

Fair Observer

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Fair Observer
Independence, Diversity, Debate

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Why Football Has a Racism Problem and How to Solve It

Ellis Cashmore
June 02, 2023

Football player Vinícius Júnior's claim, "Racism is normal in La Liga" sparked off a new debate about association football's most enduring, bedeviling and seemingly insoluble problem. Why does it persist in the most globally inclusive and culturally diverse sport the world has ever seen? Ellis Cashmore, who has researched this subject since the early 1980s, provides an analysis – and prescribes a solution.

"Racism is Normal"

"This organization is an organization that clearly wants to fight against racism, as it already has done." Javier Tebas was referring to La Liga Nacional de Fútbol Profesional, Spanish football's governing organization, of which he is president. His declaration was a response to the Brazilian player Vinícius Júnior's stunning claim, "Racism is normal in La Liga."

It was a predictable statement after a public dispute between Tebas and Vinicius: The player's assertion that the Spanish league "belongs to the racists" was met with "La Liga has worked and will continue to work against this behavior of xenophobia and racist comments in stadiums." Vinícius later called on sponsors and broadcasters to put pressure on the league to make changes. The results of this remain to be seen.

Spain is not completely alone in the 30 or so European football playing countries that lie east of

Poland. Italy's Ultras have rightwing and nationalist leanings and Inter Milan's black Belgian player Romelu Lukaku was targeted by racist abuse in Turin recently. But racism has largely disappeared from western football. At least, from football crowds. In England, Tottenham's South Korean forward Son Heung-min was the subject of a racist online video. The sources of online content are notoriously difficult to trace and it's doubtful that the originators of this or other hateful messages circulated online are sports fans: More likely malevolent geeks who want to bring sports into disrepute.

History of Football Racism

The persistence of racism in association in football is one of the most perplexing anachronisms in sports, or any other sphere of society for that matter. Like the game itself, the practice of abusing black players has its origins in England. In the late 1970s, the appearance of dozens of black players enraged many white fans who reacted by hurling bananas, grunting like apes, and screaming epithets. The players were the children of Caribbean migrants who had settled in the UK in the aftermath of the second world war (often known as the "Windrush generation," after the name of the first vessel to have arrived in England from Jamaica in 1948).

It was unexpected: at various intervals in history, black players had appeared in English football without incident, and the Afro-Brazilian player Pelé was acknowledged as the best in the world. But, coaxed by far right political movements, many fans were reminded that football was created by white men, watched by white men and run by white men. Blacks were uninvited guests. I recall talking to Cyrille Regis (1958-2018), who played for West Bromwich Albion and other clubs in the period. He told me how he learned to "absorb," as he put it, the near-

continuous abuse and somehow used it to motivate him.

Vile as it was, the racism was intelligible: White fans resented the intrusion of people they considered interlopers in a sport they and their forebears built and owned. Or at least felt they owned. There were underlying conditions too: Unemployment was prodigiously high in Britain in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In 1981, a barely believable 31% of employable under-18-year-olds were out-of-work. Far right groups blamed ethnic minorities, of whom Caribbeans and their descendants were about half (total number in UK population about 500,000, or less than 1%).

Theories of Racism

Theories of racism differ, but most are predicated on competition for scarce resources, including jobs, accommodation, healthcare and education. There is nothing inevitable, less still natural about racist antagonism, and rivalries over resources are arbitrarily created from convenient markers. Migrant status, visible appearance, language, cuisine, and patterns of worship serve as metaphorical signs of enemies. What appears to be conflict emanating from spurious “racial” differences has more prosaic origins.

Racism, in common with other cultural practices, is volatile: It’s like fire -- a blast of wind and it spreads uncontrollably and unpredictably. That’s what happened after football fans around the world discovered English fans’ extraordinary way of barracking players. Once started, fires take on a life of their own. Racism died down in most parts of Europe by the late 1980s: The emergence of so many illustrious black players in the sport’s top leagues silenced abusive fans in most of western Europe, though not in the east.

Football in places like Ukraine, Poland and Russia today is, in terms of cultural diversity,

about where Britain was in the mid-1980s. Unlike Britain and other western European nations, which have endured the tortures of the damned trying to extirpate or even just manage racism, eastern European countries regard racist abuse just like other forms of football taunting based on physical appearance. They don’t seem to grasp the severity of their abuse. Or, if they do, their governments don’t.

I won’t labor the history of racism in football. Suffice it to say that somehow it has survived in a world where black lives matter and multiculturalism has been elevated to sacrosanctity. Survived, that is, in certain forms. As I argued earlier, the form popular in most European countries is via social media and this means sports fans are not necessarily involved. The shouting has gone. Suppressed perhaps, but, as long as racism isn’t expressed in behavior (verbal and nonverbal), its effects are manageable. We’ll have to accept that Eastern Europeans will take longer to catch up. But that still leaves us with Spain. Why is it such an outlier?

Almost 20 years ago, Spain’s national team manager Luis Aragonés described Thierry Henry, a French player, as “negro de mierda [black shit].” The manager was widely condemned, but the fact that a person of such seniority felt comfortable casting such a foul slur made football wonder if the Spanish were out-of-step with the rest of Western Europe. The recent misadventure suggests they still are. Perhaps Spain, with its various regional cultures and languages, including Catalan, Basque, Galician, and Valencian, has assimilated or at least learned to live with strains and enmities related to identity and regional autonomy, particularly in Catalonia and the Basque Country. One of the effects may be to have desensitized the Spanish to the pain occasioned by divisive language.

Sledgehammer-To-Crack-A-Nut

So, what should be done? We can't get into people's heads and change their thoughts. But we can prevent them from talking and acting in a way that gives open expression to those thoughts. And, when they do, we should punish. The USA's National Basketball Association (NBA) opted for the sledgehammer-to-crack-a-nut strategy when, in 2018, it hit Los Angeles Clippers' owner Don Sterling with a \$2.5m fine and an order to sell the club. Sterling had acknowledged during an interview with NBA investigators that he had made disparaging remarks about black people. The governing organization's response appeared to be disproportionately punitive, but have you heard of any racism in basketball lately? (I'm not being naïve: it still manifests every so often: Kyrie Irving recently said crowds treat black players "like they're in a human zoo.")

Football has to make clubs culpable for their fans' behavior. It already does this to an extent: Closing stadiums or parts of stadiums for periods and fining clubs indicates that governing organizations are prepared to lay blame at the door of clubs. Yet the penalties are hardly on par with the NBA sanction. Expulsion from a major European competition, double-digit points deductions and multiple transfer window freezes might ram home the message. These kind of chastisements would quickly translate into a cogent message for fans: Do it again and you'll get more of the same! We would never hear another peep. And, if some errant sheep in the flock mouthed a racist remark, fellow members of the crowd would soon muzzle them.

This is suppression rather than resolution. It's a reasonable ambition, not an unattainable or fanciful hope. I've learned over the years that thought control doesn't work: Behavior control is altogether more practicable. It's the paradox of football that the globally inclusive game is riven

with a bigotry that should have been stillborn or, at least, died in the 1980s. In many parts of the world it has, but its persistence, especially in Spain, is a particular embarrassment. It's a wonder football's corporate sponsors like Coca-Cola, adidas, Toyota and Qatar Airways haven't grown uncomfortable with the residual presence of racism and pressured governing organizations to crush it. Television networks too might have flexed their muscles and urged stiffer penalties for offending clubs -- though, of course, they wouldn't want to lose marquee clubs, or ratings would fall.

Racism will be crushed for sure. It remains a question of time: Football will, at some point, realize that the sledgehammer is a crude, heavy, powerful instrument designed to break rocks. Some nuts are tougher than others: For example, macadamia nuts have an extremely hard shell that requires significant force or specialized tools to crack open. A sledgehammer has more than enough force to crack that. The time for education and persuasion is over: football must now start hammering.

[[Ellis Cashmore](#) is co-editor of *Studying Football*]

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Bangladesh Unveils its New Indo-Pacific Outlook

Sadia Korobi
June 06, 2023

Bangladesh's Indo-Pacific Outlook (IPO) is a pragmatic approach to a region that holds substantial importance in global affairs. But rather than becoming ensnared in geopolitical rivalries, Bangladesh has chosen to carve a distinct path that serves its own interests. The country intends to actively participate in shaping the future of the Indo-Pacific region while safeguarding its independence.

On April 24, Bangladesh formally announced its first Indo-Pacific Outlook (IPO). The announcement signifies the country's proactive involvement in the evolving dynamics of the Indo-Pacific region. The timing of the announcement came right before Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to Japan, the UK, and the US.

The IPO outlines 15 objectives for the Indo-Pacific region and "envisions a free, open, peaceful, secure, and inclusive Indo-Pacific for the shared prosperity for all."

Since independence in 1971, Bangladesh has adhered to a policy of non-alignment. While the IPO aligns with the broad objectives of the region championed by the United States and its allies, Bangladesh remains resolute in maintaining its neutral stance.

The Indo-Pacific region has its identity not solely because of its geographical boundaries but primarily due to its immense geostrategic

importance. The region produces more than 62% of the global GDP and accounts for more than half of the world's population.

The region also serves as home to several of the world's largest economies, including China, Japan, India, South Korea, Australia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. It comes as no surprise that the Indo-Pacific has evolved into a significant geopolitical hotspot, with major powers vying for influence and asserting their positions on the region's order.

The Indo-Pacific strategy emerged as a response to China's assertive rise in the region, with the United States playing a leading role. The term "Indo-Pacific" was first coined by the late Prime Minister of Japan Shinzo Abe. In 2017, US President Donald Trump introduced his "Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)" plan. President Trump garnered support from key Western allies, including the European Union, India, and Japan, as they recognized the need to counterbalance China's expanding presence.

Bangladesh has now joined the bandwagon. Its first and foremost objective for the Indo-Pacific is to "strengthen mutual trust and respect, forge partnerships and cooperation, and promote dialogue and understanding with the aim of ensuring peace, prosperity, security and stability for all in the Indo-Pacific."

In line with its pledge, Bangladesh aims to actively contribute to peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and counter-terrorism programs in the region. It also emphasizes the importance of upholding international values and collaborating with other stakeholders in the Indo-Pacific to achieve shared goals.

Maritime freedom of access and movement, and sustainable management of oceans, and seas are also key priorities. Bangladesh adheres to the

United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

In addition, the country aims to promote inclusive societies that embrace a culture of peace, prioritizing the advancement of the "women, peace, and security" agenda. It also advocates for transparent, rules-based multilateral systems that enable inclusive economic growth and development for all stakeholders in the Indo-Pacific.

The country recently unveiled Vision 2041, an ambitious roadmap aimed at uplifting the economic status of the country and improving the living standards of its people through rapid industrialization. Currently, Bangladesh is the 7th most climate-vulnerable country, according to the climate vulnerability index. Bangladesh is keen on proactive engagement in addressing disaster risk reduction, biodiversity loss, marine pollution, and other climate change issues.

Bangladesh has made a deliberate choice to use the term "Indo-Pacific" instead of "Asia-Pacific," which is favored by Beijing. This reflects the country's independent stance in regional geopolitics. However, it has avoided including explicit military goals in its strategy, in contrast to other countries like the USA, France, the UK, and Canada.

Bangladesh's non-alignment policy is a prudent decision for a small state. Bangladesh has effectively balanced its relationships with the US and China, both of which have been vying for greater influence in South Asia.

Maintaining this balance will be crucial for Bangladesh as it strives to achieve its goals amidst the evolving dynamics of the Indo-Pacific region and the emerging multipolar world. The country is bound to find a place in this new world order.

[[Naveed Ahsan](#) edited this piece.]

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What You Need to Know About the Debt Ceiling

Alex Gloy
June 07, 2023

The debt ceiling, originally conceived as a tool to control government spending, has failed to do so. What it has succeeded in doing is introducing uncertainty into markets, raising borrowing costs, and serving as a tool for parties to introduce their preferred spending policies, all too often to the detriment of ordinary households.

The recent debate surrounding the US debt ceiling has evoked widespread concern and uncertainty. However, with the signing of a bill by President Biden on June 3rd, the debt limit has been temporarily suspended until January 2025, averting the immediate threat of a debt default. Despite this temporary relief, important questions persist regarding the purpose and effectiveness of the debt ceiling. This article aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the US debt ceiling, its historical context, and the

implications and challenges associated with its existence.

The debt ceiling in the United States originated from the need to control government spending and ensure fiscal responsibility. Initially, Congress had to authorize each new batch of debt issued, a cumbersome process that was modified with the passage of the Second Liberty Bond Act of 1917. This act established an aggregate amount, or debt ceiling, to govern the total debt to be issued. Since World War II, the debt ceiling has been adjusted over 100 times to accommodate the country's evolving financial needs.

The concept of a debt ceiling, however, itself poses logical inconsistencies. All federal government spending is already authorized by Congress, making it contradictory to prevent the Treasury Department from raising the necessary debt to fund these authorized expenditures. In other words, Congress forbids spending which it has already mandated. Reaching the debt limit forces the government to choose between not fulfilling previously agreed obligations or defaulting on existing debt service. Either of these would be a violation of obligations established by law, and would therefore have severe implications for the US economy.

Implications of reaching the limit

Reaching the debt ceiling carries significant implications for the US economy. It can lead to a government shutdown, disrupt essential services, and even result in default on financial obligations, jeopardizing the nation's creditworthiness. Credit rating agencies closely monitor debt ceiling debates. If they were to downgrade the federal government's credit rating, this would increase borrowing costs and undermine investor confidence. Uncertainty surrounding the debt ceiling, even if it is not eventually reached, also

introduces volatility into financial markets and can impact global economic stability.

Government default entails the non-payment of interest or principal on its obligations. This triggers a credit event that has far-reaching consequences. Individuals and institutions relying on government funds would not receive payments. Credit default swaps (CDSs)—insurance contracts taken out against credit events—would be triggered, potentially causing financial difficulties for institutions which have written CDSs. Rating agencies would downgrade the US credit rating, impacting other borrowers, and Treasury securities would no longer serve as acceptable collateral for institutional borrowing, leading to a collapse of credit availability, choking the economy and leading to a severe contraction.

Rating agencies such as Fitch and Standard & Poor's have expressed concerns about the United States' credit rating, despite the recent agreement on the debt ceiling. A potential downgrade could have implications not only for the US but also for all other borrowers whose credit rating is usually influenced by the sovereign rating. With the US bond market dominating global markets, the loss of the anchor role of US Treasuries, which form a substantial part of institutional portfolios worldwide, could create disarray in international bond markets.

Partisan shenanigans and a borrowing spree

The debt ceiling has become a contentious political issue in recent decades, with both major parties sharing responsibility for substantial increases in outstanding debt. The threat of a debt default has often been used as a bargaining tool in political negotiations. However, neither party wants to bear the blame for driving the country into a crisis, resulting in a risky game of chicken in which each party attempts to see who will budge first and agree to concessions favorable to the other party's

spending policy. This raises questions about whether the debate really revolves around the debt itself. The recent deal, featuring a suspension of the debt limit, essentially provides the Treasury the freedom to borrow as much money as needed until January 2025—a carte blanche.

The government's account at the Federal Reserve, the Treasury General Account (TGA), has almost been depleted. It will have to be replenished to 600 billion US dollars (it peaked at 1.8 trillion US dollars during the pandemic). Those funds will have to be raised by raising additional debt—on top of money needed to fund the current federal fiscal deficit of around 2 trillion dollars. As I mentioned in a previous article, it is not apparent who would buy that amount of Treasury securities. The Federal Reserve might be forced to reverse its plan to slowly shrink its balance sheet, having to absorb additional government debt.

After borrowing 726 billion dollars during the second quarter of 2023, the Treasury Department expects to raise another 733 billion dollars in the following quarter. Total government debt is hence guaranteed to continue rising at a fast pace. Having briefly been arrested at 31.4 trillion dollars (the amount of the debt ceiling), federal debt is expected to exceed 50 trillion dollars by 2033. The exponential growth of government debt is going to continue unabated.

The spending bill includes some mild cuts of non-military discretionary spending in 2024, and a limit of all discretionary spending in 2025. Military spending, however, will increase further, to 886 billion US dollars in 2024, and 895 billion in 2025, a 23% increase over the amount spent in 2022.

The bill's drafters found other devices to cut costs. 20 billion dollars originally awarded to the IRS (Internal Revenue Service) to fight tax evasion will be clawed back. The bill imposes new

requirements for adults to maintain access to food stamps. It also ends the freeze on student loan repayments. In short: money taken from the poor is being given to the military and to people crafting “innovative” tax returns.

Hidden under the surface-level negotiations was a fight over permit reform. Local governments had the ability to block interstate pipelines and electricity lines by dragging out the permitting process. Alternative energy companies need new transmission lines to transport energy produced by wind and solar farms towards population centers near the coasts. Fossil fuel companies need pipelines to move abundant natural gas from sparsely populated areas with shale reservoirs towards the big cities or harbors for export. In the end, the Mountain Valley Pipeline, bringing natural gas from the Marcellus shale fields in West Virginia to Virginia, made it into the bill, securing Senator Joe Manchin's vote.

A proposal to end recurring debt ceiling drama

US lawmakers recognize the insanity of recurring debt ceiling debates, especially since it is a question of funding spending that has already been authorized by Congress once.

One option contemplates a bureaucratic rather than a legislative solution. This would involve the Treasury Department disregarding the debt ceiling and continuing to issue debt. The perspective finds support in the 14th Amendment of the US Constitution, which states that “the validity of the public debt of the United States, authorized by law...shall not be questioned.” However, pursuing such a unilateral move could result in a legal dispute and potentially generate still more uncertainty.

Another suggestion entails the Treasury minting a platinum coin with a denomination of 1 trillion US dollars, as it is legally permitted to do. This

coin would then be deposited with the Federal Reserve in exchange for a credit of 1 trillion dollars. However, Treasury Secretary Yellen has dismissed this idea, noting that the Federal Reserve is unlikely to agree to such a proposal.

It is worth noting that the US government has in fact experienced instances of default in the past. Esteemed Wall Street veteran Jim Grant argues that a default can occur through a unilateral change in payment terms, resulting in a diminished financial obligation, such as forced currency redenomination. Two events over the past century align with this definition. Firstly, the devaluation of the dollar relative to gold under US President Roosevelt in 1933, when the gold price was raised from \$20.67 to \$35 per ounce. Secondly, the “temporary” suspension, which has since become permanent, of the dollar's convertibility into gold by US President Nixon in 1971.

In reality, persistent inflation can be viewed as another form of default, albeit spread out over many years. Over time, the US dollar has lost approximately 97% of its purchasing power since the establishment of the Federal Reserve in 1913. While the dollar remains an effective medium of exchange, it has proven to be a poor long-term store of value due to the erosion of its purchasing power through inflation.

If spending is not controlled, the government will find one way or another of making ends meet, and all too often it is the consumer who foots the bill.

[[Anton Schauble](#) edited this piece.]

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Indigenous People in Bangladesh Suffer as Government Drags Feet

Saleem Samad
June 09, 2023

25 years ago, ethnic militias fighting in Bangladesh’s southeastern forest hills agreed to lay down their arms against the state in exchange for concessions of self-governance and land rights. To date, the government has not made good on its promises, leaving many ethnic minority farmers stranded, unable to reclaim the farmland on which they once made their livelihoods.

In the hill forest districts of Bangladesh, known collectively as the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), the inhabitants continue to suffer in agony. Many of these indigenous peoples speak Sino-Tibetan languages and practice Buddhist, Hindu, or other local religions, traits which set them apart as a minority in largely Indo-Aryan-speaking and Muslim Bangladesh. They are suffering because the government has not complied with the peace accord, celebrated at the time, which it signed 25 years ago with armed militias seeking autonomy in the region.

The United People's Party of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (PCJSS), the political high command of the mainly Chakma, Marma, and Tripura guerillas called the Shanti Bahini (“Peace Force”), signed a peace accord with the government of Sheikh

Hasina on 2 December 1997. The historic CHT Peace Accord brought to an end a protracted insurgency of more than two decades, a bush war that had cost many lives and livelihoods in southeast Bangladesh.

Parliament quickly ratified the accord, and the surrender of the combatants and their ordinance quickly followed. Finally, thousands of ethnic refugees, until then languishing in squalid camps in the neighboring Indian state of Tripura, were able to come home.

Implementation is taking forever

However, PCJSS leader Jyotirindra Bodhipriya Larma, known as Shantu Larma, lamented that this silver jubilee is nothing to celebrate. The government has not been willing to implement it. Unfortunately, a quarter of a century after the signing of the accord, a peace audit claims that only 25 provisions and 18 clauses have been partially implemented, out of 72 provisions.

While the government celebrates the anniversary of the proclaimed peace, full-fledged governing councils have not been formed through direct elections, as promised by the peace accord, in any of the CHT's three districts. The interim councils were formed with hand-picked ruling party members, mostly ethnic Bangalees from outside of the region and a few ethnic minority members. The government remains conspicuously silent when the implementation of the fundamental provisions of the accord is raised.

In spite of these headwinds, Shantu Larma is hopeful that the accord will see the light of day by its golden jubilee, if not earlier. And so it must, for unless the peace accord, signed during the first term of Sheikh Hasina's government, is put into reality, peace will remain elusive for the indigenous peoples of these beautiful hills.

In the last 25 years, the CHT Peace Accord Implementation Committee has held only six meetings. This is a reflection of the government's lack of seriousness.

Larma remains loyal to the Prime Minister, who is now in her fourth term. He argues that as she made a sincere political commitment to getting the peace deal inked and ratified, so will she surely strive to make progress in implementing the accord.

However, he reminded the national government that the responsibility to implement the peace accord lies with them and with no one else, not PCJSS or the former insurgents. He fears that the delay will cause frustration and anger among the hill people, creating a political divide in the community, especially among young people and students. In the years since the accord, young people have from time to time acted out violently in the hopes of putting pressure on the government to realize the accord's implementation.

A roadmap to implement the accord to achieve peace was also agreed with the government. Those affected do not understand what is causing the delay in the implementation of the accord.

A history of discrimination

The PCJSS argues that, like previous regimes, the ruling Awami League party has been implementing a policy of Islamization, and, coupled with the crisis, it has intensified militarization in the CHT to completely eradicate the national identity of the hill people. In this, they see the continuation of a long and painful history.

The military dictator General Ziaur Rahman (1977-1981) attempted to Islamize the hill forest and pushed tens of thousands of landless Muslim Bangalee settlers from the plains districts to outnumber the local ethnic population.

Parleys with the government's liaison committee were initiated during the military junta of General Hussain Muhammad Ershad (1982-1990) when he offered an olive branch to the guerillas to surrender. The peace process was entrusted to a small group of immature military officers, who forced the community leaders to sign a halfhearted peace treaty. This treaty was rejected by the Shanti Bahini commanders.

Subsequently, when Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party came to power in 1991, she unilaterally declared a ceasefire in the hills and initiated peace talks with members of parliament. Her regime experienced hiccups as the liaison committee could not spell out a political solution to the crisis. The end result was zero. The dialogue was abruptly abandoned in 1996.

When Sheikh Hasina came to power a year later in 1997, a flurry of peace talks resulted in the CHT Peace Accord after the government recognized the crisis in the hill forest as the political problem it was. The Peace Accord was written with the supreme sacrifice of the blood of the hill peoples and the political vision of the Awami League government, but the effects of Bangalee ethnic imperialism still continue.

Thousands of people in Bangladesh, especially those visiting the hill forests as tourists are not aware that de facto military rule continues and that the so-called Operation Uttaran, the government's offensive, has not been withdrawn, despite what was agreed in the accord.

Rights groups complain that appalling human rights abuses, including illegal detention, extrajudicial deaths, enforced disappearances, legal harassment, and attacks against the hill people by Bangalee settlers continued without any respite. The members of the CHT Citizens' Council, an outfit of the Bangalee settlers, have gained notoriety for forced conversion of native girls to

Islam, kidnapping for ransom, looting of produce from native farmers, land grabbing, and other crimes. Human rights organizations have recorded evidence from parents and guardians that indigenous children have been taken away by force and admitted to madrasas (Islamic schools) in other areas of the country and converted to Islam without the knowledge of their parents.

Native administrations disempowered

The authorities are presently making systematic efforts at forced demographic transformation of the region—further marginalizing the natives who have protected the hill forest, the flora and fauna for centuries.

Law and order, police, land and land management, forest and environment conservation, communication infrastructure development, and other competencies stipulated by the accord have not been handed over to the district councils. Alas, district police forces have not been formed. And despite the decision of the Accord Implementation Committee, the jurisdiction to issue "Permanent Resident Certificates," vital for the recognition of indigenous identity and of the incumbent rights to vote and to receive restitution according to the peace agreement, has not been turned over to the native administrations as promised.

It is an ongoing tragedy that the refugees who have returned from India have not yet gotten their land back, in violation of the accord. Internally displaced refugees have regained their land either, Mangal Kumar Chakma recently wrote in *The Daily Star*.

The list of permanent residents of the three hill districts, who are the ones eligible to vote there, has not yet been prepared, again despite the accord's mandate. Even the electoral rules and election rules for the hill district councils have not been formulated.

This undemocratic and partisan path sends the wrong message to the hill people, demonstrating the government's dearth of political commitment. The land occupation and eviction of ethnic minorities remain an apple of discord between the Bangalees settled and protected by the military and the ethnic nationalities of the hill forests. The hill people are constantly losing their lands and being evicted from their homesteads in the absence of a functional CHT Land Commission and with the sluggish progress of the implementation of the peace accord.

The Land Commission mandated under the CHT Peace Accord has not progressed at all. The commission was supposed to demarcate the ancestral lands of the minorities to establish their legal rights against encroachers. So far, the light at the end of the tunnel still appears distant.

The crucial issue is whether the government will come forward to implement the Peace Accord after being called upon to do so during the session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues held on 17–28 April 2023.

In August 2022, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights called on the government of Bangladesh to implement the accord and allow independent actors unrestricted access to the CHT region.

For the hill people, peace continues to remain a long way off as Bangla-speaking settlers from the lowlands, brought into ancestral indigenous lands at the behest of the military and continuing to enjoy the favor of the military, civil, and party figures that privilege them against the land's native inhabitants.

Frustration is mounting. As Shantu Larma said: "It does not take 25 years to implement a peace accord."

[[Anton Schauble](#) edited this piece.]

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The Bottom Line: Kemalism Just Won't Win

Nathaniel Handy

June 10, 2023

Western observers have been surprised by another win for Turkey's president, seemingly impervious to the economic and humanitarian disasters that have made recent headlines for him. What they, and the opposition alliance, fail to understand is what really motivates the Turkish voter.

Observers in the West could be forgiven for wondering how Turkey's newly re-elected president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, won again. Given the portrayal of these elections in much of the Western media, you could assume the only explanation is corruption.

Nevertheless, the turnout for the Turkish elections was high, higher than turnouts are in most Western democratic states. Turnouts in dictatorships across the region are pitifully low, caused no doubt by apathy due to the lack of any real choice—unless, of course, they are the fanciful “99.9% support” type of turnout.

Despite this, coverage of these elections has portrayed them as a contest between a dictator (as Erdogan has been described time and again) against a democrat. Opposition presidential candidate Kemal Kilicdaroglu was painted as a humble civil servant who had risen to take on the strongman in a David versus Goliath political moment.

A working-class hero

It matters that Kilicdaroglu was not an emergent democratic grassroots candidate, but the predictable consensus candidate of a broad six-party opposition alliance. He has been the leader of the main opposition Peoples' Republican Party (CHP) for 13 years. In that time, he has consistently lost at the ballot box to Erdogan.

The now casual and commonplace description of Erdogan as a dictator in Western media also misses another key point. Unlike most real dictators, who tend to be opportunist ex-military figures, or career politicians who are often scions of influential families, Erdogan is the real deal, and his supporters know it. He rose from humble origins in Istanbul's Kasimpasa neighborhood. He is in many ways unpolished. He is also sincere in his religious faith. His working-class roots and his understanding of how this constituency thinks—because he thinks like them—provide Erdogan an authenticity that you cannot simply manufacture.

All the onions and kitchen sinks in Turkey cannot obscure the fact that Erdogan is the figurehead for a constituency that was systemically disenfranchised for much of the modern Republic's history. This is at the root of his enduring appeal. It is a populist appeal, but it is no less real for that.

Erdogan has made his life's work the restoration of the dignity of a class of Turkish society that has felt marginalized and scorned by elites since at

least the foundation of the modern republic, and arguably since the rise of westernizing reformist governments in the final years of the Ottoman Empire.

In the pre-Erdogan era (and for a long time after it had begun), women who chose to wear a headscarf could not get an education or work for the public sector. Consider that fact for a moment. Women can wear headscarves to school or work in most secular Western states, and yet a state often viewed as Islamic by outsiders outlawed it.

For his constituency, Erdogan's tenure has been a very real revolution in their life circumstances. These core changes are important. The average voter sets them against the more recent economic pain. They weigh the two. Basic goods have become painfully expensive, but recently gained political freedoms are also precious. These are fundamental political considerations.

A popular, but not invincible, leader

Erdogan has made big mistakes. The economy is reeling from ill-judged policies and nepotism. The swing to nationalist policies and hardline confrontation with Kurds in the wake of the coup attempt of 2016 has brought with it intractable problems internally and externally for Turkey. The president's post-coup paranoia of real or invisible enemies has made many old friends in his Justice and Development Party (AKP) lose faith with him, and his authoritarian style has alienated key Islamist figures who would make his government stronger.

When you consider all this, it is testament to the well of goodwill he is able to draw from that he still won fairly comfortably. However, it is easy to ascribe too much of the credit for Erdogan's success to his own charisma and political know-how. Much of the cause of the result of this election was also of the opposition's own making.

If the opposition alliance had really committed to challenging Erdogan, they should have found someone who didn't require Erdogan's core constituency to betray the legacy of what Erdogan has built. The leader of the CHP was never going to be that figure.

A clear majority in Turkish society does not want a return to a Western-backed secular nationalist elite, as exists in much of the Arab world and did exist for most of the history of the Turkish republic. Erdogan has made another path possible. His tenure is far from fully successful, but for him to be usurped, he needs to be beaten on his own terms.

The person to do so has not appeared, or, at any rate, not been chosen to run as a candidate against him. As has been repeated by much of the media, even a CHP candidate such as Istanbul mayor Ekrem Imamoglu would have been a much more serious challenge, given his significant appeal with voters.

But to be genuinely successful at cutting into the AKP vote, an opposition candidate would have to reflect more of the conservative opposition to Erdogan, which did exist in the six-party alliance. This alliance included Meral Aksener's İyi Party, Ali Babacan's Democracy and Progress Party (DEVA) and Ahmet Davutoglu's Future Party (GP).

In Babacan and Davutoglu, the alliance had two party leaders who were former members of the ruling AKP and former cabinet ministers. If they had led the opposition platform, that would have asked much more uncomfortable questions of the Erdogan campaign. As it was, the old lines of political and social loyalty were relatively undisrupted.

What will Erdogan leave to history?

The opposition must now reflect on the reality Erdogan has created and the need to realign their approach in the hope of denting Erdogan's appeal. The president himself, however, has an opportunity. He is in his final term as president and has the chance to cement a legacy.

In appointing Mehmet Simsek as his new finance minister, he is making one clear signal in that direction. He knows that economic stability built AKP success in the 2000s. It nearly undid them in the 2020s. He needs to stabilize the currency to continue the prosperity that he has offered his constituency.

The other element is perhaps harder, but carries an even greater prize. It is the Kurdish question, Turkey's eternal question.

Ironically, Erdogan's revolution, for all its significance, has followed many of the trends long established by secular elites in Turkey. When his back was to the wall in the aftermath of the 2016 coup attempt, Erdogan turned to the hardline nationalists of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) for support. In so doing, he undid any attempt to solve the Kurdish question through political dialogue. The resulting mess has festered within Turkey and has had high costs for the nation's position in the region, leading to policy choices in Syria and Iraq that do not necessarily benefit Turkey in the long term.

In the wake of another victory, could this be the moment that an Erdogan now beyond the need for reelection takes on the role of a Father of the Nation, in much the way that Ataturk once did, and offers the ultimate magnanimous gesture? Could he find a political settlement to the Kurdish question that he might force through with his political capital?

If he did so, he could change the geopolitical dynamics of the region fundamentally, offering Turkey a vision of a foreign and domestic policy based not on anxiety and defense, but on economic and social opportunity. That might be the catalyst for an even more successful future than anyone could have imagined today.

[[Anton Schauble](#) edited this piece.]

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The US Merchant Marine Is a National Security Necessity

Benjamin Harrison
June 12, 2023

The US, once one of the world's foremost shipping economies, has become almost entirely dependent on foreign firms to transport goods to and from its mainland. This is a vulnerability of which China is well aware. If the US does not overhaul its shipping system soon, it may be caught unprepared by a hostile naval power.

Power talks. Realistic descriptions of the buildup of military power often will convey a better sense of the likelihood of action than will a series of estimative-type judgements which fail to include the military details or reasons on which the assessment is based. To understand

the capability, and to be able to view it objectively, is a prerequisite to the understanding of intent.

—Cynthia Grabo, *Anticipating Surprise* (2002)

Despite having the fourth largest coastline in the world (behind Canada, Indonesia, and Russia), the United States has almost no domestic maritime presence on the high seas today. The US has essentially disappeared from the world's oceans as a commercial entity. The only trading partners to which the US has overland access are Canada and Mexico, and for seaborne commerce to its east and its west, the US is dependent on the goodwill, and the cargo holds, of strangers.

America could be left high and dry

The risks surrounding this situation are known, but rarely, if ever, discussed in the public forum. "Global Trends 2040," published in March 2021 by the National Intelligence Council (NIC), posits five scenarios for 2040. The fourth scenario, "Separate Silos," imagines a world in which supply chains have been frustrated to the point that nations across the globe move toward isolationism and restrict trading to their immediate geographical neighbors. In this scenario, the commercial and security interests of the United States are limited to North America; similar arrangements are to be found in Europe and Asia. Resource-rich blocs like North America, China, Europe, and Russia are at an advantage vis-à-vis developing nations due to their relative self-sufficiency. Of the five scenarios posited, this represents the best case.

In the NIC's other four scenarios, China is portrayed as the principal catalyst of whatever shape the world happens to be taking. China's relationship with the US is either that of a strategic adversary or of a fierce commercial competitor. In all cases, China is driving the relationship.

Curiously, these four scenarios assume that throughout the projected twenty-year development of this more-or-less adversarial relationship, the import and export of goods to and from the United States on foreign-flagged cargo ships and tankers, an ever-increasing majority of which are Chinese, will continue unencumbered and unthreatened. It is a telling and possibly unintended editorial omission for the “Separate Silos” scenario not to specifically address the role or fate of ocean transport in the broken supply chain, even though roughly 90% of the world’s goods are moved by sea.

The US Department of Transportation’s Maritime Administration warns of the sobering fact that China has been investing heavily in traditional infrastructure projects at home and around the world, building port facilities in Asia as well as Africa, and supporting a booming shipbuilding industry. The latest edition of Farwell’s Rules of the Nautical Road notes that “the number of vessels traversing the world’s oceans increased by 60 percent” between 1992 and 2012. A 2017 report by HSBC claims that “China’s merchant fleet has more than tripled in tonnage terms over the last decade.” According to the UN Conference on Trade and Development, China leads the world in the number of ships owned—more than four times the number under US ownership—and is second in the world, after Greece, in tonnage. The US does not even make it into the top 10 on the latter list.

Historically, a threat to a nation’s access to the sea was seen as an existential threat, an immediate and legitimate justification for war. Such a threat has been cited as a contributing factor to the US entry into World War I and to Japan’s attack on the US in World War II. In the United States today, however, we give very little thought to the maritime component of our national defense posture, and most Americans take little notice of ocean commerce until a pandemic causes colorful

container ships to stack up in US ports, or an ultra-large box-carrier blocks the Suez Canal. China, on the other hand, does not appear to have a similarly uninterested view on the importance of sea lane and supply chain domination. This is a relatively new development, and it should concern us more than the NIC scenarios suggest.

The American merchant fleet has all but disappeared

According to the Bureau of Transportation Statistics, in 1960 the United States had a merchant fleet of nearly 3000 oceangoing ships, comprising nearly 17% of the entire world’s merchant marine. Many of those ships in the US fleet were built for WWII and were nearing end-of-life by 1960. By 1970, the US merchant fleet had shrunk by half, both in absolute numbers and as a percentage of the world’s fleet. By 1980 it had shrunk by yet another half, and by 2019 the entire US merchant fleet of oceangoing cargo ships and tankers numbered only 182. By comparison, the world’s (currently) largest shipping company, Maersk Line of Denmark, owns and operates nearly 700 ships; the world’s second largest shipping company, MSC of Switzerland, owns and operates nearly 600 ships; COSCO of China and CMA CGM of France, the world’s third and fourth largest shipping companies, each own and operate between 500-600 ships. These are individual companies, each with several times the number of ships that make up the entire domestically flagged oceangoing merchant fleet of the United States.

The Merchant Marine Act (Jones Act) of 1920 states that:

It is necessary for the national defense and the development of the domestic and foreign commerce of the United States that the United States have a merchant marine:

Sufficient to carry the waterborne domestic commerce and a substantial part of the waterborne export and import foreign commerce of the United States and to provide shipping service essential for maintaining the flow of the waterborne domestic and foreign commerce at all times;

Capable of serving as a naval and military auxiliary in time of war or national emergency;

Owned and operated as vessels of the United States by citizens of the United States;

Composed of the best-equipped, safest, and most suitable types of vessels constructed in the United States and manned with a trained and efficient citizen personnel; and

Supplemented by efficient facilities for building and repairing vessels.

Of the above five requirements, it has been half a century since the first was even an aspirational goal. The second had been doubtful for some years, and the recent Turbo Activation test of the National Defense Reserve Fleet by the US Transportation Command in September 2019 settled the matter with disparaging results: only 40% of the ships activated were able to leave port, in stark contrast with the 80% successful activation for Desert Shield in 1990 and the 92% successful activation in 2003.

China has built up while the US slept

Cynthia Grabo notes that the buildup of an adversary's capabilities is an indicator of his intent. Grabo is speaking of military capability and military intent. After witnessing the effects of accidental disruption of the supply chain—sudden and widespread shortages of essential items such as baby formula, medications, technology, building materials, and more—we cannot underestimate the ability of an intentional competitor to dominate

and control the shipping lanes and to engage in, and win, a modern version of maritime siege warfare. We would do well to keep in mind that the objective of siege warfare is an adversary's capitulation, not destruction. Nor is it a new idea that merchant shipping is a military capability:

The clash of interests, the angry feelings roused by conflicting attempts thus to appropriate the larger share, if not the whole, of the advantages of commerce, and of distant unsettled commercial regions, led to wars. On the other hand, wars arising from other causes have been greatly modified in their conduct and issue by the control of the sea. Therefore the history of sea power, while embracing in its broad sweep all that tends to make a people great upon the sea or by the sea, is largely a military history.

—Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783*

Alfred Thayer Mahan's concept of sea power, known as the Mahan Doctrine, can be summed up as follows: Control the seas, control the world. The corollary of this doctrine is that if a nation does not control the seas, or at least its own waters, someone else will. The twin objectives recommended by the Mahan Doctrine are to achieve the first and avoid the latter. Mahan was an American naval officer, the "most important American strategist of the nineteenth century" in the estimation of military historian John Keegan. According to Mahan, one of the essential and existential missions of the US Navy is to protect the sea lanes for American commerce. Not only does this allow the United States to achieve prosperity through commerce, but this also protects us against siege by embargo.

Even if the US Navy still embraces its mission to protect the sea lanes for American shipping, the point is all but moot, since an American

oceangoing fleet is all but non-existent. In a time of national crisis, assuming the US were to rebuild its merchant marine as it did in WWII, and assuming we had the trained mariners needed to operate a merchant fleet of the size needed to supply our country in crisis, it could not be assumed that the US Navy had either the mission, the capacity or the disposition to protect US shipping and sea lanes. This would mean that we would also assume extensive losses at sea, churning through even more merchant vessels and mariners. In other words: as the Mahan Doctrine would predict, the situation we have watched develop over the last 60 years has rendered the US essentially defenseless against an adversary with a superior combination of martial and merchant maritime capability.

And what becomes of Hawaii, Alaska, Puerto Rico, American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and the US Virgin Islands if the sea lanes are no longer safe for American cargo? If those strangers on whose goodwill we have become dependent find it too risky to move American cargo, resupply of any one of these non-contiguous populations will be impossible. Aerial resupply is not a serious option. Roughly speaking, 1000 cargo planes are needed to move the equivalent amount of cargo of one ship. Such a feat would be unsustainable for any protracted period.

Ships are expensive to build, expensive to operate, and difficult to operate profitably. The massive buildup of cargo capacity by China is not profit-driven; it is a national security imperative for China and the key to their long-term geopolitical ambitions. For this reason, Chinese shipbuilding and ocean shipping are heavily subsidized. The continuous launching of new Chinese merchant ships, new overseas ports, and new warships of the ever-increasing PLA Navy is fully capable of performing its intended strategic role within the framework of the Mahan Doctrine.

Re-preparing the merchant fleet will be serious work

The US has a few options. It can accept the “Separate Silos” outcome and retreat into isolation and global irrelevance, or it can reduce its addiction to foreign imports to the point that China’s investment in ocean shipping becomes an albatross for the PRC. These options would entail a fundamental change in US standards of living, like those experienced on the home front during WWII. Or, as a third option, the US can compete with China for dominance on the high seas. It would require conscious national will to change the current regulatory and employment environment that makes building, owning, and operating ships under the US flag as outrageously prohibitive and unprofitable as it is. Unless US mariners are to receive the third-world wages and conditions that give competitors the economic edge, US flagged shipping will require substantial and effective subsidization.

Moreover, rather than being unionized, professional mariners would be better served, and would serve the nation better, as a uniformed service, analogous to NOAA or the USPHS Commissioned Corps. Such a measure would require radical rethinking and a cultural change for mariners, but the organizational structure already exists, and could be accomplished by expanding the role of the US Maritime Service to assume the responsibility for training and licensing of mariners that is currently distributed across public, private, and governmental organizations and regulated by the US Coast Guard. Mariners would admittedly lose the independence that draws many to the seagoing life, but in return they would have predictable income and employment as well as training, promotion, and retirement.

A crucial component of executing this third option is something that has been firmly established and operating for many decades:

mariner training. Alongside the US Merchant Marine Academy at Kings Point, New York, there are six state maritime academies (one each in Texas, Michigan, Maine, Massachusetts, California, and New York) which together graduate approximately 1400 licensed merchant marine officers per year. With the notable exception of Michigan's Great Lakes Maritime Academy, though, most of these newly licensed merchant marine officers will sail only briefly on their licenses, if at all, and in time will lose not only their licenses but also the skills they had at graduation. As was dramatically demonstrated in WWII, with the right incentive the US can build hundreds of ships with breathtaking speed. Training mariners to operate them, however, takes years, and the skills are perishable if not continually used.

Indications of the conscious national will required to effect any of the changes needed to embark on this option are not apparent at the present time. In the Commandant of the Coast Guard's 2023 State of the Coast Guard address, Admiral Linda Fagan's only mention of the US merchant marine was her promise to end sexual harassment on US flagged vessels. This is of course a non-negotiable goal, but, considering the dwindling size of the US flagged merchant fleet, not terribly ambitious. On the other hand, if it were part of a larger vision to revive the US merchant marine and ensure a safe working environment for the robust talent pool of mariners that will be needed, then the Commandant's promise would be of strategic significance.

The fact that political decision-makers prefer to focus on short-term solutions to immediate problems is nothing new. Revitalizing and reinventing an industry that has been permitted to decline for over fifty years requires a long-term solution to a problem that most Americans will not recognize until it is upon them. By the time they do, any likely solution will entail great cost and

sacrifice. The US has a small window of opportunity to prevent the "Separate Silos" scenario, and possibly the others that project the US on its heels by 2040. Ruling the waves is hard and sometimes dangerous work. It requires investment and regulatory facilitation at the national level. Above all, it requires recognition of its importance to national security. It is hard work, but eminently preferable to the alternatives.

[[Anton Schauble](#) edited this piece.]

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Two Reasons China Can Be a Valuable Partner for Europe

John Bruton
June 14, 2023

The US has traditionally set the West's policy goals in Asia, but American and European interests in the region may be diverging. China can be a fruitful partner both economically and politically, especially with the need to counterbalance a belligerent Russia.

In the past, the United States tended to take the lead in deciding the West's security relationship with China. This was because the US had substantial security interests and alliances in the western Pacific. President Nixon, for example, gave positive leadership when he visited China.

Meanwhile, the countries that would form the EU pursued a vigorous and profitable policy of promoting trade with China. Germany led the way in this respect, especially through the export of German automobiles. This particular trend is weakening at the moment, although generally trade with China has recovered well.

There is a new problem. This is the openly declared and increasingly explicit US policy of curbing the growth and sophistication of the Chinese economy. This is being done because the US fears that China could pose a security threat to the US, and its allies, including Taiwan. The US wants to deny China access to certain types of semiconductors. Security concerns were cited by the Trump Administration when it imposed hefty tariffs on Chinese steel and aluminum. China responded with tariffs of its own. The US is also putting pressure on its allies to join in some of these measures.

The goal is to prevent China from developing strongly in areas that might make a key contribution to its national security. The World Trade Organization (WTO), of which China is a member, aims to ensure that global trade is governed by predictable and transparent rules. But "national security" is a matter of subjective judgment, to which such rules cannot easily be applied. Furthermore, China does not want WTO rules to apply to state-owned enterprises, while the US is undermining the appeals mechanism on WTO rulings.

The law of the jungle in international trade suits big countries, but not smaller ones. Economies such as Ireland are fortunate to be part of an EU bloc that will defend their interests.

Recently, the US published its National Security Strategy. It accused China of "wanting to reshape the international order" and of "assertive behavior"...hardly a hanging offense.

It said that it wanted the US to "outcompete" China, and added that it would oppose any unilateral change in relations across the Taiwan Strait. It also said that the US does not support Taiwan independence and remains committed to a "One China" policy.

This language is quite conciliatory and makes one wonder what the then Speaker Nancy Pelosi was trying to achieve with her recent high-profile visit to Taiwan—at a time when we may need China to talk sense into the Russians and get them to back out of their unprovoked invasion of Ukraine.

China had a strong record of defending the territorial integrity of states, notably against European powers in the nineteenth century. So it should not be neutral about the imperialist behavior of Russia!

[[Anton Schauble](#) edited this piece.]

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More Talk Than Action From the G7 on Afghanistan

Mohammad Jawad Ali Aqa
June 14, 2023

At last month's summit in Hiroshima, the G7 made statements on a host of issues, with Afghanistan receiving passing attention. While the sentiments expressed by the G7 regarding the rule of law in Afghanistan and the treatment of women and girls are laudable, the powers stopped short of committing to specific, actionable steps towards a real solution.

When the Group of Seven (G7) convened last month in Hiroshima, there was an elephant in the room: the ongoing crisis in Afghanistan under the Taliban rule, namely the treatment of women, the absence of an inclusive government, and the trampling of minority rights. Far from peripheral matters, these issues are central to the broader global concerns that the G7 must address, especially in light of the two perspectives—commitment to the international rule of law and outreach to the Global South—that guided its agenda.

The G7 did indeed dedicate a 60-minute session to Afghanistan, and the parties agreed in condemning the Taliban's suppression of fundamental rights. However, it could not be more of an understatement to say that the G7's response to the Afghan crisis could have been more assertive. Alongside their critique of the Taliban's conduct, the G7 also underscored a need to maintain continuous and direct dialogue with them, balancing its condemnation with engagement. This was an attempt to reflect the complexity of the international response required

in this volatile situation, but it raises questions about the commitment of the international community to the well-being of the Afghan people.

Condemnations without action

The G7's first perspective reflects the G7's commitment to uphold the international order based on the rule of law. This commitment is paramount in resisting unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force, as exemplified by Russia's threat to use nuclear weapons. It should also be crucial in countering other forms of lawlessness that can destabilize the international order, such as those currently unfolding in Afghanistan.

Through addressing the issue of Afghanistan under Taliban rule, the G7 had a prime opportunity to manifest its resolute determination to repudiate such actions and uphold the rule of law. Afghanistan must transition from a Taliban regime imposed at the point of a sword to a representative, lawfully installed government, encompassing all echelons of Afghan society. Regrettably, the dialogue on strategic measures to aid this transition was bleak.

Since the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan, the country has been plunged into a state of lawlessness that directly violates the principles upon which the international order stands. Reports of women being denied basic rights, minority groups facing persecution, and a lack of inclusivity in government structures are not only troubling but represent a blatant disregard for the rule of law. It was the responsibility of the G7 to stand united and address this crisis. Failure to act would not only compromise the credibility of the international order but also perpetuate the suffering of millions.

One of the most distressing consequences of the Taliban's rule is the blatant violation of women's

rights. For nearly two years, women and girls in Afghanistan have been denied access to education and basic freedoms. The implementation of a gender apartheid which confines women to their homes is a gross violation of human rights and a setback for gender equality worldwide. The Taliban's actions demonstrate a clear and present danger to the international order, because lawlessness within a member of the international community can indeed become a new normal if left unchallenged.

The statement issued by the G7's foreign ministers did voice a robust opposition against such repressive practices. However, it is insufficient for a multitude of reasons. While their vocal opposition to oppressive practices marks a positive first step, it is crucial that these words be underpinned by tangible actions and strategic policy initiatives that can catalyze substantial, meaningful change.

Furthermore, the G7's primary focus on diplomatic endeavors and economic sanctions falls short of addressing the multifaceted challenges that Afghan women routinely face. In order to formulate a genuinely impactful response, it is imperative to incorporate an element of inclusivity, ensuring that the unique voices and perspectives of Afghan women are taken into account.

Only with a sustained, long-term commitment, bolstered by active collaboration with international organizations and a comprehensive strategy emphasizing the primacy of women's rights and gender equality, can the G7 make significant strides in effectuating the deeply needed change in Afghanistan. This necessitates expanding the scope of their efforts beyond conventional diplomacy and sanctions, thereby unlocking the potential for transformative progress in this critical area.

The absence of an inclusive government in Afghanistan poses a significant challenge to

stability and progress. A sustainable peace and future for the country can only be achieved through a government that represents the interests and aspirations of all Afghan citizens. The G7, as a collective voice of influential nations, could have exerted pressure on the Taliban to foster inclusivity and ensure that minority rights are respected and protected. Unfortunately, the issued statement from the G7 does not live up to this vital mandate. The international community would do well to take a more assertive stance in advocating for a truly inclusive governance structure in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan issues placed on the sidelines

The second perspective emphasized the G7's mission to strengthen outreach to the Global South. The group sought to demonstrate its contributions to the issues that concern these nations.

Afghanistan, as part of the Global South, is a test case for this commitment. The G7 had a moral responsibility to ensure that the plight of Afghans, especially the most vulnerable, is not ignored. However, the shift of attention towards the "Global South" was mainly aimed at offsetting the influence of Russia and China. Thus, only a limited number of nations within the Global South were invited, and unfortunately, this meant that the issue of Afghanistan received scant attention.

Addressing Afghanistan's issues would not have been just about resolving a single country's crisis, but about reaffirming the values that the G7 represents and that the world needs. It should have been about demonstrating that the international order, based on the rule of law, isn't just a concept but a practice that can, and should, be upheld even in the most challenging situations.

As the host of the G7, Japan held a unique position to drive the agenda and focus attention on pressing global issues like the Afghanistan crisis,

which impacts global security, precipitates a humanitarian crisis, and affects regional stability. Given its strategic location in Asia, Japan's security interests could be influenced by instability in Afghanistan. Additionally, Japan's historic role in fostering international cooperation could have been leveraged to unite G7 nations in advocating for an inclusive government in Afghanistan, ensuring the rights of all citizens are respected. Unfortunately, the latest G7 meeting overlooked this opportunity.

The G7, therefore, should have taken a more robust stance on the situation in Afghanistan. It was incumbent on the G7 to leverage its combined influence to push for the restoration of women's rights, the establishment of a legitimate government, and the protection of minority rights. The G7's statement seemed strong towards ensuring that girls and women are once again allowed to attend schools and colleges, but a statement alone is not much unless it is followed by action.

In summary, as we navigate these tumultuous times and upon the conclusion of the summit, it is imperative for the G7 to prove that the international order it upholds extends beyond the boundaries of its member states. It must demonstrate that its commitment to the rule of law and its outreach to the Global South are not just theoretical constructs, but actual policies that have meaningful, practical impacts. In doing so the powers will affirm their role as a beacon of hope and a pillar of stability in a world that desperately needs both.

[[Anton Schauble](#) edited this piece.]

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Pluralism Is the Only Way Forward for Iranian Democracy

Halmat Palani
June 16, 2023

Iran's diverse society struggles with recognition of non-Persian ethnicities like Kurds, Azeris, and Arabs. The authoritarian rule of the Shah and the Islamic Republic prioritized Persian identity, suppressing others. To establish a functional democracy, Iranians must reject Persian imperialism and ensure representation and autonomy for all ethnic groups.

For over a century, there has been a prevailing myth that Iran is solely represented by Persians, perpetuating the idea that Persia encompasses the entirety of the country. It is crucial to acknowledge that Iran is diverse and multinational in composition. It extends far beyond the Farsi-speaking Persian people of the Iranian plateau, encompassing Kurdish, Baloch, Ahwazi, and Azeri peoples who have been sidelined and suppressed.

When these non-Persian Iranians speak of the need for the entrenchment and recognition of inclusivity in the linguistic, economic, and political spheres of life in Iran as a necessary condition for democratization, they are often accused of being separatists. They are told that Iran is one nation

and that its territorial integrity is a red line that is not up for discussion.

Persian identity, Iranian identity

This notion in the debate about Iran's identity is championed by Reza Pahlavi but is also echoed in statements made by other Iranian figures like Nazanin Boniadi, Golshifteh Farahani, Shirin Ebadi, and activists Masih Alinejad and Hamed Esmailion.

The assertion and emphasis on territorial integrity as a response to demands for inclusivity as a precursor for democratization is a political tactic that is not only anti-democratic but also undermines the very democratic principles that many of these figures claim to be supporting. It is designed to reinforce the Iranian state's forced assimilation policy against the Kurds, Baloch, Ahwaz, and Azeri people.

For over a hundred years, the Iranian state has attempted to assimilate non-Persian nations into a national Iranian identity that is purely Persian. The state has used repressive tactics, from poisoning, imprisonment, extrajudicial killings, capital punishment, and threatening families to militarization, linguicide, and economic impoverishment, as part of its forced assimilation policy. These efforts have been partially successful given the decline in the use of non-Farsi languages in Iran. However, a sense of distinctiveness, and the political manifestation of this distinctiveness, has only grown stronger among non-Persian peoples, as evidenced by the protests ignited by the death of Jina Amini in September 2022 at the hands of the morality police and past political agitations for change in areas inhabited by non-Persian people.

These demands for inclusivity and autonomy existed under the Pahlavi dynasty and have persisted for decades under the Islamic Republic.

This is despite claims by Khomeini and his successors that the Shia government does not discriminate against any ethnicity or religious group. Scholar Sabah Mofidi analyzed numerous speeches, interviews and written texts of Persian and Kurdish nationalists and found that the "Persian nationalists use Islamic brotherhood and unity to reinforce Islamic identity over Kurdish identity in order to marginalize the Kurdish nationalist movement, as well as to mobilize ordinary people against the Kurdish forces." Similarly, secular Persian nationalists use this rhetoric of Iranian brotherhood to delegitimize or negate Kurdish nationalist demands.

"Conversely," continues Mofidi, "the Kurdish nationalists resist, and demand equality." For instance, in a recent BBC Persian interview, journalist Ranya Rahamnpour asked the Secretary General of the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan, Mustafa Hijri, whether Kurdish political parties are separatists—an accusation that the Islamic Republic often cites to justify its attacks against Kurds in Iran and members of Kurdish political parties. In response to this question, Hijri stated that repeatedly asking this question is an insult to all Kurds and to his party, which has been advocating for "democracy for Iran and autonomy for Kurdistan." He goes on to say that "the separatists are not Kurds or Baloch, but those who have violated the rights of all of the Iranian nationalities, created a difference between the periphery and the center, and used their power to bring nothing but misfortune to these national groups."

These skirmishes are part of a deliberation inside and outside Iran on how to achieve a democratic opposition that can help topple the Islamist regime and bring about a democratic Iran. Many of these forces have failed to unite mainly because of the refusal of some parties to acknowledge Iran's multinational character.

What has become increasingly clear since the death of Jina Amini and subsequent events is that Iran is a deeply divided society. The failure to find working solutions for managing such diversity and division has allowed the Islamic Republic to rule with impunity and repress dissenting voices, especially among the Kurdish population and other non-Persian populations, such as the Baloch, Ahwaz and Azeris.

Two theories for managing ethnic divides

For many, the number of political forces at play and the diversity of demands and peoples in Iran, as well as in the diaspora, has made it quite difficult to understand what the debate is about in Iran and where the country might or should be headed. There are two theories on how to manage divided societies like Iran and institutionally design an inclusive democratic system given the many social and political cleavages along ethnic, linguistic, and religious lines. These two theories are centripetalism and consociationalism.

Centripetalism and consociationalism are two theories of political engineering for managing social cleavage in ethnically diverse societies. Centripetalism is a theory developed from the ideas of US scholar Donald L. Horowitz, who specializes in the study of ethnic conflict and has worked to help divided societies reduce ethnic conflict through democratic means. According to Benjamin Reilly, centripetalism aims to promote cooperation, accommodation and integration across ethnic divides, seeking to depoliticize ethnicity and minimize the role of ethnic identities. It emphasizes the importance of institutions that encourage intercommunal moderation, such as multi-ethnic political parties, cross-cutting electoral incentives, and intergroup accommodation.

Consociationalism, however, relies on elite cooperation between leaders of different

communities. It recognizes ethnicity as primordially rooted and seeks to protect and maximize the rights of ethnonational groups. Consociationalism promotes mechanisms that maintain interethnic harmony, such as grand coalition cabinets, proportional representation, minority veto powers, and communal autonomy. It aims to achieve a significant degree of autonomy for each ethnic polity and ensure fair representation in governance.

Which of the two theories provides the best prescriptions for democratically governing divided societies is a subject of great debate among scholars. Nevertheless, they all agree that the two theories are crucial in designing a working democracy in ethnically polarized polities.

Embracing pluralism is a prerequisite for democracy

While democracy in Iran has had periods of temporary existence, democratic movements have yet to establish a working democracy in Iran. Given the multinational character and diversity of the Iranian populace, the establishment and future of democracy in Iran require serious discussion, debate, and planning based on centripetalist and consociationalist theories, institutions, and practices.

The arguments of Iranian political parties and personalities that often take the side of the Iranian state in response to demands for inclusive government can be conceived of as a sort of centripetalist prescription of governance. In theory, centripetalism advocates for institutions and governing arrangements that seek to depoliticize ethnicity or ethnic demands and identities. This theory and arrangement of governance may be viewed as preferable or even ideal, given that it seeks to enhance cooperation between groups despite their ethnic, linguistic, or religious differences. However, many of the Iranian political

forces as well as the Iranian state, both currently and historically, use centripetalist notions not to depoliticize ethnicity and create a more level playing field between ethnic groups but to deny non-Persian nations in Iran their linguistic, political, economic, and cultural rights.

While centripetalism may seek to depoliticize ethnicity, what has happened in the last hundred years of Iran's history has been a further politicization of ethnicity and criminalization of ethnicity, particularly for non-ethnically Persian people in Iran. This is clearly illustrated in the inestimable number of Kurdish teachers and activists who are either languishing away in Avin prison or who have been executed over the years, both under the Pahlavi regime and under the Islamic Republic. The treatment of other non-ethnically-Persian people like the Baloch, Ahwaz, and Azeri has been similarly harsh.

The demise of the Islamic Republic does not begin with some outside power but with the unity of effort and goals among Iran's ethnonational groups. Iranians need to recognize their diversity not as a threat but as a necessary ingredient for creating a pluralistic and tolerant democratic system that can provide representation and self-governance to each national group.

The lack of vision and clarity for a democratically inclusive governance system for Iran has led to a lack of unity of purpose, both in Iran and among Iranian opposition groups in the diaspora. For democratic forces inside and outside Iran to inflict significant damage on the clerical grip on power, there must be agreement, organization, and coordination among opposition groups, both internal and external. This can only happen when we find a clearly laid-out system of governance that can bring us all together as equals with an equal say and an equal share of power in the system, regardless of our identity, religion, native language, or gender. I believe that

consociationalist theory, or a mix of consociationalism and centripetalist prescriptions and institutional arrangements of governance, can provide the necessary vision and model of governance that can allow us to flourish in our distinct communities as well as a part of a broader community that is Iran.

[[Anton Schauble](#) edited this piece.]

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Old Game, New Gold: What Is Saudi Arabia Planning With Golf?

Gary Grappo
June 19, 2023

Saudi-funded LIV Golf has successfully taken over the sport. What is the oil-rich Arab monarchy going to do with golf? Mohammad bin Salman could be whitewashing the kingdom's image, but his plans may be much broader.

The Professional Golfers' Association (PGA) and LIV Golf announced this month that they will merge, shocking not only the world of sports but also the broadcast media and corporate worlds. Heretofore, the latter have been the biggest investors and buyers in professional golf's lucrative market of tournaments, gear, player endorsements and advertising; no longer so, thanks to one not-so-surprising new entrant to the sport, the Saudi sovereign wealth fund, aka the Public Investment Fund (PIF).

The merger is likely to have significant implications for the game of golf and the way it's played. More importantly, the merger says much more about Saudi Arabia itself and its rising profile in today's increasingly money-driven world.

Always about the money

Firstly: what about golf? To be sure, money has always been a big factor in professional golf. Purses in the major tournaments have grown steadily as the sport garnered increasing public interest and more followers. Much of that can be attributed to rising television and streaming audiences around the world. Today, those purses can top \$20 million, with the winner taking home as much as \$4 million in some tournaments. Saudi Arabia saw the opportunity to get in on the action. Armed with more than \$700 billion in investable assets and seizing the opportunity to help remake its image in the world (more on that later), Saudi Arabia had its PIF assemble some of the sports' greatest names to organize a competitor to the PGA, dubbed LIV Golf, in 2021. The PGA and its members, including such luminaries as Tiger Woods, fulminated over the new league and the generous use of its funds—it allegedly paid golfing great Phil Mickelson \$200 million to join LIV—to disrupt and corrupt the legendary game.

But really, how generous could the Saudis be? PIF and the other LIV stakeholders will invest an estimated \$3 billion in the new merged entity.

The PGA leadership and those golfers who had stuck with the PGA out of loyalty were left dumbfounded and marginalized after the announcement. Following LIV's entry into professional golf, they had gone on media and even before Congress and the golfing public to rail against the upstart golf league. After all, LIV's principal backer, Saudi Arabia, figures prominently on just about everyone's list of worst human rights offenders, including in the US State Department's Human Rights Report. The latter's executive summary lists over 15 areas in which major abuses have occurred. And that's just the executive summary, which doesn't list the 2018 gangland-style execution of Washington Post journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul. The hit was likely ordered by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman.

The PGA banned from its tournaments those players who defected to the new league. It increased the purses of its major tournaments and stepped up its lobbying campaign wherever and whenever it could. In the end, though, it wasn't going to be able to compete with the deep pockets of the Saudis. Their PIF, rumored to be the world's second-largest, is fueled by the kingdom's massive oil reserves and uber-efficient Saudi Aramco's ability to manage their exploitation well into the next century. The PIF is rich and will only get richer.

What are they going to do with all that money?

They're looking to diversify. Sports offer the perfect opportunity. They are popular everywhere and earn lots of money in many different ways. The potential to earn even more is obvious. Enthusiasts around the world have stood by and watched money take over and run—some would

argue, ruin—sports. FIFA (the global governing body for association football), automobile racing, tennis, America’s “big four” sports (football, baseball, basketball and hockey), cricket, and even the Olympics are synonymous with big—no, make that astronomically immense—amounts of money.

Why should golf be any different? There has, after all, always been big money in golf. But the PGA and its European counterpart, DP World, ran a monopoly on professional tournaments. As a member, a golfer could compete. Refuse membership and be prepared to wander in golfing obscurity; otherwise capable golfers were relegated to duffer status. Busting up a monopoly is tough. It requires impossibly large sums of money. Thanks to the Saudis’ PIF and an aggressive investment strategy, the impossible became merely difficult and then, this month, very possible.

Congress may now be inserting itself into the matter. That’s predictable; the US legislature seems to fly into outrage over almost anything Saudi Arabia. Members are calling for investigations and hearings over fears of undue Saudi influence in a “cherished American institution.” Never mind the game was invented in Scotland and is played all over the world, though most of the big-prize tournaments take place in the US. And even though many a past American president has enjoyed the game, it would take a colossal leap in logic to assert that the Saudi-backed merger threatens US national security. Look, however, for the PGA in its new guise to lose its tax-exempt status. American taxpayers would be happy with that.

The game of golf at the professional level is forever changed. For that, players, fans, gear manufacturers, advertisers, broadcasters and thousands of golfing clubs around the world can thank Mohammed bin Sultan.

MbS still blazing his own path

MbS, as he is commonly known, is unlike any Saudi ruler since the kingdom’s legendary founder, King Abdul Aziz al Saud. To be precise, he isn’t yet the kingdom’s de jure ruler, only de facto, while his father, King Salman, still sits on the throne. Setting aside his nation’s incontrovertibly abysmal human rights record, the youthful crown prince launched his rule by first consolidating his power throughout the kingdom. The military, the security and intelligence services, and all its economic arms, including Saudi Aramco, the central bank, et al. are now headed by him or his loyalists. He severely reined in the power of Saudi Arabia’s previously powerful clerical class, including significantly reducing the authority and presence of the muttawa, or religious police. Distribution of power among the senior royals, as had been done ever since Abdul Aziz, ended with MbS. He is now the undisputed and effectively omnipotent ruler of the kingdom.

Having consolidated his rule, the crown prince quickly set out to make his nation a significant player in the world. He is doing so by leveraging the one asset it possesses in abundance, oil, and the steady flow of income it produces. His Vision 2030 plan set a high bar for the kingdom with investment expanding into high tech, solar power, finance and banking, entertainment and sports. He is even building a multi-billion-dollar megacity of the future, NEOM, in the kingdom’s northwest along the Red Sea.

Uber, SoftBank, BlackRock, English Premier League and LIV Golf are all testimony to his success. Additionally, the kingdom will host the FIFA Club World Cup later this year and the Asian Winter Olympic Games in 2029. Last month, the city of Jeddah was announced as one of the preliminary racing venues for the America’s Cup Race, scheduled for Barcelona next year. The kingdom is doubtlessly setting its sights on hosting

the World Cup and Summer Olympics at some point in the next 20–25 years. The PGA-DP World-LIV Golf merger now ensures the kingdom's leadership role in a major international sport.

Investing in ever-popular sports also enables the kingdom to repair its much-damaged reputation from MbS's early years of serial human rights abuses, though many of those existed well before he came into prominence and still continue. It's called sportswashing. The PGA, which had frequently called attention to that record in the two years it went head-to-head with LIV Golf, now has adopted a much quieter and more collaborative tone. Sportswashing, i.e. buying off one's critics by buying sports teams and leagues, works.

Striking while the wells still pump

Why this investment onslaught? For starters, the kingdom is well aware it sits on a resource of finite utility as the world, and especially the developed world, advances expeditiously toward clean energy. Diversification makes sound financial sense. Perhaps equally important is MbS's ambition to make his nation a true global power, not a military power but an economic power. It's already a member of the exclusive G-20, but the crown prince may be setting his sights even higher. The kingdom's exorbitant wealth provides it with influence even the US and China must envy. If there is any question of that, consider the parade of major foreign leaders to the country in just the last few years: US President Joe Biden (2022), Chinese President Xi Jinping (2022), Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida (2022), German Chancellor Olaf Scholz (2022), Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (2019), and Russian President Vladimir Putin (2019). Saudi Arabia is on the map of the great and rising powers (and perhaps the declining ones, too).

So, say the kingdom rises to some major global status. Then what? It is already one of the two most influential countries of the Middle East, along with Iran. Lacking both population and military might, it faces insurmountable obstacles to attain power status equal, say, to America or China. In fact, it must rely on unwritten security assurances from the US—now on shaky grounds, by the way—for its defense.

One might have thought that it would seek to hitch itself to US power both in the region and around the world. MbS, however, seems determined to blaze his own path. Moreover, the decline in US influence in the region as it focuses on great power rivalries with China and Russia bears his reasoning out.

The Saudi-led PGA-LIV merger presents an interesting case study, however, of how the kingdom might make itself a unique global player. Its extraordinary wealth provides it with an inestimable opportunity for insinuating itself into just about any human economic or commercial endeavor. Golf is but one such endeavor in a largely geostrategically insignificant area, though it does command a considerable following around the world. There is no business or nation that does not covet the kingdom's considerable investment funds in one respect or another. So, in one sense, then, the kingdom already has genuine power.

If money indeed makes the world go round, then count on Saudi Arabia to be one of the globe's spinners for a long time.

[[Anton Schauble](#) edited this piece.]

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How to Win the War With AI Before It's Too Late

Mark Cummings, William Yeack CSE
June 20, 2023

With the rapid development of generative AI, mankind must also rapidly develop to prevent chaos. Using certain defense mechanisms and strategies, research and development, and adaptive technologies, the world can protect itself against dangerous cybersecurity attacks. But we must act fast before it gets too late to take these measures.

Generative AI is a powerful new technology, differs in a fundamental way from previous versions of AI. Namely, it creates new things based on global information. It is posing a very serious cybersecurity threat that the West is not currently prepared to deal with. In a way, it could be similar to the early appearance of COVID—and could need a similar response.

A concerted, immediate and cooperative effort is needed from Western governments and innovators in the commercial space (both individuals and corporations), an effort similar to that around the mRNA vaccines to fund the development of adaptive defense technology that can stop generative AI created attacks. Cyber attacks come without borders; to be effective, responses must also come without borders.

So, how serious is the threat of generative AI? We have become so inured to rapid technical change that it is difficult to recognize when a truly disruptive technology appears. In fact, we won't know the damage for sure until after the fact.

Generative AI may be the start of another technology cycle, as significant as the one that started around the time of the appearance of the microprocessor. The danger is that generative AI is growing so rapidly in such a capability that if we wait to find out, we may not be able to catch it.

Logical analysis says that the threat is severe. Modern quality of life is highly dependent on our digital infrastructure. Before generative AI, cybercrime was the biggest industry in dollar volume on the planet. Generative AI could turbocharge cyber crime, dramatically degrading our digital infrastructure and thus our quality of life. Some are calling for regulation, but regulation may have little positive effect on the cybersecurity problem and take too long to implement.

The static defense problem

Current cybersecurity defensive tools are like castles: very effective against swords and knives. However, generative AI has given attackers cannons and bombs and the internet has given them the mobility to find the weakest points to attack. The answer isn't a better Maginot Line. Now, dynamic and adaptive defense is the only thing that will work.

Current cybersecurity tools are static. That is, they are based on identifying preexisting known patterns and applying preexisting known scripted responses. However, generative AI systems create a very large number of brand-new types of attacks for which there are no preexisting known patterns or scripted responses. That is, they change very rapidly. Too rapidly for patterns to be identified and installed in static defensive tools. Also,

because the attacks are changing, effective responses can't be easily anticipated and scripted.

What we need are dynamic defensive tools that can detect new attacks very quickly and stop the attack before serious damage has been done. To do this, the defense must be very close to the subsystem being protected. Some propose using generative AI to defend. This won't work because the response from such systems will be too slow—in part caused by their central site nature.

Generative AI technology is growing rapidly in capability, and will be able to do even more damage tomorrow. These systems are trained on everything from the web, so even this article will become part of their training. Because of this, I spent a couple of months not talking publicly about this for fear it would make the AI problem worse. But at the recent RSA Conference, the cat came out of the bag. Early on, some argued that controls could be put in place to prevent bad uses. But, there are widely reported ways to get around these controls.

The generative AI industry has started calling for regulation. Asking for regulation may be a way for the generative AI companies to move financial liability away from themselves. But, in the cybersecurity space, damage is already being done and the word is out. Regulation can't return things to normal. At least not quickly or effectively enough to control attackers outside of the West. The question that confronts us now is, "How can we quickly develop and deploy cyber defenses that are effective against generative AI created attacks?"

A global problem requires a global solution

The situation today is similar to that in the US during the 1930s regarding the appearance of the V8 Fords. Bank robbery had been local. The new Fords made it possible for robbers to quickly

escape state lines, thereby avoiding local law enforcement. The only way to defend was to create a national defense; this would become the FBI. Today we face attackers crossing national boundaries. Some are hiding in countries outside the reach of law enforcement in the West and some are actually national actors themselves. Many of the attacks are purely commercial. But some of the commercial attacks on critical infrastructure blend over into defense and intelligence. It may be politically difficult to create an international organization to respond. But, at the least, it requires a coordinated international effort.

We need to quickly develop the dynamic/adaptive technology and methods for migrating from our current static defenses (S2: static attack ID/scripted response) to dynamic defenses (D2: dynamic attack ID/dynamic response). This migration is important because of the extremely large sunk investments in today's static systems. These combination defenses can be called S2-D2.

There are innovators currently working on these dynamic/adaptive technologies, but they need support to bring their technology to fielded products. In a way, this situation is similar to when we first got news about the appearance of COVID. There were innovators working on MRNA, but they needed support to quickly bring us the products we needed to defend ourselves.

Western governments need to band together with commercial industry innovators to support research and development (R&D) focused on rapid development and deployment of S2-D2 systems. Governments in the US, Europe, Canada, Australia and New Zealand have programs to provide financial support for R&D and entrepreneurship. These programs come from both national defense and national industrial policy parts of the governments. Because of this, they have been concerned with improving narrow national

competitive positioning against the rest of the world. However, the threat from generative AI cyber attacks is global. The Western world needs an effective response quickly. This can best be achieved by cooperation between the leading Western governments working closely with innovators in the commercial industry.

Proposal for a defense strategy

The stages listed below need to involve very broad cooperation between innovators in all of these sectors, national governments, commercial organizations, academic organizations, labs and individuals. High risk projects should be embraced. The lowest risk in terms of project success as defined by delivery of project deliverables, will always revolve around a small improvement in what already exists. We know that such an approach (a better Maginot Line) will not give us what we need. Accepting high risk projects will mean that many will fail. But those that succeed will get us where we need to be.

Because the threat is already here and growing, this support has to come very quickly. Decisions made at the national level in all countries must be made on a global basis, not on a narrow national basis.

In Stage 1, cybersecurity proposals responding to current solicitations must be reviewed and granted on a multinational global basis—not on narrow national competitiveness. There has to be trust that as other nations schedule solicitations, or new initiatives come online, there will be reciprocity. Thus, Stage 1 focuses existing solicitation and proposal processes on the immediate need to fund development of dynamic and adaptive defenses.

Stage 2 will start new initiatives focused directly on dynamic/adaptive technology. From the early moments of the COVID pandemic, the US

Congress gave iARPA a special allocation for very rapidly deployed R&D funding. The solicitation was posted in May with an early June 2020 response deadline and a 30 to 60 day response turnaround target. Many notable things came out of this program, including the development and fielding of waste water surveillance programs that proved to be critically important. This same kind of thing can be done to speed the development and fielding of S2-D2.

Stage 3 is longer term. It involves the normal R&D program support planning and release of solicitations. This would be best if there was coordination between the national programs to make sure that all the bases are covered. Here again, speed is important.

Stage 4 will create an international forum for cooperation between those involved in creating, administering and actually doing the R&D in these programs. The effort to create this international forum for cooperation can and should be started now. It can begin operating informally almost immediately. It is listed as stage 4 here, only because it is likely to take time to formalize.

Generative AI is posing a very serious cybersecurity threat that the West is not currently prepared to deal with. Concerted immediate cooperative effort is needed by Western governments and innovators in the commercial space (both individuals and corporations). Regulation can have little positive effect on the cybersecurity problem and takes too long to implement. What is needed is a concerted effort to fund the development of dynamic defense technology that can stop generative AI created attacks. The attacks come without borders and the response to be effective has to come without borders.

[[Bella Bible](#) edited this piece.]

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Is the Indo-American Relationship Being Handled With Intelligence?

KJ Singh
June 24, 2023

The US and India, both democracies, have not always seen eye-to-eye. While India resents being perceived as a subordinate partner, recent shifts in the Asian balance of power are pushing India closer to the global hegemon. If America can handle its partner with tact, Indian ingenuity and tenacity can make American defense technology go a long way.

There has been a lot of hype about the state visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the United States. It is being hailed as a defining step in growing the strategic relationship between the two nations. Mr. Modi, beside his unprecedented personal popularity, carried with him the legitimate expectations of a rising India to the US.

The itinerary indicated how much prominence had been accorded to the visit. In the run-up to the visit, defense deals like the purchase of much-delayed Predator armed drones worth \$3 billion have been finalized. The US has also agreed to a Transfer of Technology (ToT) of FE-414 engines for India's Tejas-2 fighters. It appears that the visit covered most bases, from formal and informal events to defense deals and publicity.

However, it is appropriate to look beyond the hype and get down to brass tacks in our examination. There are a few hard choices that, if made, can really foster a long-term and meaningful strategic partnership between the world's two largest democracies.

Partners at two different places in the relationship

American expectations are based on a model of Indian compliance, if not one of an outright patron-client relationship. Despite declining US power, the huge remaining asymmetry between two prospective partners—especially in defense technology and brute hard power—fuels such expectations.

India, on the other hand, is known to be a difficult ally. India fiercely safeguards her strategic autonomy and views herself as practicing a refined version of non-alignment. Indian reticence resulted in giving new customized names to bilateral foundation agreements. “Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement”

(COMCASA) had to be tweaked and customized to “Communications Interoperability and Security Memorandum of Agreement” (CISMOA) for India. Such complexities, often dubbed bureaucratise, have prompted experts like Ashley Tellis to highlight the limitations of the promised relationship. India would like to be seen as the ultimate balancer, promoting multipolarity. New Delhi insists on partnership even when it may, in the near- and mid-term, remain the net recipient or beneficiary.

The geopolitical necessities of dealing with an aggressive China have forced India closer to the Quad in order to dissuade her aggressive neighbor. India knows the limitations of such relationships and doesn't expect boots on the ground. It also realistically appraises the concentricity of Washington-led alliances, like the Five Eyes alliance which complements the Quad, where India is missing.

India, with the Pakistani thorn in her side, was content to accommodate Chinese sensitivities until 2020. Millennials with no memory of the 1962 humiliation were content to remain focused on geo-economics. Economic growth in cooperation with China, as visualized by Deng, seemed to be a fait accompli. Xi Jinping, with his tactical mindset and brash aggressive maneuvers on the Sino-Indian borders, has destroyed that strategic dream. Self-reliance, decoupling and standing up to bullies are now part of the altered discourse in India.

While America may have failed to mold India to its expectations, Xi has certainly pushed India closer to the US by creating a strategic gulf between his country and its Asian neighbor. In the future, while Washington may not have a fully compliant ally, it can certainly bank on a rising India competing with, countering and balancing Beijing.

India, America and that other, once-great power

India has been dependent on Russia for its armaments and munitions since 1971, when Nixon and Kissinger, chaperoned by Rawalpindi brass, were courting China. Russia (and, before it, the USSR) has been a dependable ally to India, but its capacity in a post-Ukraine scenario will be severely circumscribed. More importantly, the myth of Russian ToT stands exposed by the federation's continued dependency on extra-Russian sources for critical components. The arrangement really amounts to licensed production.

The first things Russia will need to borrow from India are not just “print to design” (know-how) but also know-why. India has at its disposal probably the largest inventory in a war scenario, whether that is a proxy war with Pakistan to the west or a deployment (already prepared for) to ward off China in the north. Unlike many smaller nations, India has not only displayed the nerve to stand up to China but has undertaken quid-pro-quo operations against it, debunking the myth of Chinese invincibility.

Indian crews have the magical ability to quickly master equipment and improvise, something that is known as Indian jugaad. This has been demonstrated by far inferior Gnats in Indian hands taking on Sabre jets and near-obsolescent Centurions creating a graveyard of Patton tanks. Unfortunately, American equipment in Pak hands was on the receiving end. In 1971, Indians once again defied the challenges of riverine terrain in a lightning strike. Medium tanks, T-55s, forded boggy fields and PT-76s floated across mighty rivers with helicopters ferrying infantry across. They actually are devoted to and worship their weapons.

Ukrainian and other conflicts have busted the reputation for invincibility of many famed weapon

systems, mostly due to inept handling. One is reminded of a horse breeder, who mandated compulsory riding tests for his customers. In this, there can surely be the vested interest of the US military-industrial complex. Sell your equipment and technology to capable users.

Defense partnership can flourish with genuine and assured life cycle support. It should empower hosts with spares, repairs and overhaul capability. In fact, India can be utilized as a hub for the region. Indians are known for not discarding their equipment in a hurry. T55 tanks, which this author was commissioned on as a young man, continue to be in service. Life cycle extension and retrofitting would be in keeping with Indian ethos. Russia sold India weapons in famous barter deals like bananas-for-guns exchanges. Considering how long the drone deal was delayed due to money issues, Indians should hope that the Russian example will inject pragmatism into their American partners' working out effective packages, especially for life-cycle support.

[[Anton Schauble](#) edited this piece.]

***Lt Gen KJ Singh** is the former Western Army Commander of the Indian Army. In this role, he was responsible for the Pakistan border, including controlling terrorism in Jammu-Kathua-Samba region, and for the China Border in the state of Himachal Pradesh. He held many important commands during his long and distinguished military career.

Tentative Steps Toward a New Saudi-Israeli Relationship

Anthony Chimento
June 25, 2023

Tensions between Saudi Arabia and Israel have been a consistent global issue. Recently, there is evidence of progress towards normalization, especially with an eye to cooperation on domestic development with the ambitious Saudi Vision 2030, but political challenges remain.

On May 7th, a US delegation led by National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan traveled to Saudi Arabia for a meeting with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. This meeting was held to discuss prospects for normalization of relations with Israel in light of thawed relations between President Biden, MbS and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Motivations for Normalization Now

Former US Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Robert Jordan assumed his duties in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. At the time, Jordan was directed to question the governor of Riyadh, Prince Salman, now King of Saudi Arabia, on how Saudi nationals constituted 15 of the 19 hijackers. Salman denied Saudi involvement and shifted blame to the Israelis, in what he considered a conspiracy to drive a wedge between the US and the kingdom. A meeting with the minister of interior, Prince Nayef, produced similar results. Both meetings illustrated that in the Saudi mind: everything wrong with the world in those days was the fault of Israel.

Marking a sharp turn in Saudi opinion, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (commonly known

as MbS) commented in 2022, “we don’t look at Israel as an enemy, we look to them as a potential ally, with many interests that we can pursue together.” Saudi businessman and Prince, Alwaleed bin Talal, also expressed how both countries are now intertwined and on the potential path for normalization; “for the first time, Saudi Arabian interests and Israel are almost parallel...It’s incredible.’

The crown prince calculates that the parallel interests that are driven by domestic projects and the economic, commercial, and financial benefits acquired through normalization will be beneficial for the kingdom. Tel Aviv is a natural ally for Saudi Arabia. It is a leader in environmental advances and the energy sector, which could be an aid in the Saudi project Vision 2030. The Saudis therefore acknowledge that a relationship with Israel is mutually beneficial and could aid in transforming their economy into a high-tech financial center.

Israel’s economy is complementary to Saudi Arabia, not competitive with it like the energy-based economies of the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, whose own oil diversification and modernization strategies are very similar to Saudi Arabia’s. Normalization will also serve the wider goal of establishing a more integrated, regionally focused economy, while at the same time enhancing security. Tel Aviv can assist Riyadh in countering perceived internal terrorist security issues and the perceived Iranian threat. This can also foster closer security relations and enable a regional security complex to emerge that can rival the declining thirty-year-old US-dominated role. Politically, the Saudis also recognize the prospects of normalization as a substantial bargaining chip with any new presidential administration.

US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan suggested in a speech at a Washington think tank that negotiations towards normalization were

underway, but declined to comment further. He said he did not want to “upset the efforts we are undertaking on this issue.” Tellingly, Sullivan stressed that “getting to full normalization is a declared national security interest of the United States. We have been clear about that.” The rumored appointment of former U.S. Ambassador to Israel David Shapiro, by Secretary of State Tony Blinken, as an envoy for the Abraham Accords also highlights the administrations ambitious desire to implement an Israeli-Saudi deal.

For President Biden, foreign policy and domestic politics motivate Washington’s drive towards normalization. A success could help to counter criticism of US diplomatic decline in the Middle East after the China-brokered peace deal between Saudi and Iran.

The Biden administration calculates the prospect of Israeli normalization with Saudi Arabia might be enough to convince Netanyahu to abandon some of Israel’s more egregious policies towards the West Bank. The administration inherited the Abraham Accords and realized they are keen on broadening the circle of Arab Israeli normalization.

The Israeli prime minister perceives Saudi Arabia as the paramount outreach to the Arab world and a cornerstone of the Abraham Accords. A normalization deal would cement Israeli standing in the Arab world and reap the benefits of bilateral relations with Saudi Arabia.

Compromise is the Necessary Answer

Concessions from both parties are necessary for normalization to materialize, but each one needs to be viewed individually, not just considered as a package. The major problem rests in the multilateral nature of the negotiations: Netanyahu’s right-wing government must be willing to make concessions concerning the

Palestinians. In a phone call with the Israeli prime minister, MbS iterated the demands necessary for normalization. This included strengthening the Palestinian security apparatus at the expense of the Israeli Defense Forces in Judea and Samaria, while requesting Palestinian security forces assume control over al-Aqsa Mosque and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, leaving the Western Wall under full Israeli control.

The Biden Administration also established similar conditions to broker normalization. The White House stipulated the need for progression on the Palestinian issue regarding the restoration of peace talks with the Palestinian Authority. They also demanded Israel halt its judicial overhaul.

An EU diplomat emphasized that the Americans are unsure what price Netanyahu is willing to pay for normalization on the substantive issues. This includes allowing Riyadh a civilian nuclear program and access to more advanced weapons systems similar to those sold to Tel Aviv. The diplomat also questioned whether Netanyahu is politically capable to initiate conductive outreach to Palestine and the Palestinian Authority, "in order to make it easier for Saudi leader Mohammed bin Salman to risk open agreement with Israel."

Netanyahu is constrained based on the political configuration of his government ministers. Zionist Ministers of National Security Itamar Ben-Gvir and Finance Bezalel Smotrich wanted to be compensated for agreeing to the pause in judicial reform which the prime minister, at least temporarily, agreed to accept.

Equally, both Saudi and American leadership are possibly discontented with the current Palestinian Authority leadership. This coupled with Netanyahu's unwillingness to consider a two-state solution decreases the probability of a resolution to the Palestinian issue. The Saudis will

probably be less supportive of Mahmoud Abbas than they have been in the past until there is new direction in the Palestinian government and the transition stabilizes. This is another area that will potentially allow Israel-Saudi relations to develop.

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan consistently iterates the kingdom's adherence to the Arab Peace Initiative which would lead to the creation of a Palestinian state on the basis of the two-state solution before normalization. However, MbS is more progressive regarding Palestine, holding a close circle of advisors known for sympathetic positions towards Israel.

Saudi Arabia will be constrained on making peace with Israel, absent some major concessions for the Palestinians. The crown prince exercises tremendous power within the kingdom, but it is unclear how King Salman's opinions shape the decision-making process in respect to Palestine. The crown prince must delicately balance normalizing relations with the issue of Palestine because unlike the UAE, turning their back to the Palestinians would hinder their goal of becoming a leader in the Arab World.

The long-term ambitions of Saudi Arabia will likely accelerate normalization once MbS ascends the throne. However, there is a likelihood that the crown prince might wait until King Salman has passed, unless the US acquiesces to all his demands.

Saudi Arabia has much more ambition regarding the nature of concessions desired in return for normalization with the Biden Administration. MbS is demanding American assistance to establish a civilian nuclear program, a formal alliance with the US to include security guarantees perhaps similar to those offered to the UAE and the status of procuring US weapons similar to NATO member states or major non-NATO allies.

The sale of weapons, negotiation of a formal alliance/security agreement, and transfer of civilian nuclear technology will all require the active buy-in of Congress. But it won't be easy.

A Future Perspective on Saudi-Israeli Relations

There is tentative evidence that relations are warming between Tel Aviv and Riyadh, given that the latter has permitted Israeli airplanes to overfly Saudi airspace. There have also been rumors of communication between their security services. Mossad and the Saudi General Intelligence Presidency have cooperated on addressing shared concerns, including on the Iranian nuclear program, Sunni extremism and other security issues.

Additionally, Prime Minister Netanyahu and Mossad chief Yossi Cohen, accompanied by other Israeli officials and then-US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, reportedly had an exchange in Neom with the crown prince in late 2020. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan reportedly met with the Israeli Minister for Strategic Affairs, Ron Dermer, to further discuss Saudi Arabia.

Importantly, the direct overflight permission granted to Israeli airlines and the development of special visas for Israeli businesspeople are significant steps with the prospects to further facilitate business transactions already taking place. Tel Aviv has been engrained both overtly and covertly in commercial and business activities with Saudi Arabia for years.

Publicly, a number of high-profile Israeli businessmen attended the Future Investment Initiative conference in Riyadh last year signaling Tel Aviv's growing acceptance in Saudi Arabia. It was reported during the conference that Saudi Arabia and Israel signed two multi-million dollar deals concerning water and agricultural technology.

MbS is focused on domestic issues where Israeli commercial and economic relations can assist in making Vision 2030 a reality. Israeli companies, investors and businessmen are playing a role in the Vision 2030 development agenda. Growing commercial ties can support the kingdom's transformation from an oil-dependent to successfully diversified economy.

Relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel are at a high point, perhaps the best they have ever been. Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen remains optimistic, reportedly stating that "he believes some kind of breakthrough in normalization talks between Israel and Saudi Arabia could well occur by the end of the year."

While it is clear that the Saudis are interested in normalization, the process will manifest incrementally at this moment in time and more precipitously once MbS becomes king.

[[Lane Gibson](#) edited this piece.]

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The US Supreme Court's Credibility Is at Its Absolutely Lowest Level

Mehdi Alavi
June 26, 2023

The United States has globally projected itself as the leader of democracy, but a close look at the country refutes that notion. American democracy, especially with the US Supreme Court, requires genuine reforms before it can legitimately call itself representative of a democratic institution.

The US judicial system is a disgrace to justice. Judicial positions are filled based on loyalty and inclination towards certain issues, parties and fraternities, rather than objective factors such as professional qualifications, a sense of justice and ethical considerations. Although the judges are obliged to be impartial adjudicators, above any political considerations, they often vote along party lines, and their decisions are referred to as “conservative” and “liberal.”

Like members of Congress, federal judges are divided. According to the National Constitution Center, the Supreme Court’s nine justices are presently six Republicans and three Democrats. Americans overwhelmingly disapprove of such partisanship. A 2022 Pew Research survey found that 84% of American adults overwhelmingly hold that the Supreme Court justices “should not bring their own political views into how they decide cases.”

Furthermore, the judiciary is filled with incompetent individuals who favor the rich as the

poor and minorities remain their victims. It was not surprising when the infamous 2010 ruling in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* enabled corporate entities, wealthy institutions and individuals to donate unlimited money to elections. Consequently, politicians, especially presidents, have become the puppets of the rich in their struggle to finance their campaigns. Not only this, but some of them have become puppets of foreign states. The contributions of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) to political campaigns in support of Israel and stopping those who think America first are well known.

AIPAC has also opposed any attempt by the US to negotiate with Iran, and continuously pushes for sanctions and hostilities against that nation. In reaction, Iran has finally put de-dollarization in motion globally. Thanks to AIPAC. So begins the fall of US hegemony worldwide.

Americans are looking at a stark future. The Supreme Court’s decisions are often tyrannical and devoid of moral values. Its extreme-right majority is now poised to roll back many “long-standing rights and laws.”

What do you really know about the US Supreme Court?

As for the US Constitution, Article III, Section 1 establishes that the US judicial power is vested in “one supreme Court” and that judges hold their office on “good Behaviour.” Going back to the precedent set by George Washington in nominating John Jay as the first Chief Justice, “good Behaviour” has meant that Justices must be patriots and high caliber jurists, known for integrity and impartiality.

While there is no mention of “checks and balances” in the Constitution, the principle is implicit in many of its provisions. Federal judges are appointed by the President, but the Senate must

approve them. The Supreme Court may declare presidential actions or Congressional legislation illegal, but Congress can override them by changing the law or even proposing to amend the Constitution. The House of Representatives, furthermore, impeach executive officers and federal judges, including the President and Supreme Court justices.

In 1803 *Marbury v. Madison*, the Supreme Court established its authority to void actions of the executive and legislative branches found “repugnant to the constitution.” Over time, the Supreme Court has miserably evaded its responsibility to do so and keep those branches in check. The Congress has frequently delegated more and more of its constitutional power to the President, and the Supreme Court has not objected but colluded with the Congress, enabling “legislative distortion.” In doing so, the Supreme Court and the Congress have undermined the constitutional ideal of a balance of power.

The framers of the US Constitution created it in order to “establish Justice.” The 14th Amendment clearly states that no State can “deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.” However, the US has never lived up to its commitment. The bigotry peaked in the 1857 *Dred Scott v. Sandford* when the Supreme Court excluded “enslaved people” from US citizenship.

As for the “equal justice under law,” the recent arrest and arraignment of the former President Donald Trump shows how that has been turned upside down. Unlike others, Trump was treated with respect, including escort through a private corridor and not being handcuffed or subjected to a mugshot.

Like Congress, the Supreme Court has also given in to the expansion of presidential power. The President issues executive orders at will, “instant laws” passed without Congressional

approval. The Supreme Court could overturn them but has chosen to do nothing. In other words, the court has practically become a politically rubber-stamp for the other two branches.

The reason is clear. Presidential nominations, especially those for the Supreme Court, have become increasingly political. Presidents have been appointing party loyalists to such positions. In 1991, George H.W. Bush nominated the infamous Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court. The Senate confirmed his nomination, despite attorney Anita Hill’s extensive testimony of Thomas’s sexual misconduct. Now, Thomas is in hot water for violating the court’s own judicial ethics. Trump sparked outrage when he nominated Brett Kavanaugh, who was accused of attempted rape, but Brett was also confirmed.

The Supreme Court has become incorrigibly corrupt. The justices have used their judicial positions to enhance their private interests. While on the Supreme Court, Justice Louis Brandeis promoted Zionism and advised President Franklin D. Roosevelt on Zionism-related issues. Meanwhile, for decades up to the present-day, Justice Clarence Thomas has been taking vacations paid for by a billionaire.

A culture of injustice

The Supreme Court’s corruption and incompetence have taken their toll. The US suffers from endemic male chauvinism, racism, nepotism, and deceit. It continues to have the world’s highest criminal incarceration rate, including a disproportionate number of Black and Native Americans, whom police likewise disproportionately abuse and murder. The US has the world’s most mass shootings, about 5 times that of Russia, which comes second to the US. The shooters are 74% white, nicely treated by police, and seldom die unless they commit suicide. Black, Latino and Asian shooters rarely live to see the next day.

Harassment and abuse of Hispanics, migrant workers and asylum seekers by authorities have become common affairs. Women, as well, are still treated unequally.

Although females constitute the majority in the US, they continue to be discriminated against. Female prisoners in the US are sexually harassed with impunity. Violence against women and girls remains widespread and alarming. Gun violence remains high across the country, and their biggest victims are women. Assaults on Native American women and girls continue to be substantially more frequent compared to assaults on other US women. As for wages, the “gender pay gap” persists, with women making 17% less than men doing the same jobs.

Judicial incompetence has put the US on the path of revolution. It has frustrated and polarized Americans, with many of them living in anger. Over 32% of the wealth is possessed by the wealthiest 1%. Over 11% of Americans live below the poverty level and 60% “live paycheck-to-paycheck.” It was in this environment that Trump could manipulate the oppressed into the January 6 insurrection.

Nevertheless, the Supreme Court is not representative of democracy. Its judges are not elected by the people but nominated by the President and confirmed by the Senate, neither of which is representative of democracy, considering the US population.

The court’s degenerated status was summed up by a former judge. On March 11, 2020 in a letter to the US Chief Justice John Roberts, former Hawaii State Judge James Dannenberg resigned from the Supreme Court Bar. Addressing Roberts, he wrote, “You are allowing the Court to become an ‘errand boy’ for an administration that has little respect for the rule of law.” He noted that the Supreme Court was moving towards limiting freedom in favor of

“wealthy, Republican, White, straight, Christian, and armed males—and the corporations they control.” He ended his letter by saying, “I no longer have respect for you or your majority, and I have little hope for change. I can’t vote you out of office because you have life tenure, but I can withdraw whatever insignificant support my Bar membership might seem to provide.”

Time for the US to Reform

The Supreme Court is riddled with corruption and incompetence. This is not sustainable in the long run, as we saw in the 2021 insurrection at the US Capitol building. At the very least, two steps must be taken:

1. The justices must take an oath of allegiance to carry out impartial justice, not to serve Democrat or Republican, liberal or conservative, white or non-white sectors.
2. The court must develop an “ethics code” to provide the judges with sensible standards for conducting themselves.

If the US doesn’t get its own house in order soon, another insurrection is inevitable.

[[Anton Schauble](#) edited this piece.]

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Erdoğan's Shrewd Rhetoric on the Turkish Economy

Alex Rose
June 27, 2023

High inflation is damaging the Turkish economy. Yet slashing interest rates helps Turkish citizens in direct ways, by easing access to mortgages and commercial credit. Raising interest rates threatens easy credit and Turkey's banks, and could trigger recession. This explains the president's seemingly incongruous economic policy. Turkey's history of dollarization also makes voters more receptive to his rhetoric on foreign threats to the economy.

On the night of May 28, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan took to the podium and gave his victory speech. Following an election day whose results defied both domestic polls and international betting markets, Erdoğan thanked his supporters and gave a speech which mixed conciliatory messages with partisan rhetoric. The content of the speech, however, was less surprising than the location where it was delivered. Erdoğan stood on the balcony of the presidential compound, a lavish new residence and official complex completed in 2014, which the president had constructed in defiance of court rulings and opposition protests.

The situation highlighted the paradox of the entire Turkish election. After a year of record inflation, historic lows for the Turkish lira and a devastating series of earthquakes, all odds seemed to favor the opposition. However, the economic difficulties faced by Turkish citizens did not

dissuade a majority from voting for Erdoğan. On the night of his victory, the president spoke from the balcony of a compound that had cost north of \$600 million, or about 15 billion liras at today's exchange rate. He addressed supporters—many from low income brackets—who had seen their lira savings erode and their cost of living double in the last 18 months. Several observers questioned the choice of platform and asked how citizens could freely elect a leader whose policies created such tangible difficulties.

Harnessing the economy as a rhetorical tool

It has been argued that Erdoğan's victory depends on his constituency's willingness to ignore the state of the economy. After all, economic crises generally bode poorly for incumbent governments. In Turkey this effect should hold doubly true, since Erdoğan's unorthodox views on economics—in particular his insistence on slashing interest rates—directly contribute to inflation and the depreciation of the lira. While supporters might hope that Erdoğan's unorthodox position on interest rates could be vindicated in the long run, it would make sense to avoid mentioning economic topics at a time when the pain is still so acutely felt by every family in the country.

Yet the Erdoğan campaign chose a different approach, bringing the economy to the forefront of political rhetoric. In the leadup to the election, Erdoğan promised to continue slashing interest rates, encouraged citizens to take pride in the lira and even highlighted his own economic bona fides. Over the past years, these messages have been wrapped in rhetoric that's unusually politicized for such economic topics, with the president going so far as to state, "If they have their dollar, we have our Allah." Pro-Erdoğan commentators frequently argue that Western governments try to undermine the Turkish economy and devalue the lira. In Erdoğan's words, his policy constitutes nothing short of an "economic war of independence"

where Turkey is “fighting against the interest rate lobby” and “enemies of production and employment.”

This rhetorical approach works surprisingly well. Erdoğan can pinpoint how slashing interest rates helps Turkish citizens in direct ways, by easing access to mortgages and commercial credit. Even the approval rates for loans reflect this political strategy, with small and medium-sized businesses, domestic employers, lira-heavy corporates, and export-oriented firms seeing a steep rise in credit approvals. Meanwhile, the second-order effects of slashing interest rates—namely the slump in demand for liras in international currency markets and the inflation caused by higher costs for importers and increased spending by domestic consumers—are too abstract for most citizens to consider. This leaves Erdoğan with a unique ability to claim credit for the benefits of low interest rates while blaming the more indirect negative consequences on foreign actors.

A uniquely receptive audience

Turkish economic history lends tailwinds to Erdoğan’s narratives on the economy. Interest rates in Turkey have historically been high by Western standards. Even in the last five years, Erdoğan occasionally made concessions that allowed the central bank to significantly raise its policy rate—with the results usually proving very short-lived. Turkish citizens have witnessed a steady and seemingly inexorable weakening of their currency, regardless of different interest rate policies. This peculiarity has led some Turkish economists to infer that Turkey must deviate from developed countries in its economic policy. Considering the experience of the average household, it is easy to understand Turkish citizens’ aversion to conventional economic wisdom and their openness to strong rhetoric on economics.

Another aspect of Turkish economic history lends credence to Erdoğan’s arguments. Historically high inflation and the unpredictability of the lira’s exchange rate in the 80s and 90s—well before the first Erdoğan government—led citizens to change domestic assets into foreign currency deposits. This “dollarization” of the Turkish economy has continued, with 56% of deposits now held in foreign currency or gold. Such dollarization carries risks for countries since it reduces the government’s monetary control, creates more volatile inflation, and raises risk in the banking system due to uncovered foreign liabilities. Moreover, the concept of dollarization relates directly to the debate on interest rates. Historically high interest rates made borrowing in liras unattractive to most Turkish citizens, and the resulting preference for dollar-based loans contributed to the liability dollarization of the Turkish economy. The increasing preference for dollars among the domestic population further exacerbated the instability of the lira.

Clearly, dollarization cannot be blamed on foreign actors, since Turkish citizens made their own decisions to open dollar accounts and take dollar-based loans. However, viewed as a characteristic of the current economy, Turkish citizens understandably worry about the predominance of foreign currencies and the instability this causes for the lira. Erdoğan’s economic messaging astutely builds on this concern, harnessing patriotic and anti-dollar slogans to support the multiple de-dollarization policies the government has implemented over the past years. Even from a conventional economic perspective, de-dollarization efforts hold merit, although the social consensus around them is built with simplified explanations.

Naturally, the label of de-dollarization should not exempt individual policies from scrutiny. Certain measures, such as Erdoğan’s flagship policy of slashing lira-based interest rates, can

cause harm even if they nominally contribute to de-dollarization. But to truly understand how these policies are received by the majority of the population, observers must acknowledge Turkey's unique historical experience with high interest rates and an overly dollarized economy. These factors make Turkish voters more receptive to the kind of political rhetoric and economic experimentation that Erdoğan has pursued.

The dangers of raising rates

A further characteristic of Erdoğan's economic narrative is that it constrains any attempt to change course. In the leadup to the May elections, opposition leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu criticized Erdoğan's economic policies and signaled his intention to reassert the independence of the central bank. However, he kept relatively silent about concrete plans to raise interest rates. His hesitation is understandable because the Turkish economy now runs on the cheap access to capital Erdoğan has enforced. With inflation still above 40%, a hypothetically victorious opposition government would have needed to raise rates drastically—potentially targeting a central bank policy rate between 30% and 50%—to quickly bring the real (inflation-adjusted) interest rates out of the red.

Households would immediately feel the burden of such a dramatic rate increase, as consumer loans, credit card debt and mortgages become prohibitively costly, the equity value of real estate property falls, and corporate credit dries up. Meanwhile, Turkish banks would experience similar issues. Government regulations require banks to buy government bonds, which drives down Turkish bond yields and thus artificially reduces the worth of these bonds as assets to the banks. Rapidly increasing interest rates would widen this spread and leave banks with strongly under-valued bond assets on their balance sheets.

Coupled with currency instability and a presumably higher ratio of non-performing loans, banks would therefore be hard-hit by a steep rate increase. Their capital adequacy ratio (the portion of the bank's outstanding loans that are covered by their assets) would fall from 17% to an estimated 12%—risky territory by Turkish standards. Banks would respond by severely cutting back lending and imposing tougher conditions for credit approval, thus further restricting the economy's access to capital. In such an extremely tight monetary environment, corporations would respond with layoffs, possibly putting the economy on track for a true recession.

Given the severity of these impacts, Kılıçdaroğlu and his allies found their range of maneuver constrained. After all, it is impossible for a politician to campaign on a recession platform. Erdoğan could credibly communicate a message centered on employment and growth, arguing that millions of jobs depend on him remaining in power and continuing his loose monetary policy. Meanwhile, voters began to associate the opposition and their international advocates with the prospect of recession and unemployment, which rendered the electorate more receptive to Erdoğan's rhetoric on foreign threats to the economy.

The dangers of not raising rates

Understandably, the Erdoğan campaign neglected to highlight one fundamental fact about the economy: that recession may be inevitable even if the president stays in power. As late as last year, the government might have hoped Turkey could use its high growth—7.6% year-over-year in the second quarter of 2022, now down to a still-strong 4%—to “outgrow” inflation. This view is made more attractive by the fact that Turkey does not have a classic fiscal problem and avoided steep deficits in the years leading up to the election, thus eliminating one of the root causes of inflation

found elsewhere in the world. But severe risks attend Turkey's extraordinarily loose monetary policy, primarily in the form of continued currency depreciation. The lira has already fallen more than 20% since the election. Despite recent loans from foreign governments and foreign currency loans from Turkish private banks, the central bank has exhausted most of its convertible foreign exchange reserves in a bid to prop up the lira prior to the election. This leaves no ammunition to respond to future fluctuations.

This circumstance holds three distinct dangers for Turkey. First, in a country so heavily dependent on imports, a drop in the value of the lira immediately raises costs for Turkey's many importers, who then pass on these costs to consumers in the form of higher prices. The central bank has exhausted its tools to directly strengthen the lira, leaving Turkey more vulnerable than ever to this form of pass-through inflation.

Second, Turkey may find itself in a balance of payments crisis, where the stock of foreign currency available proves inadequate to cover the cost of imports. The influx of foreign currency during the summer tourist season can delay this crisis. However, increased demand for energy imports during the winter looms large. Turkey no longer has the resources to cover the gap, even if some natural gas from Russia can be imported on credit.

Third, Turkey experiences a surprising degree of balance sheet risk. Despite a historically healthy fiscal policy and low public debt, Turkey's central bank hosts a number of "hidden" liabilities. In its search for foreign currency to support the lira, the central bank has frequently borrowed dollars from Turkish commercial banks. The result has been to migrate the foreign currency balance sheet risks of private banks to the public sector. The central bank will need to find the foreign currency to cover eurobonds it didn't issue, as well as the liquidity to

reimburse private banks' dollar deposits should people ever try to withdraw their money. With the central bank's foreign exchange reserves exhausted, the only way these obligations can be met is by selling liras—thus further weakening the exchange rate.

What does the future hold for the Turkish economy?

While rate increases cannot directly regenerate foreign exchange reserves, a significant rate hike could theoretically ease the effects of these crises. Bringing inflation-adjusted interest rates above zero would dampen domestic spending by making deposits more attractive, thereby curbing inflation. Higher interest on lira deposits would also attract foreign investors to buy liras, thereby potentially ending the currency's downward spiral while restoring foreign exchange reserves thanks to an uptick in FDI.

In the weeks following the election, the imminence of multiple crises led many observers to believe that Erdoğan had no option but to backtrack on his long-held position and raise interest rates. Signs appeared that Erdoğan himself—along with key coalition partners—had begun to consider the idea. The reinstatement of former Merrill Lynch economist Mehmet Şimşek to the post of finance minister and the tapping of former First Republic executive Hafize Gaye Erkan to lead the central bank highlighted this possibility. International financial institutions watched eagerly, predicting that the policy rate—kept at 8.5% since March—would rise drastically to somewhere between 20% and 40%.

Once in their new positions, however, Şimşek and Erkan found themselves constrained by the same problems that plagued the opposition on the campaign trail. Much of the credibility built by Erdoğan during this election hinges on his ability to stick to his economic views, grow employment,

continue providing benefits and avoid the kind of recession that voters feared from a Kılıçdaroğlu administration. Any interest rate hikes that drastically tightened the economy's access to capital would ripple through the job market and evaporate credit. A significant change would prove especially dangerous for the ruling party as the country prepares for local elections next March, where Erdoğan's AK Party will seek to regain control of the Istanbul and Ankara mayor's offices.

As a result, when the central bank's Monetary Policy Committee on June 22nd finally announced an increase in its policy rate from 8.5% to 15%, observers were disappointed. With inflation still at 40%, real interest remains squarely in the negative zone. While some analysts believe that further gradual hikes may follow—a position expressed by Erkan herself—the market shows unequivocal pessimism. Instead of the increase in value that economists expected from a rate hike, the lira fell a further 7% against the dollar. Ironically, this depreciation may further discredit conventional economists and make the Turkish population even more receptive to Erdoğan's unorthodox views. It could also serve as a rhetorical tool to justify a return to Erdoğan's usual interest-slashing policies.

The observers now surprised by the lackluster hike in the policy rate are ignoring the fundamental lessons of Erdoğan's economic rhetoric over the past three years. The president's insistence on low interest rates is more than a personal belief: it is a core tool of political communication. Instead of avoiding economic discussions, Erdoğan brought the economy to the front and center of campaign rhetoric. The president harnessed Turkish citizens' unique openness to interest rate experimentation while shrewdly embedding economic topics in the core messages of national pride and self-reliance that increasingly motivate the electorate. Meanwhile, the opposition found itself tainted by the fact that a radical pivot on interest rates would end access to cheap capital and endanger jobs—the

same dilemma that now constrains Erdoğan's own finance minister.

It should not surprise us that Erdoğan proved willing to moderately raise rates on June 22nd. Several precedents exist for such a move—and all have proved temporary. Much like in past rate hikes, Erdoğan is ardently voicing that his fundamental position on interest remains unchanged, and that it is a “delusion” to think otherwise. The counterintuitive fall of the lira after the June 22nd announcement may help cement his view. We must therefore not conclude that the Turkish government is pivoting to a conventional economic stance. Difficult times lie ahead, when the electorate's vote of confidence in Erdoğan's unorthodox monetary policy must be balanced with the need to fix looming economic crises. It will not be an easy task.

[[Lane Gibson](#) edited this piece.]

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