However, the West cannot continue on this regressive trajectory forever. When it becomes apparent that the existential threat of authoritarianism is inescapable, a paradigm shift is likely to occur. This will lead to a recalibration of forces towards an all-out confrontation with China and its allies.

There is also a growing demand for democracy among the oppressed people living under the yoke of despotic regimes. Many people in China, Russia

and Iran are now seeking freedom and democracy. The same is true for people living under Chinese and Russian influence in places such as Hong Kong, Ukraine, Afghanistan and Central Asia. The West must organize all-out efforts to counter despots. When these efforts coalesce with the resistance and inevitable revolt of the oppressed against their oppressors, then and only then will it be possible for liberalism and democracy to emerge victorious worldwide.

[Hannah Gage edited this piece.]

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## **Has the Rainbow of Inclusivity Now Become a Tyranny?**

Ellis Cashmore  
May 19, 2023

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**Inclusivity of one of the century's great cultural tropes. Taking the knee for black lives and wearing a rainbow on your shirt to support LGBTQ+ rights has become the norm. Many people object to such gestures on philosophical, religious or cultural grounds. Has forcing them to go along with these so-called inclusive gestures turned coercive?**

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**I**nclusivity. Has there ever been a word so self-evidently good that only an ogre would dare question its benignity? Everyone, or at least every rational person, buys into this unchallengeable shibboleth of twenty-first century culture. And yet.

Earlier this year, France's professional football organization called for all players from its top leagues to wear shirts with rainbow-colored numbers to express support for The International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia. Five players refused and chose not to play rather than show solidarity with the inclusivity signaled by the special day.

### **Personal Beliefs**

A year ago, the Paris St-Germain football player Idrissa Gueye declined to play in a match rather than wear a rainbow symbol in support of LGBTQ+ rights. The then club manager Mauricio Pochettino said only that Gueye missed the game for "personal reasons." Gueye was born and raised in Senegal, where about 97% of the population are Muslim and homosexuality is illegal and punishable by prison sentences of up to five years. It is also illegal in Qatar, the home of Paris St-Germain's owners. Last year's men's World Cup was staged there, of course.

Among the players who declined to participate this year was Zakaria Aboukhlal, who plays for Toulouse and was born in Morocco, another Muslim country, where blasphemy against Islam is a punishable offense and same sex relationships are legally prohibited. "Respect is a value that I hold in great esteem," Aboukhlal wrote on Twitter, explaining his refusal to participate in the day of celebration. "It extends to others, but it also encompasses respect for my own personal beliefs. Hence, I don't believe I am the most suitable person to participate in this campaign."

It seemed a measured response and contrives an answer to a question that has so far not been asked: Is inclusivity inclusive? It sounds like a pun or some other form of wordplay, but it conveys an uncertainty about one of today's most momentous cultural trends: Does inclusivity undermine the very groups it seeks to embrace?

### **Civic Unity vs. Individual Liberty**

Every right minded person agrees inclusivity is desirable: We can never right history's wrongs, but we can at least equalize conditions in a way that ensures no repetition. This policy aims to provide equal access to opportunities and resources for groups that have historically been oppressed. By promoting understanding, challenging stereotypes and encouraging empathy, it's possible to create spaces where diverse populations can come together, engage in respectful dialogue and live and work together.

The trouble is: certain groups that have been subordinated sometimes oppose the policy of inclusivity. Muslims are one such group. They have no particular interest in contributing toward building a society in which LGBTQ+ groups are accepted, integrated, respected and treated as equals. Understandably so: The Qur'an stipulates that homosexuality is sinful.

Muslims have faced discrimination, sometimes known as Islamophobia, and continue to do so. They assert their right to believe homosexuality is a sin. Religious freedom is as much a human right as anything we can conceive. So, how do we respect both Islam and groups it deems sinners and so unworthy of respect? Squaring this circle requires us to distinguish between cultural inclusivity and individual rights.

The philosopher John Rawls (1921-2002) considered what conditions need to be satisfied in order to achieve what he considered a just society.

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Balancing social good against the protection of individual rights and liberties was the key. It seems rational to preserve basic liberties, such as freedom of speech and assembly, as well as ensuring equality of opportunities. No rational person would willingly sacrifice these in pursuit of something as indeterminate as the social good, but Rawls entertained the possibility of civic unity amid a diversity of worldviews. He argued that curbing the liberties of an intolerant group that intended to harm the liberties of others may be justified. But what if the intolerant and potentially harmful group is one that's been denied equal treatment? And what if the group's apparent intolerance is based on a religious mandate. In other words, the group's unwillingness to accept views, beliefs and behavior that differ from its own derives from its commitment to a faith. One answer to the question came via a case in England in 2010.

A Christian owner of a bed-and-breakfast in England refused a double room to a gay male couple. The owner insisted that it was against her religious convictions to let two men share a bed. A court concluded she unlawfully discriminated against the couple. Her appeal was supported by the Christian Institute, a national charity that defends the civil liberties of Christians. She lost her appeal. The word inclusivity was not in the popular vocabulary at the time, but the import of the court's decision was clear: Her religious beliefs, no matter how fervently held, provided no justification for her action, which breached Britain's equality law and was therefore harmful, in the sense it had an adverse effect on particular groups. The verdict portended the arrival of inclusivity, prioritizing the social good over religious beliefs.

### **The Mailed Fist**

Inclusivity describes the endgame fought for over the decades by those who oppose racism, sexism, homophobia and many other forms of bigotry that

have blighted society. But it's an ideal: Desirable and perfect but unlikely to become a reality. The cracks appeared in the late 1970s when Louis Farrakhan took over the leadership of the Nation of Islam, a predominantly African American organization advocating black economic independence and separatism. Farrakhan denied allegations of antisemitism, sexism and homophobia but used the phrase "Satanic Jews," prompting the uncomfortable recognition that belonging to a group that had been disparaged historically did not prevent someone reiterating the disparagement of others.

Similarly, women who railed for decades against sexism, or to use a more current term, misogyny have, in recent years, been accused of bigotry when they've opposed the induction of transgender women into institutions traditionally reserved for biological females. It's hardly surprising many women have responded angrily to the appearance of transgender females in sports competitions, prisons, shelters and bathrooms designated for women. But the logic of inclusivity is irresistible. Women's groups will flail, but inclusivity bears the feelings and ideas of our times and, when necessary, reveals a mailed fist inside its velvet glove.

For example, in England, some football crowds voiced their disapproval of the Premier League's introduction of taking the knee before games. The gesture was to signal the sport's alignment with Black Lives Matter and demonstrate football's fight against racism. Thus it was consistent with the inclusivity project. When fans remonstrated, they were instantly denounced as racists. In fact, much of the resistance to the gesture was based on the manner in which a symbolic display had replaced a genuine fight against racism. In other words, it seemed worse-than-futile. But honest criticism of a ritual that advertised football's embrace of inclusivity was condemned. Personal beliefs were crushed, along with alternative

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perspectives and criticism that would have been considered valid in previous decades.

### **Coercive?**

Inclusivity distinguishes the early twenty-first century from previous epochs. It is an unquestioned, incontestable and unassailably virtuous ideal. It is also a juggernaut of secular culture that will overwhelm everything. It aims to provide acceptance and equality by persuasion and, if need be, by force. And this is why the recent disagreement in French football is worth scrutinizing. Dismaying as it sounds, this case suggests that a policy designed to protect and enhance the experiences of previously marginalized communities will surely engender clashes with individuals who solicit respect for their beliefs, especially when those beliefs are based on religious scriptures. Ten or fifteen years ago, their solicitation would have been heard and considered. Now, it's likely to be ignored. Religious beliefs and rights will be subordinated.

I've spent much of my professional life researching, writing about and opposing racism, sexism and other bigotries, so I instinctively approve of inclusivity. I also subscribe to cultural relativism, meaning that I don't believe in absolutes: knowledge, truth and morality exist in relation to society, culture and historical contexts. "Live and let live" is my favored proverb: tolerate the beliefs and behavior of others in order that they'll tolerate yours. Inclusivity chimes with that. But only if it's discretionary and refrains from compulsion. European football's instruction rather than suggestion to its players seems coercive, controlling, even tyrannical. A display of solidarity is just window dressing if some of the participants are performing under duress. It may be a way of promoting one of the great policies of our age, but it's also misleading.

A different way of pursuing inclusivity is to recognize that cultural differences are not always reconcilable. We just have to tolerate them and prevent them from promoting harm to others. Tolerate is an old-fashioned verb but one worth reimagining: Allowing, accepting or even just enduring with forbearance beliefs and practices we don't like seems a mature approach. Persuasion often works, but, when it doesn't, coercion is no alternative: it's more like a tacit admission of defeat.

[Ellis Cashmore's latest book is *The Destruction and Creation of Michael Jackson*.]

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\***Ellis Cashmore** is the author of "Elizabeth Taylor," "Beyond Black" and "Celebrity Culture." He is an honorary professor of sociology at Aston University and has previously worked at the universities of Hong Kong and Tampa.

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## **How to Interpret India's Kashmir G20 Meeting**

Aniket Bhavthankar  
May 21, 2023

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**Kashmir is hosting a G20 meeting that will boost tourism, employment, investment and economic growth. Over the last four years, improved infrastructure, increased grassroots democracy and greater peace have boosted the economy, taking the wind out of the sails of a Pakistan-fueled insurgency.**

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**A**lthough I live in Germany now, I retain strong connections with my rural roots. Recently, I traveled to my ancestral village in Maharashtra, the western state in India of which Mumbai is the capital. Pune, a fast-rising information technology (IT) city is about 300 kilometers away from my village.

On my way, I saw hoardings welcoming G20 delegates for a meeting. At my village, which has a population of a little over 500, people wanted to discuss G20 with me. This surprised me and, on my return, I can now see what is going on.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has decided to host hundreds of delegates coming from G20 nations in 50 locations across the country. Only the final G20 Summit will be held in New Delhi. This is a break from precedent. In the past, international meetings were largely conducted in New Delhi, the British-built colonial capital. Its anglicized elite dominated discourse on India's foreign policy and strategic affairs. That has changed completely. Modi has democratized discourse in a young and dynamic nation.

The G20 comprises 19 countries and the EU. Today, G20 delegates are meeting in Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir. Since 1989, Kashmir's economy imploded for three decades because of a Pakistan-fueled insurgency. India has subsidized this beautiful part of the world. In 2019, India abrogated Article 370 that kept Kashmir locked out of the national economy. Western media like The New York Times and The Guardian criticized Indian actions without understanding either the historical context or economic implications of the decision.

Four years later, this decision has led to more peace and greater prosperity in Kashmir. The G20 meeting that kicks off in Kashmir today will shine the light on the beauty of this fabled land. China is boycotting the meeting. Turkey, Egypt and Saudi

Arabia are following suit but delegates from the other 16 members are attending. They will see Kashmir with their own eyes. Both national and international media will cover the visit of G20 delegates. This will give tourism, a historical mainstay of the economy, a shot in the arm. The G20 meeting will also increase investment in Kashmir.

### **Move to Peace in Paradise**

For good reason, Kashmir is known as paradise on earth. For decades, Indian couples went on their honeymoons here. Bollywood producers shot songs for iconic movies in Kashmir. During long hot summers, Indians made their way here for cool climes, spectacular vistas and the refined local cuisine. Foreigners visited in droves too. Both Indian and foreign tourists invariably returned with arts and crafts, boosting the Kashmiri economy.

Kashmir is on the upswing again. In 2022, Indian tourists increased by 64.5% since the last year. Foreign tourists went up by a staggering 1111.3%. Progress in Kashmir is anathema to Pakistan and China. Both of India's neighbors claim part of Kashmiri territory. Both would like to see this region unsettled and, ideally, tormented by insurgency for geopolitical reasons.

Sadly for Pakistan and China, Kashmir is increasingly peaceful. Indian Home Minister Amit Shah's junior minister informed the Indian parliament that terrorist incidents have declined by 45% since 2018. That year, 228 terrorist incidents occurred that killed 91 security personnel. In 2022, this number had fallen to 125 and 31 security personnel deaths.

### **Grassroots Democracy and Local Economy Improves in Kashmir**

Since 1989, insurgency has hurt democracy in Kashmir. Too many people with guns have

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threatened civil society and local elected bodies. In October 2020, the government amended legislation for elected local bodies. Now, village, town and district representatives of the people will decide the developmental agenda.

Even before this reform, Kashmiris demonstrated a great appetite for democratic participation. A record 98.3% turned out to vote in 2019 after Article 370 was abolished. Shah has announced that his government is creating the right conditions for the Election Commission to conduct assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir, the union territory that comprises both the Jammu and Kashmir regions of the country.

Unfortunately, international organizations and Western media ignore positive developments in Kashmir. Amnesty International argues that the Indian government has deployed repressive state machinery in Jammu and Kashmir. The deepening of democracy and the reduction in violence have not attracted attention. Nor has the violence unleashed by terrorist organizations based in and funded by Pakistan. This ideological fixation with blaming India for all of Kashmir's ills is untrue and, more importantly, unwise.

The likes of Amnesty International and The New York Times are risking irrelevance. The Modi government does not have an inferiority complex vis-à-vis these institutions. Earlier governments were ruffled by them. Now, the Modi government lets appropriately junior authorities respond to obviously biased reports that cherry pick facts and ignore the great gains Kashmir has made since 2019.

One of these gains is the development of top-class infrastructure. Railways, roads, ports and airports are emerging all across the country. Since 2014, the Modi government has constructed 500 kilometers of national highways in Kashmir. Power generation is expected to double by 2025.

Kashmir is finally developing the infrastructure that will give a major multiplier effect to its economy.

Better infrastructure is leading to increased investment. The makers of Dubai's Burj Khalifa are investing \$60 million in Kashmir Valley, the first foreign direct investment in the region. Jammu and Kashmir is expecting to attract \$10 billion, which is likely to create 260,000 jobs.

The G20 meeting will give a signal to the world that Kashmir is open for business, improving the investment climate and employment opportunities in the region. With rising tourism, increasing trade and incoming investment, Kashmir's economy is headed to the bright sunlit uplands. The visit by the delegates of the G20 will give the economy of this fantastically beautiful land a further and welcome boost.

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## **The New American-Style Privatization of War**

Andrea Mazzarino  
May 24, 2023

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**Russia is not alone in using mercenaries. The US has been using contractors (i.e. mercenaries) for a while. This hides the costs of America's forever wars and the lack of accountability this implies has had disastrous effects on society.**

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The way mercenary leader Yevgeny Prigozhin and his private army have been waging a significant part of Vladimir Putin's war in Ukraine has been well covered in the American media, not least of all because his firm, the Wagner Group, draws most of its men from Russia's prison system. Wagner offers "freedom" from Putin's labor camps only to send those released convicts to the front lines of the conflict, often on brutal suicide missions.

At least the Russian president and his state-run media make no secret of his regime's alliance with Wagner. The American government, on the other hand, seldom acknowledges its own version of the privatization of war — the tens of thousands of private security contractors it's used in its misguided war on terror, involving military and intelligence operations in a staggering 85 countries.

At least as far back as the Civil War through World Wars I and II, the Korean and Vietnam Wars, and the first Gulf War, "contractors," as we like to call them, have long been with us. Only recently, however, have they begun playing such a large role in our wars, with an estimated 10% to 20% of them directly involved in combat and intelligence operations.

Contractors have both committed horrific abuses and acted bravely under fire (because they have all too often been under fire). From torture at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq to interrogations at the Guantánamo Bay detention camp, from employees of the private security firm Blackwater indiscriminately firing on unarmed Iraqi civilians to contractors defending a U.S. base under attack in Afghanistan, they have been an essential part of the war on terror. And yes, they both killed Afghans and helped some who had worked as support contractors escape from Taliban rule.

The involvement of private companies has allowed Washington to continue to conduct its operations around the globe, even if many Americans think that our war on terror in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere has ended. I tried looking for any kind of a survey of how many of us realize that it continues in Iraq and elsewhere, but all I could find was pollster Nate Silver's analysis of "lessons learned" from that global conflict, as if it were part of our history. And unless respondents were caring for a combat-wounded veteran, they tended not to look unfavorably on sending our troops into battle in distant lands — so scratch that as a lesson learned from our forever wars.

None of this surprises me. American troops are no longer getting killed in significant numbers, nor are as many crowding the waitlists at backlogged Veterans Affairs hospitals as would be the case if those troops had been the only ones doing the fighting.

At points during this century's war on terror, in fact, the U.S. used more civilian contractors in its ongoing wars than uniformed military personnel. In fact, as of 2019, according to Brown University's Costs of War Project, which I co-founded, there were 50% more contractors than troops in the U.S. Central Command region that includes Afghanistan, Iraq, and 18 other countries in the Middle East, as well as Central and South Asia. As recently as December 2022, the Pentagon had about 22,000 contractors deployed throughout that region, with nearly 8,000 concentrated in Iraq and Syria. To be sure, most of those workers were unarmed and providing food service, communications aid, and the like. Even more tellingly, roughly two thirds of them were citizens of other countries, particularly lower-income ones.

In 2020, retired Army Officer Danny Sjursen offered an interesting explanation for how the war on terror was then becoming ever more privatized:

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the Covid-19 pandemic had changed the Pentagon's war-making strategy as the public began to question how much money and how many lives were being expended on war abroad rather than healthcare at home. As a result, Sjursen argued, the U.S. had begun deploying ever more contractors, remote drones, CIA paramilitaries, and (often abusive) local forces in that war on terror while U.S. troops were redeployed to Europe and the Pacific to contain a resurgent Russia and China. In other words, during the pandemic, Washington placed ever more dirty work in corporate and foreign hands.

### **(Not) Counting Contractors**

It's been a challenge to write about private security contractors because our government does anything but a good job of counting them. Though the Defense Department keeps quarterly records of how many civilian contractors it employs and where, they exclude employees contracted with the Central Intelligence Agency or the State Department.

When Costs of War first tried to count contractor deaths by searching official government sources, we came up short. The spouse of a gravely wounded armed contractor directed me to her blog, where she had started to compile a list of just such deaths based on daily Google searches, even as she worked hard caring for her spouse and managing his disability paperwork. She and I eventually lost touch and it appears that she stopped compiling such numbers long ago. Still, we at the project took a page from her book, while adding reported war deaths among foreign nationals working for the Pentagon to our formula. Costs of War researchers then estimated that 8,000 contractors had been killed in our wars in the Middle East as of 2019, or about 1,000 more than the U.S. troops who died during the same period.

Social scientists Ori Swed and Thomas Crosbie have tried to extrapolate from reported contractor deaths in order to paint a picture of who they were while still alive. They believe that most of them were white veterans in their forties; many were former Special Forces operatives and a number of former officers with college degrees).

### **Limited Choices for Veterans**

How do people of relative racial, economic, and gendered privilege end up in positions that, while well-paid, are even more precarious than being in the armed forces? As a therapist serving military families and as a military spouse, I would say that the path to security contracting reflects a deep cultural divide in our society between military and civilian life. Although veteran unemployment rates are marginally lower than those in the civilian population, many of them tend to seek out what they know best and that means military training, staffing, weapons production — and, for some, combat.

I recently spoke with one Marine infantry veteran who had completed four combat tours. He told me that, after leaving the service, he lacked a community that understood what he had been through. He sought to avoid social isolation by getting a government job. However, after applying for several positions in law enforcement agencies, he “failed” lie detector tests (owing to the common stress reactions of war-traumatized veterans). Having accidentally stumbled on a veteran-support nonprofit group, he ultimately found connections that led him to decide to return to school and retrain in a new profession. But, as he pointed out, “many of my other friends from the Marines numbed their pain with drugs or by going back to war as security contractors.”

Not everyone views contracting as a strategy of last resort. Still, I find it revealing of the limited sense of possibility such veterans experience that

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the top five companies employing them are large corporations servicing the Department of Defense through activities like information technology support, weapons production, or offers of personnel, both armed and not.

### **The Corporate Wounded**

And keep in mind that such jobs are anything but easy. Many veterans find themselves facing yet more of the same — quick, successive combat deployments as contractors.

Anyone in this era of insurance mega-corporations who has ever had to battle for coverage is aware that doing so isn't easy. Private insurers can maximize their profits by holding onto premium payments as long as possible while denying covered services.

A federal law called the Defense Base Act (1941) (DBA) requires that corporations fund workers' compensation claims for their employees laboring under U.S. contracts, regardless of their nationalities, with the taxpayer footing the bill. The program grew exponentially after the start of the war on terror, but insurance companies have not consistently met their obligations under the law. In 2008, a joint investigation by the Los Angeles Times and ProPublica found that insurers like Chicago-based CAN Financial Corps were earning up to 50% profits on some of their war-zone policies, while many employees of contractors lacked adequate care and compensation for their injuries.

Even after Congress called on the Pentagon and the Department of Labor to better enforce the DBA in 2011, some companies continued to operate with impunity vis-à-vis their own workers, sometimes even failing to purchase insurance for them or refusing to help them file claims as required by law. While insurance companies made tens of millions of dollars in profits during the

second decade of the war on terror, between 2009 and 2021, the Department of Labor fined insurers of those contracting corporations a total of only \$3,250 for failing to report DBA claims.

### **Privatizing Foreign Policy**

At its core, the war on terror sought to create an image of the U.S. abroad as a beacon of democracy and the rule of law. Yet there is probably no better evidence of how poorly this worked in practice at home and abroad than the little noted (mis)use of security contractors. Without their ever truly being seen, they prolonged that global set of conflicts, inflicting damage on other societies and being damaged themselves in America's name. Last month, the Costs of War Project reported that the U.S. is now using subcontractors Bancroft Global Development and Pacific Architects and Engineers to train the Somali National Army in its counterterrorism efforts. Meanwhile, the U.S. intervention there has only helped precipitate a further rise in terrorist attacks in the region.

The global presence created by such contractors also manifests itself in how we respond to threats to their lives. In March 2023, a self-destructing drone exploded at a U.S. maintenance facility on a coalition base in northeastern Syria, killing a contractor employed by the Pentagon and injuring another, while wounding five American soldiers. After that drone was found to be of Iranian origin, President Biden ordered an airstrike on facilities in Syria used by Iranian-allied forces. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin stated, "No group will strike our troops with impunity." While he later expressed condolences to the family of the contractor who was the only one killed in that attack, his statement could have more explicitly acknowledged that contractors are even more numerous than troops among the dead from our forever wars.



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In late December 2019, a contractor working as an interpreter on a U.S. military base in Iraq was killed by rockets fired by an Iranian-backed militia. Shortly afterward, then-President Trump ordered an airstrike that killed the commander of an elite Iranian military unit, sparking concern about a dangerous escalation with that country. Trump later tweeted, “Iran killed an American contractor, wounding many. We strongly responded, and always will.”

I can’t believe I’m saying this, but Trump’s tweet was more honest than Austin’s official statement: such contractors are now an essential part of America’s increasingly privatized wars and will continue to be so, in seemingly ever greater numbers. Even though retaliating for attacks on their lives has little to do with effective counterterrorism (as the Costs of War Project has long made clear), bearing witness to war casualties in all their grim diversity is the least the rest of us can do as American citizens. Because how can we know whether — and for whom — our shadowy, shape-shifting wars “work” if we continue to let our leaders wage an increasingly privatized version of them in ways meant to obscure our view of the carnage they’ve caused?

[TomDispatch first published this piece.]

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## **My Abiding Love Affair With India**

Philip Goldberg  
May 25, 2023

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**India is a land of contradictions, of change and continuity, and of modernity and mystery. I discovered India in the 1960s through the legendary film director Satyajit Ray and have immersed myself in the philosophy of this timeworn land. It remains one of the great loves of my life.**

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**I** recently returned from a month in India. It was exhilarating, transformative, illuminating and sublime. It was exhausting, maddening, stressful and debilitating.

As is now something of a cliché, India is a land of contradictions and extremes.

This was my seventh visit of at least three weeks since 2001, and the fourth time I’ve led a tour since 2016. These repeated visits are all part of my attraction to India that began in the 1960s at the movies. As a college student discovering foreign cinema in the art houses of New York City, I viewed with wonder and delight the revelatory films of François Truffaut, Akira Kurosawa, Federico Fellini and others. Then, in one memorable three-day span, my mind was blown (as we said back then) by Satyajit Ray’s *Apu Trilogy*.

### **The Magic of India**

Every element of the trio of films—the exquisite black-and-white images of village and city life, the main character’s arc from childhood to middle-

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age, the tension between tradition and modernity—was gripping and intriguing. But it was the scenes in Benares (now Varanasi) that captivated me. I knew nothing about the ancient city, and the Ganges was just the name of a river to me, not a sacred entity. But something about the way Ray depicted, framed, and revealed the city penetrated me deeply. I knew that one day I had to go there.

Almost as enchanting as what I saw on screen was what I heard. The trilogy's score, subtle, unobtrusive, and utterly enthralling, featured string and percussion instruments I'd never heard before. Words like sitar and tabla were not yet in my vocabulary. But a short while later, when Ravi Shankar was befriended by George Harrison and emerged as an unlikely superstar, the sitar became part of the 1960s soundtrack. That's when I learned that Maestro Shankar had composed the music for the three-part tale of Apu's life.

By then, India to me was more than an exotic tourist destination, and more than a surprising source of world-class art. It was the homeland of timeless wisdom that was reformulating how I saw the world and reshaping the contours of my life.

I was young and restless, angry and scared. My discontent had led to a diligent search for answers to the Big Questions: Who am I? How can I find peace and fulfillment? What's my place in the universe? Conventional wisdom seemed wrong at every turn, and the standard American lifestyle seemed, to quote William Shakespeare, "weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable." As I drifted to what was called the counterculture, books came my way, and in the works of authors I admired—Joseph Campbell, Aldous Huxley, Somerset Maugham, Herman Hesse, J.D. Salinger—I found admiration for India's spiritual heritage. That led me to Bhagavad Gita, the Upanishads, and works by modern swamis, yogis, and Buddhist masters. I took up meditation and supplementary practices,

and I never looked back; my life had changed irrevocably.

I've been grateful to India ever since for birthing the universal wisdom of Vedanta and Yoga, and for somehow maintaining it through centuries of colonization.

### **The Discovery of India**

I planned to go to India for the first time in 1970, to be trained as a Transcendental Meditation teacher in the Rishikesh ashram made famous by the Beatles. To my great disappointment, the program was held in America instead, and I spent three months in the Rockies, not the Himalayas. For the next thirty years, every time I hatched a plan to go to India, circumstances intervened; basically, I either had the money and not the time or the time and not the money.

Finally, in 2001, I was introduced at long last to my spiritual homeland. I spent about a week each in Delhi, Rishikesh, Varanasi, and, along with 30 million other pilgrims, the Kumbha Mela in Allahabad (now Prayagraj), plus a day or two in Khajuraho, Vrindavan, and Agra for an obligatory—and unexpectedly sublime—viewing of the Taj Mahal.

Since then, every trip back has been illuminating and transformative in its own way. And, when I return to the US, I'm invariably asked what I'd seen for the first time and how places I'd been to before have changed.

The first question is easier to answer: every Indian location I visit for the first time—from the temple towns and tropical backwaters of the south to the hill stations and ghats of the north, from colossal metropolises to remote villages—shows me stunningly new things and also reassures me with comfortable, familiar things.

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The second question is more nuanced, because India is consistent in its inconsistency and changeless in its constant change. I always say, to start with, that in many ways India hadn't changed at all, and that's very fortunate. The insights of the rishis, the oral and written legacy of the sages, the timeless practices maintained in temples and ashrams—those precious gifts India has given the world live on in all their remarkable diversity. The representatives of the various lineages whom I meet continue to uphold and transmit to others the precepts of the sacred texts and the psychospiritual methodologies they favor. And, in the spirit of seva and karma yoga, most continue to direct service projects that benefit the Indian people.

At the same time, India changes, most visibly in its sorely-needed infrastructure upgrades: new roads have made long rides more bearable, and the new airports are superior to the aging ones in the US. I occasionally learn of disturbing developments. It breaks my heart to hear about communal conflict or acts of bigotry and violence directed at Muslims and other minorities in the name of Hinduism. It seems antithetical to the innate pluralism that's been central to the tradition since the Rig Veda and is deeply admired by people like me the world over.

It's also disturbing to hear about anti-Hindu activities in Kashmir, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, or the coercive and deceptive conversion tactics of Christian missionaries in Tamil Nadu and other areas. I am pained by the reflexive anti-Hindu sentiments of various Indians in the name of modernization with the underlying assumption that ancient spiritual traditions are impediments to progress. That premise, I hasten to point out, has been disproven by the enormously successful adaptation of dharmic teachings to the modern, scientific, rational, technologically advanced societies of the West.

## **Change and Continuity in India**

On a related note, one trend line has become more troubling with every visit: the eager Westernization of India's youth. It's one thing to embrace technologies like computers and automobiles, or to exchange saris and kurtas for jeans and T-shirts, but it's quite another to go all in for frenzied consumerism and the alcohol/soft drink/junk food/office-bound/commuter lifestyle that has wreaked havoc with the mental and physical health of Americans. It was particular dispiriting, on my recent tour, to find Burger King and Domino's Pizza shops side by side in Rishikesh, of all places, and to see Coca Cola commercials on the recently-installed giant screen above the Varanasi ghat where evening aarti is performed.

Ah, but one thing that doesn't change—and I suspect never will—is the gracious spirit of the Indian people. The tours I co-lead are rooted in the theme of a book I published in 2010, *American Veda: From Emerson and the Beatles to Yoga and Meditation, How Indian Spirituality Changed the West*. Our itineraries feature places associated with the prominent gurus who came to the West, as well as encounters with various swamis, scholars, and other interesting people with something to teach us. Along the way, we visit temples, ashrams, historical and architectural landmarks, and explore the Indian landscape. And yet, after imbibing that arresting buffet of experiences, after diving deeply into India's spiritual treasures, after learning new practices and exploring new ideas, after seeing a stunning array of magnificent sights, the thing our travelers talk about most is the people they encountered.

The kindness and generosity offered to us by ordinary Indians, who are, with rare exceptions, welcoming, curious, and helpful, is always singled out in end-of-tour reflections. I always share with our travelers, as part of their orientation, the Indian

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maxim, Atithi Devo Bhava: the guest is god. By the end of the tour, they've seen firsthand just how seriously the Indian people take that adage. They're invariably deeply moved by the kindness and affability of ordinary Indians, a lived experience that leaves a bigger mark on their hearts than learned discourses and spectacular views.

I should add that, like most good things, friendliness, courtesy, and generosity can be taken too far, providing visitors with endearing stories to tell. My 2014 visit was an 18-city book tour for the Indian release of American Veda. I was not only a guest that time around, but an honored one, and when Indians decide you're worth honoring they pull out all the stops. After a week of being overfed and over-entertained, I told my wife that I was going to die of Indian hospitality. I didn't know how to say "No" to those who insisted on keeping me company at all times, or to the constant offerings of food (especially the endless plates of delectable sweets). I ended up asking the tour organizer to tell those hosting me in each destination that I had diabetes. It was a lie, and I hated to lie, but the strategy worked, and I gained only twelve pounds instead of fifty.

Of course, my tour guests don't have to deal with such extremes of cordiality, only the occasional groups who can't take enough pictures with their new American friends (especially blonde ones—a rarity in India). What they remember are the wide, gleaming smiles, the dark, inquisitive eyes, and the sincere offers of assistance, advice, and sometimes humble, heartwarming service. More than anything else, it's the warmth of the Indian people that make the heat and dust, the chaos and clamor, the illnesses and near-catastrophes, seem like minor inconveniences. And the travelers have the pictures to prove it.

As for me, even though I know by now exactly what to expect, India always manages to take me

by surprise. On the last tour—more harrowing than the previous ones because some of our group got Covid—I oscillated continuously between the magnificent and the unbearable, the elevating and the depressing, the joyful and the annoying. I returned to the US utterly worn out but somehow exhilarated.

I never want to go to India again.

I can't wait to get back to India.

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**\*Philip Goldberg** has studied India's spiritual traditions for more than 50 years as a practitioner, teacher and writer. An interfaith minister, meditation teacher, and spiritual counselor, he is a skilled speaker who has lectured and taught workshops throughout the US and in India.

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## **Morocco Make up Causes Spain Economic Loss in Algeria**

Youssef Igrouane  
May 26, 2023

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**Spain's decision to recognize Morocco's "autonomy plan" for Western Sahara has caused tensions and a trade war with Algeria. Spain is seeking to strengthen ties with Morocco while maintaining good relations with Algeria, which is a tricky balancing act.**

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**T**rade between Spain and Algeria has been seriously jeopardized since June 2022. This has occurred because Algeria suspended a 20-year-long friendship and cooperation treaty

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with Spain. This suspension came as a response to Spain's decision to formally recognize Morocco's "autonomy plan" for Western Sahara.

### **What is the Backstory of Western Sahara?**

Western Sahara is a stretch of desert territory along the Atlantic coast. It borders Morocco, Algeria, and Mauritania. From 1884 to 1976, Spain was the colonial ruler of Western Sahara, which was then known as Spanish Sahara. During the great wave of decolonization in the second half of the 20th century, the Polisario Front—a Sahrawi nationalist liberation movement—waged guerrilla war against Spain.

Following the campaign of pressure that the UN, Morocco, and the Polisario Front launched against Spain in the late 1960s prompted Madrid to consider withdrawing from the region, given that it no longer anticipated a future in the area. Subsequently, in 1974, Spain signaled its withdrawal by announcing plans for a referendum in which the Sahrawi people could determine the future of the territory, whether to be a part of Morocco or Mauritania or to obtain their independence. Morocco and Mauritania welcomed Spain's decision. However, the UNSG adopted Resolution 3292 suspending the referendum until a formal process for this could be determined.

On October 16, 1975, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the Hague found that while there were legal ties of allegiance between the Sultan of Morocco and certain tribes in Western Sahara during the time of Spanish colonization, and there were rights connecting the Mauritanian entity to the territory of Western Sahara, there was no evidence of a territorial sovereignty link between the territory of Western Sahara and either the Kingdom of Morocco or the Mauritanian entity. In response to the ruling, in 1975 King Hassan II of Morocco called for a peaceful mass demonstration in the form of a march into Western Sahara. The

King sought to reaffirm Morocco's claim of sovereignty over the territory and called upon the Moroccan people to participate in the march. He emphasized that the march was the only way to regain control of Western Sahara.

Western Sahara is important for Morocco not only for sovereignty reasons but also for economic ones. It is rich in rock phosphate, a valuable fertilizer that secures the world's food supply. This mineral is Morocco's third largest export and brought the country \$850 million in 2021. As a region along the Atlantic coast, Western Sahara is important for fishing, providing 75% of Morocco's catches. Clearly, this region is of paramount importance to Rabat.

### **What Is Going on Now with Spain, Morocco and Algeria?**

Therefore, Moroccan-Spanish ties turned glacial when Spain admitted Polisario leader Brahim Ghali in April 2021 for medical treatment without officially telling Rabat. In 2022, Madrid agreed to support Rabat's autonomy plan for Western Sahara, ending a year-long diplomatic crisis.

Spain's change in policy has improved ties with Morocco after a year-long diplomatic spat. However, this move has infuriated Algeria, which imposed an economic blockade on Spain in June 2022. This resulted in significant losses estimated at around \$1 billion (€930 million) in the following seven months alone. Spanish Secretary of State for Trade Xiana Méndez Bértolo recently announced that, between June and November 2022, Spain's exports were a mere \$189.1 million (€176.2 million) to Algeria. In December 2022, Spanish exports to Algeria amounted to \$11.81 million (€10.8 million), a fall of 84%. Spain's position as an exporter to Algeria fell from second in 2021 to ninth in 2022.

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This has hurt Spanish companies and businesses exporting to Algeria, especially in Valencia and Catalonia. These regions account for over 50% of Spain's exports to Algeria. In terms of sectors, enamellers and ceramic machinery manufacturers are facing significant negative impacts. The economic pain of this blockade has led the Spanish Ministry of Trade to seek the support of the European Commission. It has come up with a financial plan to support Spanish companies suffering from the blockade. EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell traveled to Algeria in March to resolve this crisis but the visit was unsuccessful.

### **Algeria Is Still Supplying Gas to Spain**

Spain depends on Algeria for gas. Therefore, it is important for Madrid to maintain good relations with Algiers. Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune commented that “among all the Algerian statements, what matters to the Spanish state is the full guarantee of Spain’s supply of Algerian gas and the strict respect of the international contracts.” Algeria has assured Spain that it will continue to supply gas under any circumstances.

Spain gets much of its gas through the Medgaz pipeline from Algeria. According to Spanish reports, Madrid has recently turned to the US for gas. Many analysts speculate that Spain might be moving away from Algerian gas. Hence, Algeria decided not to escalate matters with Spain when it comes to supply of gas. Losing a lucrative export market would not be in Algerian economic interest.

Tensions between Spain and Algeria have occurred in the past but the two countries have always been able to achieve an accommodation. This time, things are different. Spain’s change of policy has touched a raw nerve and only a change in government might lead to the calming of the waters.

### **Algeria Strengthens Ties with Other Countries**

As Spanish exports to Algeria have crashed, other countries such as Portugal and Italy have stepped in. In 2021, Portugal exports to Algeria totaled \$241 million. The main products were uncoated paper, heating machinery, and acrylic hydrocarbons. Between February 2022 and February 2023, Portugal’s exports have increased by \$384.6 million. The top exports to Algeria in February 2023 were vegetables, wood pulp, paper products, plastics and plastic goods, machinery, mechanical appliances and parts.

Before the rupture in relations, Algeria preferred Spanish products. Sociedad Española Automóviles de Turismo (SEAT), a Spanish car manufacturer was active in Algeria. In 2018, SEAT expanded strategic operations in Algeria. Now, Italian car company FIAT seems to be replacing SEAT. In March 2023, six FIAT carlines were launched in Algeria. In contrast, SEAT’s growth has suffered.

Italy and Algeria have good neighborly agreements. They are now deepening their strategic partnership. In January 2023, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni visited Algeria to launch her new Mediterranean policy in Algiers. It is well known that Italy wants to become an energy hub between Europe and the southern Mediterranean. The Russia-Ukraine War is causing an energy crisis in Europe, which is looking for alternative sources. This offers a great economic opportunity for both Italy and Algeria.

Both countries also signed agreements relating to aerospace and pharmaceutical sectors. These agreements were not only about economics but also geopolitics. Italy sees Algeria as a vital actor in the Mediterranean region that can underpin regional stability. Algeria’s neighbors are facing turmoil. Libya is going through a civil war. Al Jazeera has called Tunisia a “ticking time bomb.” The unsettled situation in North Africa makes

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Algeria critically important not only for Italy but also the European Union.

### **Is Morocco a Springboard for Spain Into Africa?**

Spain has a growing interest in the Moroccan market. In 2022, Spanish exports to Morocco amounted to \$12.9 billion (€11.748 billion) while Moroccan imports to Spain were \$9.4 million (€8.6 million). Morocco lies just across the Strait of Gibraltar to the south of Spain. It is Spain's closest neighbor in North Africa. Morocco is a natural trading partner where demand for Spanish goods and services is growing. Therefore, it makes sense for Spain to invest in closer relations with its southern neighbor.

Spanish President Pedro Sánchez visited Morocco in February. The two governments reached agreements on migration, tourism, trade and investment. Just as Italy is developing a strategic relationship with Algeria, Spain is betting on Morocco. Spanish companies are looking to expand in North Africa. Morocco could be a good base of operations for Spain. Given the fact that Spain's relations with Algeria have taken a hit and other European rivals are stepping in, it makes sense for Madrid to cultivate Rabat. A closer relationship with Morocco makes both economic and geopolitical sense for Spain.

[Stephanie Verroya edited this piece.]

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## **Can ChatGPT Really Write Now?**

Garima Garg  
May 28, 2023

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**As a Large Language Model, ChatGPT works on the literal surface of discourse. Its database is wide as a mile and its thinking — in other words, its writing — never more than an inch deep. Nicholas Carr explains why in his book *The Shallows: What The Internet Is Doing To Our Brains*. Writing requires an inner life.**

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**F**or a 21st century invention, our reactions to ChatGPT and its succeeding clones have been reflective of the times too—superficial, irreverent, and unwise. While many critics of such tools have pointed out that AI writing is nothing more than stringing together of sentences which ultimately lack meaning and insight, the chorus around their potential continues to grow and so it becomes important to understand them better.

But to gauge whether AI can really write or not, we first need to understand why we write and read at all. That is a question that has been elegantly tackled by the American journalist and author Nicholas Carr in his book, *The Shallows: What The Internet Is Doing To Our Brains*. Having grown up in an age before the Internet, he found that he was rapidly becoming more and more incapable of reading articles online because he simply couldn't hold his concentration for long. He writes of peers who grew up reading books in libraries, enjoying the process of hunting for the right book for years, but now find it difficult to read books at all. "I can't read *War and Peace*

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anymore, I've lost the ability to do that. Even a blog post of more than three or four paragraphs is too much to absorb. I skim it", one of these peers say to Carr.

While it may be reliably argued that the vast majority of humanity would anyway never have the patience to read War and Peace cover to cover, it is a cause for concern when devoted readers who want to read more find it difficult to do so. Carr makes the point that it's because the Internet has now made it possible for us to skim through a truckload of information in a much shorter span of time. We can now get a sense of a narrative on a topic that seems to be rooted in facts but is ultimately as vacuous as it comes. In the case of Carr and his peers, this hunting for information online and stringing it all together for a narrative is done by humans themselves. But what we're seeing with the advent of ChatGPT and the like is that from now on, even that will be done by an algorithm.

What seems to be lost on AI evangelists are the internal stages of questioning, processing, and resolution that are associated with good writing. A reader in love with the elegance of literary writing may think that the writer's talent lies in being romantic but there's a whole lot more to enduring texts. A text of any nature— literary, academic, religious, and so on— if it endures through the years does so because it answers some of humanity's most persistent questions, processes, and resolutions. We do not talk about the Bhagavad Gita or Phaedrus (or even a Pride and Prejudice) today out of religiosity or idle philosophizing but because they encode within themselves universal challenges and solutions to being human. But why do such texts come into existence at all?

To understand that, Carr takes us to ancient civilisations of Egypt and Greece. He writes of a dialogue between the Egyptian god, Theuth or

Thoth, who invented writing, and one of the kings, Thamus. Theuth obviously has all the good things to say about writing but Thamus disagrees with him, saying, "should Egyptians learn to write, it will implant forgetfulness in their souls: they will cease to exercise memory because they rely on that which is written, calling things to remembrance no longer from within themselves, but by means of external marks. It is no true wisdom that you offer your disciples, but only its semblance. Those who rely on reading for their knowledge will seem to know much, while for the most part they know nothing. They will be filled, not with wisdom, but with the conceit of wisdom".

This ancient story resonates louder than ever before in the age of writing bots. But that's not all. For Carr now moves the proverbial mic over to Socrates. He writes that unlike his prodigious student Plato, Socrates was more of an orator than a writer. While the teacher acknowledged the benefits of writing to capture one's thoughts, he also argued against a dependence on the technology for he thought it would alter our minds and not for the better. By substituting outer symbols for inner memories, Carr paraphrases Socrates, writing threatens to make us shallower thinkers and prevent us from achieving the intellectual depth that leads to wisdom and true happiness.

And so, it follows that anything worth writing and reading about comes from deep within us. Any text is a repository of our inner life— our fears, confusions, aspirations, dreams and more. When a writer captures them, he or she does so by tapping into both their inner life and its conflicts with the external world. Through this difficult and sustained churning we get a writer's insight, which can be literary, philosophical, or moral, but which is nevertheless intrinsically human. Ancients, then, understood the importance of an inner life that was constantly questioning, processing, and resolving the external environment in creating wisdom,



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whether idealistic or practical, that was necessary to living a good life in a given age and culture.

The emphasis on memory is found in many cultures around the world with the underlying reason that it helps us build and sustain an inner life. This inner life helped us tap into universal and eternal ideas of a good life through which we could deal with changes in our external environment in a more meaningful way rather than becoming herd-like. What artificial intelligence contributes to is this continual erosion of an inner life. While technology was only meant to make our physical lives easier, it is now coming for our emotional selves. Carr writes how much of this has seeped into modern academia, journalism, and arts as well as the ordinary life with most of us following “scripts” or algorithms laid out by search engines like Google or even online academic journals. ChatGPT and artificial intelligence tools may still help us become more innovative and creative, helping us chart new horizons in understanding the world around us. But we must heed Carr’s *The Shallows* in the disadvantages that these tools may cause us in near future as well.

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## **Democratic Survival: Venezuelan Triumph Leads the Way**

Michelle Ellner  
May 29, 2023

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**21 years ago, a US-backed coup failed to overthrow the government of Hugo Chávez and replace it with one more amenable to US interests. The citizenry took to the streets, refusing to accept the attempt of their elite to replace the popular president, and succeeded. The Venezuelan experience may serve as an inspiration and example for other Latin American nations seeking to take a direction independent from overbearing US pressure.**

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### **A tradition of US imperialism in Latin America**

President Hugo Chávez's democratically elected government in Venezuela suffered an attempted coup on April 11, 2002. Chávez had prioritized programs to improve living conditions for those who were previously unrepresented and established an independent foreign policy in favor of the nation's interests. This stance conflicted with the so-called Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, adopted in 1904, which had since become the guiding principle of US policy in the region.

In his 1904 State of the Union Address, Theodore Roosevelt claimed the right for the US, as the local “civilized nation,” to intervene in the internal affairs of states in the Western Hemisphere which it judged guilty of “chronic wrongdoing.” What it amounted to was a declaration of intention to oppose any government, foreign or regional, that jeopardized US interests. It laid the groundwork for the use of US military

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force and other forms of intervention in Latin America. In the years since, armed with the Roosevelt Corollary, the Monroe Doctrine became the ideological basis for US hegemony in the region, justifying the violation of the rights of nations of self-determination.

The case of Venezuela in 2002 seemed ready to be just one more chapter in the long history of US imperialism in the region.

The Chávez administration had redefined the rules of democracy by drafting a new Constitution, one that was voted on by the people, and that allowed for greater popular participation. The Chávez government had also reasserted its sovereignty over its vast oil wealth by moving to abort the privatization of PDVSA, the state oil company. In September 2000, it had organized a summit meeting in Caracas of OPEC oil-producing countries to stabilize prices at higher levels to increase the country's main source of income.

Washington's main opposition to Chávez's foreign policy came when he met with OPEC leaders considered to be US adversaries, including those of Libya, Iraq, and Iran in preparation for the 2000 OPEC summit. Chávez met with Saddam Hussein and Muammar Ghaddafi again the following year, and spoke out against the US invasion of Afghanistan as a reaction to 9/11, saying, "You can't combat terror with more terror".

### **The US intervenes**

The situation came to a head when in April of 2002, with the backing of the Oval Office, Venezuela's pro-Washington elite, high-ranking military officials, leaders of the traditional labor organizations, Catholic Church hierarchy, and chamber of commerce embarked on ousting the popularly elected government.

An intelligence brief dated April 6, 2002—a mere five days before the coup plot would be carried out—explicitly states that a coup was set to take place.

Under previous Venezuelan governments, neoliberal reforms increased poverty while the police and military used violent repression, but the US still perceived Venezuela as a flourishing democracy. This attitude was to fall by the wayside when, upon Chávez's ascension, the United States ceased to respect the fundamental premise of respecting an elected leader's mandate. A State Department cable leaked right before the coup revealing the dissident military factions' intentions to detain and overthrow Chávez, exhibits the US's advance knowledge of and direct involvement with the conspiracy.

On April 10, one day before the coup, US Ambassador Charles Shapiro spoke to the press after meeting the Mayor of Caracas. When asked if the US supported President Chávez, his reply was: "We support democracy and the constitutional framework" and he advised US citizens in Venezuela to "be careful". The mayor, by his side, said: "If he doesn't rule like a democrat, Chávez will leave office sooner than later."

What came after was a wave of violence and repression that led to the arrest of Chávez, the killing of 19 people and injuring of over hundred, and saw Pedro Carmona, a business leader, swearing himself in as President, soon enjoying a visit from Ambassador Shapiro. All according to regular Rooseveltian protocol, thus far.

### **The Venezuelan people refuse to acquiesce**

However, one factor had not been taken into consideration: the will of the Venezuelan people.

On April 13th, the people of Venezuela made history and made a dent on the Monroe Doctrine's

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record. Community leaders and organizers, despite facing police repression and a corporate media blackout, took to the streets to demand that Chávez be brought back to office. Military officers and enlisted soldiers, loyal to the Constitution so recently installed by the Venezuelan people themselves, rose up against their commanding officers and demanded that Chávez be reinstated as the legitimate President. This joint civilian and military popular rebellion to save Venezuelan democracy made history and overturned the Rooseveltian, imperialist formula which had successfully overthrown other independent Latin American leaders in the past, among them Jacobo Árbenz, Salvador Allende, João Goulart, Juan Bosch and Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

The questions we must ask ourselves on an anniversary like this are: why does the United States continue to insist on an over century-old doctrine that causes it to turn its back on the aspirations of the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean? Why does the US government continue to promote violence, human rights violations, and undemocratic governance that it would not tolerate on its own soil? Why would the US continue to make people suffer in places like Venezuela by sanctioning the entire country for standing up for their self-determination? Shouldn't any people, among the peoples of the world, be able to expect solidarity and respect from the US for standing up for democratic ideals?

In the end, Roosevelt's version of the Monroe Doctrine is condemned to failure because a people's determination to be free will always prevail. Why not turn, instead, to a policy of mutual cooperation, of respect for Latin American and Caribbean internal affairs? Why not convince rather than coerce, collaborate rather than take advantage? Why must it take the United States so long to understand that the instability, violence and exploitation it promotes in its own region backfires

and leads to the migration challenges it faces today?

In Venezuela now, there's a popular saying that refers to the day of the 2002 coup and the day—two days later—that Chávez was reinstated: "Every 11th has its 13th." It is a significant sign of the new Latin America and Caribbean that has emerged in the 21st Century, a region that wants to bury a long history of US interventionism. For every Monroe Doctrine intervention, there will be an April 13th rebellion for sovereignty and dignity.

[Anton Schauble edited this article.]

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## Article Five Is Now Killing the United States

Anton Schauble  
May 31, 2023

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**Like any living thing, a society must learn to adapt if it is to survive. America's legal and constitutional system makes meaningful change extraordinarily difficult. This inability to change is choking America's ability to remain the vibrant republic which it once was and can still be.**

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**A**nation, like an animal, is a living thing. It changes, as does its environment change, and it must adapt to its internal and external environment if it is to survive.

“It is in changing that things find repose,” says the philosopher Heraclitus. The world that we live in is a world of flux, and things that resist this flux die. Mountain ranges wear down because they attempt to stand still against the wind and the rain. Biological life, which at first glance seems much more fleeting than geological features, has survived on this earth for billions of years while the mountains wear away. Land plants and the Appalachian Mountains both formed in the same geological period, but now the Appalachians are eroded hills while plant life grows thick on top of them, eroding them further.

Without belaboring the point too much, we can say that life is not just change, but organized change, change according to a definite plan. An organism must react to its environment and modify itself and its behavior in order to survive, but it does so while preserving the nature that it has from birth. Even evolutionary history, which enacts no preconceived plan, does not simply change without direction. Mutation is without direction, but evolution is mutation guided by selection. This is why crustaceans turn into crabs, and mammals do not. What we will become is guided by the nature and the needs of what we are. What life enacts is not random change, but change that preserves its existence and, so to speak, mission. Deer developed antlers so that they could keep being deer.

### **To survive is to change**

A state is like an animal, but it is most like that rational animal, man. It is capable of understanding its core principles and values and of planning and enacting deliberate change in order to live up to those values. We are not called to evolve

blindly, but by deliberation and understanding to move forward into history with our eyes wide open. Using reason—our ability to conceptualize, to dialogue, and to plan—we humans do what all life does, but intentionally. And when we cease to do this, we die.

States die. Civilizations die. History is all too full of tales of the calamities, wars, and devastations that occurred when statesmen and citizens became either too complacent, too divided, or otherwise too unequipped to take account of reality and affect adequate change. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, infamously crippled by the broad right of individual nobles to veto legislation, precipitating a humiliating and disastrous partition between its land-hungry neighbors and over a century of suffering for the Polish people. The same pattern has played out time and time again in human history from the dynasties of China to the republics of Latin America as corruption, factionalism, and poorly functioning political processes paralyze states, rendering them unable to reform.

I stand here with the strange privilege of living in one of the most successful and powerful states that have existed in the history of this planet, the United States of America. This country has astounded the world more than once with its capacity for innovation and dynamism, finding solutions hardly imagined by generations past. But there is a sickness in this country, an ideologization of what are taken to be our values that is slowly killing that dynamism, which is meant to come to the defense of our core values and is indeed one of them. What I am talking about is the notion, so much in vogue in the current popular discourse but so alien to the founders of this nation, that every jot and tittle of the Constitution—not only its principles and values, but the mechanisms that were originally crafted to enact those principles—is so imbued with the

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wisdom of that founding generation that it cannot be changed.

Everyone understands, perhaps, that on a basic level no commonwealth can exist very long without some change. “Even the barley-drink,” says our friend Heraclitus, “will separate if it is not stirred.” Yet was it not that same philosopher that admonished a republic to “fight for its laws as it does for its walls”? For what could protect it from upheavals of a social, economic, military nature or otherwise if, without its laws, it were no community of citizens but just an unorganized mob of men and women? Only a fool would argue for a nation with no respect for the laws that have created it and guided it, but all the same it would be folly, too, to forget that it was reason that crafted those laws, and it is still reason—the reason of the living, communicating, rational animals that we are—that must judge those laws and modify them, in an orderly way and for the common good.

### **The United States has a legislation problem**

American law is in many ways uniquely hard to change. Even ordinary legislation must pass through an intricate path of checks and balances in which, at every step of the way, there are barriers that can stop proposed legislation in its tracks. It may die in committee, fail to pass on the floor of the chambers of Congress which often operate on razor-thin partisan majorities, fail to achieve the agreement of the House and of the Senate, experience filibuster in the Senate, suffer veto by the president, and so on...it is a wonder that any laws ever get passed at all. Of course, this kind of legal process is going to be an essential part of lawmaking in any democracy, but the American process has so many choke points that it is far easier to kill a bill than it is to pass one.

This creates a bias in favor of old legislation rather than new legislation which is, on the face of

it, irrational, since the time at which a law was crafted has no essential bearing on whether or not it is wisely framed. The new is not automatically better than the old, but neither is the old automatically better than the new. If old laws are to continue, it should be because human minds, in a legally structured process, have considered them and judged them prudent to continue, not because of an institutional structure so full of snags that the previous way of doing things is mindlessly approved simply because it is too difficult to do anything else.

“Ah,” I can hear the reply coming back, “but this is by design. A government that governs less governs best, after all, and the founders intended to make it very difficult to pass new laws.”

If this is the founders' intent, it is ill-served by this mechanism. New laws do not always mean more government; indeed, there are good reasons to think that the growth of government can be fostered by the rigidity of laws, rather than hampered by them. More of this anon. But the more basic notion is this: if small government, or any other ideal that we prize, is to be the aim when we are deciding how to craft our laws, then we must do so consciously, keeping that ideal in mind when we make laws and adjusting every measure to best suit it. We can only do this consciously, not by trusting unconscious processes like legislative inflexibility to do the work for us. We must choose to be what we will be: A republic cannot better itself by hindering its own ability to make choices. Only a nation self-conscious of its own activity can keep itself free. Legislative snarls will not keep you free.

The most fundamental reason underlying the fact that unconscious processes will not keep one free, or serve very many other useful purposes, is that what is done unintentionally will inevitably have unintentional consequences. Of course, all human endeavors on this side of heaven will have

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unintentional consequences, but the surest way to multiply them is to hinder reason's ability to monitor, to anticipate, and to forestall negative events by assessing and readjusting its methods.

### **Legislation problem expands executive and judicial power**

If Congress does not issue its own guidance in the form of laws, the president will find his own way. This leads to the expansion of executive power, about which enough ink has been spilled that I need not continue the subject here. The bureaucracy will find its own way, and what ought to have been laws, deliberated by civil society and enacted by the people constitutionally empowered to make laws for the republic, instead become regulations, of dubious democratic merit and perhaps of opaque origin. The courts will find their own way, concocting in legal decisions directives which often have very little to do with the text, history, or intent of the laws that they claim to find their source in. But the executive and the courts are not simply being irrational or selfish. They are making do in a system where the direction that ought to be given by law is found lacking. And this is because the legislature cannot act.

I don't think either liberals or conservatives are thrilled with an imperial presidency or with judge-made law. Such channels can provide temporary wins, but each side can count just as many smarting losses. In the end the real loser is an America which is seeing her ability to deliberate clearly and openly and to make laws that best suit everyone weaken with every year.

Nowhere is this country's inability to legislate more acute than in that most vital legislation of all, our Constitution. Here, Article Five mandates that in order to make any change at all to the Constitution, in addition to proposal by a supermajority in both houses of Congress (aside from an alternative convention process which in

234 years has never been used), a proposed amendment must be ratified by a whopping three quarters of states or state conventions.

This extraordinarily high bar hearkens back to the confederal origins of the union, in which the nation's first constitution behaved more like a treaty, requiring unanimity, than like the constitution of a republic. But the United States is a republic, in spite of the many and time-honored aspects of federalism that it possesses. It is conceived both by its own citizens and by the global community as a nation among nations, not a supranational organization, and as a nation it ought to have the constitution of one. It should be able to decide its own destiny, by common as well as by fundamental law, and it should not be subjected to the levels of paralysis, often more reminiscent of the EU or even the UN, that do indeed more befit a treaty organization than a constitutional republic.

US constitutional law is in disarray. Judges and legal commentators, all the way up to the high court, seem torn between a rigid originalism which would tie the world's hegemonic power to the legislative framework framed for a league of thirteen recently liberated and mostly agrarian colonies, and a "living constitution" model which seems to be employing a biological metaphor not in support of an ordered and self-conscious development of a political community operating through rational laws, but to support the departure from those laws into a zone of individualistic, moralizing, often ad-hoc judicial oligarchy. Neither of these will do and indeed neither should we expect that any judicial philosophy should. The problem is not with those who interpret the laws, but with those who make the laws.

We need a different system. We need to stop hiding behind institutions and processes which no longer work for any of us as an excuse not to step up and take control of our future. We need to stop using processes as a way to bludgeon each other

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and exploit thin majorities which will inevitably reverse and learn to reason with each other and develop genuine consensus. Only genuine consensus can save us, and only genuine consensus is worthy of the kind of social and rational beings that we are.

I am proposing that we make amendments easier. What I am not proposing, however, is that some new clever set of norms and processes will make all of the difference. Ultimately, the change will not come from some new system but from a new mindset which will make new systems necessary. We need to start to talk to each other. And we need to listen.

### **Going down a dangerous path**

In ancient times, the most powerful republic in the world was the one that belonged to the Romans, a people more famous for devotion to their laws and their constitutional customs than we. Through it all, the wisdom of the senate, the energy of the people, and the ingenuity of the magistrates guided Rome from a tiny vassal city to the Etruscans to a superpower that dominated the entire classical world. Its laws were singularly well-developed, intricate, and socially entrenched, but at the same time the republic—ultimately, unlike ours, a direct democracy—could modify its most basic laws with a single act of legislation, something it did time and time again to resolve the numerous social and military crises the city was beset with in its long history.

When the Roman democracy finally did come to an end, it was not because of its mechanisms of flexibility, but rather because of the degradation of them. The republic did not end because a demagogue whipped the people up into a fury and convinced them to vote away their democracy—although this sort of thing certainly can happen—but through a much longer, slower process of loss of political consensus-building, the increasing

abuse of its institutions through partisan corruption and obstructionism, which eventually necessitated the use of illegal force as a brute substitute for consensus in order to stabilize the state.

After a century of strongmen—Sulla, Pompey, Caesar, Antony—tried and failed to use military authority to shore up a republic that no longer knew how to govern itself, the empire was founded when Octavian, using his personal prestige, took control ultimately not as a legally appointed dictator but as a private citizen granted extraordinary powers to do what the magistrates and the senate could not do. Even Tiberius, his successor, was surprised to find the senate so unwilling to govern that he was caused to continue this unorthodox arrangement. Eventually, the imperial role would evolve into an unfettered despotism.

This is how a republic dies. When it forgets how to deliberate, it degenerates into political gamesmanship. When political gamesmanship degenerates, as it inevitably does, the door is opened to violence. And violence can only breed more violence.

We cannot allow this to happen. If we are to avoid this fate, we must learn how to legislate. And to do that, we must rediscover how to debate, and how to think.

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