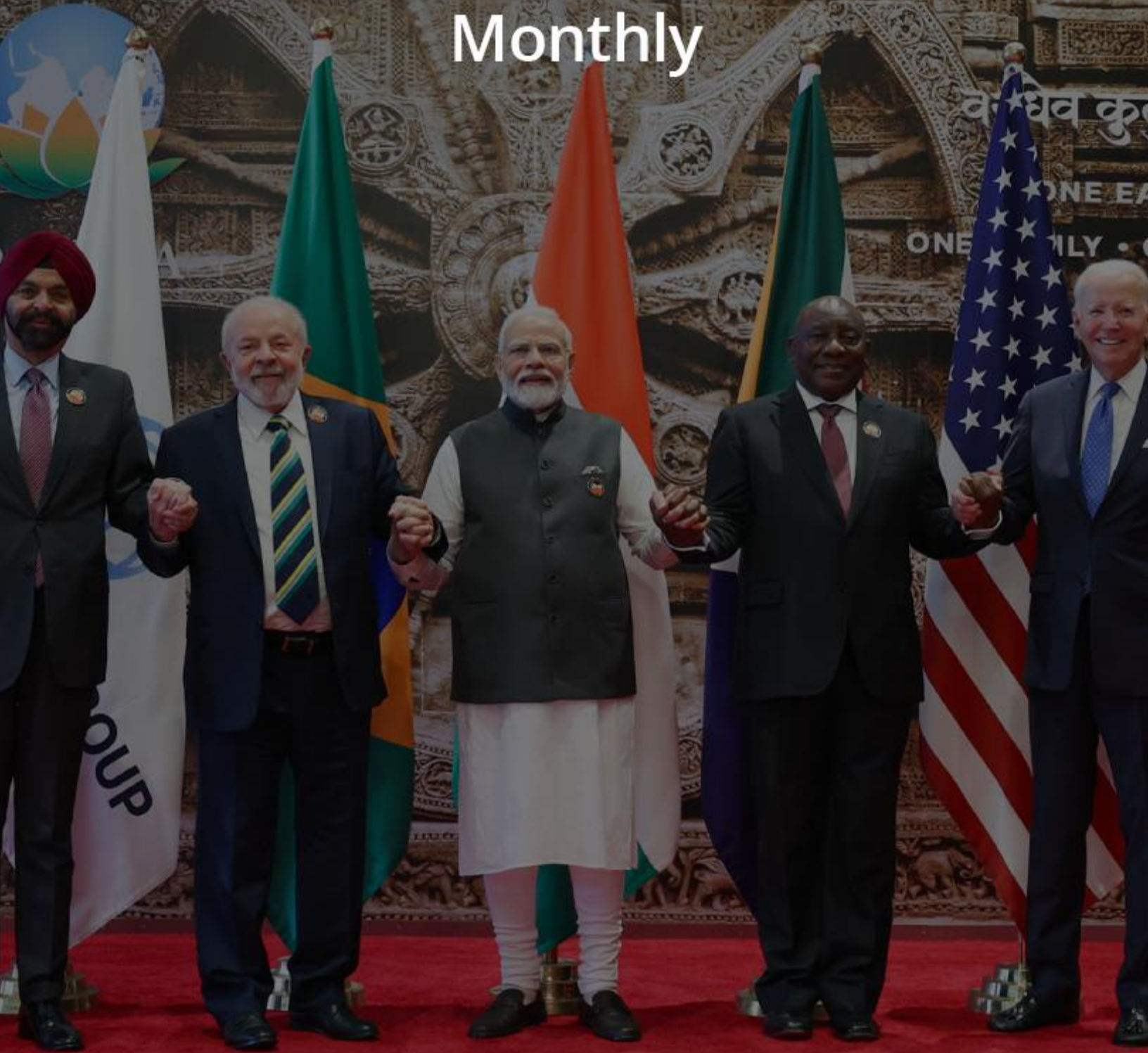


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Independence, Diversity, Debate

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ABOUT FAIR OBSERVER

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Unparalleled Cruelty Against Civilians: What's In A Hamas Killer's Head?

Leonard Weinberg
November 01, 2023

In light of recent events in Gaza, one wonders about the psychological motives of violent organizations. What influences Hamas to harm innocent Gazan civilians? Doing some armchair psychology, one can guess Sadistic Personality Disorder — a disorder where individuals gain pleasure from the pain of others — is at the root of it.

The decades-long conflict between Israel and the various Palestinian organizations opposing its existence has lent itself to a variety of social and political interpretations. These interpretations appear appropriate in light of the problems facing the states and populations involved in this protracted conflict. But the recent conduct of Hamas's operatives in areas surrounding Gaza lends itself to further analysis.

Analyzing the situation from afar requires a psychological practice that is often, perhaps deservedly, a source of scorn and derision: armchair psychology. Armchair psychology, defined as rational, theoretical psychological inquiry without empirical evidence or professional experience, seems virtually unavoidable in this case. I refer to the evident gaiety and glee with which Hamas operatives carried out their attacks on unarmed Israeli civilians — women, children, elderly — living in the area of southern Israel in which they perpetrated their campaign of murder, rape and torture on October 7. Also, we cannot

help paying attention to the celebratory reaction of Gaza residents to the rape and public humiliation of Israeli captives that Hamas operatives dragged back to Gaza.

Given this behavior, it is hard to ignore the psychology of the Hamas perpetrators and their delighted well-wishers. The seemingly most appropriate label in these cases is Sadistic Personality Disorder (SPD). Individuals displaying SPD harm other people because it provides them with pleasure and feelings of emotional fulfillment. Seeing someone suffering or unhappy provides them with satisfaction.

What are the risk factors for developing Sadistic Personality Disorder? The literature suggests four characteristics:

— A personal experience of injustice.

— Abuse. Individuals diagnosed with SPD often continually experience abuse in the course of their development, so much so that they come to regard pain as a normal part of life.

— Personal failure. The individuals repeatedly experience personal defeats in achieving their goals and seek vengeance against those perceived as responsible for their woes.

— Poverty. If a person grows up in poverty and has only limited control over their lives, they may hunger for control, to dominate others in their surroundings.

Personality disorder on an institutional scale?

Of course, SPD is a personal outlook on the world. Hamas is a complex organization with thousands of members and supporters. How can we make the leap from the individual to the collective? First, we have to understand their history.

Hamas, or the Islamic Resistance Movement, was founded as a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood by Sheik Ahmed Yassin (1936–2004) in 1988, during the First Intifada. The violent elimination of Jews from the *Dar al-Islam* (the lands of Muslim nations), Palestine in particular, was its fundamental purpose.

Sheik Yassin and his followers derived their views from the antisemitic writings of key figures in the founding Egyptian Brotherhood, Hassan al-Banna (1906–1949) and Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966), who expressed what has come to be labeled Islamism. In other words, they aimed to recreate the world of the Prophet Muhammad (570–632) based on the holy Quran and his sacred sayings, the hadith. To achieve this objective, it was often necessary to declare a jihad, or holy struggle, against the enemies of Islam.

When Hamas came to dominate Gaza in 2006–2007, its leaders were faithful to the Islamist agenda, accepting truces and ceasefires with the Zionist entity as seemed necessary. But Hamas' leaders have never lost sight of its ultimate goals or the means to achieve them. The existence of Israel as an independent Jewish state is a continuing source of collective humiliation.

Hamas, despite all this, is a voluntary organization. Membership is not a requirement for Gazans; to recruit new and retain members, Hamas offers incentives which are largely unattainable. Unlike other organizations in Gaza, Hamas does not promise high salaries or materialistic gains; instead, Hamas attracts and retains members based on their inspirational goals and by providing the organizational framework necessary to reach them.

Under these circumstances, it is not hard to believe that young men with Sadistic Personality Disorder would find that Hamas provides them with the type of intangible incentives they would find exceptionally attractive.

The link between individual SPD and collective action is not exclusive to Hamas and its violent opposition to Israel. Narratives and pictures dating from the period show white racists attending lynchings in the South during the early twentieth century. Crowds displayed smiling faces as they witnessed hapless African-American men hanged from trees after they were castrated. They often mailed picture postcards to friends and well-wishers to enjoy the spectacle vicariously.

Other episodes might be cited.

[[KeAmber Council](#) edited this piece.]

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The Mossad's Startling Miss In the Middle East

Srijan Sharma
November 07, 2023

Israel's foreign intelligence agency, Mossad, failed to predict the horrific October 7 cross-border attack by Hamas. How did such a colossal intelligence failure happen? Srijan Sharma, an Indian national security analyst, looks into the issue in the context of Israeli-Arab relations.

The Middle East region is reeling under the first blows of war between Israel and Hamas. A three-pronged invasion (on the ground, with rockets and by boat) by Hamas terrorists into the southern part of Israel, wreaking havoc on Israeli citizens across the country, has stunned the whole world. October 7 is now for Israelis what November 26 was for Indians or September 11 for Americans.

Once again, the Israel and Palestine conflict has come into focus, not by light flare but uncontrolled fire, which has pushed the Middle East back into its old days of heightened tensions, possibly snowballing into full-fledged regional war. After the Russia–Ukraine war in Europe, another war frontier has opened in the Middle East. This conflict will alter the regional geopolitical balance.

However, Hamas pulling off an attack of such magnitude has raised serious questions over its sterling intel agencies, the foreign intelligence agency Mossad and the domestic intelligence agency Shin Bet. Didn't they see it coming? Or did they underestimate it?

In my view, the changing dynamics of Middle East geopolitics in the wider region played some role in misting Israel's intelligence glass.

Changing power balance in the Middle East

The thaw between Israel and the Arab World began with a series of agreements and accords from Camp David in 1978, to the Oslo Accords in 1993 and 1995, and the more recent Abraham Accords. This has allowed the powers of the Middle East to a somewhat more comfortable position. By taking the focus off of the Israel-Palestine hotspot, the normalization process has given way for regional forces to converge for their regional and national interests. For example, Saudi Arabia has shifted its focus to economic

development, namely with its Saudi Vision 2030 project.

More distant powers interested in the region — such as the quartet of China, Pakistan, India and the US — also got some breathing space in the region. Operation Sankalp, India's maritime engagement to ensure the security of Indian vessels in Middle Eastern waters, got some breathing time when the Abraham Accords happened because the accords eased the risks along trade routes in the Persian Gulf where ships off the Emirati coast were previously trapped in crosshairs of Israel and Iran covert warfare as the rival powers targeted each others vessels. Similarly, New Delhi's Look West Policy got a fillip from the visit of former Army Chief General M. M. Narvane to United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia in December 2020 (Narvane was the first Indian army chief to do so).

Similarly, China's brokering peace between Iran and Saudi Arabia has prepared a base for its economic incursions in the region.

The so-called West Asian Quad or I2U2, which is an informal cooperation between the US, Israel, India, and the Emirates, has likewise increased its geopolitical relevance in the Middle East amid the cold war with Iran, aiming to block Chinese and Russian inroads. From time to time, these geopolitical configurations are able to exert enough control in the region to prevent conflict and increase stability. At least, that is the hope.

At the same time, the thawing of relations antagonises the Arab players sitting at the extreme ends of the spectrum such as Hezbollah, the Houthis and other Arab proxies of Iran. So, in spite of better relations between most of the state actors, the region is still a tinderbox. Recent various initiatives such as the Middle East Corridor at the G20 and the much-talked about potential normalization of ties between Saudi Arabia and

Israel have stirred the extremist hornet nest. So, while on the surface the situation appeared more amenable to Israeli interests and safer, it also created the potential for an explosive reaction, which we have unfortunately seen on October 7.

Israel's vengeance

Now, the situation is much different. War has broken out again in the Levant, and Hamas's deadliest terror strike on Israel has triggered a spine-chilling Israel's massive retaliation. Dubbed Operation Iron Sword, the counterattack involves heavily striking Hamas locations across Gaza. Continued pounding bombs, air strikes, targeting banks, media houses and the like have paralysed the Gaza strip. There is little doubt that Israel will continue its assault with determination.

It wouldn't be correct now to say that the balance of power or the geopolitical force of the Middle East is at risk; it is on the verge of collapse. Israel won't stop; many forces in the Arab world, including Syria along with Hezbollah and other extremists groups, would mobilize, backed by Iran. War, or even the risk of war, will give a strategic shock the world again if not controlled as it did in 1973 oil crisis.

Interestingly, Israel's vengeance mode will provide the US a small opening to establish its hard power relevance in Middle East after decades which will to some extent revive its security architecture which came under heavy storm during Russia–Ukraine war. The US has flexed its military muscles by sending two carrier strike groups to the Mediterranean waters off of the Israeli coast. The purpose of this is not to aid the Israeli military in Gaza directly, but to serve as a warning to neighboring countries. With Israel distracted, its hostile neighbors might see the moment as an opportunity to strike. So, the US is using its hard power to deter Iran and its proxies.

This tactic may help rebuild the US's image as a nation able to project power in the region. This image has been weakened by the ongoing war in Ukraine, as well as by tense relations between the US and Saudi Arabia. China recently stymied the US by pulling off a partial rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Still, the US is taking some risks in employing its hard power influence vis-à-vis Israel. By doing so it may exacerbate tensions with its Arab partners, especially Saudi Arabia, won't let a conflict in Palestine go without protest.

How many power alterations will the Middle East see, especially the conflict of territories, with a bright chance to see some makeovers in a few days? Perhaps its answer requires some patience and tight observance in the coming days.

Mossad's colossal miss

Israel has been caught off guard vis-à-vis Hamas, something which brings back the memories of the 1973 Yom Kippur War. Then, too, Israel failed to rightly assess its opponents' intentions.

Although tensions between the two countries had been rising to that point, Israel did not expect Egypt and Syria to launch an attack on October 6, 1973. The Mossad had not been left completely without warning, however, and at almost the last moment, a Mossad asset codenamed "Angel" communicated that Egypt and Syria were about to launch an offensive. The Mossad ignored the information, however, as it ran counter to its assessment of Egypt. The institute did not believe that Egypt could attack Israel because it believed they did not possess the necessary technology to counter Israeli airpower. They were wrong. Egypt was able to carry out an effective and complex offensive against Israel using Soviet SAM-6 missiles for air defense.

The 1973 failure contributed to the fall of Golda Meir's government and the sacking of its military intelligence chief, Eli Ziera, after the Agranant Commission investigated the failure of Israel's defence forces and intelligence.

A close examination of the Mossad's intelligence misses shows that, then as well as now, the real problem in Israel's famed intelligence agency does not lie in intelligence gathering or awareness of the threat; the real problem lies in the assessment and feedback part, which is an integral part of the intelligence cycle.

Nations often pay a heavy price for biased or half-baked assessments and underestimated feedback. Israel falters, not in raw intelligence but in intelligence management, either by assessing intelligence through a prejudiced or biased perspective or by underestimating the policy response warranted by the intel in hand.

Although we cannot say so with certainty, Mossad may well have received some prior intelligence on the October 7 attack, but they underestimated Hamas's capability of carrying out a well-coordinated three-pronged attack. Four possible reasons why they thought this are:

1. Overconfidence in Israel's technology — Iron Dome, border security, surveillance capabilities, etc.
2. Normalization of ties between Israel and Arab nations, which perhaps led Mossad to believe that the situation with Palestine too was thawing.
3. Divided Israeli attention in the West Bank and domestic politics. Israel feared that the recent surge in unrest in the West Bank would lead to widespread violence. Israeli

citizens, too, were restless. Security establishments were therefore focused on the West Bank and domestic fronts and distracted from Gaza.

4. Iran's nuclear obsession, which kept Mossad under the impression that Iran would not wish to stir the pot because it was engaged in delicate negotiations regarding the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action via backchannels with the US. Israel might have been under the valid impression that Iran would not sabotage the nuclear deal by encouraging an offensive action by its ally Hamas, at least for a time. At the time, Iran was lowering the pace of its nuclear stockpiling. The action of lowering stockpiling can be seen as a deception to shift Mossad's attention and make them believe that Iran was still strongly pursuing the deal via backchannels. If, as per some reports, Iran was behind the attack, it succeeded in carrying out a clandestine proxy attack where Iran can exercise clean deniability and play safe. Even if not, the appearance of detente may have contributed to catching Israel off guard.

As strategic affairs expert and national security analyst Praveen Swami notes, "successful conduct of war demands endless intellectual creativity." A senior Israeli journalist notes that intelligence failure is attributed to "sinful arrogance of the Israeli defence establishment."

From a purely military standpoint, the three-pronged attack was a feat in intellectual creativity that defeated famed Israeli technologies at the borders. It is time for Israel's intelligence community to recognize its own failure of

imagination, to build strategic foresight, and to avoid misting their intelligence glass with complacent assessments in the future. For now, Hamas has sabotaged any further attempts at Israeli normalization with the Arab world, and what lies ahead is anybody's guess.

[[Erica Beinlich](#) edited this piece.]

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Human Lifespan: Can New Technologies Make Us Live Longer?

Stephen M. D. Day
November 09, 2023

Some animals can live “forever.” So can humans live forever? Not any time soon, but advancements in science and technology suggest promising possibilities that human lifespans could get longer in the near future.

We tend to overestimate what we can do on short-term scales, but massively underestimate what we can do on longer time scales...

— Richard O’Bousy, physicist

Nothing vast enters the life [span] of mortals without a curse.

— Sophocles

Is there a limit to the human lifespan? In 2023, the simple answer is yes. However, a more nuanced response, considering advances in medicine, bioengineering, related technologies, definitions and quality of human lifespan, appears to be unknown — though perhaps not.

It seems that humans are living longer. Let’s examine some facts, broadly discussed in an excellent article by Ferris Jabr in The New York Times Magazine back in May 2021:

— The French woman Jeanne Louise Calment, who died in 1997 at the age of 122, was the oldest documented human. Others, including Sarah Knauss (US) and Kane Tanaka (Japan), died at 119. Interesting that these super-centenarians were all women — one might (incorrectly) guess that it had something to do with fewer moving parts! (In truth, women tend to have healthier hearts, stronger immune systems and smaller bodies than men. They also avoid some genetic diseases linked to the Y chromosome.)

— The UN reported 95,000 centenarians globally in 1990, 450,000 in 2015 and projected 25,000,000 by 2100. The number of supercentenarians (>110 years) in Japan rose from 22 in 2005 to 146 in 2015. The conclusion is that a group of humans is living longer, though not so far exceeding the record set by Calment.

If this is the case, the next question to ask is, “How far can we go?”

Why do humans only live as long as they do?

Human death and frailty increase exponentially with age — a blinding statement of the obvious no doubt, but with caveats including mortality plateaus for some.

Some complex organisms, such as the Greenland shark, live several hundred years. Simpler organisms, including some nematodes, jellyfish and certain plants, can live even longer, depending on the definition of “life” as discrete organisms.

Simple organisms, such as the nematode *C. elegans* dauer, were revived briefly in 2023 after ~46,000 years in the Siberian permafrost, based on radiocarbon dating. Known as cryptobiosis, this suspended animation could open intriguing scientific doors regarding biological aging.

On a more basic level, there is no theoretical limit to how many times cells can reproduce themselves. Some cancer cells are defined as “immortal,” like HeLa cells. This is a line of human cells used throughout the world for scientific research; they have been reproducing indefinitely since they were derived from the cervical tumor of Henrietta Lacks, who died in 1951.

The purpose of life appears to be to reproduce (successfully). In complex organisms, this ability fades. In humans, women experience menopause. (Men can reproduce in older age, but a typical man is not going to be able to reproduce with the women available to him, so the evolutionary effect is the same.) When this happens, biological maintenance becomes a greater cost than the biological imperative to grow and reproduce, and the organism subsequently dies, to be replaced by the next generation.

To date, there appears to be no central “genetic clock” governing aging in humans. Rather, progressive aging seems more linked to a multitude of single and multi-point failures in critical organs including hearts, brains, lungs, livers, kidneys, pancreas, cells, etc. Taken together, each with its own probability of failure over time, it is hardly surprising, when grouped statistically, that the probability of death increases over a finite period (e.g., the biblical “threescore years and ten”).

With all of the possible points of failure in such a complex system as the human body, it is hardly surprising human life span “banks out” in the low to mid-eighty years, having increased only modestly in the modern period, largely due to modern medicine & care facilities. Sooner or later, something will fail. As Elizabeth Taylor quipped, “Just about the time you get your head together, your ass goes to hell.”

Can we make our cells last forever?

Modern biology has discovered that there is more to aging than failure on the system or organ level. Our cells themselves wear out.

Cellular senescence, the slowing down and halting of cellular division, is currently an area of active scientific research. Professor Leonard Hayflick discovered cellular senescence in 1961. This resulted in the “Hayflick limit” where human cells cease dividing after ~50 population doublings. Previously, it had been believed that human cells were essentially immortal; now, it is believed that cells can only divide without limit under certain extraordinary conditions (as with HeLa cells).

Experimental drugs, dubbed “senolytics,” are being developed to clear senescent and “zombie-like” cells. Medical research centers, including the Mayo Clinic, have active research projects.

Around 11,500 projects involving cellular senescence since 1985 have been recorded, according to an AP analysis of the National Institutes of Health database).

A Mayo Clinic study in 2021 revealed for the first time that exercise can reduce indicators in the bloodstream of problematic senescent cells. According to Mayo Clinic's Nathan LeBrasseur, "The ability to understand aging – and the potential to intervene in the fundamental biology of aging – is truly the greatest opportunity we have had, maybe in history, to transform human health ... quality of life, public health, socioeconomics, the whole shebang."

Practical steps to slow aging

As exciting as almost sci-fi-level anti-aging drugs can sound, most of us will not want to wait that long. There are steps that we can take here and now to prolong our lifespans.

As interviewed in The New York Times by Hilary Achauer, August 13, 2022, according to Dr. Jonathan Myers of Stanford University Veterans Affairs Palo Alto Health Care System, "With age, strength and balance tend to decrease and that can result in frailty. Frailty is a really big thing now that the population is aging."

Quoted in the same article, Dr. Lewis Lipsitz, a Harvard University professor and director of the Marcus Institute for Aging Research at Hebrew Senior Life, stated, "There's a downward spiral of the people who don't go out, who don't walk, who don't exercise, who don't do balancing training, and they become weaker and weaker. And muscle weakness is another important risk factor for falls."

Various researchers connected balance and strength with mortality — finding that an ability to rise from the floor to a standing position, balance on one leg for 30 seconds with one eye closed

(without falling flat on one's face) and walk at a brisk pace are tied to longevity.

So, the best thing that you can do right now to achieve a longer lifespan is to start exercising body and mind. In general, the longer you stay healthy, the longer you will live.

Where does this leave us humans?

So, that is where human longevity stands at the moment. But what will happen to our lifespans in the future? It is a truism to say that one cannot predict the future, but wouldn't we all like to know?

In an ever-evolving environment like that of human longevity, it is a fool's errand to try to make definitive pronouncements. However, by using scenario analysis, a method of producing mathematical models to predict future outcomes, we can arrive, not at predictions, but at least at some probable scenarios. While we do not have a science for predicting the future, like the fictional science of psychohistory from Isaac Asimov's Foundation novels, scenario analysis is a real-life discipline that enables us to prepare for future events:

— Scenario analysis was used by Shell Oil to anticipate oil shocks 1973 and 1979.

— It was also used by IVA LTD. where I was CEO, to successfully derive the most probable outcome of the 1982 break-up of AT&T.

— I used Scenario Analysis to evaluate the Shakespeare authorship issue, the results of which I presented in 2016 at the Cosmos Club in Washington, DC.

In order to perform a scenario analysis of human longevity, we need first to evaluate the relevant factors or forces involved. "Forces" in this context

can be divided into four: predetermined, constant, dependent and independent. Allow me to explain by way of example.

Predetermined forces are often the most obvious ones. In this case, they include human genetic and evolutionary changes.

Constant forces would be things like wear and tear, organ life cycles, weakening of the immune system with aging, frailty, advances in hygiene, etc

Dependent forces affecting human longevity would include technical advances in medicine such as disease eradication and organ replacement.

Independent forces, which are the hardest to predict, can be things like bombardment by another giant asteroid, synchronized super volcano eruptions or nuclear armageddon. These are possibilities that we are aware of; beyond these known unknowns, there are unknown unknowns (to use Donald Rumsfeld's phrase) that could each transform or obliterate humans, perhaps leading to the next evolutionary cycle beyond mammals. Less dramatic, perhaps, but no less powerful are possible breakthroughs in bioengineering, the fusion of cyber technology with human genetics, rebooting the human immune system and brain, unanticipated approaches to extend quality of life with aging, dealing with cognitive and physical frailty deterioration, and perhaps as interesting, changing human's perception of time.

That last factor is a discipline that recognizes the perception of time as relative, and therefore capable of being stretched or contracted. This requires a rethinking of the concept of time and how individuals can pack more (or fewer) experiences into the physical time available, by "lucid time thinking." For more on this, see my August 2023 contribution to *Fair Observer*.

Identifying and weighing these factors allows us to piece together some plausible scenarios for the future. Though in no order, listed below are four scenarios for human longevity to the next century:

1. Average human lifespan continues to increase beyond 73 years. The longest surviving human remains a statistical outlier at <130 years through 2100. Centenarians continue to increase globally to ~25M by 2100. Quality of life continues to improve for the elderly, especially in developed economies. GDPs in all countries reflect a higher percentage share allocated to improving health care. However, the maldistribution in longevity between rich and poor nations continues, though significant average longevity improvements in Africa continue due to improved health care.
2. Breakthroughs in bioengineering, genetical intervention, cyber-biology integration, disease control (including malaria, Covid, etc.) extend the global number of centenarians above 25M by 2100 and more radically beyond 2100. The number of outliers above 122 years increases. Improvements in quality of life continue for those 70+ globally, especially in developed economies.
3. Costs to maintain the health of aging populations place increasing constraints on resources and money available, resulting in a slowdown in both quality and expanded length of human lifespans.
4. Unexpected, unanticipated events, such as diseases, environmental hazards, etc. cause average human lifespan to stall — or even

decline (as it did in the U.S. from Covid and other medical factors 2020–2023).

It is not clear which one of these, or other, scenarios have the highest probability of occurring through 2100. The author's educated guess is that scenario #2, or some combination, has a greater than 50% chance of occurring — though #4 remains a wildcard scenario with relatively low (<25%) probability.

So where does this leave us vis-à-vis immortality? Is it physically possible? Yes; there is no physical law preventing a biological organism from regenerating itself and perpetuating its existence indefinitely. But is it medically, scientifically or practically possible? I wouldn't hold my breath, yet. With luck, however, the generations to come will be living longer than the generations behind us.

For now, I will follow the developments in science with interest and with hope, but I will not be counting on any miracle drug to keep me around just yet. The best that I can do is live healthily, both in body and in mind. And the mind is not something to discount. Since time spent on Earth is relative, rather than simply chronological, the Zen practice of living and participating in the moment — rather than the past or future, can help expand that precious commodity of useful time spent in good health.

[[Jennifer Wider](#) and [Anton Schauble](#) edited this piece.]

***Stephen Day** has more than 40 years of rich business experience in American, European and Japanese markets. From 1991 to 2005, he was CEO and founder of International Ventures Associates, a private consulting and investment company providing strategic advice and

investment support for telecoms, information technology and software industries.

How Does Brutal Fighting in Ukraine Affect A Soldier's Mind?

Edgar Jones
November 11, 2023

The high-intensity fighting in the Ukraine has taken a heavy toll of casualties, both soldiers and civilians. The scale and severity of the trauma is likely to have far-reaching repercussions for the mental health of the people of Ukraine. Yet, high morale and group cohesion may provide a level of psychological protection for Ukraine's fighting men and women.

Reports of the war in Ukraine have focused on the deaths and injuries suffered by civilians, the destruction of towns and the battles fought by frontline troops. For good reasons, less has been written on the psychological cost of the war. Still, the psychological toll of a conflict of this magnitude is likely to be considerable.

A look at the physical casualties will give some idea of the severity of the fighting. In August 2023, US officials reported that the total casualties from the conflict were close to 500,000, with Ukraine suffering 70,000 killed and between 100,000 and 120,000 injured; they put Russian mortality at 120,000, with 170,000 to 180,000 wounded or sick. In October, UK Defence Intelligence analysts suggested a larger total of

Russian casualties, somewhere between 240,000 and 290,000. Further, in September 2023, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights recorded 27,149 civilian casualties in Ukraine since the February 2022 invasion, comprising 9,614 killed and 17,535 injured. Given these headline statistics, it is not surprising that levels of current traumatic illness and the persisting post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) once the conflict has ended are likely to be high.

We can look to psychology to give us a fuller picture. The mental health effects of wartime trauma are well-studied. So, what does the science have to tell us?

Psychological casualties of battle

In the aftermath of World War II, American researchers studying hospital and unit records established that a positive association exists between the casualty rate and psychological breakdown on the battlefield. While factors such as morale, leadership and confidence in equipment may dampen the effect, it has been found for different nations and across time, from British soldiers in World War II to Israeli troops in the Yom Kippur War and US forces in Vietnam.

Key studies in the 1990s looked at Israeli veterans of the conflict in Lebanon and, more recently, at US and UK forces deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan in counter-insurgency roles. This research has shown that veterans who suffer from post-traumatic illnesses often do not recover when treated with therapies that work well for civilians in peacetime. Soldiers are exposed to more trauma than civilians, and the factors that would normally protect them from trauma — such as group cohesion and a soldier's identity — are diminished once they leave the armed forces.

It has also been shown that veterans who continue to suffer from troubling thoughts,

intrusive memories of trauma and dreams of war meet the criteria for “complex PTSD.” This is a more severe and persisting form of PTSD characterized by negative self-beliefs, difficulty controlling emotions and interpersonal difficulties. The recognition of this distressing mental state has gone some way to explain why some veterans struggle with the challenge of reintegration to civilian life.

Treatments that work well for civilians suffering from PTSD often fail to resolve the symptoms of those with complex PTSD, but research is underway to find more effective interventions. Hopefully, any therapeutic gains can be offered to Ukrainian veterans.

Protective factors

While psychological casualties are inevitable, there are protective factors that will influence the final numbers.

Of importance is the fact that the Ukrainians are defending their homeland and families. Other conflicts have shown that troops fighting an invasion force often achieve success beyond their numbers. In March 1940, the Finnish Army halted a much larger Soviet invading force by inflicting heavy casualties on their infantry and destroying many tanks. In the summer of 1944, Finnish forces again defeated an offensive by superior Russian numbers before agreeing to peace terms. In Yugoslavia, partisans took advantage of mountainous terrain and dense forests, winning significant victories against larger and more experienced German forces and neutralizing the enemy's superior equipment and air superiority with guerrilla tactics. In short, soldiers fight more effectively when they believe in what they are fighting for. Some research shows high morale may reduce psychological casualties, too.

Confidence in weapons has also been shown to protect against breakdown. There has been a progressive increase in both the quantity and range of military aid delivered to Ukraine. In June 2022, for example, the delivery of the US M142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS), which enabled the Ukrainians to strike accurately from long-distance, improved their military capability. Reportedly, in the midsummer of 2022, battle fatigue among Ukrainian troops engaged in the region of Severodonetsk was significantly reduced after receiving a supply of modern artillery and missiles from Europe and the United States.

Studies of US and UK armed forces deployed to Afghanistan have shown that higher levels of unit cohesion, morale and leadership were associated with lower levels of psychological illness in high-tempo combat operations. These factors not only rely on the selection of soldiers for positions of authority but also on the creation of a military culture in combat units that sets standards of behavior.

Before the Russian incursion into the Donbas and the occupation of the Crimea in 2014, Colonel-General Henadii Vorbyov had begun to redesign the training and education of Ukrainian ground forces to move away from the traditional Soviet model. The reforms were targeted at senior sergeants and junior officers. Subsequently, individual soldier skills and battalion level operations were taught with the assistance of NATO nations to generate higher levels of professionalism.

Lastly, although conscription can lead to the enlistment of unwilling soldiers, when a nation's existence is threatened, this is less of a factor. Conscription can add diversity and skills not normally found in regular armies. Recruitment across age groups can promote the feeling of an entire nation at war for a common purpose. Hence,

there are grounds for thinking that the Ukrainian armed forces have established the foundations for a psychologically resilient fighting force.

Studies of Western nations have shown that when soldiers and veterans feel supported by friends, family and the civilian population as a whole, it protects against psychological illness and aids psychological recovery. A Chatham House survey of Ukrainian civil society in December 2022 showed that, despite economic hardships, 72% of Ukrainians had donated money to support the war effort. Whilst it is possible to exaggerate the protective effect of a "blitz spirit," the resilience of civilians exposed to bombardment has been demonstrated in many conflicts, including the Siege of Sarajevo and air raids on Nanking in August 1937 and Barcelona in March 1938.

Ukraine may have the strength to come through, but there will be damage

Ukraine is fighting for its own existence, and history tells us that people defending their homelands often have a resourcefulness that surpasses their numbers. But there are other factors that make the war an especially challenging one from a psychological standpoint.

The Ukrainian conflict resembles World War I in the extensive use of trench systems and artillery. With little movement, the fighting has an attritional character. Because Russia has well-established defensive systems, Ukrainian forces have encountered considerable difficulty counterattacking through extensive minefields and across physical barriers. As in World War I, Ukrainian commanders face the challenge of maintaining the morale of an army faced with a lengthy frontline no immediate prospect of an easy breakthrough.

It is difficult to consider long-term outcomes while the prospect of peace remains unclear.

However, the numbers of killed and wounded leave little doubt that there will be a need for psychological therapy in the post-conflict period.

In both World Wars, psychological casualties were between 5% and 30% of the wounded and sick, depending on the intensity of the fighting. Given that the Ukrainian armed forces have suffered an estimated 100,000 to 120,000 wounded, we could extrapolate that somewhere between 5,000 and 36,000 soldiers will suffer from psychological wounds.

However, as the Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz argued, in war, “moral factors” are often more important than physical factors, such as weapons, logistics and terrain. By moral factors, he meant an essential spirit that governs the will to conduct military operations and was expressed through adaptability, determination, and stamina. Moral factors, for Clausewitz, were the ultimate determinants of war.

Whilst modern research has shown that these variables do not confer absolute protection against psychological wounds, they can mediate the effects of trauma. Ukrainian forces resisting and driving back a larger invasion army have provided practical weight to Clausewitz’s theories.

[[Beaudry Young](#) edited this piece.]

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Simplistic Condemnation Comes From an Ignorance of History

Ranjani Iyer Mohanty
November 12, 2023

In today’s world, the typical Westerner tends to have a narrow and biased perspective of global issues. Without understanding the history behind today’s tensions, it is easy to define a right and wrong side after seeing a short clip from any news source. This results, often, in polarized opinions on matters one knows little about.

There’s a North Americanism: “That’s history.” It’s a dismissive term, as though history no longer matters. “That was then, this is now.” And “then” has no relation to “now.” This expression implies that “then” is not the cause of “now” and played no part in leading to “now.” Thus, “then” can be ignored.

North Americans in general are famous for focusing on the now. It’s very understandable. Throwing off of the yoke of history and the past in order to build, unburdened, something new and different and hopefully more equal is the whole premise of the New World. The present-centered perspective — with no regard for what came before — is liberating. There is no stigma attached to past love affairs or failed businesses. A fresh start: tabula rasa. It’s an idea that has attracted and inspired millions of immigrants.

On the other hand, in their focus on the present, they tend to see only a snapshot, not the full story — and they mistake that snapshot for the full narrative. When something happens in the news,

they are quick to feel that they understand, and they are quick to condemn.

The tabula rasa effect

Let's say we only caught the last few minutes of the movie *True Grit*, where John Wayne has the reins of his galloping horse clenched between his teeth and is shooting with two rifles. We would think he was a crazy old dude and pretty nasty for doing all that shooting and killing. If we saw only the last few minutes of *Breakfast At Tiffany's*, we'd think it's a light rom-com and Audrey Hepburn and George Peppard must be obsessive cat-lovers to be standing in the pouring rain and hugging a cat between them. If we only saw the last few minutes of *The Godfather*, where Michael Corleone swears to Kate that he absolutely did not kill Connie's husband, we'd think he's a sound, straightforward businessman surrounded by loyal colleagues. To get the full story, we need to see the whole movie, not just the stills.

Similarly, if all we saw was American news channels, we would wonder how this horrific Hamas terrorist group emerged out of nowhere to surprisingly, arbitrarily and viciously kill innocent Israelis. And if all we heard was Canadian politicians, we would wonder how India dared to suddenly enter Canada and kill an innocent Canadian plumber for no reason. And if all we heard was Western media, we would wonder why on Earth Russia would invade Ukraine unprovoked and whether the Russian PM Putin was unhinged.

North Americans ignore history by seeing only the most recent minutes of the movie. They see only Hamas' attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, and consequently unconditionally support Israel against Palestine. They conveniently forget that Palestinians have been dispossessed and oppressed for over 75 years, and that for every one Israeli killed, some 20 Palestinians have been killed.

They see only Russia's invasion of Ukraine two years ago, and boundlessly support Ukraine, presenting Russia as evil. They forget their 1990s understanding with Russia not to expand NATO beyond its then borders. They also hypocritically forget their own invasions of Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan. They only see foreign interference in recent US elections and are outraged, but not US interference in the elections and politics of many foreign countries over the decades.

The complex enlightenment in a backstory

Let's focus for a moment on Canada. The recent allegation by Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau that India assassinated a Sikh man in Vancouver continues to cause divisions and hamper Canada-India relations. Most Canadians live in the now and give little importance to history. All they see is a man shot near Vancouver and their PM pointing his finger at India; that is the beginning and end of their story. Many Canadians don't know that this act — like most acts — has a significant backstory.

There are various reasons for not knowing the history of an event. One such reason is not considering that something could even have a backstory: ignorance. Another reason is knowing that there must be a backstory, but lazily not wanting to understand it. Another reason is knowing that there is a backstory, and perhaps even knowing what the backstory is, but purposefully not wanting to engage with it or acknowledge it in order to pursue a personal agenda.

However, engaging with the backstory can be powerful. Engaging with the history of an event has two opposing effects: It sheds more light, but it also muddies the waters. You no longer see situations as black and white. You no longer see people as bad guys and good guys. You no longer think you know all the answers or are morally

superior. Instead, you see everything in shades of gray and you develop compassion for a broader swath of society. That's history.

Backstories, real life and fictional, can be fascinating. In *Double Indemnity*, we find out how insurance agent Walter Neff comes to be slumped over his typewriter, dying. The hugely popular musical *Wicked* explains how the Wicked Witch of the West becomes who she is. *Batman Begins* and *Joker* lead us to an understanding of these two characters and how they became enemies. Nobody is born "bad" or "good." Nobody is born a terrorist or a freedom fighter. We all evolve, often through a series of circumstances.

And the point is, even though we don't know or care to remember the backstories and histories, other cultures and peoples and nations do. And they have noted the North American myopia and the holier-than-thou attitude and hypocrisy that often goes with it. As Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said, "The world is a diverse place. Nobody has a monopoly on virtue or wisdom." Or truth, or God.

We need to learn the world's backstories and histories. And we need to remember that each group has its own valid backstory and history: Israelis as well as Palestinians; Ukrainians as well as Russians; Sikhs in Canada, Sikhs in India, Indians in general in India, as well as Canadians in Canada — even if they don't know it. Knowing the world's backstories and histories can guide our relations with other nations, temper our actions and thereby raise our credibility on the global stage.

The importance of knowing history

American historian David McCullough said, "History is who we are and why we are the way we are". American novelist Pearl S. Buck said, "If you want to understand today, you have to search yesterday". If we step back and take a view of

even a hundred years, the reasons of others become more visible, their actions more understandable, and maybe even solutions to conflicts more possible.

Another American historian, Howard Zinn, said "If you don't know history, it's as if you were born yesterday. If you were born yesterday, then any leader can tell you anything." Our not knowing history enables our politicians to believably state simple, strong, moralistic, myopic opinions — unmuddied by facts. Knowing history can reveal hypocrisy and enable us to make up our own minds on issues more wisely.

We North Americans are no longer the New World; we are growing up and getting older. It's time to leave aside our simplistic, unburdened, short-sighted mentality and evolve to assume a complex, mature, long-sighted perspective. We cannot rely on the stills to understand the whole story; we must watch the whole movie. History — environmental, political, cultural, and personal — does matter. Learning it, understanding it, and respecting it will enable us to not only see the world in a more realistic light, but deal with our conflicts in a more constructive, compassionate, and equitable manner. Statesman and historian Winston Churchill said, "The farther backward you can look, the farther forward you are likely to see".

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

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Who Will Win Argentina's Presidency After 28 Years Of Peronism?

Leonardo Vivas
November 15, 2023

The center-left, big-tent Peronist party has dominated Argentinean politics ever since the country's transition to democracy in the 1980s. The populist, self-described anarcho-capitalist Javier Milei has set out to challenge the status quo of Argentinean politics. But 28 years of Peronism won't give up easily.

All nations grapple with complexities and contradictions, and Argentina is no exception. Argentina's primary paradox lies in its enduring commitment to democracy despite recurring economic challenges. Over many years, Argentina has wrestled with achieving economic stability. Yet, these fluctuations have neither shattered its democratic foundations nor subjected it to the left-right political pendulum that has affected many other countries in the region. In fact, of the forty years since Argentina's return to democracy in 1983, Justicialismo (often referred to as Peronism) has held power for 28 years. This dominance traces its roots back to Juan Perón's entry onto the scene in the late 1940s.

The question arises: will this status quo change? Many experts and pundits are hoping for change after the surprising emergence of Javier Milei, a

controversial far-right economist and politician. He garnered the most votes in the August 2023 Argentinean primary elections, challenging the political establishment.

At that time, it appeared that Argentines were weary of the long-standing center-left dominance in the country's political landscape. Both within Argentina and beyond its borders, the climate seemed ripe for a transformation, especially because the country is stuck in a long and deep financial crisis.

Yet Milei has not gone unchallenged. Despite the increasing desire for change, Argentinean citizens might once again be taking the side of Peronism. The party's candidate is Sergio Massa, a moderate Peronist who has been rising through the party's ranks. When the government found itself cornered by the impending economic crisis, the current president, Alberto Fernández, called Massa in as the economic minister. He brought calm to the markets.

Milei may be popular, but it was Massa who garnered the most votes in the first round of the presidential elections. It seems, then, that a majority still supports the continuation of Peronism. Still, we will have to wait for the November 19 runoff election to know for sure.

Why has Peronism prevailed?

Let us look decades back to why the main feature of Argentina's politics has been the dominance of Peronism. One of the main reasons is that Peronism has been a catch-all organization for most of its history, like the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) of Mexico. For decades, Peronism has nested in its womb different currents and factions, from urban guerrillas in the 1970s, the populist neoliberal reforms of Menem in the late 90s, to the extreme state-led Leftist policies of the Kirchners in this century.

For decades, Argentina has been the home of one of the most robust trade unions in the continent, with the Peronist trade union, the General Confederation of Labor, being the largest among many. While the party was never completely identified with the institutions of the state in Argentina, as the PRI was in Mexico, it did capture and express vast sectors of Argentinean society. This has been true to the point that for many years Peronist-like rhetoric has been closely identified with the idiosyncrasies of ordinary Argentines.

There are two main reasons for the survival of Peronism. Firstly, the Peronist party is internally flexible and has a strong federal system, just as the state itself does.

Secondly, it was under the Peronist aegis that Argentina dealt with the crimes of the Dirty War, which occurred in the latest phase of the military dictatorships (late 1970s and early 1980s). It was then that Argentina witnessed some of the worst and more prolonged crimes against humanity in the region.

Despite back-and-forth decisions — well depicted in the 2002 movie *Argentina, 1985* — the Argentinean judiciary prosecuted and imprisoned many high-level perpetrators, most of them military officers. It was no coincidence that, when in July 2002 the International Criminal Court was established in The Hague, the first prosecutor appointed was Luis Moreno Ocampo, who served many years as a fundamental actor in bringing military criminals to prison in his country during the transition to democracy in the 1980s.

Those dark days are over now. While Argentines have suffered economic instability, inflation and limited growth, they credit Peronism with the level of social civility they now enjoy.

Peronism today

Peronism experienced a comeback to stardom in the first decade of the 21st century during the Pink Tide which swept across Latin America led by Hugo Chávez, Lula da Silva and Evo Morales. During the last two decades, the party has grown in complexity, allowing for the emergence of regional powerhouses and political families. One such case is of the Kirchners (first Ernesto and later his wife Cristina Fernández de Kirchner), who dominated Argentinean politics for twelve years (2003–2015) between them. Cristina, despite being indicted for corruption charges, is currently Vice President since 2019.

After this long dominance, many analysts interpreted the emergence of Javier Milei as a call for change. The Peronist party would finally enter the cemetery of political dinosaurs where it belongs.

However, Milei is not the first openly free-market politician to enter Argentina's political fray. In 2015, Mauricio Macri played a similar role. He ran for president on a ticket promoting a shift in economic policies.

Macri was a businessman who held the helm of Chief of the Government of Buenos Aires. This is a position of considerable importance in a country where the capital region contains roughly 50% of the population. Once elected, Macri devoted most of his efforts to moving the country in a new economic direction. He did that in many respects, like abandoning the fixed exchange rate inherited from the Kirchners, removing high taxes for exports and reducing subsidies on energy to reduce the fiscal deficit.

Macri also launched a tepid anti-corruption campaign with little consequences. However, he failed to deliver the renegotiation of the Argentinean debt, which had been frozen after the

country declared a sovereign default in 2001. He left his term in office unable to curb inflation and having increased the national debt.

In 2019, Macri lost reelection to Alberto Fernández, a moderate within Peronism, who included Cristina Fernández de Kirchner as Vice President. But while losing the seat in the Casa Rosada, the presidential palace, Macri left behind a strengthened center-right movement that won a host of governorships and an important slice in both chambers of Congress.

Given the economic difficulties of the Fernández administration, two years ago most analysts placed their bets on a change of government led by Cambiemos (Let's Change), the Macri-created coalition. But Macri's conventional center-right politics were not successful enough. It was clear that Argentinean voters were ready for a populist candidate boasting far-right changes.

Milei disrupts mainstream politics

To crush the mainstream articulated around both the Peronist tradition and the center-right alternative that emerged in the last decade, Milei has oriented his rhetoric against the establishment. Like many other populists, he lambasted traditional party politics as the main source of corruption. The two parties were both a political "caste" to be eradicated.

Despite a short career as a legislator, Milei ran as an outsider, which he is in many respects. He has a greater presence in the media than in political circles. He lacked a political organization until he decided to run for president. Secondly, as Trump before him, he ran a high-rated TV show where he sparred with opponents, deploying his extreme economic arguments, and explored the value of emotions in political discourse, even in such aseptic issues as economic policy.

Yet he is different from other populists in the region as he has adopted a style of extreme eccentricity, if not blunt extravagance. Despite creating a political movement, La Libertad Avanza (Liberty Advances), Milei relishes in centering all his actions around himself as a self-described anarcho-capitalist. Not only does he propose dollarizing Argentina, but he supports eliminating both ministries of education and health. Regarding Peronism, he claims that "We are facing a criminal organization that won't stop committing atrocities to stay in power."

Regarding social issues and cultural wars, Milei is a pioneer "of the modern strain of far-right politics marked by vulgarity, attacks on institutions, discrediting of the news media, distrust of science, a cult of personality and narcissism," according to Federico Finchelstein, an Argentinean professor of history at The New School, New York. Milei called China, Argentina's trade partner, an "assassin." He also claimed that the state of Argentina is a criminal organization.

Last year Milei went to the extreme of lambasting Pope Francis, an Argentinean citizen. He called him an imbecile, "a filthy leftist" and "someone who always stands on the side of evil." Additionally, Milei's rhetoric to chop all state institutions (he actually campaigned with a chainsaw pointing to those ministers he would eliminate) did not play well with a vast majority of state workers, who preferred a well-known don't-rock-the-boat politician. As the Latin American saying goes: "más vale mal conocido que bueno por conocer" (better a well-known bad guy than one that is well-known). Yet, it is unclear whether Milei's extremist actions are enough to overturn Peronism's dominance.

The first round of the presidential election

In the runup to the first round of the presidential election, Milei was the clear favorite in most opinion polls. He scored between a high 36.2% and a low 29.9%. His main competitor, Sergio Massa, scored a low 25–26% and a high 32.33%. This was very close to the election date. As a result, most analysts and news outlets bet on a relatively close score with Milei dominating. Patricia Bulrich, the third contender representing the Macri movement, had the support of the business community and a long career starting as a Peronist youth member. Despite this, she shifted alliances until she ended as the minister of Security in the Macri administration. She won the primaries in the Cambiemos coalition but failed to become a real contender for either Massa or Milei.

The first-round vote brought about yet another surprise. Unexpectedly, Massa came on top with 37% of the votes, while Milei ended in the 30% level. Several facts account for these results. First, Massa played the safe card. He emphasized the need for stability and alerted the high risk represented by Milei. Secondly, Massa performed better in the presidential debate, showing a greater knowledge of the issues and a more “presidential” demeanor.

Additionally, in the week prior to election day, Massa pulled off a couple of public relations coups directed at Milei’s arguments. One was increasing tax exemptions for workers, and the other was providing two ticket options for train and bus commuters. Out of these two options, one was with the “Massa” low price and another with a higher price (without subsidies), allegedly corresponding to his adversaries.

Milei failed to capture votes from the other portion of the conservative spectrum including Bulrich and her fellow conservatives. Massa’s business-friendly approach opened more doors to

that segment of the electorate, once again proving the predominance of the Peronist party.

The ballot leans in favor of Massa

Yet none of the candidates achieved the necessary minimum percentage of votes, 40%, established in Argentina’s legislation. Bulrich came in third, and is therefore excluded from the runoff election. She simply did not find a clear path in contrast to the other two and babbled regarding policies. Therefore, the two top contenders, Massa and Milei, will dispute the presidency on November 19. It is unclear who will win.

Most experts give the same probability to both, but as the well-known Argentinan journalist Martín Caparrós mentioned recently, the second round has become a choice between two worst candidates. However, judging by several trends already in place, a qualitative analysis gives Massa a better chance than Milei.

Let’s take a look at that. Massa was able to capture an important fraction of voters from other quarters, but Milei’s numbers remained unchanged. It’s clear that Bulrich’s votes will be distributed between the two. However, even if they get 50% each, Massa will have turned the odds in his favor. Of course, this may vary after Bulrich publicly supported Milei’s ticket, as well as former president Macri. But politically, it is easier for Massa to play moderation and capture the interest of the center-right than it is for Milei to make a break with his high-gear anti-establishment rhetoric. This is especially apparent since he has argued that his two adversaries are both culprits of the nation’s economic crisis.

Yet the same political party that has caused these economic crises might strike the balance in favor of Massa’s hyper-traditional politics. Peronism has survived the demise of most traditional parties in Latin America. The federal

organization of the Argentinean state is more nurturing of traditional politics, both left and right, than centralized national politics.

Demographics might also help Massa. Milei's demographic is a majority of above forty-year-old males and an important inroad with young voters. Massa's demographic is spread across demographic groups, with a stronger impact on the female voter. While Massa won a majority in the large cities, Milei won easily in the periphery. This is essentially because poverty levels there are higher. Those provinces have suffered to a greater extent from the restrictive export policies of Peronism, and they hold an anti-metropolitan grudge.

The main political factors accounting for political instability in most Latin American democracies are polarization, fragmentation, volatility, breaking-up of governing coalitions, rejection of crucial government policies and impeachment of presidents. Compared to the rest of Latin America, Argentina scores low in most unstable political factors, with the exception of polarization and fragmentation, as I observed in a June 2023 article for Science, Technology & Public Policy. So, the probability that unseen factors will push for an abrupt change seems lower than in most other countries. All in all, if I had to place my bets, I would put them in the Massa basket. Of course, I may be wrong. It would be neither the first nor the last time.

[[Cheyenne Torres](#) edited this piece.]

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Defeating Hamas Is a Challenge Israel Cannot Overcome

Emir Hadzikadunic
November 17, 2023

Israel possesses a formidable military capability, but it has never been able to turn this capability into a lasting victory against Hezbollah or Hamas. In every engagement, Israel eventually withdraws, leaving behind death, destruction and greater instability. Israel must realize that it cannot fight its way to peace in Gaza; a two-state solution is the only way forward.

In 1979, there were two significant developments in the Middle East. First, Israel and Egypt signed a historic peace treaty, the Camp David Accords. The accords did not specifically address the issue of occupied Palestinian territories, including Gaza.

Second, the Iranian Revolution overthrew the Shah. This marked a change in the relationship between Israel and Iran. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini established "Quds Day" as an annual event to express opposition to the Israeli occupation of Jerusalem and other Palestinian territories, including Gaza. (Quds is the Islamic name for Jerusalem.)

These events had a profound regional impact, shaping politics and conflicts from the 1980s onward. Israel had defeated its Arab neighbors in several wars (1948, 1956, 1967, and 1973), but now militant groups like Hezbollah and Hamas took their place. Backed by the US, Israel has in its favor a greater disparity in military power than history has ever seen. In conflicts with these militants (1980s, 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s), the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) won every battle. Despite this, Israel has never been able to secure a strategic victory. Each time, Hezbollah and Hamas emerged stronger and more determined in their resistance. With Israel engaged in another war against Hamas in Gaza, we are seeing the same conflict play out once again.

Israel's failed occupation of Lebanon

Over the past 40 years, Israel has demonstrated time and again that it cannot win wars against Hezbollah or end them by military means.

On June 6, 1982, the IDF crossed into southern Lebanon and quickly advanced to the outskirts of Beirut. However, the war that Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Defense Minister Ariel Sharon believed would last for just few days turned into Israel's version of Vietnam. By the end of the war, Israeli casualties totaled 455 dead and 2,460 wounded.

Hezbollah, a Shia Muslim militia, formed during this war. It forced the IDF to retreat 30 kilometers south of Beirut, a major setback for Israel.

Faced with growing public pressure, Begin resigned on September 28, 1983. The new Israeli government, led by Shimon Peres, faced the same challenges as before and eventually withdrew to a self-declared security buffer zone in southern Lebanon on January 14, 1985. This move set a precedent for future Israeli withdrawals from

occupied territories without negotiated agreements with opposing sides.

Israel left the battlefield to Hezbollah, which became a prominent actor in Lebanon and it solidified its presence and influence in the following years.

Israeli dissatisfaction with the occupation of a buffer zone grew during the 1990s. It escalated following a 1997 helicopter crash in which 73 Israeli soldiers were killed.

Ultimately, on May 23, 2000, the Israeli army executed the third and final withdrawal of Israeli forces. The IDF pulled out of southern Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley, effectively ending the 22-year occupation. It was the second Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories in Lebanon without a negotiated agreement, marking another strategic setback for Israel.

After the withdrawal, the border with Lebanon remained unstable. Hezbollah expanded its missile and military capabilities in the area, and a new conflict erupted in the region only six years later. Although the Israeli army destroyed Lebanon's infrastructure in the 2006 Lebanon War, Hezbollah was not defeated. Hezbollah's leader Hassan Nasrallah called the war a "divine victory." For Israel, the conflict was a military failure. The conduct of the war discredited Israel's leadership, and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's approval rating soon fell to 3%.

From Hezbollah to Hamas

Israel has demonstrated time and again that it cannot win wars against Hamas, either, or end them by military means.

Israeli security forces have killed many leaders from the military and political wings of Hamas. In 2004, they killed Hamas's founder and spiritual

leader, Sheikh Ahmed Ismail Yasin. In the same year, they killed one of the co-founders of Hamas, Abdel Aziz al-Rantissi. Despite these targeted killings, Hamas has demonstrated the ability to rebuild its leadership, increase its popularity and act effectively as a political organization. It won the plurality of the vote in the 2006 Palestinian legislative election.

Some argue that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu carried out a strategy designed to weaken the power of the Palestinian Authority, the governing body led by President Mahmoud Abbas, by allowing Hamas to retain control over Gaza. One of Netanyahu's associates, Major General Gershon Hacohen, said, "We need to tell the truth. Netanyahu's strategy is to prevent the option of two-states, so he is turning Hamas into his closest partner. Openly Hamas is an enemy. Covertly, it's an ally."

Whatever the truth, Hamas maintained its presence in Gaza. Despite facing conflicts with Israel in 2008-09 (Operation Cast Lead), 2012 (Operation Pillar of Defense), 2014 (Operation Protective Edge), 2018 (Gaza Border Protests) and 2021 (Israel-Gaza Conflict), Hamas survived with support coming from regional actors like Iran, Qatar and Turkey. While Israel won each battle, Hamas, after suffering casualties and infrastructure damage, consistently demonstrated resilience. Following each conflict, Hamas rebuilt infrastructure, adapted new tactics, and refined strategies.

On October 7, Hamas executed a swift and coordinated action by land, sea and air, resulting in the deaths of around 1,200 people, including at least 846 civilians, 278 soldiers and 44 police. Hamas also took an estimated 239 hostages. This unexpected move disrupted the status quo, altering dynamics in the Middle East. Journalist Alon Pinkas described Hamas's incursion as an "epic Israeli debacle."

Israel's mission impossible

Given the historical patterns of conflict between the Israel Defense Forces and non-state actors like Hezbollah and Hamas over the past 40 years, we can predict how this present conflict will evolve. Israel's chances of winning the war against Hamas are slim. Netanyahu painted himself into a corner with "destroy Hamas" as an objective, just as Begin and Olmert painted themselves into corners with "destroy PLO" or "destroy Hezbollah." Both of them won their battles but eventually lost their wars, withdrawing from the fight without achieving their declared objectives.

If Netanyahu aims to "destroy Hamas," he would have to wage a protracted and bloody urban war, similar to what Begin faced. The question arises: Is Israel prepared for a prolonged war on multiple fronts against highly motivated militias entrenched for over a decade? Will the Israeli public tolerate significant IDF casualties? Even if the IDF incapacitates Hamas in Gaza, as it did with the PLO in Lebanon in 1982-83, merely destroying infrastructure will not eradicate its ideology. As Ami Ayalon, Gilead Sher and Orni Petruschka point out, Hamas is an idea, and it will persist among Palestinians as long as there is no real peace option to which they can attach their hopes.

Moreover, Tel Aviv is unlikely to bring the 2 million Palestinians in an occupied Gaza to submission. More likely, considering history, we will witness the IDF leaving Gaza, leaving destruction in its wake, similar to its compelled withdrawal from Lebanon. Hamas would claim a victory because it, or at least its ideology, wasn't completely destroyed.

New trends in the Middle East

Netanyahu has said he will "change the Middle East," establishing a regional order aligning with

Israel's interests. However, his actions following October 7 have had the opposite effect. The region has undergone drastic changes: Protests have erupted in major Arab capitals, leading to the suspension of normalization talks between Israel and Saudi Arabia and forcing Cairo, Amman and Riyadh to change their official narrative. Israel's relations with Turkey are strained, and Iran's proxies have targeted Israel, as well as US assets in Iraq and Syria, with missiles and drones.

A sustained ground operation by Israel could result in tens of thousands of casualties, heighten the risk of a broader regional conflict and destabilize governments in multiple Arab countries. Iran has also hinted that it would not allow Hamas to lose without escalating the conflict.

Internationally, Israel's maneuvering space is narrowing, as public opinion increasingly rejects the dehumanization of the Palestinian people. The voices supporting Palestinians resonate from London to Madrid to Washington. The United States, once the primary force in the Middle East, is no longer the sole or main authority. We live in a multipolar world. Muslim-majority states in the Middle East are demonstrating greater independence and a willingness to establish strategic partnerships with different global powers, including BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) or the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The withdrawal of US troops from Iraq in 2011 and Afghanistan in 2021 serve as poignant reminders of evolving regional realities.

Prime Minister Netanyahu presented himself as a master statesman who could do the impossible for Israel. In addition to killing two-state solution, his plan involved normalizing relations with all Arab states, and treating Palestinians as a security concern to be managed indefinitely. But everything Netanyahu has built for decades crashed in a matter of hours. The political grave he

dug for the two-state solution may now become his own, and like Menachem Begin four decades earlier, he and his unpopular ministers may retire from politics.

The recent conflict and devastation in Gaza might sow the seeds for a new order, challenging the existing structure of the occupation of Palestine, which, in turn, contains the seeds for more wars that Israel cannot win and cannot end. The two-state solution is the only thing that can fix this system. Ending what UN Secretary-General António Guterres called "56 years of suffocating occupation" is the only reasonable option for any future Israeli government. This is the only victory Israel could make.

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

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The Secrets Behind Brazil's Military and the January 8 Insurrection

Karin Schmalz
November 18, 2023

On January 8, 2023, rioters stormed Brazil's capital in support of the defeated President Jair Bolsonaro. This was not just a random occurrence. In reality, the riot was driven by

Brazil's armed forces, an institution that has held on to power and privilege despite the end of the military dictatorship in 1985.

On October 30, 2022, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro lost a hard-fought bid for reelection. His supporters rioted throughout December and gathered in camps outside army bases. On January 8, 2023, they staged an attempted coup d'état. The world watched, flabbergasted, as 9,000 rioters invaded the Three Powers Plaza, the heart of Brazil's democracy in Brasília. They looted and vandalized buildings representing the three branches of government: Planalto Palace (seat of the presidency), the Senate and the Supreme Federal Court.

For the global audience, it looked like a hastily made copy of the invasion of the US Capitol on January 6, 2021. The visibly older, overwhelmingly white crowd sported the shirts of Brazil's national football team. Watching older men behaving in a disorderly and dangerous manner in the largely empty city was surreal.

On the surface, the insurrection looked like a spontaneous movement that started a few months prior and got out of hand, again spontaneously, on that infamous Sunday afternoon. In reality, the January 8 riots marked the culmination of a decade-long process. The rise of the global far right and political distrust caused by inequality drove this process. Also at work was the Brazilian armed forces' century-long ambition to political power, stemming from Brazil's five-century history of exploiting natural resources and human beings. These forces came together with the sole objective of controlling public and natural assets for personal gain.

Several investigations are still ongoing, with the Supreme Court starting trials of alleged civilian ringleaders in September. Until these are completed, we will not have the whole picture. However, we can examine the connections between these forces and pinpoint the main characters of the latest rebellion attempt in Brazil. That is what we will do in this and following articles.

The isolated and privileged military caste

Since the dawn of the First Brazilian Republic in 1889, the armed forces have removed, or at least tried to remove, democratically elected governments several times. So, Brazil has a long history of suffering under military dictatorships.

The last military dictatorship (1964–1985) was a bloody and genocidal regime. It created artificial economic “growth” by putting the country deeply in debt. In the transition to democracy, instead of punishing those responsible — like Argentina did with the Trial of the Juntas and beyond — Brazil decided to give total amnesty to the perpetrators, both for crimes against humanity and for sedition. This encouraged the armed forces to believe that they are above the law.

The infamous torturer Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ustra — to whom Bolsonaro dedicated his vote for the impeachment of one of Ustra's victims, President Dilma Rousseff — lived to enjoy his retirement peacefully until he died in 2015, leaving a sizable pension to his daughters.

Consequently, the Brazilian armed forces enjoy unique powers and immunities that no other military enjoys. Lawmakers trod very lightly around the subject, leaving those privileges intact after promulgating the 1988 Federal Constitution. The military justice system has exclusive jurisdiction over violent crimes committed by soldiers against civilians. The military has its own

separate set of labor and social security laws. Indeed, the military seems to have Brazilian democracy cowed into maintaining its anachronistic and excessive rights.

Aside from all these privileges, the military in Brazil lives in its own bubble, disconnected from civilian life. The children of officers study in the 14 military schools spread around the country. These schools serve over 15,000 students. The teachers are military officers and teach children “rituals related to the military culture.” The schools are governed by their own education law and curricula only need to be loosely equivalent to civilian education. They use the Marshall Trompowski Collection books, which teach that the 1964 military coup was a “democratic revolution” necessary to protect Brazil from “subversive terrorists.” The Brazilian Army offers a book blatantly in favor of the dictatorship on its website. Worryingly, Bolsonaro increased the number of “militarized” schools to almost 200, with a total budget of over 128 million reais (\$26.4 million).

The situation gets more complicated at military colleges. To become a general in Brazil, one needs a degree at the Military Academy of Agulhas Negras (AMAN). AMAN’s motto is “House of Values — Cradle of Traditions.” It teaches students that military personnel are serious, professional, mature, orderly and competent, while civilians (or *paisanos*) are unprofessional, incompetent, idle and infantile.

AMAN students are isolated from society and go through a regimen of exercise, discipline and reading outdated or plain delusional books. The authors include infamous self-proclaimed philosopher and far-right conspiracy theorist Olavo de Carvalho, who believed that the left is destroying society with progressive ideas, and another by his disciple Flávio Gordon, in which he attacks journalists, university professors, scientists

and artists. Another book used in the institution teaches that the Araguaia Guerrilla War ended with the escape of the resistance fighters, omitting the arrest, torture and execution of over 60 of them.

Even more outrageous is a book by Colonel Carlos Menna Barreto, printed by the army’s publishing company, entitled *The Yanomami Hoax*. The Yanomami are a group of indigenous people that live in the Amazon rainforest in the north of Brazil. Menna Barreto holds that the Yanomami do not exist and are rather part of a plot by NGOs to weaken Brazilian sovereignty in the Amazon. This conspiracy is widely believed in military circles and may be the inspiration for Bolsonaro’s genocidal policies against the Yanomami.

As most high-ranking officers come from military families, they come up through this system and are disconnected from civilian needs and struggles. General Eduardo Villas-Bôas, Commander of the Army from 2015 to 2019, says that he only started socializing with civilians when he was 50 years old and that it was “tough” and “an exercise in patience and intellectual flexibility.” Villas-Bôas was responsible for a threatening tweet addressed to the Supreme Federal Court on April 3, 2018. The court was about to discuss the release of then-former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, then held at the federal police headquarters in Curitiba. The tweet subtly warned that Lula’s release would not go unpunished by the armed forces. Mainstream media underreported the move.

Another infamous example of the disconnect between officers and the general population is General Eduardo Pazuello, Bolsonaro’s Minister of Health from September 2020 to March 2021, who said after taking office that he did not know what the Brazilian Unified Health System was at all. The military has its own health system, with total

medical, dental, and psychological coverage for personnel and their families. It has over 600 nationwide units, including 11 general hospitals, dozens of clinics and health schools — all taxpayer-funded. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Pazuello pushed ineffective treatments like hydroxychloroquine and allowed an oxygen shortage that led to hundreds of deaths in Manaus. He lied to the Congressional Inquiry Commission on COVID-19 in order to cover up Bolsonaro's responsibility for the mishandling of the pandemic. Pazuello may yet be charged with crimes against public health, malfeasance and perjury.

The armed forces interfere in politics

Since 2002, active-duty military have been forbidden by law to opine on politics without authorization. Nevertheless, generals have been meddling with politics since at least the Rousseff administration.

In 2011, Rousseff, who had been arrested and tortured during the dictatorship, installed the National Truth Commission to investigate human rights violations by military authorities. The 2,000-page report, released in 2014, exposed damning evidence of crimes by more than 377 state agents. Rousseff presented the results during an emotional and personal speech. This seemed to be the first step toward healing Brazil's decades-old wounds.

Some were not very impressed, however. One was General Sérgio Westphalen Etchegoyen. The Etchegoyens are an old military family that has been involved in army uprisings since the 1920s, when Alcides and Nelson Etchegoyen attempted to prevent the inauguration of President Washington Luís.

Sérgio Etchegoyen vehemently contested the inclusion of his father, a general who commanded a fourth of the whole Brazilian Army during the dictatorship, and his uncle, who participated in the

1964 coup, in the National Truth Commission report. He called the accusations "frivolous," despite abundant proof of criminal orders issued by the two men.

Sérgio Etchegoyen and Villas-Bôas had meetings with Vice President Michel Temer a year before the move to impeach Rousseff in 2016. They were also involved in several crises during Temer's term. In an interview with Celso Castro, Villas-Bôas confessed that the military had wanted to remove the Lula and Rousseff's Workers' Party from power since 2008 and that Rousseff's impeachment was part of a "long coup" to put the military back in power.

The military did not want to remove the leftists from power from the start. Lula's and Rousseff's governments had invested in the military, renewing military equipment and infrastructure. They did not touch the relationship between civilian powers and the armed forces. However, the armed forces began plotting to topple the leftists because they planned to review the military curriculum and allow civilian courts to try military police officers.

The military police is the de facto street policing force in Brazil. Military police have been involved in countless episodes of brutality and thousands of homicides across the country, but they rarely face charges for crimes against civilians in civilian courts. Conversely, the mere word of a military police officer can, in practice, send a civilian to prison. Rousseff threatened the military by discussing the demilitarization of the police forces.

Another incident involved the Institutional Security Bureau of the Presidency of the Republic (GSI). The GSI is responsible for the personal security of the president and vice-president and their families and the protection of buildings and institutions of the presidency. President Fernando Henrique Cardoso made the GSI a federal ministry

in 1999. In 2015, Rousseff dissolved the ministry and incorporated it into the Presidency Office, an action lamented by the military establishment.

As soon as Rousseff was suspended, and before she was impeached, Temer reinstated the GSI as a ministry. He even put the whole Brazilian Intelligence System under military control — with Sérgio Etchegoyen as minister. This effectively put Brazil back under military tutelage.

Recent developments show how ill-advised this idea was. The armed forces hang like a sword over Brazil, just waiting to decapitate democracy, aware of any action they may see as threatening to their power, their privilege or their immunity.

The uncomfortable rise of Bolsonaro

In November 2014, Bolsonaro made a speech to graduating cadets of the Agulhas Negras military academy, where he was received with shouts of “Leader! Leader!” He announced his bid to run for president in 2018 to “bring this country to the right” and reinforce the separation between civilians and the military.

Bolsonaro's relationship with the armed forces is very complicated. After completing the preparatory army cadet course in 1972, he failed to join the Air Force Academy but managed to enroll at AMAN in 1973. There, he received middling grades and stood out for his excellent athleticism, which earned him the nickname “Big Horse.” He finished the training to become a paratrooper but nearly died after losing control of his parachute and hitting the side of a building in Rio de Janeiro. He broke both arms and legs.

In 1983, Bolsonaro's superiors described him as aggressive, “excessively ambitious and obsessed with personal financial gains.” He admitted his desire to become “a wealthy man.”

In 1986, while posted as a captain at the paratrooper battalion in Rio de Janeiro, he faced disciplinary action after publishing an op-ed without permission. *Veja*, the most popular magazine at the time, published the article. In it, he complained about the earnings of lower-ranking officers and enlisted personnel.

The following year, *Veja* named Bolsonaro as the mastermind of a plot to plant bombs at army barracks to undermine Army Commander Leônidas Pires Gonçalves. The article contained detailed plans drawn by Bolsonaro. After a lengthy secret trial by the Supreme Military Court, Bolsonaro was not discharged. Nine of 13 justices voted in his favor. The evidence connecting him to the plans was “inconclusive,” the court decided. Later, federal police analysts confirmed Bolsonaro's authorship of the plans.

Military dictator General Ernesto Geisel (1974–1979) named Bolsonaro in his autobiography, describing him as “completely out of the normal” and “a bad military man.” Many within the army command — career officers with no interest in politics — saw him as dangerous because his heroes were not moderate generals. Instead, Bolsonaro looked up to torturers like Ustra and bloody regimes like the worst phases of the dictatorship.

Bolsonaro left the army in 1988 as a captain. He ran a successful campaign for the City Council of Rio de Janeiro, boosted by his appearances in the press. Elected with over 11,000 votes, he was surprised to learn that he got only seven votes at the polling station of the Military Village but got overwhelming support from paramilitary groups and militias. His City Council colleagues described him as “private and uncommunicative.” Bolsonaro made only two speeches, both in favor of the armed forces. He presented projects to improve salaries and military privileges.

Bolsonaro did not complete his term, as he ran for a seat in the Chamber of Deputies in 1990, winning the first of six terms. Though he began as a Christian Democratic Party candidate, he changed his political affiliation seven times. He always, however, joined right-wing parties.

Bolsonaro's presence in the legislature was marked by outrageous speeches, politically incorrect positions and even blatant defense of the death squads and militias that terrorized the state of Rio de Janeiro for decades. He proposed 171 draft bills, including one to halt the use on official documents of the preferred names of transsexuals and transvestites. Most of Bolsonaro's proposals were discarded for poor writing. Only two of his proposals became law: a temporary tax reduction for IT products and the legalization of synthetic phosphoethanolamine, a compound falsely purported to be a cure for cancer. Upon advice from scientists and the Brazilian Health Regulatory Agency, the Supreme Federal Court later suspended the latter law.

The troublesome relationship between the armed forces and politics led them to support Bolsonaro despite his mediocre record. He increased their privileges, providing a less conspicuous path for the military to return as the actual rulers of the nation. Anthropologist Piero Leirner called it a "hybrid war to come back to power," using Bolsonaro as a façade.

While men in uniform were involved in all steps of Bolsonaro's rise to power, the armed forces tried to distance themselves from their creation every time he overstepped the bounds of decency. Now that Bolsonaro is no longer president, they are still fighting to interfere in the newly elected Lula government and are refusing to step down from politics.

Dictator Ernesto Geisel was right when he said it was effortless for the armed forces to become a

political force, but it is challenging to remove them from power. With Rousseff gone after the 2016 impeachment, the military used Bolsonaro to consolidate its power.

[[Madelyn Lambert](#) and [Anton Schauble](#) edited this piece.]

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It's Preposterous to Claim that Trump Supports the LGBTQ Community

Logan M. Williams
November 23, 2023

Since Donald Trump's election in 2016, Republicans have claimed that Donald Trump was the most LGBTQ+ friendly president ever to occupy the Oval Office. As we approach the 2024 Presidential Election, we must let go of this falsehood, which continues to hold power and helped bring ex-President Donald Trump to power in the first place.

During the 2020 election, Trump nearly doubled his support within the LGBTQ+ community and is still touted as the most “pro-gay” president by many Republicans. Additionally, in 2019, the Log Cabin Republicans organization — which purports to “work to make the Republican Party more inclusive, particularly on LGBT issues,” by “working from inside the party” — even rushed to endorse the then-incumbent President Donald Trump, a complete reversal of their decision to withhold that endorsement in 2016.

The two reasons — yes, only two — given in a Washington Post op-ed detailing the endorsement were Donald Trump’s announcement of his intent to work towards curing HIV/AIDS by 2030 and Trump’s choice to appoint Richard Grenell, who is gay, as the US Ambassador to Germany.

Trump’s so-called commitment to end HIV/AIDS, however, came after years of Trump’s administration decimating the progress made by former presidents of both parties toward HIV prevention. Trump’s administration implemented policies regarding Medicare Part D that effectively restricted access to medicines that are essential for those who are living with HIV. Trump also ended necessary HIV research simply because extremists and anti-abortion activists within the GOP asked him to. Thus, many members of the LGBTQ+ community rightly looked upon Trump’s so-called “commitment” with disdain.

Ambassador Grinnell’s appointment was at least one silver lining in what was otherwise the least diverse presidential cabinet in recent history, but I dare say, a completely insignificant one.

It is no wonder that the Log Cabin Republicans’ endorsement of Donald Trump caused a significant degree of division amongst the Log Cabin Republicans’ state branches and individual members.

Trump's progress is a falsehood

As a proud gay man and ex-Republican, I struggle to think of one legitimately LGBTQ+-friendly policy made during Trump’s tenure in the White House. Log Cabin Republicans must learn to look closely at these issues and protect our right to exist in a safe and accepting society with equal rights, privileges and protections before the law. Some of those who say that they support the United States’ LGBTQ+ community do, in fact, create environments that are not safe for our existence.

In other words, we must resist the GOP’s attempts at wooing the LGBTQ+ community with token appointments (such as Grinnell’s) and lip service. As I wrote in a previous article about the nature of populism in Latin America,

Populism, by its very nature, is a movement that places power in the hands of individuals with little in the way of experience, education, and qualifications. With these individuals often come the various biases and fallacies common among those without access to opportunities for exposure to diverse characters and viewpoints ... Populists stay in power by manipulating or weaponizing the biases of a segment of the population — forging those biases into an aggressive, hyper-exclusive, ethno-religious concept of nationalism. The populist authoritarian cycles through conceptions of the “other” to rile his base into a frenzy, justifying his continued rule by way of fearmongering, and discarding each “other” as it loses its ability to evoke panic or rage.

I followed this by stating that populism “[leaves] scars on the political community [that outlast] generations by leaving behind fragmented polities characterized by factional distrust.”

These words are as true in the United States today as they were about Latin America then. Donald Trump's populist rhetoric has attracted the most discriminatory elements of the United States' political community. The GOP's infestation with these ignoramuses has caused it to embrace bigotry, thereby compromising upon its former claim to moral leadership. It is unbelievably foolish of the Log Cabin Republican community to believe that the zealots who are attracted to ex-President Trump's rhetoric of hate and exclusion regarding women, immigrants, transgender persons, those of Muslim faith and those with disabilities will suddenly become more accepting when it comes to issues of sexual orientation. Do LGBTQ+ members of the GOP sincerely believe that Trump's xenophobic sycophants are waking up in the morning and saying, "I hate everyone who doesn't look, sound, or act like me, except when it comes to gay, lesbian, or bisexual folks — that community, I'm alright with"?

Violence is on the Rise

Believing that Donald Trump is pro-LGBTQ+ is an exercise in cognitive dissonance. Donald Trump's rhetoric is the reason that we've seen an influx of so-called "parents' rights" groups that are intent on attacking the LGBTQ+ community. These groups have adopted hateful policies such as advocating for the disciplining of teachers who display any LGBTQ+ Pride materials in their classroom and banning books from school libraries, which so much as mention the existence of LGBTQ+ people.

The goal of these organizations is to shame members of the LGBTQ+ community while enforcing standards of heteronormativity and forcing gay folk to once again live as outcasts. These policies have earned some "parents' rights" groups a place on the Southern Poverty Law Center's watch list of extremist hate groups. The re-invigorated attack on the LGBTQ+ community

is a significant part of what drove me, personally, from the GOP.

Donald Trump's populism and the deplorables that he attracted to the Republican Party are the reason that support for gay marriage within the GOP has continued to decline. As a recent Gallup survey reported, support for gay marriage has dropped from 56% in 2022 to 41%. This is the lowest value at which this metric has been measured since 2014 before the Supreme Court ruled in favor of allowing homosexual marriage in *Obergefell v. Hodges*. This same Trumpian populism is the reason that threats against the LGBTQ+ community continue to rise. It seems that Trump's acolytes are intent on manifesting their homophobia through harassment and even acts of violence.

Republicans need to take action

If anyone needs to seek any more evidence of the danger that Donald Trump poses to LGBTQ Americans, one need look no further than a recent new item: Project 2025's recent publication of its "Mandate for Leadership." Project 2025 is an organization run by two former Trump Administration staffers. It is known to be associated with several far-right hate groups, an association which it proudly advertises on the Advisory Board page of its website. The "Mandate for Leadership" is a platform mapping out the policy prerogatives that are expected to be prioritized by an incoming Republican president — which the organization expects and hopes to be Donald Trump. It is a guidebook for the expansion and institutionalization of the authoritarian right as well as the further oppression of the LGBTQ+ community.

The "Mandate" calls for a repeal of most anti-discrimination protections and all laws that pursue equity for members of the LGBTQ+ community. It also advocates replacing these policies with "those

encouraging marriage, work, motherhood, fatherhood, and nuclear families.” This is paired with several other anti-LGBTQ+ policies, such as re-instating the ban on transgender persons serving in the armed forces and advocating for ludicrous and outdated policies regarding homosexual parentage.

Project 2025 openly boasts that previous iterations of its “Mandate” have significantly influenced President Trump, so it is impossible to tell which of these policies a newly elected President Trump will attempt to adopt and which he’ll succeed in implementing.

A second term for ex-President Trump will spell doomsday for this nation’s LGBTQ+ community. The Log Cabin Republicans need to stop spreading the dangerous lie that Donald Trump is — or ever was — pro-LGBTQ+, or they will be complicit in bringing about that doom. History will never forgive them for that crime.

[Lane Gibson edited this piece.]

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Antisemitism Is Popular Again. How Can Jewish Students Respond?

Leonard Weinberg
November 24, 2023

Historically, Jews as a group are often blamed and abused for the actions of some Jews. Sometimes, they fled; other times, they fought back. Now, Jewish students in the United States are facing antisemitism stoked by the Israel–Gaza war. They are responding by using their voice. Will that be enough?

For these things I weep; mine eye, mine eye
runneth down with water, because the
comforter that should relieve my soul is far
from me; my children are desolate, because the
enemy prevailed.

— Lamentations 1:13

By virtually all accounts there has been a dramatic rise in antisemitic ‘incidents’ throughout the United States and the other Western democracies. This eruption of Jew-hatred globally has been ignited by Israel’s response to the attacks carried out by Hamas operatives on October 7, 2023. As night follows day, pictures of Gazan civilians suffering as the result of the Israeli Defense Forces’ (IDF) bombing raids have led to attacks on American Jews and Jewish institutions. Perpetrators of these attacks have held American Jews responsible for the actions of the Israeli military, whatever the views of individual Jews and Jewish institutions.

This is, of course, the logic of the pogrom. Historically Jews have been held to be collectively responsible for the behavior, real or imagined, of individual Jews.

Collective blame of Jews has a long history

For example, there were widespread attacks on Jewish communities throughout the Russian

Empire following the assassination of Czar Alexander II in 1881. The Czar's murder was carried out by an anarchist group, the People's Will, a few of whose members were Jewish. In response, large numbers of Jews fled Russia for destinations in Western and Central Europe. More emigrated for the United States.

In the aftermath of the Bolshevik seizure of power in Russia in 1917, a civil war broke out between the new Communist regime, the "Reds", and the "Whites" who were violent opponents of Lenin, Trotsky and their fellow revolutionaries. The Whites often blamed Jews for the new communist order. The fact that Leon Trotsky and a handful of other revolutionaries were Jewish led the Whites, Cossacks and other Ukrainians to carry out violent attacks on Jews in the Ukraine and Poland during 1918–1920. Some 100,000 Jews were murdered in Kyiv and other Ukrainian and Polish cities during this extensive pogrom.

These killings and many like them in nineteenth-century Europe were secular versions of Christian and Muslim massacres of Jews dating back centuries. Throughout the late Middle Ages and beyond, even into the early 20th century, rumors spread, often during Easter time — the "Blood Libel" that Jews had killed a Christian infant and used its blood to bake matzo as part of their Passover ritual. Among populations in Central and Eastern Europe these rumors, sometimes spread by ecclesiastical authorities, led to outbreaks of mob attacks on Jewish communities based on this long-lasting superstition.

At the beginning of the 20th Century, the Dreyfus Affair created an occasion for anti-Jewish violence throughout France, the home of the European "Enlightenment." In this episode, Captain Alfred Dreyfus, the first Jew to serve on the French General Staff, was accused of treason. It was alleged that Dreyfus had committed treason

by transferring French military secrets to the German ambassador in Paris.

Dreyfus was court-martialed, found guilty, stripped of his rank, and sentenced to life imprisonment on Devil's Island. Eventually, after multiple court proceedings and ferocious public debates, another military officer was found to be responsible for the crime. Dreyfus was exonerated and restored to rank. But during this protracted (1894–1905) episode Jews were violently attacked throughout France because of this false allegation against a single individual.

How Jews have defended themselves from antisemitism then and now

What were the responses of Jews to these centuries of abuse and murderous violence in nominally Christian Europe? Where possible, it was flight to safer parts of the world. Given the options of "fight or flight," many European Jews chose flight. The European Zionist movement is an example of the "flight" option. Rarely in this long history of violent persecution did Jews in general exercise the fight alternative. (The 1943 Warsaw Ghetto uprising was a dramatic exception.) More commonly, though, the response was one of endurance and the public expression of lamentations. Like hurricanes and other natural disasters, common European Jewish reactions were stoic endurance and persistence — under the assumption that it will all blow over, at least until the next event occurs.

The formation and persistence of modern Israel, on the other hand, embodies the "fight" reaction. Over the decades, the Jewish state's leaders and its average citizens have exercised the "fight" alternative, concluding, reasonably enough, that if Jews wished to survive as a people in the Middle East they had better learn to fight. If not, at best they would have been treated as dhimmi, i.e. tolerated as an inferior minority in the Muslim

lands (Dar al-Islam). The historical parallel that comes to mind is the brutal treatment accorded the Armenian Christian minority in the later years of the Ottoman Empire. They were a minority community subject to the whim and caprice of the Sultan. If a Palestinian state “from the river to the sea” were to become a reality, Israelis might either exercise the “flight” option or suffer the fate of the Armenians under Muslim rule.

In terms of central tendency, the reaction of American Jews to the outbreaks of antisemitism that followed the Hamas attack of October 7 and Israel’s armed reaction to it has involved still another response: “voice” (use of the term owes to Albert Hirschman, who wrote *Exit, Voice and Loyalty*). Confronted by pro-Palestinian and oftentimes antisemitic protests staged throughout much of the country in the streets, on college campuses and in other public spaces, the leading Jewish “watchdog” organizations (e.g., the Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Committee) have raised their voices in condemnation of the attacks on individual Jews and Jewish institutions.

Jewish students on college campuses from Cornell on the East Coast to UCLA in the West have been the targets of antisemitic threats of violence. Swastikas and antisemitic slurs of various kinds have been spray-painted on the sides of campus buildings. Social media postings have threatened Jewish students with Hitler-like denunciations. In response, students and wealthy donors (e.g. the Jon Huntsman Foundation at the University of Pennsylvania) have appealed to university administrators to do more to stop the antisemitic threats and abuse.

When interviewed by reporters, many Jewish students have expressed fear and trepidation. Orthodox men have reported removing their kippah (skullcaps) out of fear they would be attacked. Other Jewish students said they were

afraid to attend classes or show themselves at dining halls for the same reasons.

These reactions to antisemitic threats have a familiar ring to them. We have re-entered the world of the shtetl and Jewish lamentations. If only the czar (or provost) knew, he would put a stop to the antisemitic threats and violence. (For a discussion see, for example, Anemona Hartocollis and Stephanie Saul’s article in *The New York Times*.)

Unlike Israelis and the IDF, Jewish students attending American universities have conspicuously avoided the “fight” response. Instead of preparing to defend themselves, individually and collectively, the dominant reactions have been ones of anxiety and fear.

These students are, of course, a world away from Odesa in 1882, Kraków in 1918, or Polish and Romanian universities in the 1930s, but their reactions to antisemitic abuse seems strikingly similar to those of their ancestors. Voice, yes, but fighting back, no.

What can we learn from this most recent experience of antisemitism?

There appear to be a few lessons to be learned by the continuing experience of on-campus abuse of Jewish students (and some Jewish faculty). The first is that courses and university programs aimed at promoting diversity, inclusion and mutual tolerance have proven to be virtually worthless, at least so far as combating antisemitism is concerned. The same applies, sorry to say, for courses on the history of the Holocaust. When the chips are down, none of these courses and programs have served to insulate Jewish students from abuse and violence by those who equate their ethnic or religious identity with the state of Israel.

Instead of participating in these programs and taking these courses, Jewish students would be better served, better able to defend themselves, if they began learning the martial arts. In more extreme cases of on-campus abuse and violence, these students might even be encouraged to learn how to use firearms responsibly. On-campus awareness that Jewish students possess or may possess firearms might very well have a deterrent effect for those who threaten them.

A final consideration: In 2022, the US Senate overwhelmingly confirmed Deborah Lipstadt as a “Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism” – with the rank of ambassador-at-large. Given her status and apparent influence in the State Department, she might very well be approached by Jewish student groups and their well-wishers to help combat the on-campus abuse of Jewish students. If this abuse and violence can be attributed to particular students or faculty, the ambassador might use her influence to have their visas revoked, so that they may be returned to their countries of origin in the Middle East or elsewhere. Some awareness of this possibility might also have a deterrent effect on those contemplating antisemitic violence. Otherwise, the ambassador might be preaching to a choir of those already opposed to the present revival of antisemitism in the Western World.

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

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Why Is the West Now Lowering the Iron Curtain?

Valery Engel
November 27, 2023

Ostensibly, EU sanctions on Russia are aimed to weaken Russia’s war effort and support for Putin. But restrictions on private citizen’s family cars and personal cash do not achieve this. Instead, they seem to be part of an effort to simply keep Russians out.

The sanctions war between the West and Russia is gaining momentum. As of November 2023, the EU has developed 12 sanctions packages against Moscow.

In recent months, European countries have increasingly adopted restrictions aimed at reducing contact between Western and Russian citizens. This is difficult to explain with the purpose of the sanctions — to economically weaken Russia and force it to make peace with Ukraine.

The EU’s increasingly restrictive travel sanctions

Recall that back on February 25, 2022, the day after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the European Council imposed visa sanctions on Russian diplomats and businessmen, who from that moment lost simplified access to the EU. The EU extended such restrictions to all Russians in September 2022.

Furthermore, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania and Poland banned visas at the national level and restricted border crossings for Russian citizens with EU visas, citing “a serious threat to our public

security.” To put it bluntly, after the introduction of restrictions on money transfers to the EU for Russians, as well as the refusal of Western insurance companies to cooperate with Russian partners, obtaining Schengen visas for most Russian citizens is now impossible.

As early as the February and March of 2022, all EU member states, as well as the US and Canada, banned Russian airlines from flying to their countries. Russia adopted retaliatory sanctions. Air travel is now much more expensive and time-consuming, requiring additional connections to avoid banned airspace.

For now, however, Russia still has a land border with the EU, which runs through the territory of Finland, the Baltic States and Norway. However, all of them have restricted the issuance of visas and the movement of Russians with transit visas.

On March 2, 2022, the EU announced that it was banning key Russian banks from SWIFT, the most important global financial messaging system. It also prohibited the importation of EU-denominated banknotes into Russia. On March 5, leading credit card companies Visa and Mastercard ceased operations in Russia. On March 11, the US government also banned the importation of its currency to Russia. A little later, in April 2022, the EU extended its restrictions to all other official currencies of EU member states.

These measures primarily hit, not Russian citizens, but citizens of other countries who wanted to enter Russia. However, the EU did not object to its people exchanging euros for US Dollars and taking out the amounts of cash they needed in American currency. This proves that the goal was to make traveling to Russia more expensive — after all, in order to eventually buy the Russian ruble, people in European countries had to pay an additional fee for the double conversion.

On October 6, the EU adopted the eighth package of sanctions, providing for a ban on exports of Russian products, including vehicles, to Europe. In July 2023, German authorities interpreted this clause as a ban not only on imports for the purpose of sale but also on the temporary entry of cars with Russian license plates. Both Russian car owners who had the right to be in the EU (for example, family members of European citizens) and EU citizens who had cars with Russian registration came under threat. These cars began to be seized and confiscated.

On September 8, 2023, the European Commission (EC) issued a clarification confirming that Russian-registered personal vehicles were not allowed in the EU. This measure applies to all vehicles with Russian license plates. Moreover, the clarification stated that Russians are prohibited from importing not only cars into the EU but also suitcases, bags, purses, leather and fur products, cosmetics, semi-precious and precious stones, cell phones, cameras and laptops. EC spokesman Balazs Ujvari later said that EU countries should not confiscate Russians' clothes, but insisted that this should be done with regard to cars.

EC spokesman Daniel Ferri emphasized that member states must strictly enforce the ban on importing cars specifically, even if the vehicle is not actually “imported” but crosses the border only for tourism or short-term stays. Ferri did not specify whether there could be exceptions to the obligation of national authorities to confiscate cars of Russian citizens, for example, if these citizens permanently reside in an EU member state or enjoy refugee or humanitarian status.

While Italy, Spain, Austria and a number of other Western European countries immediately announced that they would not seize Russian cars, the countries bordering Russia — Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania and Finland immediately agreed with the EC's clarification. Moreover, only Finland agreed

to respect an exception for EU citizens and Russians permanently residing in that country. Moreover, on November 2, 2023, Latvia formalized this by amending its law on road traffic.

In the near future, it appears that countries that have land borders with Russia will close their border crossings under the controversial pretext of “security.” Thus, slowly but surely, the West is lowering the “iron curtain” with Russia. This is fundamentally different from the situation in the 1930s, when it was the USSR that closed itself from the West.

Travel bans are achieving the opposite of their stated purpose

Let’s try to understand why the West has chosen such a policy and how it will help to establish peace in Ukraine and democratize Russia.

The EU’s official explanation is that sanctions are aimed at weakening the Russian government’s ability to finance a war of aggression against Ukraine and are designed to “minimise the negative consequences on the Russian population”; “sanctions are designed to maximise the negative impact for the Russian economy, while limiting the consequences for EU businesses and citizens.”

That is, formally, the European Council declares that it does not aim to collectively punish the Russian population and or restrict EU citizens in their contacts. Its goal is to weaken the Kremlin’s economic and military-technical power and force it to make peace. Thus, there is a contradiction between the spirit of the sanctions originally laid down by the European Council and its interpretation by overzealous European law enforcers.

How has the actual massive visa ban on Russians and air travel ban advanced the peace

process? If one assumes that Russian business has the ability to influence President Vladimir Putin (which is not really true, because Russian business is completely dependent on the government, not the other way around), then one would assume that these restrictions were anti-business. But this is also not true, because those rich Russians who are not under sanctions and own real estate in Europe have, as a rule, residence permission in these countries; they do not need a visa. Unlike to ordinary people, the additional costs associated with longer flights are of no consequence to the rich.

Ordinary people bear the brunt of the difficulties. Among these are representatives of the Russian opposition, who previously had the ability to run to one of Moscow’s nine airports in order to escape retaliation after a protest. It is interesting that after the air travel ban, protests in Russia virtually ceased.

The opposition has no longer the moral right to call on Russians to take to the streets, as that call is tantamount to imprisonment for a minimum of five years.

Could Russia’s economy and military potential really have been hit by sanctions on private Russian cars driving into the EU? There is not and has never been any significant importation of Russian cars into the EU. There has always been the reverse process — exportation of cars to Russia.

Given the visa restrictions already existing, the car ban only affects a limited number of Russian citizens, mostly permanent residents of EU countries with residence permits as well as Europeans with residence permits in Russia, who need a car with Russian license plates to travel safely around Russia. It is unlikely that they have any influence over Putin or the Russian authorities.

What do these people do now? They cannot neglect their families. They have to take a train or hitchhike to the Russian border, cross the border on foot and take a cab to the city of Pskov in order to access the rest of Russia by train or plane. And the ticket price will go to a Russian state-owned railroad company or airline, which in turn pays into the Russian budget.

And there are many such people who have families on both sides of the border. About 1,000 Karelian families moved to Finland from Russian Karelia in the 1990s. All of them have relatives in Russia. Let alone the several million Russian-speaking families in the Baltic States and Germany.

The real purpose of the restrictions

So, what effect have such sanctions really achieved?

Bans on the transportation of euros, or of Russian travelers' cell phones or cosmetics, as well as the possible complete closure of borders with Russia — these measures are all of a piece. Their goal is to reduce contacts, to isolate Russians from the West and the West from Russia. In reality, these measures hurt those who have family ties on both sides of the border. This is completely contrary to the EU's humanitarian policy, which prioritizes the maintenance of kinship ties.

Are we sure that these people blame the Russian authorities, who started the war with Ukraine, for the new difficulties and financial costs they are now having to bear? My personal experience suggests that such people are in the minority. People's thinking is much more straightforward: It is the fault of the one who introduced the restrictions.

Most people who have trouble traveling across the border are convinced that they are not

personally to blame for the Kremlin's waging war against Ukraine and therefore should not be held accountable for its actions. And they begin to wonder whether Putin is right when he claims that the West simply hates Russians. Thus, the measures do not weaken support for Putin, but for Europe.

It is possible that those officials who made such decisions in Brussels or Berlin were simply mistaken. Perhaps they did not realize that the interests of permanent residents of the EU, including their own citizens, would actually be affected. Perhaps they did not realize that these measures would have no effect on the Kremlin or the war in Ukraine.

But why were these decisions so enthusiastically supported by European politicians and political analysts, especially in Eastern European countries? Perhaps authorities in countries bordering Russia want to use the moment to detach their fellow citizens from Russia, some of whom view it as a "historical homeland". What does this have to do with the purpose of the sanctions?

Where did the idea that the West should close itself off from Russia by minimizing contacts come from? I think the main reason is quite prosaic. In January 2023, Mark Temnitsky, a journalist and staff member of the Atlantic Council's Eurasia Center, published an article in Euronews entitled "The European Union should stop issuing tourist visas to Russians." In reality, by that time Schengen visas to Russians were practically no longer issued. The article was really about something else, which Temnitsky reveals in the anecdotes he cites.

During a trip to Montenegro, Temnitsky climbed one of the local mountains. He writes,

We reached into our bag and pulled out a Ukrainian flag. A customary tradition, we

always take a photo with it during our annual trips.

We took a second to pose with our flag at the fortress and requested a neighbouring tourist to take our picture.

But this encounter was different. As we stood for a photo, another group of tourists gave us unpleasant looks.

“Ukrainians,” one of them snarled in Russian, eyes cold with contempt.

We quickly finished taking our photo, packed our flag, and descended down the fortress. As our group continued on our walk, the discomfort among us became palpable as we came across additional Russian tourists who gave us similar stares.

Temnitsky was offended that the onlooker assumed he was a Ukrainian. But Temnitsky did not check this person’s documents, either. The tourist could have been a citizen of any of the former Soviet republics, including the Baltic States, as well as a citizen of Israel, the United States, Germany, Finland, or anywhere there is a Russian-speaking community. But he concluded that these were tourists from Russia.

Then the author went to Greece and Cyprus, where this story repeated itself. On this basis, he concludes: “This is Russia today. Over the past 19 months, many have mislabeled the Russian invasion of Ukraine as ‘Putin’s war,’ blaming the current circumstances on the Russian president.” According to him, all 145 million Russian citizens support the war. As proof, he cites the results of opinion polls conducted by Russian sociological services controlled by the Kremlin.

The author's conclusion is quite simple and radical: Russians should be punished for the actions of their government. Vacations and trips

abroad are a luxury, and banning Russian citizens from traveling abroad will make them think twice about the actions of their government. It's hard to imagine Temnitsky, an Atlantic Council staffer, could seriously believe what he’s saying — since the Atlantic Council regularly accuses Russia of rigging elections and being out of touch with voters. So, either the Atlantic Council is spreading disinformation and Russia remains a democratic state, or we should recognize that the author of this Euronews article is, to put it mildly, not logical in his inferences. His message is based on plain xenophobia.

Xenophobia in the form of Russophobia, as well as growing isolationist sentiments towards Russia, also based on fear of “outsiders,” is the main reason why the West is now lowering the Iron Curtain. There is simply no other explanation. The restrictions on travelers in no way bring victory over Putin's Russia, but on the contrary contribute to the consolidation of anti-Western sentiment among the victims of this policy.

One can, of course, accuse the West of incompetence, but then the conclusions are even sadder. But if Western countries, whose main value is tolerance and freedom, begin to be guided by xenophobia in the development of political decisions, it is bad, first of all, for the West itself.

Openness has always been the main weapon of the free world. We have always been strong because we profess freedom and are not afraid of the truth. We have carried this truth to the whole world, including Russia, and in the 1980s and 90s, it yielded results. Today, with the propaganda that characterizes the main official Russian media, the openness and accessibility of the West with its free information and values is becoming more and more important. Let us not forget that, although reforms in the USSR began with the coming to power of an adequate leader, Soviet public consciousness by that time had already been was

already prepared for changes. And it was the openness of the West that played a key role in achieving that.

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

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Can Bobby Kennedy Win the Presidency Now? Of Course.

Scott Bennett
November 28, 2023

Recent polls show that Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. has suddenly become a serious contender in the 2024 race for the US presidency. Despite the traditional headwinds against an independent candidate, RJK Jr. shows a powerful possibility of winning.

It may come as a surprise, but Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. can win the 2024 presidential election.

Every article you read about RFK Jr. is going to emphasize that his candidacy is a long shot. Some sources — like a recent Vox podcast — will even come right out and say he'll never win.

The dominant message to the American public is that if you're not voting Democrat or Republican on Election Day, you are "throwing your vote away." This is the knee-jerk response to any discussion about a candidate that does not have a D or an R next to their name.

There are huge institutional barriers designed to block upstart challengers from operating outside the two-party system in the US. Stat-heads can summon Excel spreadsheets that "prove" it is impossible for an independent or third-party challenger to win the Electoral College. In fact, no independent has won the presidency since George Washington. Obviously it would be easier to get around that problem if the popular vote counted in presidential elections. But the US continues to hand victory to the loser of the popular vote about 11% of the time.

These psychological and structural barriers exist and will still be firmly in place on November 5, 2024. But RFK Jr. can still win.

Watershed polling

A recent Quinnipiac poll showed Kennedy with a surprising 22% share of the electorate in a head-to-head matchup against Joe Biden and Donald Trump. Another poll shows Kennedy pulling ahead of both major party contenders among voters under 45 in several key battleground states. This is a significant breakthrough.

Unexpectedly, Americans are becoming aware that 2024 could be a three-way race: An independent candidate could potentially upset the two-party hammerlock on power.

But is this a surprise? Joe Biden and Donald Trump are hugely unpopular. According to 538, a majority of Americans holds an unfavorable view of both candidates: 54% for Biden, same for Trump. To say that the people are not jazzed about a replay of the 2020 election is supreme understatement. In contrast, more view Kennedy favorably than unfavorably.

Old name, new game

So who is Robert Francis Kennedy Junior, who promises to inject fresh blood into the 2024 race?

Well, the name is a clue that he is actually some very old blood, at least by American standards. The Kennedy name is the most recognizable brand in US politics, putting even the Bush dynasty at a distant second place. RFK Jr. is the son of Senator Robert F. Kennedy Sr. and the nephew of President John F. Kennedy. It makes one wonder how many Americans would vote for RFK Jr. even if they didn't know a single other thing about him besides that surname.

The Kennedy provenance gives establishment credibility that past independent and third-party candidates would have killed for: the advantage of an entire life spent in politics. RFK Jr. has been attending high-profile parties since childhood, including the one Frank Sinatra threw for his uncle Jack at the 1960 Democratic convention. As a result, Kennedy knows the fathers of practically every prominent modern American, and there's a good chance he's met their grandfathers as well.

However, several members of his family have gone out of their way to disavow his candidacy. Four of eight living siblings put out a statement saying, "Bobby might share the same name as our father, but he does not share the same values, vision or judgment ... We denounce his candidacy and believe it to be perilous for our country."

While his family is busy spurning him, Kennedy has now spurned the Democratic Party his family's traditional home. The Democrats currently hold the White House, and incumbency is always the strongest advantage in any election. Earlier this year the Democratic National Committee voted to support President Biden's plan to reorder the primaries according to his preference. On top of that, Democrats won a court case in 2017 that gave the major parties an all-clear to play favorites during the primary election season. Facing what he called roadblocks to "fair primary elections," RFK Jr. is now running as an independent.

RFK Jr.'s political views: third-party mindset

Voters may know what they're getting with Biden and Trump, but Kennedy is a true wild card. He told New York Magazine, "I still consider myself a Democrat, and I have all the values that I grew up with, nothing changed." But outside of his positions on the environment and abortion, there isn't much overlap between RFK Jr. and his family's party.

The perception of many Democrats is that RFK Jr. is an anti-vax nutjob. His unorthodox views on the subject are like catnip to the millions who listen to Joe Rogan, but absolutely anathema to mainstream MSNBC-watching Dems — though Kennedy has not actively sought the approval of traditional Democrats, anyway.

It is precisely Kennedy's ability to appeal to voters outside of the traditional Democratic spectrum that makes him a threat to both major parties. Taking a page from Trump's playbook, Kennedy has recently said he plans to "formulate policies that will seal the border permanently." He has also been critical of gun control. He has stressed that, while he might support a bipartisan assault weapons ban, he was "not going to take people's guns away."

As a Democrat who was willing to criticize President Biden, Kennedy was a frequent guest and darling of the right-wing media circuit during his period in the Democratic primary. After announcing his independent run, however, that relationship may have soured. Republicans like Trump spokesman Steven Cheung swiftly went on the attack, saying in a statement, “Voters should not be deceived by anyone who pretends to have conservative values.”

The GOP has good reason for anxiety. Current polling shows Kennedy is likely to take a bigger chunk of Republican voters than Democrats. No doubt even more alarming to party insiders, a Politico analysis of campaign finance reports shows Kennedy is pulling in significantly more big-money political investment from those who traditionally give to Republicans, hitting the GOP where it hurts.

Kennedy's image as an anti-establishment populist has enabled him to stake foreign policy positions far outside what either major party could stomach. His primary attack on the Democratic establishment is that Hillary Clinton and Joe Biden are “warmongers.” He has also criticized the CIA as an institution designed only to provide more wars to keep the military-industrial complex afloat.

But there are also reasons to question how anti-establishment Kennedy truly is. Despite a willingness to call out chemical and oil companies, industrial agriculture and Big Pharma for their culpability for chronic disease, he does not support single-payer healthcare. His views on the Israel–Palestine issue are unlikely to win over many on the left either.

Kennedy also regularly reaffirms his economic orientation as that of “a free-market capitalism kind of guy.” This really shouldn't be surprising, of course, considering Kennedy's roots. As he wrote in his own family memoir, *American Values*,

“During the Depression, there were only twenty-four known millionaires in the country, and among them were” both of his grandfathers, Joe Kennedy and George Skakel.

The US's perfect independent candidate?

Herein lies the irony of Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s campaign for president. He is the most establishment candidate, strictly on the strength of his family and the privileged personal position and connections the Kennedy name confers on every member, and yet he possesses an anti-establishment streak. This candidate spent his entire career as an environmental attorney (and if a job like that doesn't make a person distrustful of what corporations or bureaucracies tell them, nothing will). He is somehow establishment and anti-establishment all rolled into one.

It is precisely this combination of factors that might make him the perfect candidate for this moment. Independent voters, a huge plurality according to recent polling, have an unfavorable view of both Donald Trump and Joe Biden. They are looking for something that neither major-party candidate is offering. If Kennedy gives independents reason to show up on Election Day, he can win.

The 2020 election contest had record voter turnout — the biggest in more than a century, 66%. But 80 million eligible voters still didn't vote: one-third of the US voting population. 80 million is more than enough votes to turn the tide in Kennedy's favor.

It is the winner-takes-all election system that bequeaths two-party politics to the US. It is winner-takes-all that gives us the lesser-of-two-evils phenomenon, making any independent or third-party candidate a “spoiler.” But another reality of a three-way race is that it is possible to win with a simple plurality of the vote, as little as

34% if the race is a dead heat. As Kennedy himself said, “The Democrats are terrified I’ll spoil the election for President Biden. The Republicans fear I’ll spoil it for President Trump. The truth is — they’re both right! But only their inside-the-beltway myopia deludes them into thinking we have no chance to win.”

Of course RFK Jr. can win.

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

***Scott Bennett** is a writer living in Chicago. His decent (but not hoity-toity) university education never prepared him for this moment. It did, however, prepare him for a career in major market media. He has been working on a book for 10 years with few ideas on how to publish it, so he turned to TikTok.

How to Strengthen Your Mind’s Immunity to Bad Ideas

Andy Norman
November 29, 2023

Like the body, the mind is susceptible to infectious agents: bad ideas. Likewise, evolution has endowed the mind with its own immune system. The emerging science of cognitive immunology helps us to recognize and strengthen our mental immune systems. Philosopher Andy Norman explains.

Question: The problem of misinformation and disinformation is huge, and it’s growing with the arrival of AI like ChatGPT. With a dearth of solutions out there, the idea of cognitive immunity is alluring. Does it offer real solutions?

Andy Norman: People are right to be concerned. AI promises to be hugely disruptive. Here’s one reason why: AI-governed algorithms amplify information with “viral” properties. Nearly everyone now is plugged into the web, where infectious nonsense can spread like wildfire. Propagandists can now reach millions of vulnerable minds in a matter of minutes. We don’t like to admit it, but our connectedness makes us more vulnerable to sketchy information. Toxic polarization and conspiracy theories are symptoms of a deep imbalance: Our ability to spot nonsense has not kept pace with our ability to spread it.

An exciting new science, though, is teaching us how to fight back. Each of us possesses a highly evolved capacity to filter out false and malicious information. The suite of mechanisms that does this work deserves a name; we call it the mind’s “immune system.” Scientists from around the world have joined our call to understand it so we can better cultivate mental immunity. Here’s what we’ve learned: these systems can go haywire, but they can also perform at a very high level. The key is to learn habits of mind that keep your mind’s immune system grounded. The Mental Immunity Project is all about freeing ourselves from false and manipulative information.

Q: How real is the mind’s immune system?

Norman: Philosophers are going to be arguing this one for a long time! Here’s what we know: the mind does something deeply analogous to bodily immune function: It actively monitors for false, harmful, and infectious stuff — “viral” information, basically — and does its best to shed

it. The body's immune system manufactures antibodies to fight off pathogens, and the mind manufactures doubts to fight off problematic ideas.

Both systems function best in a "Goldilocks zone" that lies between extreme trust and extreme suspicion. Both tend to go haywire when they stray out of this zone.

Fortunately, our minds are inoculable, just like our bodies. And bodies are inoculable because they have immune systems. So what does that tell you? Both systems evolved by natural selection to solve similar problems. Each functions to protect an evolved thing from infectious and parasitic stuff. The similarities are really quite striking.

To sum up: Yes, I think that mental immune systems are very real. I have smart colleagues who disagree, though, and that's fine. We differ on a subtle philosophical question, but agree on the important thing: We need to understand and care for the mind's capacity to spot and filter misinformation.

Q: In your book, *Mental Immunity*, and with the Mental Immunity Project, you aim to advance the science of cognitive immunology. You also aim to share actionable ideas that people can employ in their day-to-day lives. What are some of the most exciting recent findings?

Norman: There's so much neat work going on, it's hard to know where to begin. Here are a few findings that I think have the power to change lives. First, the science should change the way we feel about doubt. Most people dislike doubt; it makes them uncomfortable. They prefer certainty. But ultimately, doubts are our friends. They're quite literally the antibodies of the mind. The mind sends them to try and alert us to the problematic features of bad ideas. If you pay attention to them, appreciate them, and update your beliefs regularly

— sometimes by letting go of them — you will grow wiser over time.

My second favorite finding has to do with other people's doubts. Each of us harbors beliefs. We grow attached to them, and are usually blind to their defects. (Like love, belief can be blind.) This means that we need the help of others to spot our mind-infections. We need to listen to other people's objections, fight down the urge to get defensive and learn to appreciate them for what they are: opportunities to "unlearn." Simply put: Treat challenges to your worldview as opportunities, not threats. The mind's immune system can freak out and attack the bearers of conflicting information; it's up to us to calm it down so we can learn from that information.

Q: What are some practical things people can do to start strengthening their mental immune systems? How can people help their kids and their families from falling for bad information?

Norman: We've developed a Guide to Mental Immune Health designed to help everyone build their immunity. In it, we identify ten key habits of mind. We call them principles of mental immune system care, and each one is pretty simple. For example, we should monitor our motives for believing. A lot of times, we believe things because we want them to be true, not because they really are true. This is problematic, though, because it can make us prone to wishful thinking. The antidote is to notice why you believe what you believe. Believing something because it's useful to believe it is one thing, and believing it because it's probably true is something else. Responsible thinkers keep track of which is which.

Another principle of mental immune system care: Embrace shades of gray thinking. Life is full of uncertainties, so complete certainty is almost always a mistake. Make your peace with intermediate confidence levels. If you're only

about 85% certain that something is true, own that. Say, “I think it’s true,” rather than, “I know it’s true.” The world’s best thinkers are continually adjusting their confidence levels as new evidence comes in. If a new consideration weighs against a belief, but only a little, it’s usually best to reduce your confidence a bit.

A third example: Play for team truth. It’s easy to get caught up in a culture war and feel outraged by the things “they” are saying and doing. When this happens, resist the urge to indulge in righteous indignation. Why? Because continually reacting to the latest outrage from the other side can damage your mind’s immune system. It tends to compromise your ability to think objectively. When you encounter an objectionable half-truth, appreciate the truthful part of it before you criticize the not-so-true part. Give the other side’s reasonable points their due. Don’t react, reflect. Be fair-minded. Seek truth and common ground, not victory.

Q: Can you offer some examples where techniques like pre-bunking have effectively neutralized bad information, or at least made it less damaging?

Norman: Sure. Here are two important ones. In the run-up to Russia’s Ukraine war, US intelligence learned that Vladimir Putin was planning an invasion. They learned that Putin was going to use Russia’s powerful propaganda machine to sell a false narrative of Ukrainian aggression. The Biden administration took this information and began warning allies. His ambassadors alerted other nations of a coming disinformation campaign. Representatives of his administration warned news outlets. When the invasion and the influence campaign arrived, dozens of governments and media outlets were prepared not to drink Putin’s Kool-Aid. Biden had successfully “prebunked” Putin’s false narrative,

so it fell flat. This is a big reason why Putin’s power grab failed.

“Prebunking,” by the way, is another name for mind-inoculation.

Second example: In the run-up to the 2020 presidential election, Donald Trump made it clear that he was planning to claim that the election was rigged. He concocted a false narrative and began selling it months in advance. He knew instinctively that simple and emotionally charged messages can hijack minds, and he repeated his claims again and again. He was actually hacking his supporter’s minds. Fortunately, the Department of Homeland Security saw that this could result in electoral chaos. They worked closely with one of our colleagues — Sander van der Linden, a Cambridge University psychologist — and they warned election officials all over the country. They used prebunking to prevent these election officials from falling for the big election lie. When the time came to count the votes, these officials were effectively inoculated. They did their jobs and American democracy survived. Prebunking prevented a constitutional crisis.

Q: Are certain people more prone to believing misinformation than others?

Norman: Absolutely. Just as people vary in their susceptibility to the flu, people vary in their susceptibility to misinformation. Those who know how to spot and disregard sketchy information (those with well-functioning mental immune systems) can shrug off the very same information that seriously addles others (those with poorly functioning systems).

There are three major reasons why we fall for misinformation. First, we tend to trust information that confirms our biases. If information “fits” with our worldview, we’re less likely to be skeptical and more likely to accept it as true. Fail to

understand this, and your worldview can become rigid and self-validating. Second, we're more likely to fall for misinformation that triggers strong emotions. Anger, outrage and fear are especially potent: They reduce our ability to think well. Third, we're more likely to fall for misinformation when it's repeated. This bias is known as the illusory truth effect, and it's especially powerful in "echo chambers" where false information is repeated uncritically.

Learn a bit about your mind's misleading tendencies, though, and you can begin to mitigate them. For example, make a habit of asking yourself: "Am I accepting this at face value because it's genuinely reliable, or am I accepting it because I find it validating?" If there's some mix of the latter, you probably ought to give the information a second, more critical look.

Q: What is it about conspiracy theories that allow them to infect minds so successfully?

Norman: Conspiracy theories are like traps. Buy into one and it provides ready-made excuses for doubling down on the narrative. Why is there no evidence for the conspiracy? Because the conspirators covered it up! Why is there evidence against the conspiracy? Because the conspirators planted it!

Those prone to conspiratorial thinking share similar traits. They tend to be low in intellectual humility. They rely more on intuition and less on analytical thinking. They have a need for certainty and prefer simple answers for complex events. They see patterns where none exist, connecting unrelated events into a larger plot. They view themselves as heroic victims and blame others when things go wrong. Conspiracy beliefs give you a sense of control; they boost your self-esteem and make you feel part of a special group that's "in the know."

Often, conspiracy theorists are hyper-critical thinkers. Their suspicions are overblown. They're unable to trust where trust is warranted. And, ironically, conspiratorial thinking won't help uncover real conspiracies (which do exist!). For that, we need measured skepticism and genuine critical thinking.

Q: How did the Mental Immunity Project come together?

Norman: In my book about mental immunity, I proposed a new approach to our world's misinformation problem: one centered on the idea that minds have "immune systems" that can do a lot of the work for us — provided we care for them properly. I founded the Cognitive Immunology Research Collaborative (CIRCE), an institute dedicated to understanding the mind's defenses and cultivating mental immune health.

In 2022, we convened a blue ribbon panel composed of the world's leading experts on misinformation and cognitive immunology. The panel drafted a bold declaration highlighting the science, which has now been signed by over 100 scholars and domain experts.

The panel also concluded that we could use the science to begin cultivating mental resilience at scale. So, in 2023, CIRCE teamed with Thinking Is Power to launch the Mental Immunity Project, which translates the science into tools anyone can use. We developed the first-of-its-kind guide to mental immune system care and put it online. Anyone can go there and learn how to spot the worst kinds of misinformation — extremism, hate, pseudoscience, conspiracy theories, propaganda, etc. We're developing tools to protect loved ones, kids, and organizations too.

Q: What do you think the future of cognitive immunology holds?

Norman: The science of immunology turned the tables on infectious microbes. It gave us the upper hand in the battle against disease. This fundamentally changed the human condition. Now, the science of cognitive immunology promises to turn the tables on infectious misinformation. We think it will give us the upper hand in the battle against viral nonsense — a battle we think is every bit as consequential. To get there, though, we need partners. We need foundations that can invest in the science. We need school districts committed to equipping their students. We need citizens who can spot propaganda and call it out. We need everyone to acknowledge their susceptibility to manipulative information, and take steps to mitigate it.

***Andy Norman** is the award-winning author of *Mental Immunity: Infectious Ideas, Mind-Parasites, and the Search for a Better Way to Think*. His work has appeared in *Scientific American*, *Psychology Today*, *Psychiatric Times*, *Skeptic*, *Free Inquiry* and *The Humanist*.

India's G20 Presidency Is the Dawn of New Multilateralism

Narendra Modi
November 30, 2023

Today marks 365 days since India became president of the G20. Over a historic year, India revitalized multilateralism, amplified the voice of the Global South, championed development,

and fought for the empowerment of women, everywhere.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi pens an op-ed exactly a year after India assumed the presidency of the G20 for the first time and highlights the country's achievements.

Today marks 365 days since India assumed the presidency of the G20. It is a moment to reflect, recommit, and rejuvenate the spirit of “Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam — One Earth, One Family, One Future.”

As we undertook this responsibility last year, the global landscape grappled with multifaceted challenges: recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, looming climate threats, financial instability, and debt distress in developing nations, all amid declining multilateralism. In the midst of conflicts and competition, development cooperation suffered, impeding progress.

When India assumed the presidency of the G20, it sought to offer the world an alternative to the status quo. We pushed for and achieved a paradigm shift from a GDP-centric to a human-centric progress. India reminded the world of what unites us, rather than what divides us. India changed the global conversation, which had to evolve. Under Indian leadership, the interests of the few gave way to the aspirations of the many. This required a fundamental reform of multilateralism as we knew it.

Indeed, four words — inclusive, ambitious, action-oriented, and decisive — these four words defined India's approach as G20 president. In fact, the New Delhi Leaders' Declaration (NDLD) was unanimously adopted by all G20 members and is testimony to our commitment to deliver on these principles.

A true multilateralism

Note that Inclusivity has been at the heart of our presidency. For this reason, we championed permanent membership of the G20 for the African Union (AU). The inclusion of the AU into the G20 has integrated 55 African nations into the forum. Now, the G20 has expanded to encompass 80% of the global population.

India's more inclusive stance towards the AU and the Global South has fostered a more comprehensive dialogue on global challenges and opportunities. The first-of-its-kind 'Voice of the Global South Summit,' convened by India in two editions, heralded a new dawn of multilateralism. India has brought the Global South's concerns into mainstream international discourse. Our country has also ushered in an era in which developing countries have taken their rightful place in shaping the global narrative.

Inclusivity also infused India's domestic approach to G20, making it a people's presidency that befits that world's largest democracy. Through "Jan Bhagidari" (people's participation) events, India's G20 activities reached 1.4 billion citizens. India's national government partnered with all 28 of India's states and all eight of its union territories to boost people's participation.

A clear developmental agenda

On substantive elements, India focused the international attention on broader developmental aims. As part of the 2030 Agenda, India delivered the G20 2023 Action Plan to Accelerate Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This plan adopted an integrative, proactive strategy along with a cross-cutting, action-oriented approach to interconnected issues involving SDGs, including health, education, gender equality and environmental sustainability.

A key area driving this progress in SDGs is robust Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI). On the DPI front, India's recommendations were decisive. Even in the West, people are now realizing the revolutionary impact of digital innovations such as Aadhaar, UPI, and Digilocker on the Indian economy and daily life. Through G20, India successfully completed the Digital Public Infrastructure Repository, making a significant stride in global technological collaboration. This repository, featuring over 50 DPIs from 16 countries, will help the Global South build, adopt, and scale DPI to unlock the power of inclusive growth.

For our One Earth goal, we introduced ambitious and inclusive aims to create urgent, lasting, and equitable change. The NDLD's Green Development Pact addresses the challenges of choosing between combating hunger and protecting the planet. This pact outlines a comprehensive roadmap in which employment and ecosystems are complementary, consumption aligns with climate consciousness, and production is planet-friendly.

Simultaneously, the G20 NDLD calls for an ambitious tripling of global renewable energy capacity by 2030. Coupled with the establishment of the Global Biofuels Alliance and a concerted push for Green Hydrogen, the India-led G20 has demonstrated bold ambitions to build a cleaner, greener world. Sustainability and conserving the environment have always been central to India's ethos. In this G20 Summit, India pioneered Lifestyles for Sustainable Development (LiFE). This new LiFE initiative could greatly benefit the world through India's age-old sustainable traditions.

The question of climate, gender and equity

The NDLD also addressed the burning issue of our times: climate change. India highlighted the need

for climate justice and equity, urging substantial financial and technological support for the Global South from the Global North. For the first time, the Global North recognized the need for a quantum leap in the magnitude of development financing. Under India's leadership, this figure moved upward from billions to trillions of dollars. In fact, the G20 acknowledged that developing countries require \$5.9 trillion to fulfill their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) by 2030.

Since countries need monumental financial resources for their NDCs, the G20 emphasized the importance of better, larger, and more effective multilateral development banks (MDBs). Key MDBs include the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, Asian Development Bank, the African Development Bank, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. In addition to improving MDBs, India is taking a leading role in reforming the United Nations. In particular, India is working to restructure principal organs of the United Nations such as the Security Council to create a more equitable global order.

Concerning equity, the NDLD put gender equality center stage. India has pioneered the formation of a dedicated working group on the empowerment of women, which will commence work next year. India's Women's Reservation Bill 2023 reserves one-third of the seats in the national parliament and state legislative assemblies for women, epitomizing India's commitment to women-led development that could serve as a model for the rest of the world.

The NDLD embodies a renewed spirit of collaboration across key global priorities, focusing on policy coherence, reliable trade, and ambitious climate action. It is a matter of great national pride that the G20 achieved 87 outcomes and adopted 118 documents during India's presidency. Note that this is a marked increase from the past. Under India's leadership, the G20 certainly got a lot done.

India also led deliberations on geopolitical issues and their impact on economic growth and development. One such issue is terrorism, which kills innocents and causes severe economic damage. It is clear that the senseless killing of civilians is unacceptable, and we must address it with a policy of zero-tolerance. The world must prize humanitarianism over hostility and ensure that our era does not turn into one of terrorism, violence or war.

In conclusion, I am delighted that India achieved something extraordinary during its presidency. We revitalized multilateralism, amplified the voice of the Global South, championed development, and fought for the empowerment of women, everywhere.

As India hands over the presidency of the G20 to Brazil, we do so with the conviction that our nation's collective steps for people, planet, peace, and prosperity, will resonate with the world for years to come.

***Narendra Modi** has been serving as India's 14th prime minister since May 2014. He is the leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and has been a prominent figure in Indian politics for decades. Before serving as prime minister, Modi served as the chief minister of the Indian state of Gujarat from 2001 to 2014. This world leader is known for his charismatic leadership, work ethic and efforts to modernize India

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