

Fair Observer

Monthly



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Fair Observer^o

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CONTENTS

About Fair Observer	6
Share Your Perspective	7
Addressing Climate Change Impacts on the Sporting Calendar Damilola S. Olawuyi	8
Unnatural Disasters: India’s Environmental Mismanagement Tarun Shridhar	10
Can Football Find a Way Out of a Moral Maze? Ellis Cashmore	13
A 21st-Century Marshall Plan for Cyber Defense Steve Westly	15
Eric Zemmour’s Plan to Save France from Extinction Hans-Georg Betz	17
Germany Lacks Political Courage to Welcome More Afghan Refugees Kiran Bowry	19
Can the Taliban Govern Responsibly? Gary Grappo	23
Lebanon’s Future as an Inclusive Democracy in Doubt Jean AbiNader	25
Will Joe Manchin Remain a Democrat? Christopher Schell	26
Taliban Takeover Will Further Radicalize Pakistan and Increase Nuclear Threat Rakesh Kaul	29

ABOUT FAIR OBSERVER

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Addressing Climate Change Impacts on the Sporting Calendar

Damilola S. Olawuyi
October 2, 2021

Addressing the impacts of climate change on the scheduling and planning of major sporting events is no longer an option but a necessity.

On the final day of the recently concluded Olympic Games in Tokyo, World Athletics President Sebastian Coe warned that climate change will adversely impact the regular schedule and timing of major sporting events. This warning came amid increasing concerns that extreme weather conditions and harsh temperatures induced by climate change may already be altering sporting calendars.

A case in point: For the first time in history, the 2019 IAAF World Athletics Championships held in Qatar was scheduled for late September to avoid the hot summer climate. Another major departure was to hold tournaments mainly in the late afternoon and evening, rather than following the traditional morning schedule of previous championships.

Similarly, the next FIFA World Cup is scheduled to commence in Qatar in November 2022 to avoid extreme heat during the traditional summer schedule of the tournament. Even at the Tokyo Games, the Olympic women's football gold-medal match between Canada and Sweden was switched from a morning start time to the evening to avoid the heat and its associated health impacts. Unsurprisingly, the International Olympic Committee has confirmed its plans to take into account "flexibility and adaptation to the consequences of climate change" in planning future events.

No Longer an Option

Addressing the impacts of climate change on the scheduling and planning of major sporting events

is no longer an option but a necessity. Apart from climate-induced fatal heatwaves that may force changes to the schedule and timing of events, climate change could have wide-ranging effects on sporting infrastructure.

This includes the potential failure of facilities due to extreme weather, reduced lifespan of buildings, increased operational and maintenance expenditure of playing surfaces and tracks due to extreme temperatures, and the cancellation or abandonment of sporting games due to off-season rainfall, storms or heatwaves. Additionally, climate change could exacerbate injuries to players and athletes due to heat exhaustion.

From a risk mitigation perspective, addressing the impacts of climate change on major sporting events will have to go beyond moving the schedule to cooler months or hours. For example, while having events at midnight may be a good way of avoiding the extreme heat, such timing could negatively affect the level of fan attendance and active participation, which may detract from the overall recreational, educational, social and economic benefits of sporting events. Similarly, delaying tournaments until cooler or warmer months may not always be a solution, especially for sporting events such as skiing, beach soccer or volleyball.

Making Changes

So, how can countries and key stakeholders in sports cope with the cascading challenges of climate change for the sporting calendar?

Holistic risk mitigation strategies are required to effectively balance the social, environmental and economic aspects of planning major sporting events in a climate-constrained world. Addressing the health impacts alone, without addressing the social and economic impacts, could lower the overall sustainable development contributions of major sporting events, especially with respect to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 1 on zero poverty, SDG 3 on good health and well-being, and SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth, among others. Further, holistic and high-leverage interventions can accentuate

the role of sports as an enabler of sustainable development.

Enhancing the adaptive capacity of existing and emerging sporting infrastructure to the risks posed by climate change will require a strategic commitment by sporting stakeholders to integrate climate objectives in the design, approval, finance and implementation of sport infrastructure projects.

For example, Article 7 (5) of the 2015 Paris Agreement specifically encourages countries to integrate climate adaptation into relevant socioeconomic and environmental policies and actions, which include redesigning infrastructure and buildings to enhance their resilience and adaptive capacity. The United Nations Sports for Climate Action Initiative also emphasizes the need for sporting stakeholders to systematically integrate climate mitigation and adaptation strategies into planning processes.

A climate-smart approach to the planning and organization of major sporting events will place climate resilience objectives squarely at the heart of sporting decisions, including venue selection, infrastructure planning, kit design, marketing, branding and awareness creation among others.

A starting point is for international sporting bodies to overhaul bidding requirements for major sporting events to include significant consideration of the level of available climate-smart infrastructure in host countries. Adopting holistic screening processes that integrate climate considerations, as part of sporting risk management frameworks, can help sporting bodies, host countries, suppliers and other relevant stakeholders to upgrade infrastructure design, operation and maintenance practices to prioritize climate resilience.

For example, the question will not only be whether a country has sporting venues, but how many of such venues are climate-smart in terms of the ability to withstand extreme weather events and advance global net-zero targets. At the same time, the extent to which associated infrastructure such as aviation and transportation, as well as

digital infrastructure are climate-smart will be a key consideration.

By paying greater attention to climate due diligence, sporting events can serve as enablers of climate change mitigation and adaptation in host countries, which would in the long-term reduce the frequency of future disruptions to the traditional calendars and schedules of major sporting events.

Educational Institutions

Higher education institutions have crucial roles to play in developing innovative programs to train and equip sporting stakeholders with advanced skills needed to integrate climate resilience into their entire operations and value chain.

In Qatar, the College of Law at Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU) is already spearheading innovation in this area. Its Juris Doctor (JD) program, LLM in International Economic and Business Law, LLM in International Law and Foreign Affairs, Doctor of Juridical Science (SJD), as well as the online course “Navigating Legal and Commercial Aspects of Sports,” offered by HBKU through edX, provides students with exceptional opportunities to acquire comparative skills and knowledge on the key legal, commercial and sustainability aspects of major sporting events.

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Unnatural Disasters: India's Environmental Mismanagement

Tarun Shridhar
October 7, 2021

Disasters in India regularly cause loss of lives and property because of man-made reasons, which can be addressed with some cheap, easy and effective measures.

“If we don't learn from the tragedies of the past, we are cursed to repeat them in the future,” proclaims the home page of the website of the Himachal Pradesh State Disaster Management Authority.

To ensure that the irony is not lost on either the creator or the visitor of the website, just above the quote is a ticker flashing a sequence of major disasters that have afflicted the state, from the 1905 earthquake in the Kangra region to the cloudbursts of recent years. This information includes the morbid details of the number of lives lost, property damage and economic costs, displaying an undeniable, if unintended, pattern of loss and neglect.

Himachal Pradesh is credited with having one of the best State Disaster Management Plans in the country. In fact, a few years ago, the government of India had advised other states to emulate Himachal Pradesh. Relief operations too are carried out with a fair degree of alacrity and responsiveness. Yet Himachal Pradesh falls well short of international best standards.

A well-drafted plan document and post-event response cannot absolve the state of its complicity in the deaths of citizens and the loss of valuable public and private property. Where has the state gone wrong in its approach to managing disasters that now recur too frequently?

Nature Takes Its Toll

Perched on the Himalayas, the youngest and the most fragile mountain system in the world,

Himachal Pradesh is predisposed to hazards and calamities. While it is blessed with an abundance of rich natural resources, Himachal Pradesh is one of the most disaster-prone states in the country. Nature — in the form of earthquakes, cloudbursts, flash floods and landslides — takes its toll here.

In July, 14 people died and four went missing after flash floods ripped through the state. The same month, a boulder rolled downhill, killing nine, while another collapsed a bridge. In August, at least 11 died and up to 30 people were reported missing following a landslide that buried passing vehicles. In winter, avalanches are a regular occurrence, causing death and destruction.

Himachal Pradesh is also vulnerable to earthquakes. Since January 2019, at least 14 earthquakes have been recorded, the latest one just yesterday. None of them have killed anyone or caused significant damage, but the state has experienced some of the most disastrous earthquakes in history. The Kangra earthquake of 1905 killed 20,000 people. Other major quakes have followed, and scientists estimate that Himachal Pradesh could be hit with an earthquake of high magnitude equal to or greater than 8.0 on the Richter scale.

In July, the state government estimated that 187 people had died and four had gone missing because of natural disasters and accidents in the brief period beginning June 13 and ending July 27. These events killed 381 animals and caused damages of a staggering 4 billion rupees (\$54 million). The floods and landslides that followed have increased these numbers significantly.

Unnatural Disasters

It is clear that natural disasters have caused Himachal Pradesh much grief and destruction. Experts are increasingly pointing out that human activity has worsened these extreme events. I take the view that anthropogenic activities are a greater danger to lives, property and certainly the environment than natural disasters.

Therefore, as a first step, we should stop using the phrase “natural disaster,” which absolves

humans of any responsibility. These days, most disasters tend to be man-made. In 2010, a 7.0 magnitude earthquake devastated Port-Au-Prince, Haiti's capital, killing approximately 250,000 people and rendering more than 1 million homeless.

That year, an earthquake of identical magnitude hit New Zealand but resulted in no casualties and caused negligible loss to property. Between the years 2011 and 2012, five major earthquakes, all with a magnitude greater than 7.0, rattled Japan. Yet the country suffered only 13 casualties. The reason for the different death rates in Haiti, New Zealand and Japan is man-made structures.

Earthquakes don't kill people — badly designed buildings most certainly do. In poor countries, building codes are often rudimentary or not followed through. Building materials are of inferior quality and the work itself shoddy. Governments often push for more construction in the name of development for populist reasons, disregarding environmental factors. Such poor practices lead to disaster in case of events like earthquakes and floods.

Cheap and Easy

Few know that the interventions required for disaster prevention are absurdly simple. Planting trees on slopes, especially soil binding species, is the most effective method to stem soil erosion and prevent landslides. Yet for some inexplicable reason disaster management authorities in India prefer building retaining walls to contain soil erosion.

Another intervention that has proven effective is to avoid cutting off the toe of a mountain slope while constructing buildings or roads. Yet toes of slopes are regularly cut to construct highways all across the country, and Himachal Pradesh is no exception. By cutting off the toes of slopes, Indian road makers are creating artificial vertical elevations with steeper slopes leading to landslides.

On slopes, good, clean and unclogged roadside drains assume great importance. Sadly,

roadside drainage systems in India leave a lot to be desired. In the Himalayas, drains are frequently clogged with rubble and, even more worryingly, plastic.

In a 2020 article, Satya Prakash Negi, a senior officer in the Indian Forest Service, pointed out how plastics threaten the Himalayan environment. They now litter hills, mountains and rivers. Plastic absorbs heat, blocks natural water channels and causes floods as well as landslides that damage roads and property, leading to avoidable deaths.

But perhaps the biggest threat in mountain areas is unregulated, reckless and often illegal mining in riverbeds. Mountain roads invariably have numerous bridges that span riverbeds. Dangerous mining often goes on right under our noses or, more accurately, under our bridges.

Such mining leads to disaster during natural calamities. Often, the very businesses that were profiting from dangerous mining make a killing from post-disaster construction contracts, making a mockery of law and justice.

Vested Indifference

The prevalence of natural disasters begs a simple question: Why have India's policymakers failed to implement zero-cost interventions and precautions to save lives and property? Is it because of apathy, or are there vested interests at play?

These questions are best answered by examining one particular disaster. In 2017, a whole mountain snapped and buried alive 50 people in Kotrupi village on the Mandi-Pathankot highway in Himachal Pradesh. Parts of the highway were washed away, smaller landslides followed; the area suffered flooding as well. Yet the very next day a group of college students insisted on walking through the disaster site instead of taking a route that would have added 30 minutes to their journey.

The next day, I saw groups of people posing for photographs in the middle of the river with no concern for safety. That vignette stamped indelibly in my memory captures the indifference

to disasters among the Indian public. This indifference is at the root of the country's poor disaster management policies.

There are two other anecdotes that capture this very peculiar Indian indifference. A few years ago, I was at the World Bank for a meeting. A fire alarm sounded, and the entire building was evacuated. Thousands of people came out and assembled in designated spaces outside. This was merely a fire drill, but everyone took it seriously.

We planned a similar drill in the state government headquarters in Shimla, the capital of Himachal Pradesh. The first date had to be postponed because of a ministerial visit. The second one went ahead but senior officials refused to leave the building. They prioritized their files over the exercise. If those in commanding government roles do not take safety seriously, what message does it send to other government servants and the public?

Vested interests also play a role in exacerbating disasters. Those who get construction contracts often grease the palms of those who give them out. Those who are winning contracts to build retaining walls argue against tree plantations. Those practicing engaging in dangerous mining activities persist because it brings them revenues and profits. Private benefit trumps public interest and eventually results in tragedy when disaster strikes.

Populism

Apart from apathy and vested interests, another factor is at play: populism. Encroachment on public lands to build private homes is a problem common to developing countries from Brazil and Kenya to Bangladesh and Indonesia. India is no exception. Politicians seeking votes often promise the "regularization" of such encroachment. Needless to say, the private homes that are often little more than shanties are rarely safe. They are built on lands that were supposed to have no buildings and do not follow safety regulations.

As a government official, I came across an incident where people had built homes over

public drains. Construction over public utilities, especially drains, was prohibited under the law, yet people had flouted it merrily. When talk of imposing the law arose, protests broke out.

The fact that stormwater would wash away homes, sometimes in their entirety, if the drains were blocked did not wash with the protesters. Some politicians took the side of the protesters and put pressure on officials to turn Nelson's eye to the breach of planning regulations.

This situation is repeated again and again all across the country. Indian authorities are wary of imposing any planning regulations in urban areas. For rural areas, they rarely bother to even draft such regulations. The political class supports "regularizing" unauthorized constructions because it is a vote winner. Those whose homes are retrospectively legalized tend to vote for politicians who pushed the measure through. Everything goes swimmingly until disaster strikes, buildings collapse and people die.

What India needs is not only a disaster management plan like Himachal Pradesh's but also a cool examination of the causes of such disasters. Public apathy must end. We must confront vested interests and put public benefit over private profit, and politicians must look at longer-term horizons instead of a few votes in the next election. For a start, India must move away from pouring ever more concrete on its slopes to planting more trees that save the soil and allow us to bask in the cool shadows of our hills.

***Tarun Shridhar** is a former officer of the Indian Administrative Service who has nearly 35 years of experience in public policy, governance and administration.

Can Football Find a Way Out of a Moral Maze?

Ellis Cashmore
October 11, 2021

As the world's most popular sport, does football have the duty to lead by example when it comes to ethics?

Are we freighting football with too much responsibility? After all, the game we recognize today started as a frivolous competition for English factory workers to let off steam at the end of a miserable, emotionally unrewarding and ungratifying work week in the 19th century. Yet this futile ball game in which 11 grown men try to direct an inflated ball in one direction while another 11 try to stop them, has, over the course of the 20th century, acquired planetary acclaim.

There's not a country on earth where citizens will not know the name of at least three football teams, wear club regalia and watch, play and bet on football. Around 3.5 billion people viewed some part of the 2018 World Cup, with 1.12 billion watching at least one minute, according to FIFA, the sport's global governing organization.

With over 3.5 billion fans, football's faithful following is comparable to that of a major religion, like Christianity (2.38 billion) or Islam (1.9 billion). But, unlike religions, football, like other sports, isn't expected to make pronouncements on torture, gay rights, labor exploitation, freedom of expression or any of the other moral issues of the day. The trouble is, it does.

Global Society of Inclusion

Football's moral philosophy seems clear. FIFA expressed its two key directives in its policy document, "Making Football Truly Global: The Vision 2020-2023" as "Fight against Racism and all other forms of discrimination" and "Protect

human rights." To demonstrate its sincerity, in June 2020, England's Premier League approved football players taking the knee before games to showcase a committed opposition to racism in the aftermath of the killing of George Floyd by police in the US.

Other major sports organizations, including the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the National Football League (NFL) in the US, steadfastly refused to allow the gesture, recognizing it would compromise the traditional stance on political and partisan actions. Football was one of the first to adopt a "commonsense approach" to the controversial ritual and remains an enthusiastic supporter despite objections, some from black players. Other sports have grudgingly accepted kneeling, largely as a result of pressure from players. The NFL finally changed its position last year and the IOC prior to the Tokyo Olympics.

Football continued without compunction. "We remain resolutely committed to our singular objective of eradicating racial prejudice wherever it exists, to bring about a global society of inclusion, respect and equal opportunities for all," a statement affirmed in August. "The Premier League will continue to work with our clubs, players and football partners to bring about tangible change to remove inequality from our game." Yet two recent developments suggest that practical considerations complicate principles.

Eighteen months ago, an attempted takeover of Newcastle United by a consortium collapsed after the Premier League decided that, had the deal been allowed to proceed, Saudi Arabia would have effectively become the club's owner. The Gulf state would be subject to the league's owners' and directors' test. Failure to pass the test means potential buyers can be stopped if they've committed an act in a foreign jurisdiction that would be considered a criminal offense in the UK — even if the act is not illegal in their home territory.

The original potential buyers pulled out, the popular assumption at the time being the killing of Washington Post journalist Jamal Khashoggi

at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in 2018. It was widely reported that Saudi agents were responsible for the murder.

However, it appeared that the real stumbling block was Saudi Arabia's apparent involvement in a television network that streamed Premier League games. Qatar-based broadcaster beIN Sports had spent billions to acquire territorial rights for the games, but Saudis "permanently cancelled" its license and suspended its channels in 2017. Reduced to basics, the deal stalled because of money. So, when the dispute between Qatar and Saudi was settled earlier this year, the deal was revived.

Sportswashing

The completed sale of Newcastle United Football Club to the Saudi Public Investment Fund, which lists as its chair Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who is widely thought responsible for ordering Khashoggi's murder, has horrified and disgusted critics. Amnesty International has stated that Saudi authorities are "sportswashing their appalling human rights record with the glamour of top-flight football." Sportswashing is an attempt by odious political regimes to clean up their international image by associating themselves with prestigious sporting events or competitions.

Amnesty claims that Saudi Arabia regularly violates human rights in various ways, including using torture as punishment, banning freedom of speech and expression, and subjugating women. The Saudi government denies claims of rights abuses and claims its apparent excesses are designed with national security in mind. Presumably, the Premier League — and perhaps football generally — accepts this.

Saudi Arabia's Gulf neighbors, all of which have questionable human rights records, have already acquired top-tier football clubs: Qatar Sports Investments owns Paris Saint-Germain; Sheikh Mansour, an Abu Dhabi royal, owns Manchester City. Qatar is scheduled to host next year's FIFA World Cup.

The timing of the takeover is hardly propitious. In Saudi Arabia, women have essentially the same legal status as children, having to rely on husbands or male relatives to make nearly all decisions in their lives. Much of the workspaces in the territory are gender-segregated. In 2019, Saudi was rated the fourth most dangerous place in the world for gay travelers by Forbes magazine, which reported that the country "implements the death penalty for consensual homosexuality under their interpretation of Sharia law."

Football ostensibly lauds freedom, equality and open-mindedness while indulging insular regimes that encourage practices it officially denounces. In the 1970s, Commonwealth countries prohibited sporting contacts with South Africa, then operating a constitutional racial segregation policy known as apartheid. The Gleneagles Agreement, as it was called, effectively closed down South African sport. Non-Commonwealth nations showed solidarity by supporting the ban, which was relaxed only at the end of apartheid in 1990. No one has dared suggest a comparable ban on the Gulf states.

Freedom or Dereliction of Duty?

But this isn't the only dilemma football has faced in recent weeks. West Bromwich Albion player Callum Robinson is among an unknown but probably sizeable number of professional football players who are opting not to get vaccinated against COVID-19. Robinson is worthy of attention because he's contracted COVID twice, survived (obviously) and presumably decided the dangers of the virus are less significant than the potential side effects of the vaccine.

He isn't, as far as we know, a QAnon affiliate, doesn't subscribe to any known conspiracy theory and has not aligned himself with anti-vaccination campaigners. He enjoys the support of some teammates and not others. He is 26 and is probably expecting to play competitively for another 10 years, maybe more, if he avoids injury. His decision has drawn the ire of Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp, who says that

footballers “are role models in society.” Currently, 16 to 29-year-olds are the most vaccine-hesitant demographic in the UK and elsewhere; Klopp is 54.

We can only use educated guesswork to divine the reasons so many professional athletes choose not to vaccinate. Their bodies are, in a sense, the tools of their trade and they have presumably made a cost-benefit calculation, recognizing that, given the brevity of the development and trialing of the vaccine compared to other pharmaceuticals, the medium-to-long-term side effects are unknown and, without the benefit of a time machine, unknowable at present.

In the US, the National Basketball Association (NBA), when confronted with a similarly reluctant percentage of players, compelled them to get vaccinated or face suspension without pay. The order worked: 95% of NBA players are now vaccinated. Football’s governing organizations have eschewed this approach. FIFA instead issued a statement saying that “We encourage Covid-19 vaccinations.”

Depending on your perspective, this is either an admirable defense of freedom of choice or dereliction of duty. Those who believe the latter are maddened by football’s indecision, if that’s what it is. They consider public health a priority over personal freedom.

If FIFA had blocked the Newcastle takeover, people would probably accuse football of favoritism, pointing to the Manchester and Paris ownerships. If it followed the NBA mandate, people would accuse it of restricting freedom of choice. But football’s own piety invites these criticisms. Other sports see no need to make their moral philosophy so public, at least not as ostentatiously or in such a self-congratulatory manner. Why does football?

No sport has struggled so painfully and for so long with racism, nor has any sport witnessed spectator violence on a comparable scale or duration. Bribery and corruption were once commonplace in boxing, but a 2015 expose revealed football’s epic history of venality and

led to the removal of FIFA president Joseph “Sepp” Blatter.

Child abuse was once thought to exist only in gymnastics, but a recent investigation found that it has been in football since at least the 1970s. Australia’s female players have recently complained of a “culture of sexual harassment.”

No other sport in history has been as popular as football or, alas, manifested so many pernicious, multiform wrongdoings. Football constantly struggles to map its way out of a maze of malevolence. Its visible attempt to occupy the moral high ground is perhaps football’s attempt to place itself above suspicion, making its morality clear to everyone. It’s a bold move, but one with serious drawbacks. It puts football’s hypocrisy in plain sight.

***Ellis Cashmore** is a co-editor of “Studying Football.”

A 21st-Century Marshall Plan for Cyber Defense

Steve Westly
October 12, 2021

The US needs a government that is technologically capable enough to protect its people and smart enough to get the money to those who need it most.

The Republican Party is facing an existential crisis. Will their traditional base of small-government, low-tax party members endure, especially as they come under increasing attacks from, anti-immigrant, anti-science MAGA fundamentalists?

Democrats face challenges of their own trying to figure out how to weave together moderate Biden Democrats with a new generation of democratic socialists. One way to become “the

party of the future” is to articulate a clear plan for solving the problems of the future. Here is one clear opportunity.

Both the Trump and the Biden administrations approved multibillion-dollar pandemic stimulus programs. Despite the gravity of the COVID-19 economic crisis, half of the government stimulus did not get to the working Americans who desperately needed help. Much was stolen by fraudsters and criminal rings who exploited online claims. Made worse, 70% of the stolen funds went abroad to Russia, China and Nigeria.

California State Auditor Elaine Howle warned as much last August and announced in a January report that the Employment Development Department (EDD) had sent 555,000 claims to 26,000 suspect addresses — an average of 21 per address — despite the evidence of fraudulent activity. One address had more than 80 claims, and yet EDD’s automated tool missed 12 as late as in December 2020. Howle also noted that a disturbing number of claims went to people currently incarcerated in California prisons.

This begs the question: How long will taxpayers support government programs only to learn that the money ended up in the hands of criminals? This is how we stop it.

Every FBI or Drug Enforcement Administration office has a special agent in charge (SAC) to coordinate efforts in combatting criminal threats. We need state-based SACs for cybersecurity to assist state and local governments, prevent fraud and direct funding for state task forces as we already do for counterterrorism.

Under the authority of the secretary of homeland security, chief security officers in each state would provide a full conduit of information to all levels of government to intercept criminals. Besides preventing fraud, they could play a valuable role in helping local governments encrypt both voter rolls and votes as well as protect against ransomware attacks.

Governments in general also need more cyber experts. Cyber gangs have upped the ante, going

so far as to examine companies’ cyber insurance policies before activating ransomware as experts believe was done in the most recent Kaseya hack. We need to raise the bar to intercept these bad actors before they reach private citizens or entities. A Marshall Plan for cyber hiring across all government would put us on stronger footing to combat increasingly aggressive behavior by state-supported crime syndicates.

Lastly, we need to measure how we are doing. We need to require that states publicly account for the share of unemployment benefits that get into the right hands. Obviously, not every malicious individual can be caught. By spotlighting our efficacy, we can highlight the problem, heighten demand and recruit more people with the tech backgrounds we need to tackle fraud.

As a lifelong Democrat, I believe in the power of a strong government that provides a social safety net to protect its citizens. The answer is not less government or pretending there will not be more tech-based attacks on our citizens and businesses. The answer is for government to demonstrate it can proactively provide solutions to stop the problem and provide accountability.

We need a government that is technologically capable enough to protect our people and smart enough to get the money to those who need it most. Whichever party shows it understands the future by solving new problems like cybersecurity will be in the pole position to win in 2022 and beyond.

***Steve Westly** is the founder of The Westly Group, a large sustainability venture capital firm. He previously served as the controller and chief fiscal officer of the State of California from 2003 to 2007.

Eric Zemmour's Plan to Save France from Extinction

Hans-Georg Betz
October 12, 2021

Zemmour believes that no political party is currently capable of “expressing the just wrath and anxiety of the French people.”

Until recently, France appeared to be on the way out, the Australian-American betrayal on the submarine deal the coup de grace, the ultimate humiliation for what once was known as the grande nation. Grand no longer, a nation at risk, collective psyche in the dumpster: autumn in France. Things could hardly get any worse.

As it turns out, they can. Last week, a new survey came out that had Eric Zemmour surpassing Marine Le Pen in next year's presidential election. As things stand now, Zemmour, not Le Pen, would advance to the second and decisive round of the election, facing the incumbent, Emmanuel Macron.

Machine à Polémiques

The results sent shockwaves across the French political landscape and put Zemmour onto the front pages of the country's major news outlets. Zemmour ante portas, quelle horreur! The whole thing is quite remarkable. After all, as of yet, Zemmour has not declared his candidacy for the election. But it appears to be a foregone conclusion. The media certainly act as if it were, and Zemmour would be a fool to contradict them. Fool he is not — quite the contrary.

The whole thing is even more remarkable, and not devoid of irony, given the fact that Eric Zemmour happens to be Jewish (and practicing, at least until his father passed away in 2013) and originates from a French-Algerian family that left Algeria during the country's struggle for independence. Zemmour himself defines his

ethnic background as Berber. A curious case, indeed. A Jew, a “métèque” (a pejorative term for alien residents) — the nightmare of every traditional extreme-right French nationalist, as the left-leaning magazine *Marianne* recently pointed out.

Eric Zemmour is France's response to Donald Trump, if not his French avatar. Like Trump, he has no filters, but unlike Trump, he is highly intelligent, erudite, refined, articulate and sharp-witted. A prolific author of editorials, commentary and bestselling books, a prominent TV personality and celebrity, Zemmour figures among France's most notorious provocateurs, a “machine à polémiques,” as *Politico* recently called him, who riles, aggravates, irritates and polarizes.

For years now, Zemmour has been content to play the role of the public intellectual on the right, a modern-day male Cassandra, indefatigably lamenting the seemingly inexorable decline of France and fustigating the whole of the French political establishment for failing to halt and reverse it. The title of his bestseller from 2014, “*Le suicide français*,” said it all. It was an analysis of how France's elites — political, economic, administrative and particularly intellectual, the “heirs of May '68” — have systematically “undone France.”

The result is a line of argumentation reminiscent of the Kulturpessimismus that pervaded late 19th and early 20th-century Germany, most notably Oswald Spengler's “*Decline of the West*.” In the past, Zemmour noted, France had “imposed” its ideas, its vision of the world, “even its caprices” on “a universe carried away by all these wonders.” Today, by contrast, France was “forced to swallow values and mores that are the total opposite to what it had built up for centuries.”

At the same time, he charged, the French political and economic elite had to a large extent renounced and abandoned the country's sovereignty and national independence in the name of the European project and of globalization, all under the approving eyes of the

media that enthusiastically praised “this great renouncement.”

At first sight, it might appear that this is nothing more than the typical Euroskepticism so dear to the contemporary radical right. In reality, Zemmour’s diagnosis of the spiritual situation of the current age goes a bit deeper. It is informed by a strong sense — *Kulturpessimismus oblige* — that not just the French, but Western civilization in general has run its course, fallen victim to fatigue and exhaustion.

Dechristianization and widespread suspicion with respect to the notion of progress have hollowed out the foundations on which it has rested. In the process, it has lost its spiritual shield and made itself vulnerable to the influx of alien ideas and values.

Great Obsession

Like so many other right-wing populists in Europe these days, Zemmour is obsessed with Islam, and for more than a single reason. For one, there is the acknowledgment that Muslims have retained what the West has largely abandoned — a sense of spirituality and anti-materialism, an ethical and moral compass and, above all, a sense of honor.

At the same time, Zemmour regurgitates ad nauseam all the familiar anti-Islamic tropes that have made the political fortunes of radical right-wing entrepreneurs in recent memory, from the late Pim Fortuyn to Geert Wilders in the Netherlands, from Pia Kjaersgard in Denmark to Paulin Hanson in Australia. These tropes posit that Islam is not only a religion, but also a political ideology, and as such totalitarian; that the basic principles of Western culture and civilization, such as democracy, freedom of religion and opinion, the equality of men and women, or the separation of church and state, are fundamentally at odds with Islam; and that Islam is all about submission and therefore incompatible with liberal democracy.

Zemmour’s other great obsession is closely tied in with his anti-Islamic position — the specter of the “grand replacement.” This is a

conspiracy theory that has been around for quite some time. It gained new traction with Renaud Camus’ eponymous book from 2011 (now in its third edition). But it has been Zemmour who has popularized it in France, with great success.

In 2018, one out of four respondents in a representative survey subscribed to the “theory” of the great replacement. The idea here is, in a nutshell, that the combination of mass immigration and high birth rates of non-Europeans is going to overwhelm the “original” European population and replace it as well as its culture, values and traditions, and all this with the full knowledge, complicity and support of Europe’s cosmopolitan elites who have nothing but contempt for national identity and their own culture.

Reluctant Savior

A few weeks ago, Zemmour’s new book came out. The title is meant as a warning, “La France n’a pas dit son dernier mot” — “France Hasn’t Yet Said Its Last Word.” As expected, it is a bestseller — in first and second place on amazon.fr at the time of writing — and, as expected, it is largely seen as a manifesto designed to launch his campaign. The message is clear. It is not yet too late to act. But act we must, and fast. For we are faced with a situation of life and death: either remain France or disappear.

To win, Zemmour insists, “we have to fight on all fronts.” To keep “the invaders” away from us and “to save our identity and regain our sovereignty.” That’s the only way to put a stop to the “migration waves” that “for decades overwhelm our territory and our people.” Otherwise, France is lost, fallen prey to reverse colonization and the great replacement. For, as Zemmour asserts, “demography is destiny.”

This is where Zemmour comes in, a reluctant savior, who steps in because, as he charges, there is no one, no political party — and that includes Marine Le Pen’s National Rally — capable of “expressing the just wrath and anxiety of the French people.” Zemmour sees himself as the heir to a long tradition of national-populism, and

particularly to one of its most prominent exponents, Maurice Barres, famous for his definition of identity and belonging as “la terre et les morts” — the soil and the dead. At one point in the book, Zemmour characterizes himself as a “Français de la terre et des morts” who passed from Emile Zola to Barres.

On a certain level, this makes sense. After all, Barres was, at the end of the 19th century, among the first to obsess about France being inundated and submerged by migrant workers — first inklings of the great replacement. Ironically enough, Barres also happened to be a notorious anti-Semite, who played a prominent role during the Dreyfus affair, a defining moment in modern French history that left a permanent mark on the republic.

Another prominent notorious heir to this tradition is, of course, Jean-Marie Le Pen. Recently, Le Pen père was asked his opinion on Eric Zemmour. Le Pen’s response was as revealing as it was disconcerting: “The only difference between him and me is that he is Jewish.” *Honi soit qui mal y pense* — evil to him who evil thinks, as the saying goes. One thing is sure, the next months are going to be turbulent in France, and perhaps amusing — as long as you happen not to be French.

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Germany Lacks Political Courage to Welcome More Afghan Refugees

Kiran Bowry
October 13, 2021

By describing the events of 2015 as catastrophic for the country, Germany’s political class has succumbed to the narratives of the far right.

Since the Taliban retook power in Afghanistan in August, debates in Germany have flared up whether the country should grant access to more Afghan refugees. In the run-up to the general election in September, German politicians faced a dilemma. How should they address this contentious issue among an electorate that, according to recent polls, overwhelmingly opposes the admission of refugees?

Most opted for the convenient and electable option of telling voters what they wanted to hear. In doing so, many made use of a new in-vogue and almost bipartisan mantra that Germany must not see a repeat of what happened in 2015, invoking fear of uncontrolled immigration and a split society that supposedly followed Chancellor Angela Merkel’s decision to grant entry to nearly 900,000 refugees six years ago.

But this framing oversimplifies, decontextualizes and exaggerates the events of that year. Most of all, it denies a shared responsibility for Afghanistan’s current predicament and the human stories behind the German-Afghan migration history that spans four decades.

A History of Afghan Migration

According to the UN Refugee Agency, 147,994 Afghan refugees lived in Germany in 2020, trailing only Pakistan and Iran as the largest receiving countries. At the same time, 1,592 live in the US and 9,351 in the UK. Afghan migration

to Germany dates back to the first half of the 20th century, yet until the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, only 2,000 Afghans lived in Germany.

Historically, immigration to Germany varied vastly relative to the conflict phases in Afghanistan. Following the Soviet invasion in 1979, approximately 3,000 Afghans arrived in Germany each year from 1980 to 1982. The second phase of immigration followed from 1985 onward, when predominantly Afghan communists sought refuge in Germany.

The largest movement of Afghan refugees began with the end of Soviet occupation in 1989 and the start of the Afghan Civil War in 1992. Restrictions and expulsions imposed by the riparian states of Iran and Pakistan forced many Afghans to choose Germany as an alternative migration destination.

With the mujahedeen victory and the rise of the Taliban, migration to Germany increased drastically until the mid-1990s before numbers declined steadily. Since 2010, with the resurgence of the Taliban, the number of Afghan refugees heading toward Germany has rebounded continuously. While 9,115 Afghans initially applied for asylum in 2014, this figure almost quadrupled to 127,012 in 2016.

Since then, the number of Afghan refugees dropped significantly, from 16,423 in 2017 to 9,901 in 2020. The causes for this decrease can be found both on the European and national level, in policies enacted in response to the 2015 refugee crisis. In March 2016, as part of the EU-Turkey Declaration, European Union member states provided financial support for Turkey to take back irregular migrants, mostly from Greece. In the same year, the EU concluded the Joint Way Forward agreement with Afghanistan to ease “the return and readmission of irregular Afghan migrants from the EU to Afghanistan.”

On a national level, German information campaigns attempted to dissipate alleged rumors about lavish living conditions in Germany. Other measures, such as restrictions to family reunifications, might have also had an impact.

A New Phase of Immigration

After the fall of the government of Ashraf Ghani, a new phase of Afghan immigration is likely. Its extent will be subject to political will. Initially, Germany responded quickly to the Taliban takeover by adapting its asylum policies by halting deportations to Afghanistan. That represented a significant shift. Before, in a controversial attempt to appease the German population after support had waned for Merkel’s refugee policy, more Afghans were forced back to their home country as some areas were declared safe.

But Germany has been timid in its response to the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. As of now, fewer than 3,000 Afghans have been evacuated to Germany. It seems that six years later, Merkel’s so-called “open door” approach still casts an overwhelming shadow over German politics and is a strong impetus for the tentative approach toward aiding Afghan refugees today.

The issue of migration has become a hot potato that German politicians were keen to avoid during the election campaign. If addressed, candidates were likely to try to outdo each other in using restrictive immigration rhetoric in an attempt not to alienate voters.

During the election campaign, the chairman of the Christian Democrats (CDU) and candidate for the chancellorship, Armin Laschet, tried to capitalize on an immigration-weary German society by reiterating that 2015 “must not be repeated.” While this phrase failed to inspire a successful campaign, as the election results show, it aptly reflects the public mood: According to a poll published in June, 60% of Germans reject accepting more refugees.

This collective backtracking by Germany’s political class casts an unwarranted bad light on the decisions made in 2015. Essentially, it capitulates to the far right — particularly the Alternative for Germany — in its interpretation of that period. According to journalist Anna Thewalt writing in *Der Tagesspiegel*, “with a truncated reference to the year, the events of that

time are decontextualized and exposed to myth-making.”

Margarete Stokowski, a correspondent for *Der Spiegel*, calls out the cynicism and the lack of empathy in the shifting political climate against refugees: “2015 was the year in which civil society accomplished much of what politics could not or did not want to. ... What must not be repeated is politicians treating fleeing people like nuclear waste they don’t know what to do with.”

To the relief of many German and European politicians, a scenario similar to 2015 is unlikely to materialize. Many Afghans already face barriers and restrictions in Pakistan and Iran, stymieing a journey to Europe. According to Professor Vassilis Tsianos, a sociologist at Kiel University of Applied Sciences, 2015 “will not be repeated in Europe. Afghan refugees simply don’t make it to Europe because the borders are sealed. The border regime that was established during the so-called refugee crisis is working. Afghan refugees are a minority on all main routes to Europe.”

Migration as Misfortune

In light of the human tragedy unfolding in Afghanistan, the rhetoric in German politics that dismisses migration as misfortune is not only lacking empathy, but avoids the responsibility for the country’s 21-year military involvement in a failed Afghanistan mission. German armed forces were part of the 2001 multinational International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mandate and initially helped to secure Kabul after the defeat of the Taliban.

From 2003 onward, German soldiers were largely deployed to the northern region of Kunduz to establish a secure environment and improve infrastructure. This mission came under severe criticism due to a military exercise on September 4, 2009, when a German commander ordered the bombing of two tankers, feared to be stolen by Taliban fighters, resulting in 142 casualties, most of them civilians.

Despite increasing public scrutiny and doubts about the purpose of Germany’s involvement, its

armed forces remained in Afghanistan until 2021, participating in Operation Resolute Support to advise and train local armed forces after the ISAF mandate ended in 2014.

Not only does the anti-immigration rhetoric shut its eyes to the military involvement with loss of civilian life, but it also ignores the history of Afghan migration and the human stories behind it. The negative connotation of 2015 demonizes refugees “who came to Germany ... started a new life here under difficult circumstances and are now part of society. What are they supposed to think now when they hear this?” asks Anna Thewalt.

Particularly Afghan women, for whom fleeing to Germany was the path to freedom and self-determination, are struggling to reenact the rising anti-migration sentiment. One of them is Adela Yamini, who had fled from Kabul to Germany in 1994 to escape the mujahedeen. She now lives in the state of Hesse, in the Rhine-Main region near Frankfurt, home to a large proportion of Afghans. During her 27 years in Germany, she has thrived and excelled as a teacher in a vocational school and a local party chairwoman for the Social Democratic Party (SPD).

The recent developments in her homeland filled her with great concern and horror, as escape routes that were open to her many years ago are now closed to Afghan women. “I am overjoyed that as a woman I could flee Afghanistan and study and work in Germany. ... It is terrible just to think that as a woman you have no way out and are locked up forever and ever. ... When I see the pictures and hear from my relatives what they are going through, I am at a loss for words and I can’t find the language to comfort them, to reassure them,” she wrote in an email.

Yamini believes that the German government needs to face up to responsibility in light of its military involvement by supporting Afghan people “who are currently in acute danger to leave the country.” For that, “bureaucratic hurdles must be overcome and people without

passports or visas should be taken out of the country.”

As of now, she sees the current German government as avoiding its duty to those who supported its mission in Afghanistan. According to Yamini, by trying not to “scare off voters,” this responsibility is foisted off to a “future government” due to the events of 2015 which were “not discussed appropriately.”

Since 2001, Germany has taken in more refugees from Afghanistan than many other countries that were capable or had a moral obligation to do so. Instead of building on that legacy, Germany is caving into false doom-and-gloom narratives around the events of 2015 that do not correspond with the realities on the ground today. According to Sabrina Zajak, of the German Institute for Integration and Migration Research (DeZIM), “Germany would be much better prepared today to receive refugees — both at the level of civil society and in terms of improved accommodation capacities as well as integration measures.”

One pretext against further immigration is that Afghans find integration particularly hard. This is not reflected in reality as high employment rates of Afghan refugees in Germany exemplify. That is even more remarkable in light of government measures that had an inhibiting effect on the integration of Afghan refugees. According to Ramona Rischke, also of DeZIM, “German integration policy ... has disadvantaged Afghan refugees for years in their access to integration-promoting measures because as a group they have not had so-called ‘good prospects of staying’ in recent years.”

As soon as the obstacles are lifted, Afghans prove their willingness to integrate into German society. When refugees were allowed to complete shortened apprenticeships in understaffed professions in 2020, it was mostly Afghans who seized the opportunity. Already in 2016, statistics from the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees showed that Afghans in particular, who are often young and low-skilled, are seeking to

complete school education and vocational training.

New Government, Same Inhibition

Following the results of the recent election, the end of the Merkel era is imminent. That era will not only be associated with the courageous decisions of 2015 but also the hasty, scowling renunciation of those policies. There won’t be another policy shift in the foreseeable future, even with the upcoming change of government.

That was indicated by Olaf Scholz, of the SPD, who is likely to take over the chancellorship by forming a coalition with the Green Party and the Liberal Democrats. During an election campaign appearance, he pledged support for Afghan refugees — as long as this takes place as far away from Germany’s front door as possible: “This time we will have to make sure that those who are also seeking protection in neighboring countries are not left alone, as was often the case in the past. Instead, we have to do everything in our power to ensure that there are prospects for integration, that they can stay there, that they can have a secure future there.”

With this statement, Scholz conceded that an affirmative discourse on migration to Germany is a hornet’s nest. For the time being, Germany is preoccupied with its own problems. By describing the events of 2015 as catastrophic for the country, portraying migration as bad fortune and disparaging successful integration, Germany’s political class has succumbed to the narratives of the far right. As a result, this rhetoric has fed and reinforced the public’s negative attitudes toward migration. Meanwhile, the suffering in Afghanistan, particularly among its women, slips from public view.

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Can the Taliban Govern Responsibly?

Gary Grappo
October 18, 2021

Is the Taliban willing to moderate its extremist ideology in order to secure assistance from the US and the rest of the international community?

Following the fall of Kabul in August, the first face-to-face meeting between US officials and the Taliban took place last week. As is typical in such first encounters, both sides came with their respective agendas, including demands and requests of the other side.

The one issue on which both may have agreed is the growing need for humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan. The UN and various international NGOs have alerted the international community to the imminent dangers faced by the Afghan people, especially inadequate health care and food shortages. Many of the 12 million at-risk Afghans are children.

To complicate matters, with only 2.2 million Afghans vaccinated prior to the Taliban takeover, COVID-19 infections are on the rise. Starved of resources, hospitals and clinics lack basic medicines, and staff is forced to work without pay. Then there is the country's fast-approaching, notoriously harsh winter when food and fuel come at a premium.

Aware of the pending crisis, the G20 nations earlier this week at an emergency meeting called for and hosted by Italy agreed to respond, though no specific pledges were made. Attendees, while aware of the need to coordinate any assistance effort with the Taliban, also expressed concerns over the Taliban's commitment to fighting terrorism, specifically mentioning the Islamic State's (IS) Khorasan faction inside Afghanistan, known as ISK.

Where's Our Money?

Part of the humanitarian problem stems from the inability of the Taliban to access Afghanistan's international accounts, frozen by most of the Western governments in whose banks the funds had been deposited. The asset freeze was imposed almost immediately after the Taliban took control. Of the estimated \$9 billion in frozen accounts, \$7-\$8 billion are believed held in US banks, and the Taliban want it. They assert that they can't care for their citizens properly without it.

As reflected in the G20 discussions, the US and other governments don't necessarily dispute the claim but also know full well that the Taliban may, and likely will use any unfrozen funds for other purposes, some not at all to the liking of those governments, such as weapons, aid to terrorist groups, support for their drug trade, etc.

The US and other governments are also well aware of the Taliban's egregious mismanagement of the Afghan economy when they previously ran the country from 1996 to 2001. Their gross ineffectiveness brought the economy to its knees and their strong affiliation with al-Qaida put the country off-limits to outside aid.

Today, it is fair to ask whether the Taliban have learned anything about economic management since they were toppled by the US in 2001. Unless they are willing to accept genuine experts from the previous regime without prejudice, it's difficult to believe that 20 years of fighting their way back into political power has taught them much about finance, monetary policy, macroeconomic planning, budgeting, banking or any of the other responsibilities that are needed of competent governments to responsibly manage an economy for 40 million people.

Show Us the Goods

With winter on the way, the Americans are acutely aware of the need to start humanitarian assistance now. But they have their own list of wants. These include fighting terrorism, adhering to basic human rights norms and respecting the

rights of women and girls, including to equal education, health care and employment opportunities.

Additionally, the US has a number of citizens who could not be repatriated in the rushed evacuation effort that followed the Taliban's capture of Kabul and the fall of the previous government. Thousands of Afghans who had worked for the US during its 20-year presence in Afghanistan were also left behind. The US wants immediate and unhindered departure of these individuals and their families, if they freely elect to leave.

Following the meeting, a Taliban spokesman announced that the Americans had agreed to provide humanitarian assistance. But there was no official confirmation from the US side, and there likely won't be until it receives some affirmative responses to its demands from the Taliban.

That holds particularly true for the frozen Afghan assets. Without airtight commitments from the Taliban followed by genuine action, the Americans will continue to withhold the Afghan funds. It's leverage, and right now, it's the only means the US has of assuring some of its basic requirements for the Taliban government are met. Needless to say, trust on either side likely hovers around zero. Therefore, it's all about, "What are you going to do for me?" The fact that the Afghan people may bear the brunt of the suffering for this position is unquestionably tragic.

Stepping Up to Responsibilities

The US demands, as well as those of the rest of the international community, are reasonable, basic and expected of a responsible and competent governing authority in any country. So, the Taliban face their first test of governance. Having prevailed in their two-decade struggle, they now need to demonstrate they can govern. That the fate of millions of innocent Afghans hangs in the balance is an unfortunate consequence. But consider it a yardstick of Taliban goodwill to their own people.

Nevertheless, neither the US nor the rest of the international community will be able to ignore for long the increasing need — soon to be desperation — of the Afghan people. Soon, some interim solution will be necessary whereby international NGOs and UN humanitarian organizations can enter and operate in the country to provide and distribute goods and services to meet basic human needs, starting with essential food items, medicines and health care. The G20, working with the UN, may be the best approach for that.

But such an emergency effort will do little to get the Afghan economy on its feet. Much more is necessary, starting with the release of the frozen assets. That will mean the Taliban stepping up to its responsibilities and likely not before.

The Biden administration — already under some pressure at home over an ambitious domestic economic agenda stalled in Congress and the humiliating manner in which the Afghanistan withdrawal unfolded — isn't about to complicate matters by releasing those funds without real Taliban action. Joe Biden is no doubt familiar with the opprobrium heaped on President Barak Obama when he released about \$30 billion in frozen Iranian assets in 2015 after the signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. To quote from many classic American crime shows, it's "Show me the goods before I show you the money."

Perhaps the only good that may be claimed after this first meeting is that the two sides have opened a dialog. But considerable territory will need to be covered before any assertion of "a relationship" may be said to exist.

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Lebanon's Future as an Inclusive Democracy in Doubt

Jean AbiNader
October 18, 2021

The latest violence in Lebanon, coming shortly before the anniversary of protests that brought down the government, does not bode well for economic and political reforms.

In Lebanon, October 17 marked the anniversary of the 2019 demonstrations against the government due to its mismanagement of the economy and widespread corruption. After two years, despite the fall of the government led by Prime Minister Hassan Diab, there has been no investigation into the charges of corruption or capital flight that occurred, accelerating the implosion of the local currency and the subsequent tanking of the banking sector.

The interlocking political and banking elites who control the government based on sectarian power-sharing have so far ignored the pain of those affected and the need to have a national strategy of reconciliation and economic recovery. The economic erosion was furthered by the Beirut Port explosion of August 4, 2020. That incident destroyed much of the business area of the downtown. It also further set back the country economically and politically as the current government, headed by Prime Minister Najib Mikati, has been unable to remove impediments to an independent investigation.

The people of Lebanon are suffering. The statistics on poverty, loss of education and quality of life, hyperinflation of essential goods, cost of living and health care, and emigration of skilled Lebanese are well known. The security and stability of the country are eroding as the families of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and Internal Security Forces (ISF) share the depressing costs of a barely functioning economy.

The Governing Troika

The latest threats and violence demonstrate the fragility of the civil order as the Shia Amal-Hezbollah alliance, along with their Christian enablers in President Michel Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement — now headed by his son-in-law and presidential aspirant, Gebran Bassil — feel free to ignore demands for change. The march on October 14, 2021, demanding the removal of Judge Tarek Bitar, who was calling current and former officials to testify about their roles in the Beirut Port blast, was the latest opportunity to demonstrate their dominance. This was too much of a provocation for those opposed to the governing troika, which led to bloodshed and a spike in instability. Despite the current calm, that chapter has not been concluded.

More damaging is the challenge that inaction poses on two fronts: to the new government and to the security services. Prime Minister Mikati supports an independent judiciary and an independent investigation into the blast. This could lead to the dissolution of his government, which depends on an agreement with the troika to survive. Hezbollah and company have not shown any concern for the integrity of the state up until now, so there are no assurances that they will tolerate an investigation that might expose some of their own friends.

The LAF and ISF are already struggling to hold together their forces, who have experienced a 90% drop in their salaries while facing hyperinflation in food, medicines and fuel. Desertion rates are increasing as soldiers look for other employment opportunities. With budgets decreased by 90% due to the currency devaluation, the LAF and ISF have to increasingly rely on external assistance from the United States and others to retain their operational readiness.

Time for Action

All the while, the people are on the sidelines, not able to promote changes that will improve their lives and save their country. At the core is the concern that Lebanon for the Lebanese may

become an aspiration more than a reality. To avoid the demise of what was once the educational and intellectual center of the region, it is time for remedial action.

It is time to begin the process of negotiations with the International Monetary Fund and move toward a single exchange rate by reducing subsidies and public spending. Work must be done to ensure increased stable power supplies throughout Lebanon. The people's trust needs to be earned through transparent and credible policies to restore a functioning government.

The international community is clear in its position: Clean elections, implementation of basic reforms, and a robust and sustainable social safety net are central to opening the country to outside support. Only then can Lebanon begin the process of reconstruction and recovery. Now, as the people remember the October 17 demonstrations, it is time to recommit to a process of reform and reconciliation that will provide a basis for Lebanon's reconstruction.

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Will Joe Manchin Remain a Democrat?

Christopher Schell
October 22, 2021

Has Senator Manchin's love for his party has gone unrequited for too long?

Americans typically like divided government and, on November 7, then-Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer gave them reason for that preference. Preceding a pair of run-off elections in Georgia that would decide whether Democrats would control the Senate in addition to the White House and the

House of Representatives, he said: "Now we take Georgia, then we change the world. Now we take Georgia, then we change America."

Americans had just elected whom they thought would be a moderate, measured president, and what they heard from Senator Schumer amounted to a battle cry for a sea change.

Concerns were already heightened that Democrats would take a less measured approach in the wake of presidential election debates about eliminating the filibuster, a key minority right that prevents a bare Senate majority from passing major legislation. There had also been debate in Democratic circles about packing the Supreme Court.

Recognizing Democratic vulnerability on these points and the broader issue of temperate governance going forward, Joe Manchin, of West Virginia, playing the most avuncular moderate on the Democrats' roster, was trotted out two days later to declare that "whether it be packing the courts or ending the filibuster, I will not vote to do that."

Senator Manchin assured all that he wanted to "rest those fears" and would stand as a bulwark against more extreme maneuvers. The charm offensive in conjunction with Donald Trump's back-and-forth position on whether Georgia Republicans should bother to vote at all enabled Democrats to seal their razor-thin majority in the Senate.

Unrequited Democracy

However, Senator Manchin's love for his party has gone unrequited, as has his fidelity to the principle of the filibuster. From the beginning of the 117th Congress, he has been treated to a buffet of difficult votes and has had to take positions at times at odds with his party's expansive legislative ambitions and, at times, at odds with his conservative home state.

Manchin was instrumental in cobbling together the \$1.2-trillion infrastructure bill, yet he has received little praise for his efforts. But when he made possible Democrats' control of the

Senate and, thereby, the full legislative and executive levers of power, he might as well have painted a target on his back. Once he opened himself to the “talking filibuster,” effectively gutting the filibuster in all but name, he was never to be taken seriously again.

Sparing the Senate a painful fight and mixed press, Democrats quickly found they did not necessarily have to eliminate the filibuster but could use the available mechanism of budget reconciliation for passing massive legislation, albeit within certain limitations. This approach, coupled with Great Society ambitions on a threadbare majority, has led to the current predicament in which Senator Manchin finds himself.

Since the massive reconciliation bill was conceived, Democrats and the media have persisted in the narrative of an inscrutable Senator Manchin, who simply will not articulate what he wants in a deal, but his requirements have long been clear. Late last month, brought forth the revelation of a signed agreement between his office and Majority Leader Schumer, dated July 28. In it, Manchin outlined specific parameters for the reconciliation bill, yet the Democrats persisted steely-eyed when, on August 11, the Senate proceeded with their original \$3.5-trillion bill.

Clearly, Manchin had not made his point, and he was consequently forced to put his foot down yet again in an article for the Wall Street Journal published on September 2 wherein he objected to the topline figure and pressed for a “strategic pause” in the reconciliation bill. Crickets again. Three days later, his assertion was met with an eye roll by President Biden’s chief of staff, Ron Klein, who said Manchin was “very persuadable.” Manchin’s barbaric yawp seemed to strike the powers that be as a whimper.

On September 29, Senator Manchin decided to release his own statement, writing, “I cannot — and will not — support trillions in spending or an all or nothing approach that ignores the brutal fiscal reality our nation faces.” He went on to tell reporters: “I’ve never been a liberal in any way

shape or form. ... I guess for them to get theirs, I guess elect more liberals. I’m not asking them to change. I’m willing to come from zero to \$1.5 trillion.” Manchin claimed he wanted to avoid “changing our whole society into an entitlement mentality.” How much clearer could he have been?

Yet Manchin continues to endure slings and arrows from his own party. He has become the punching bag for progressives and has endured at least one public criticism by the president himself. Beyond the inaccuracy of the president’s claim that Senator Manchin votes more with Republicans than with Democrats (depending on how you slice it, he votes with the Democrats 61.5% of the time), this was hardly a thank you for his service to the party.

Tightrope Walk

This is not to say Senator Manchin’s goodwill is inexhaustible. Democrats have increasingly abandoned the coal country voters who once were the base of the party in West Virginia. Whereas some argue that coal production has somewhat receded in economic impact within the state, 91% of West Virginia’s electricity comes from coal, and cultural affinity for and pride in the hydrocarbon run deep.

This is at odds with today’s Democratic platform, where the fossil fuel and industrial agendas are at odds with green ambitions. As green priorities increasingly win out within the party, frustration grows with industrial voters.

Once untenable policies like the Green New Deal have taken root within the party, and, as a result, Democrats have been leaking blue-collar voters like a sieve. A common explanation for why these voters are migrating to the Republican Party is to imply there are racist motivations by middle-class whites, but Hispanic and black blue-collar voters continue to migrate to the GOP in equal percentages.

West Virginia is not only economically (energy and mining) aligned with the Republican Party these days but is culturally (guns, abortion, wokeism) more consistent with Republican

stances, and there may come a time when Joe Manchin will have to change parties to remain viable. The question could be not if but when he leaves. In departing, he would surely endure the enmity of Democrats, though many would understand his decision.

On the positive side, were Manchin to fully uproot, he would no doubt be welcomed with open arms by his Republican peers and likely retain his seniority, making a very light-footed step from one majority to another overnight. Yet another possibility is to eschew the “D” label and become an independent, thereby curiously paring under that non-affiliation a left-wing Bernie Sanders and a left-of-center Joe Manchin.

As Gerald F. Seib observed in his excellent article, “It is probably no exaggeration to say that Mr. Manchin is the only Democrat in the country who could hold his seat for his party.” Yet he also notes that “even the formidable Mr. Manchin isn’t holding that seat comfortably; he won reelection in 2018 by a 50% to 46% count against Republican Patrick Morrisey.” Not only that, his increasingly vulnerable seat is in a state that Trump won by 39 points in 2020. In the future, keeping his seat as a Democrat will be quite a trick.

Manchin’s Dilemma

It seems that rumors of Joe Manchin’s defection abound, and even Mother Jones is in on the act. This last case, which occurred earlier this week, met with a strong response from Manchin, who declared the reports of his switching parties “Bullshit” (“with a capital B”). Yet no matter how many times Senator Manchin says “bullshit,” it doesn’t engender fidelity to the party when, say, Bernie Sanders carpetbags an op-ed into Manchin’s backyard that contains a strait jab at Manchin in the penultimate paragraph.

Interestingly, Sanders might have added to the pressure for Manchin to vote against the bill when he wrote, “This reconciliation bill is being opposed by every Republican in Congress.” (Note to Senator Sanders: Heavily Trump-leaning West Virginia voters don’t necessarily “Feel the

Bern.”) Nor did Manchin particularly appreciate Vice President Kamala Harris’ attempt on local West Virginia TV to turn the screws on a vote for the \$1.9-trillion COVID-19 relief bill earlier this year. This, too, did not meet with a dispassionate response from Manchin.

Sometimes it’s “bullshit” until there simply is no choice. For nearly a decade, I worked as a staffer for a man of humor, kindness, intelligence and practicality. A lifelong Democrat like Joe Manchin, my former boss eventually had to switch parties to continue doing what he did so well: represent his constituents.

Moments before filing for reelection, he weighed whether to run as a Democrat or a Republican. Heading out the door, he told his staff to file the Republican paperwork (both had been prepared). By the time he arrived at his house, his wife, also a life-long Democrat who had heard the party switch story over the radio, met him at the front door, arms crossed, asking: “You got anything to tell me, big boy?” My boss would laugh and say that switch banished him from the bedroom to the sofa for a week.

Senator Manchin might end up sleeping on the couch for a while when it comes to his Democratic supporters, but were he to switch, he would no longer be the whipping boy for all that ails the party. He would no longer be subject to Joe Biden rousing himself for belated entreaties to vote for an agenda that is unpopular in West Virginia. No more would he be tied to a president who has lost a step, or maybe more, and whose poll numbers have declined substantially, including one that shows 35% of Americans say “mentally sharp” describes Biden “not at all well.”

In formally making the switch, Senator Manchin would merely echo what his state’s governor and potential billionaire Senate race opponent, Jim Justice, did in 2017, which could help shore up support with those back home questioning the current rash of trillion-dollar bills.

It also seems that the progressive wing wouldn’t even notice if Manchin and Arizona

Senator Kyrsten Sinema left the party. Late last month on CNN, Representative Ilhan Omar said of the two senators: “It is saddening to see them use Republican talking points. We obviously didn’t envision having Republicans as part of our party, and I hope that they will understand that Democrats need to be united behind the president’s agenda.” Not content with hounding the pair, Democrats seem eager to foist them on Republicans and unite in the minority.

From Manchin’s perspective, both the passage and the failure of the reconciliation bill lead to difficult places. The former hastens his departure from the Senate or his party, and the latter heaps blame at his feet for destroying party unity and the Democrats’ ability to affect their priorities. The best West Virginia residents can hope for is that the bill fails as much for the country and West Virginia’s economy as for the senator’s own prospects for keeping his seat. Despite the outcome, with a little more friendly fire from his own party, Democrats might soon wake up to a diminished party and the plaintive, “Say it ain’t so, Joe!”

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Taliban Takeover Will Further Radicalize Pakistan and Increase Nuclear Threat

Rakesh Kaul
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Millions might die if major powers and the international community do not contain the Taliban and their patron Pakistan.

It is now well known that younger officers in the Pakistani army are no longer members of the Scotch-swilling elite. To understand the growing radicalization in Pakistan, it is instructive to read Nadeem F. Paracha, a noted columnist in Dawn, Pakistan’s most reputed newspaper.

In 2013, he wrote a tour de force about alcohol in his country. Pakistanis, especially in Punjab and Sindh, might have a love for the bottle, but they have to pay obeisance to hardline clerics who have now defined the state. Instead of Scotch, army messes now serve Rooh Afza, a sugary syrup popular across the Indian subcontinent.

More importantly, the Pakistani army has created a Frankenstein’s monster that is increasingly out of control. In 2013, the Small Wars Journal identified the growing Islamization of the army as a security threat for the United States. Starting with the first Indo-Pakistani War of 1947-48, Pakistan used militant Islamists to mobilize Pashtun tribesmen against Kashmir.

This began the patron-client relationship between the Pakistani army and militant Islamists that has become deeper with time. The journal correctly predicted that the army “would again support a Taliban takeover of Kabul,” the Afghan capital. Once Kabul fell, the journal took the view that “Afghanistan and Pakistan [would] again become places that jihadis [could] freely roam.”

The Bloody Past of Jihad

My family has vivid memories of the first Pakistan-supported Pashtun jihad in 1947 in Kashmir. My great-grandfather was the first Kashmiri Pandit killed in the town of Varahamula, now known as Baramulla. The Pashtuns tied his dead body to a horse and dragged it through the streets to terrorize the local population into submission.

It was not only Pandits who suffered at the hands of the tribesmen. Fellow Muslim Kashmiris and even Europeans were subjected to murder, robbery and rape. In a haunting account, noted British journalist Andrew Whitehead has documented the massacre at St. Joseph's Mission in Baramulla during that invasion.

After 1948, members of my community suffered from growing Islamization in Kashmir aided and abetted by Pakistan and eventually became victims of jihadi ethnic cleansing in January 1990. The indigenous Kashmiri Pandits had to flee their homeland to the plains of India after millennia of continuous habitation in the beautiful Himalayan valley. They have now become refugees in their own country and have yet to get justice, reparation or rehabilitation.

Like Kashmiri Pandits, Afghans have also had to flee their ancestral lands. This trend kicked off when the Soviets moved into Afghanistan in 1979. In June 1985, National Geographic published the photograph of Sharbat Gula, a 12-year-old-refugee from Afghanistan. Her haunting green eyes aroused the compassion of the world. Once described as the Third World's Mona Lisa, Gula did not go on to have an easy life. In 2016, she was arrested "for using a forged Pakistani identity card—a common practice among the 1 million Afghan refugees who live in the country without legal status."

If Gula provided the striking image for Afghanistan during the endgame of the Cold War, the photograph of Taliban fighters standing in front of the iconic painting of Ahmad Khan Abdali with their weapons in full view defines the new era unveiling before our eyes. In that painting, a Sufi saint anoints Abdali as the shah

of Afghanistan by touching his forehead with a chaff of wheat. Culturally, the authority and legitimacy of Ahmad Shah Durrani, the founder of the Durrani dynasty, the last of the Afghan empires, came from a Sufi saint.

Today, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan has seized power through the barrel of the gun. The Sufi chaff of wheat be damned. With the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, death and devastation will stalk the land, leaving little alternative for the likes of Gula to flee for their lives despite grim prospects across the border.

In contrast to the divinely ordained shah, an emir is "a military commander, governor of a province, or a high military official." The fact that the Taliban have proclaimed Afghanistan to be an emirate demonstrates their nakedly militaristic worldview. Their authority and legitimacy derive from unabated conquest. The Taliban is running a fundamentally anachronistic anti-democratic regime with little regard to the rights of women or minorities, whether ethnic or religious.

The Dangerous Role of Pakistan

The victory of the Taliban is a great boost for Pakistan, a state that has used terror as an instrument of state policy for decades on both its eastern and western fronts. In the early 1990s, some members of the Afghan mujahideen who had fought the Soviets and younger Pashtun tribesmen who studied in Pakistani madrassas came together to found the Taliban. From the early days, Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) played a key role in their spectacular success.

In November 1994, the Taliban captured Kandahar and, in September 1996, its fighters seized Kabul. Burhanuddin Rabbani, the Tajik president at the time, fled for his life. Later in 1996, the Taliban declared Afghanistan an Islamic emirate. This time around, they are better trained and better equipped than in the past. They have announced that executions and amputations will be back. The Taliban have hung bodies in public squares of the historic city of Herat, a little

over 120 kilometers from Iran. The Taliban are unleashing a reign of terror in Afghanistan thanks both to the ruthlessness of their fighters and the backing of Pakistan. Intelligence officials from many countries have said that Pakistan has deployed ISI agents, special forces and Chinese-built drones in Panjshir Valley.

Pakistan's current reputation as the world's global breeding ground for jihad is a result of disastrous decisions by both populist and fanatical leaders. In 1974, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto brought in a constitutional amendment that declared the Ahmadiyya community to be non-Muslim. In another 2013 piece, Paracha identified this act "as the starting point of what began to mutate into a sectarian and religious monstrosity in the next three decades."

General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq ousted Bhutto through a military coup and had him hanged on the gallows. The general's first move as the army chief was to change Muhammad Ali Jinnah's original army motto from "Unity, Faith, and Discipline" to "Faith, Piety, and Jihad for the sake of Allah," a change that has come to define the army today. With more religious lower-middle-class young men joining the officer class, there is not even a hairline separation between elements of the Taliban and the Pakistani army. The Taliban-controlled Afghanistan will not just be Pakistan's strategic depth but instead its sword arm.

The Taliban inspire not only Pakistanis but also many Indian Muslims. They are Deobandi, a Sunni Islamic revivalist movement that was founded in 1866, eight years after the bloody 1857-58 Indian rebellion that shook the British Empire to its core. In 1858, the indirect rule of the British East India Company ended. The Mughal Empire was formally dissolved and the Crown took over. Many Muslims regarded the end of Mughal rule as a catastrophe and some charismatic preachers began the Darul Uloom Islamic seminary in Deoband, a town in the northwestern region of India's most populous state of Uttar Pradesh close to Delhi.

In a recent feature article, American journalist Lauren Frayer of the National Public Radio covers the roots of the Taliban. She notes that Maulana Arshad Madani, the 80-year-old head of Deoband's Darul Uloom, expressed admiration for the Taliban kicking out the Americans from Afghanistan. She quotes the cleric as saying, "I'm weak and old, but if given the chance, I would go to Afghanistan." More worryingly, Madani has supported the Taliban policy to completely segregate men and women in educational institutions. He thinks women should wear hijab and not participate in sports. Madani has also warned of another partition if the Hindu right tampers with Indian secularism.

Like Madani, many Pakistanis are inspired by the victory of the Taliban and some see it as a divine sign of God's will. Religious extremists are already demanding greater Islamization and the imposition of sharia. Already, Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan has capitulated to the mullahs, abandoning the domestic violence and forced conversion bills. Hardline clerics argue that these bills contradict Islamic teachings. Given such a zeitgeist, it is little surprise that many analysts predict that terrorist attacks will increase.

India fears increased infiltration by Pakistan of Taliban Pashtuns into Kashmir and yet another cycle of violence. What is emboldening the Pakistanis is support from Turkey. Amalendu Misra, writing for *The National Interest*, argues that there is already a tacit working relationship between these two countries to establish a borderless Islamic imperium. Khan has championed the superhit Turkish action-adventure series called "Dirilis: Ertugrul" about "Muslim Oghuz Turks fighting invading Mongols, Christian Byzantines and the fanatic Knights Templar Crusaders in Anatolia (now modern-day Turkey) of the 12th century." After turning to Saudi Arabia in the 1980s and 1990s, Pakistan is now turning to Turkey for its cultural identity.

It is also important to note that the current Pakistani government is led by a Pashtun and is

far more pro-Taliban than its predecessors. This increasing radicalization of Pakistan is making intelligence officials worry about Pakistan as a potential source for nuclear proliferation. Marvin Kalb, a nonresident senior fellow at Brookings, has just written about “the agonizing problem of Pakistan’s nukes.” The specter of “jihadis taking control of a nuclear weapons arsenal” of about 200 warheads is a very real one. There is also the scenario of mid-level officers conspiring to release or sell warheads to militant groups.

For the World

The international community has been worrying about the security of nuclear facilities for over a decade. In 2008, Mohamed El Baradei, then head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, feared that “nuclear weapons could fall into the hands of an extremist group in Pakistan or in Afghanistan.” Later that year, Ken Berry, a senior analyst of the EastWest Institute, observed that an increasingly overstretched military and rising Islamic extremism was increasing the risk of Pakistani nuclear weapons falling into the wrong hands.

Over the last 75 years, the steady spread of Islamic extremism in Pakistan and then Afghanistan has left the international community confused at best and paralyzed at worst. Leaders in world capitals have ignored long-term trend lines that began with the use of Pashtun tribesmen to invade Kashmir in 1947. Now, the 20-year war on terror has ended in an ignominious American retreat even more dangerous than Vietnam, giving a shot in the arm to the likes of Madani in Pakistan, Afghanistan and India.

In the light of the debacle in Afghanistan, US senators are seeking an assessment of Pakistan’s role in Afghanistan. Some are proposing sanctions. This has caused stock market prices to fall and the Pakistani rupee to drop to a record low. Pakistan’s economic woes are expected to boost radicalization further. Vikram Sood, the former chief of India’s intelligence agency R&AW, has repeatedly warned about Pakistan

becoming a center of a new global jihad. He is not alone. US General Mark Milley is worried about rising regional instability along with “the security of Pakistan and its nuclear arsenals.”

Many senior American military and intelligence officials estimate that the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan has increased risks not only to the region but also to the US. Europeans are worrying about terror threats and yet another flood of refugees. The world faces a clear, present and unprecedented danger that will only grow with time. A rogue nuclear strike would make the 9/11 attacks of 2001 look like insignificant firecrackers.

Washington’s decades-long fixation with Iran and North Korea has obscured the reality that the Taliban and Pakistan present the greatest global security threat. Therefore, the major powers and the international community must come together to contain both the Taliban and their patron Pakistan before millions of innocents lose their lives.

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