

# Fair Observer

Quarterly

June 2016

**FAIR OBSERVER**<sup>o</sup>  
make sense of the world

# **Fair Observer Quarterly**



June 2016

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International Standard Serial Number (ISSN): 2372-9112

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# ABOUT FAIR OBSERVER

*Fair Observer* is a US-based nonprofit media organization that aims to inform and educate global citizens of today and tomorrow. We provide context, analysis and multiple perspectives on world news, politics, economics, business and culture. Our online journal is recognized by the US Library of Congress with International Standard Serial Number (ISSN) 2372-9112.

We have a [crowdsourced journalism model](#) that combines a wide funnel with a strong filter. This means that while anyone can write for us, every article we publish has to meet our editorial guidelines. Already, we have more than [1,700 contributors](#) from over 50 countries, including former prime ministers and Nobel laureates, leading academics and eminent professionals, journalists and students.

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# Fair Observer Quarterly

Atul Singh

June 30, 2016

In the northern hemisphere, June is the highpoint of summer. It is also the time when we are releasing the second edition of our *Fair Observer Quarterly*.

This June is turning out to be historic. Great Britain has decided to heed the Pied Piper Boris Johnson and march out of the European Union (EU). Brexit has ended an island nation's stormy marriage with a continental organization. The last time this happened was when the lecherous Henry VIII stormed out of the Catholic Church because he lusted for *la bella donna* Anne Boleyn. As a result, Queen Elizabeth II and not Pope Francis is the big boss of the Church of England, the established church of "this sceptered isle." In a contentious and close election, British voters have opted to take back their country à la Henry VIII, reclaiming sovereignty from Brussels to London.

British or rather English antipathy to the EU is now finding resonance in other parts of the continent. Eurosceptic voices are growing shriller and many Europeans are not exactly in love with the EU elite or even the EU. Many rightly worry about the post-Brexit future of the European Union.

Even as the EU faces a growing backlash, the African Union (AU) is planning to create an EU-style "continent without borders" that allows a free movement of people across Africa. It is also aiming to achieve free movement of goods and services to boost trade in a once brutally colonized continent where only 10% of the trade is intra-African trade. By contrast, intra-Asian trade is 25% and intra-European trade is 75% of the total. In theory, this has the potential to transform African economies.

Africa's realities are a bit more complicated. The movement toward the AU is accompanied simultaneously by the weakening and crumbling of many African states. Nigeria is a classic example of a postcolonial state that is fraying at the edges. Boko Haram is wreaking havoc in the north and the Niger Delta is blowing up, sometimes quite literally. South Sudan is in disarray with a combination of civil war and drought followed by floods, unleashing the menace of both starvation and epidemic.



In Latin America, Brazil entered full-blown political and constitutional crisis. A sprightly 75-year-old author of erotic verse took over as president of this legendary land of samba, sensuousness and soccer. Dilma Rousseff, the technocratic female president, was put on an impeachment trial for illegally manipulating government accounts in 2014 before her reelection.

Rousseff is probably not exactly blameless but probably far from the villain her enemies are making her out to be. As a matter of fact, Brazil's political elite has a reputation for rapaciously robbing its people. As a result, inequality, poverty and crime run riot in this Latin American giant. Of the 50 most violent cities in the world, 19 are Brazilian. Unemployment is rising, wages are falling and prices are increasing.

In 2015, Brazil's economy shrank by 3.8%, rivaling Russia's for the title of the worst performing economy of the year. Now, an all-white cabinet of aging men has ascended to the throne. Here's hoping they will be a bit more charitable to the state coffers than vultures on a carcass.

It is clear from the above that the world is going through an inflection point. The current economic models and political systems are not working for a large number of people. Many parts of the world are going through crises, with many societies experiencing conflict and collapse.

As citizens, we have no choice but to ask questions, address issues and think critically. It is time for all of us to make sense of the world. Here's hoping that *Fair Observer Quarterly* will help you do so.

*Atul Singh is the founder, CEO and editor-in-chief of Fair Observer.*



APRIL

# The Question of Sovereignty in the EU Referendum

Michael Julien

April 2, 2016

*A vote to leave the European Union will be life-changing for the British people.*

Whilst many issues are being discussed in relation to the forthcoming European Union (EU) referendum in the United Kingdom, the issue of “sovereignty” is the one that divides the remain and leave camps.

The highly respected think tank Open Europe, which is backing neither side, has made it clear that the economic effects of the [two options are marginal in this report](#). While there may be disruption in the short term, it is likely that the UK will prosper in either scenario.

The issue is thus about sovereignty and who calls the shots on important issues such as border control, environment, defense and security, all of which require government intervention.

Trade is not an issue, as it is not governments who trade in either manufactured goods or in services. It is entrepreneurs and their businesses that generate the wealth that governments then spend wisely or unwisely.

Governments can set the rules on trade and negotiate trade agreements but, in practice, they have no role in generating wealth—in most cases quite the opposite occurs.

**PART OF THE CLUB**

The sovereignty issue for the UK turns on whether it is better to be part of a club of nations such as the EU or outside the club as a member of the World Trade Organization, NATO and the United Nations.

The problem with the EU is that it presently comprises 28 nations, each of whom have other national priorities as well as diverse electorates, who also have their own priorities that differ as a result of their history.

For example, Germany spends considerably less than Britain or France on defense, and has not participated to any great extent in resolving conflicts in recent years in the Balkans or the Middle East and North Africa. It may not be so surprising that the Germans do not want to appear warlike after starting two world wars of the last century, but it is time for them to put their past behind them and to play a more proactive role in defending Europe and in resolving conflict issues elsewhere in the world.

Germany has the largest economy in the EU and can well afford to do more. While Brexit will make little difference to this situation, it will enable Britain to distance itself from demands from Germany and other European countries with weaker defense capabilities to form the core of a new European army. These demands are strongly resisted in the UK.

## **BUREAUCRATIC MAZE**

The sovereignty issue for the UK is made a great deal worse as a result of the cumbersome and ineffective organizational structure of the EU. There are three levels, each with its own president, and, in the case of the Council of Ministers, two presidents, one of whom takes the chair every six months and the other continues for five years. While the Council of Ministers comprises the leaders of each of the 28 countries in the EU, it does not have the final say on anything.

The final say is exercised by the European Parliament which, however, has no power to initiate legislation—a power reserved for the European Commission; both of these have their own presidents.

The European Parliament is made up of representatives from all 28 nations and do not necessarily represent the views of those nations as they are elected in a different manner and at different times.

In the case of the UK, they are elected under a system of proportional representation, which means there are 73 members (out of 751) who come from different parties to those elected to the British Parliament under the “first past the post” system used for national elections. For example, the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) has 22 members of the European Parliament and just one in the British Parliament.

This complexity is the root cause of why the leave camp is making such an issue of sovereignty, especially as there is nothing “reformed” about the EU despite the long and difficult negotiations. All that was achieved was more opt-outs for the UK in areas such as a temporary brake on in-work benefits for immigrants.

More importantly, there is still little recognition of the importance of the UK’s strength in financial services, with the City of London remaining under the regulatory control of the EU where regulations are created and supported by other nations with limited knowledge of financial markets, or countries—as in the case of France and Germany—that are very jealous of the City of London’s success.

It is feared by many in the leave camp that the EU will continue on its way to a “closer union” with a dysfunctional eurozone introducing new laws or regulations to integrate the financial management and funding of its members that will cover up the failings of many of its members and will drag the UK down as a result of their high unemployment and lack of competitiveness.

It is also feared by many in the leave camp that any future UK government can opt to join the euro and Schengen by repealing the European Union Act of 2011, which purports to block the transfer of more powers to the EU unless supported by a referendum.

Furthermore, it is settled Conservative Party policy to support enlargement of the EU, including the admission of Turkey that continues to be on the table despite worries about the admission of another 77 million people with the right to free movement. It is also noteworthy that the European Union Act of 2011 does not block enlargement of

the EU, despite the fact that enlargement changes the balance of power within each of its institutions.

## **THE SPLIT**

Where does all this lead? Business leaders are split. Understandably, larger businesses with lobbyists in Brussels are more able to cope with steering the EU Commission in the direction that suits them. Smaller businesses and the general public are left feeling overwhelmed by the bureaucracy and lack of accountability at all levels. Disenchantment with politics and politicians and especially the elite is giving rise to support for those who show leadership, but leadership is sadly lacking in Europe.

This makes people vote for anyone who is “different” and not a member of the elite. In the UK, this has given rise to UKIP under the leadership of Nigel Farage and to the rise of the left-wing of the Labour Party under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn. Even the much-admired Angela Merkel is losing support both in her own country and generally in the UK, but no one but the Germans can deal with that.

Remaining a member of the EU adds to this disenchantment due to the democratic deficit in the EU as a result of the dilution of power and influence caused by the myriad levels of the EU structure. If the UK chooses to leave the EU, the ability to change its leaders will be significantly enhanced for better or for worse.

The vote by the British people on June 23 will shake the elite whichever way it goes and may surprise the commentators. While the two sides are generally neck and neck in the polls, there remain a large number of people who are undecided and it would take very little to tip the result one way or another. For example, another terrorist attack as the one in Brussels close to the day could change everything.

A vote to leave will be life-changing for the British people, and in the long run would be the best thing to happen to the UK as it would free up the innate competitiveness of the British people who have a long history of innovation and an independent streak, which has enabled them to strike back in adversity and to survive two world wars.

But people generally fear change, and so the balance of probability will be that the final result will be to remain for now.

It is also likely that the EU will change considerably over the next 10 years and might even break up because not only Britain but also other countries are unhappy with it in its current form. Therefore, they might then exit the EU when the opportunity arises.

It should never be forgotten that France voted in a referendum against the introduction of a European Constitution (drafted by former French President Giscard D'Estaing) and only accepted the European Constitution after it was rebranded as the Lisbon Treaty, and a referendum was then avoided by a change in the French constitution.

*\*Michael Julien is a chartered accountant with extensive international business experience.*



# Ignoring the Plight of the Rohingya is a Mistake

Daniel Sullivan

April 2, 2016

*The State Department's minimization of the plight of the Rohingya is sending dangerous, mixed messages to Myanmar and its neighbors.*

The US State Department's recent declaration of the [Islamic State \(IS\) being responsible for genocide](#) against groups in areas under its control, including Yazidis, Christians and Shia Muslims, captured headlines across the globe. The news came out of a [congressionally mandated report](#).

However, the biggest story out of that report was not about IS, but rather the failure to find anything more than “discrimination” and “persecution” against the Rohingya in western Myanmar. Such a shockingly understated conclusion and downplaying of atrocities against Rohingya sends a dangerously mixed message at a time of important transition.

It is not so much that the State Department did not find that the Rohingya are facing genocide. Proving intent is always a difficult and controversial barrier for genocide determination. Rather, the greater damage is in the blatant minimization of the plight of the Rohingya and what it means for increasing the risk of further atrocities against them.

## THE EVIDENCE

The threat is real. The Early Warning Project at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, a sophisticated system of state-of-the-art quantitative and qualitative analysis, continues to place Myanmar at the top of its [list of countries at the greatest risk of mass killings](#).

Multiple independent human rights group reports, including by the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, Fortify Rights, [United to End Genocide](#), and ASEAN

Parliamentarians for Human Rights, have documented abuses and warned about the high risk of genocide and mass atrocities in Myanmar. Yale Law School's Human Rights Clinic has found "[strong evidence](#)" that genocide is already taking place.

Even if one disagrees with such a determination, it is clear that the risks are high and that the Rohingya face much more than your run of the mill "discrimination" and "persecution."

United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide Adama Dieng has [warned about rising religious hatred and marginalization](#) of the Rohingya and the need to address the situation "or face the risk of further violence and potentially, more serious crimes." Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, in his last report on Myanmar to the UN General Assembly, cited no major improvements to "[long-standing and institutionalized discrimination against the Rohingya community](#)."

Even the [State Department report](#) itself lists a litany of abuses that beg for a stronger and more accurate conclusion. The report cites the deaths of over 200 people and the displacement of 140,000 in intercommunal violence targeted against the Rohingya in 2012. It states, "There have been numerous acts of violence against Rohingya over the last few years," and cites the UN Refugee Agency's estimates that 160,000 Rohingya have fled Myanmar by sea since 2012.

The report finds that government policies continue to restrict freedom of movement, access to vital health care and education services, and rights to marry and have children. It further finds that the government "restrict(s) access for humanitarian agencies providing life-saving services" and that the government has "enabled discrimination and targeting of members of the Rohingya population."

## **BLATANT MINIMIZATION**

Yet the State Department findings leave out significant events and fail to add up to an adequate conclusion. Strangely, the crisis in 2015 that saw thousands of Rohingya and other migrants and asylum seekers trapped at sea gets no mention.

Similarly, the fact that hundreds of lives were put at risk when the Burmese government expelled Doctors Without Borders in February 2014 goes unmentioned. While the group has been allowed back in, it is at a much reduced scale and with



greater restrictions. [UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Myanmar Yanghee Lee](#) continues to report on “preventable deaths due to lack of access to emergency medical treatment.” Exact estimates of deaths are difficult given the ongoing access restrictions, but the report’s authors do not seem to make the connection between the stated restrictions and the very real loss of life.

The minimization is particularly striking coming in parallel to the strong language on the Islamic State. Whereas the State Department’s report comes to the damning conclusion that IS has committed mass atrocities, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing, the Rohingya are treated like an afterthought, getting the surprisingly low key summary sentence: “Meanwhile, we remain concerned about current acts that constitute persecution of and discrimination against members of the Rohingya population in Burma.”

While freely referring to atrocities committed by IS, the report seems to go out of its way to avoid the use of the word “atrocities” in regard to abuses against the Rohingya. Key subheadings refer to “atrocities in the Middle East,” but just “the situation in Burma” (emphasis added). While the IS determination was rightfully deemed of such great importance that it required an address by US Secretary of State John Kerry, the Rohingya determination came up only in a cursory exchange with the State Department’s spokesperson at the prompting of a reporter.

## **THE DANGERS OF MINIMIZATION**

So what does this all mean?

First, such minimization sends a dangerous note to the new government led by Aung San Suu Kyi’s National League for Democracy (NLD). Shortly, after the NLD’s historic electoral victory in November 2015, NLD Spokesman [U Win Thein](#) said the Rohingya would not be a priority and suggested talking to Bangladesh about returning them. Suu Kyi has answered questions about the Rohingya by saying their [plight should not be exaggerated](#).

Many Rohingya are optimistic about their future under an NLD-led government, but with such statements, it is not at all clear that their situation will be any better. This is all the more reason for the US to clearly include treatment of the Rohingya as an

essential part of US-Myanmar bilateral relations. The US State Department report muddles that message at best.

Second, the report sends a dangerous message to Myanmar's neighbors, those who have taken in tens of thousands of Rohingya refugees. The initial reaction by member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to the boat crisis in May 2015 was woefully inadequate, and the status of Rohingya refugees and asylum seekers in those countries remains tenuous.

If Myanmar's neighbors get the message that the situation faced by the Rohingya is not so dire, then why should they provide refuge?

### **OBAMA MUST SPEAK OUT**

Sadly, this appears to go above the US State Department. President Barack Obama had a perfectly good opportunity to emphasize treatment of the Rohingya not only to Myanmar, but to all of its neighbors when he hosted regional heads at the US-ASEAN Summit in February. But the Rohingya did not even make the agenda.

When Obama first visited Myanmar in November 2012, addressing the situation in Rakhine State was one of 11 commitments made by now outgoing President Thein Sein. In the final days of the Thein Sein administration, it is clear that the Rohingya situation has not gotten any better. The question remains: Will Suu Kyi and the NLD do anything about this? As long as that is a question, President Obama must be clear in his message that she must.

The bar for doing better in regard to the Rohingya is not high, but the consequences for not doing better may just be genocide and mass atrocities, the very threats that the State Department seems so intent on ignoring.

*\*Daniel Sullivan is the director of policy and government relations at United to End Genocide.*



# What the Panama Papers Have To Do With America

Scott Klinger

April 11, 2016

*Panama is not alone in the world of financial secrecy. The problem of secret financial transactions affects lives in communities throughout America.*

The massive release of the [Panama Papers](#) has rocked the financial and political world. The leaked documents from Panama's Mossack Fonseca law firms contain more than 11 million files involving 214,000 companies set up over the last four decades. A dozen current or former heads of states are implicated and one, the prime minister of Iceland, has already resigned.

Despite the enormous scope of the leak—more than 1,500 times larger than Edward Snowden's WikiLeaks files—it represents just the tip of the iceberg of worldwide activity to conceal the identity of those participating in financial transactions.

Anonymous offshore companies can be used for a host of reasons, some perfectly legal, but many not, including tax evasion, theft of public funds, arms trading, human trafficking, consumer fraud, illegal campaign contributions and international drug trading. Though Mossack Fonseca says it is the fourth largest law firm that specializes in helping clients set up offshore accounts in secrecy jurisdictions throughout the world, there are tens of thousands of law firms willing to help their clients set up offshore corporations.

One of the striking things about the Panama leaks is that, to date, few Americans have been named. Several commentators have noted that Americans don't need to go to Panama to get help concealing their transactions in anonymous companies, since there are ample opportunities to do so using anonymous shell corporations set up in the United States, with the help of American law firms.

## IN THE US

Mossack Fonseca's business centered on providing its customers secrecy to hide their transactions from tax authorities and law enforcement officials. But Panama is not alone in the world of financial secrecy. In fact, it is not even the most desirable nation in providing cover to wealthy and powerful investors. The US ranked as having the third least transparent financial system according to the most recent [Financial Secrecy Index](#), an annual survey prepared by the Tax Justice Network. The US trounced Panama which ranked 13<sup>th</sup> and was bested only by Switzerland and Hong Kong.

In January, 60 Minutes aired a segment focusing on a ground-breaking undercover investigation of anonymous corporations undertaken by Global Witness, an international human rights organization. Global Witness' undercover representative set up meetings with 13 New York law firms. He claimed to be representing an unnamed West African minister of mines looking to buy a private jet, a brownstone apartment and a yacht and needed help bringing funds into the US without detection. All but one of the firms eagerly supplied suggestions—including on how to use both foreign and domestic anonymous companies to conceal the wealth of the seemingly unscrupulous client.

Though no money was actually moved during the Global Witness investigation, anonymous US shell corporations are used for nefarious purposes every day in our country. Convicted international arms dealer Viktor Bout used a global network of shell companies, including those set up in Delaware, Florida and Texas, to sell arms that perpetuated conflicts in Africa and throughout the world.

The government of Iran violated US sanctions by using an anonymous shell company in New York to disguise its ownership of a skyscraper in the heart of Manhattan. A major Mexican drug cartel used anonymous corporations based in Oklahoma to launder millions of dollars of profits in illegal drugs. Anonymous corporations have been used to rip-off vulnerable seniors and military families, promising too-good-to-be-true investment schemes.

The Federal Election Commission currently has before it several cases where anonymous companies were allegedly used to skirt campaign finance laws. Anonymous corporations have been used to rip-off taxpayers, including a school administrator in Ohio who directed funds intended to pay for school supplies into an

anonymous corporation, and an organized crime syndicate that used anonymous companies in seven states to perpetuate the largest Medicare fraud in US history.

Crimes involving anonymous shell corporations waste the time and resources of our nation's law enforcement agencies. Agents following trails of money wind up at shell company after shell company, each of whose true owners are concealed.

Why has the US been unable to stop this dangerous and costly practice?

The answer is simple: political will. In many American states, you are required to provide more information to get a library card than to set up a shell company. Comedian Stephen Colbert [set up an anonymous shell corporation](#) on his television show in less than 10 minutes.

## **US LAW**

In the US, states are responsible for incorporating businesses. None of them require the true person who owns or controls the company—known as the “beneficial owner”—to be identified on corporate registration papers and instead allow an agent (such as a lawyer or a company formation agent) to be named instead.

Since 2008, there has been legislation in the US Congress that would change the rules and require all US corporations to disclose the names of real owners, not third-party agents. The Incorporation Transparency and Law Enforcement Assistance Act (S. 2489 in the Senate and H.R. 2489 in the House) would require states to acquire one additional piece of information from corporations they register: the names of beneficial owners.

The law contains many reasonable exemptions, including public corporations (who already have registers of beneficial owners); churches and other non-profits; and owners of businesses with more than 20 employees, \$5 million in annual revenues and a physical presence such as an office.

Many law enforcement agencies, along with the FACT Coalition, a 100-member coalition of human rights, faith-based, labor, transparency and environmental organizations, have endorsed the legislation. The main opponent to date has been the National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS), the lobbying arm of state

Secretaries of State. NASS argues against the bill because of the cost of reprogramming their databases to accommodate the names of beneficial owners.

Despite the commitment of the US Department of Justice and the US Treasury who together have pledged to provide \$40 million from a pool of funds they have seized from criminals, to help states offset the cost of implementing the collection of beneficial ownership information, NASS has refused to budge. Meanwhile, the list of shell corporations used for criminal activities in their states continues to grow.

The Panama Papers do not represent a problem that's "out there," but rather a problem of secret financial transactions that affects lives in communities throughout America. When US political leaders pledge to look into the Panama leaks, they should start by looking in their own backyards.

*\*Scott Klinger is an expert on tax policy and executive compensation.*



# There Are Limits to Defining Indian Nationalism

Rita Kothari

April 14, 2016

*Those who claim to speak for the state—as well as those who question the state and claim to speak for the rest—remain highly exclusive.*

Terms such as “home” and “nation” have different meanings for different people. The transnational links of the Nagas and Mizos in northeastern India or those of people living in western Rajasthan and Kutch, when held to restrictive definitions of “nationalism,” provide challenges to mainland categories.

The last few months have witnessed public discourse in India deteriorate to abysmal levels. Personalities and vested interests have come to limit the possibilities of truth, the idea of which continues to remain elusive. All we know is whether to trust the pursuer of truth, and whether s/he stands to gain to stand from a particular definition of truth. The rest is surrounded by a mist of multiple interpretations.

However, while thinking through the events, something nagged at me from a not-so-distant past. People I met while working on a monograph—[Memories and Movements: Borders and Communities in Banni, Kutch](#)—pushed their way into my mind, adding “nonsense” to the dominant discussions.

## THERE’S NO ONE BRUSH

Look at this example from a cattle-breeding family. Fahmida Mutwa (name changed) lives in a village called Dordo, part of a region called Banni in the district of Kutch in Gujarat. Dordo is the last village of Banni. It is on the edge of the vast desert that divides India and Pakistan.

For the last 40 years or so, Fahmida has listened to the radio almost every single day. She tunes in to stations in Sindh, Pakistan, and listens to women’s programs or

religious discussions. The world of Bollywood cinema and TV soaps that the rest of India is supposedly watching are unknown to her. She knows nothing about Salman Khan or Aishwarya Rai.

Fahmida is not the only one who is far from symbols and icons that define India as an imagined community. The fact that Fahmida doesn't watch TV—and would not be allowed to do so because most people in her region consider television to be bad for spiritual health—is only one reason. The fact that this restriction is particularly applicable to women and children is also a separate issue. However, it is common to see the entire region respond to symbols from across the border. Discussions, songs and Sufi discourse from Sindh are part of the day-to-day life in Banni.

To Fahmida, Sindh is far more relevant and immediate than Ahmedabad or Mumbai. It is likely that she would be considered anti-national in the emerging discourse of today, and it is likely that she would be lumped together with many others who hail from universities and political affiliations. As for Fahmida, she has never left the region of Kutch.

A pastoralist from the same region once said to me: “We hardly encounter Gujarat. Leave alone [the] rest of the country.” The distance from the idea of nation in this case is not animated merely by disaffection, but largely by localized experiences of region and cosmopolitanism. “When [we] go on Hajj, we keep remembering that we are from Hindustan,” he added.

Experiential Indianness is often times a response to the interlocutor, not by neatly defined concentric circles in which being Sindhi, Muslim, pastoralist and Indian are organized in sequential ways.

So, we must think of what our discourses look like to people who are far from our minds; to those who do not put forth a strident view for Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) or against it. Is there a world of semantics out there that we are not looking at or even aware of?

## **“NATIONALISM”**

Thus, if “nationalism” itself is a discursive category and far from uniform, how can its supposed antithesis be stable? “Nationalism” and its antithesis have been mobilized to



mean a specific set of things over the last few months. Dissent, desirable or otherwise, is now associated with “anti-nationalism,” while silence and conformity with the dominant hegemonies of caste and religion is associated with the nationalism of the ruling party.

In discussions, few notice the fact that nationalism and anti-nationalism do not have stable meanings. What many consider as anti-nationalism of the urban, educated, left-leaning stance of some is different from an emotional charge that ordinary and unnoticed people experience with relatives and language and ethos across the border. In the instances mentioned above and many more unmentioned ones, individuals are not consciously critiquing the Indian state, although their thoughts and expression might seem critical. They ask not for the freedom to express, but the freedom to be left alone.

In the shrillness of our times, we would do well to remember how our “categories”—used both by those who claim to speak for the state as well as those who question the state and claim to speak for the rest—remain highly exclusive, as usual.

*\*Rita Kothari is a leading translator, writer and academic from India.*



# Better Education Can Decrease Wealth Inequality

Brad Brasseur

April 22, 2016

*Inequality in education is at the forefront of the global wealth gap.*

Today, the world is doing a lackluster job of finding sustainable solutions to global inequality. This crisis is evident in cities like Lima, Peru, where a “[wall of shame](#)” separates the wealthy neighborhoods from the poor shantytowns. It is disconcerting that the [United Nations](#) (UN) estimates today that [1.2 billion people live on less than \\$1 a day](#), while Forbes reports that the [world’s 1,810 billionaires hold a net worth of \\$6.48 trillion](#).

The world’s failure to effectively fight poverty can be significantly attributed to corruption, as most heads of state are more concerned with pleasing their wealthy financiers and retaining power. In addition, global thought leaders use inequality as a quest for global fame and padding their bank accounts. Sadly, the majority of influential global leaders lack sincere passion for the poor and compete for awards or reelection, instead of working together to find legitimate solutions, such as enhancing global education.

## **SOLUTIONS, NOT PROBLEMS**

Today, many economists highlight growing middle classes in China and India as hope for the global poor and decreasing inequality. However, this is a false hope as the UN and the [Organisation for Economic and Co-operation and Development](#) (OECD) defines a middle class citizen as someone spending or earning at least \$10 per day, which in reality is not a large sum. Plus, as [OECD’s Director Mario Pezzini](#) highlights, many middle class citizens work in the unstable informal sector, lack a good education and knowledge to sustainably accumulate wealth.

In order to make strides in decreasing global inequality, we need to focus on bridging the disparity in education between the rich and the poor, as nearly 1 billion people

today are illiterate. It could be argued that inequality in global education is at the forefront of global wealth inequality. The rich have access to an elite education and use the skills that they acquire through learning to grow their income; while the poor lack access to quality education and remain marginalized without the proper tools needed to thrive but instead barely survive.

At the most basic level, enhancing the education level of the poor can help them find quality jobs to provide for their family. Equally important, education creates more brainpower that can work on formulating innovative ideas to solve pressing global problems. Think of the amount of untapped brilliant minds among the billions of the uneducated who can actually find the solutions to global problems, instead of being the problem that some people wrongly think they are.

Plus, today, if someone lacks basic literacy or numeracy skills, it becomes harder to access the educational or social benefits of the internet. In addition, a country's educated population is extremely valuable to its economic development, as studies show that a country needs at least [40% adult literacy in order to achieve sustainable economic growth](#). Not to mention the proven effects of education in the growth of democracy, enhancing health and increasing farming production.

## **COMMON MISTAKES**

However, when implementing new education programs, we must avoid a common mistake made in past poverty solutions, which is painting all the poor with the same brush. We must learn that not all solutions can be fully applied in all places, because each region has a unique cultural fabric, geography, history and religion.

This means that just because a solution worked in Ghana 15 years ago, it does not mean it will work in Bolivia today. Thus, education programs must have different elements to their curriculums in each unique place in the world and include direct input from local leaders.

The first step to improving education for the poor will be urgently addressing the infectious corruption in the Global South that prevents foreign aid from reaching its intended targets. UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon even admits on record that a ghastly amount of [30% of total development assistance each year is lost to corruption](#).

This means billions of dollars are stolen by the rich and not invested in the needs of the poor, such as education.

Looking into the future, the [Global City Institute](#) in Canada has calculated that by year 2100, as a result of rising birth rates cities such as Lagos, Kinshasa, Dar es Salaam and Mumbai will each have over 65 million people. Hence, as the global phenomenon of urban migration continues, it appears the inequality gap will widen, unless we find solutions fast.

With a rapidly growing developing world population, it is time to put words into action and give the poor a greater education that they can use to defeat poverty and inequality. The new United Nations global education goal can guide the way, but it needs to be complemented by legitimate grass roots initiatives, as we cannot count on global leaders. Plain and simple, we need to decrease the global inequality gap through enhancing quality education for the poor, so we can increase global peace.

*\*Brad Brasseur is a Canadian international development specialist.*



# Water as a Strategy of War

Mara Tignino

April 26, 2016

*In times of war, a lack of access to safe water can kill as many people as bombing.*

Inequality in the distribution of water resources and risks of shortage are contributing causes of tension and conflict between states. The conflict in [Darfur](#), characterized by rivalry between local communities and tribes for access to arable land and water resources, is a prime example of such a relationship between conflict and scarcity of natural resources.

Yet there is another dynamic: Armed conflicts also damage water resources both in the short and long terms, compromising both the health and, in some circumstances, the survival of local populations.

## ATTRACTIVE TARGETS

Unlike peacetime legislation, the law of armed conflict (or international humanitarian law) contains few rules that relate directly to the protection of freshwater resources. Nevertheless, access to and the protection of water installations may be significantly affected by wars. Dams and dykes have often represented an attractive target for the parties in a conflict. A 2016 report of the [German Institute for International and Security Affairs](#) points out that the control of strategic dams on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers have been at the center of military operations carried out by the Islamic State (IS) in Syria and Iraq. Control of the [Mosul dam](#) in 2014 set off alarm bells around the world.

The control of water installations allows to IS to dispose of large amounts of water and energy to sustain the extraction, processing and selling of crude oil that continue to provide the financial basis to the militia. The [US led anti-IS coalition](#) supported both the Kurdish and Iraqi armies to ensure the control of the dams in the Euphrates and Tigris rivers and impeding the control of these strategic installations that strengthens the powers of the caliphate in the Middle East. However, major dams such as those at [Fallujah](#) and [Ramadi](#) are still in the hands of IS.

The risks entailed by the control of dams are multiple. The first type of risk is that too little water is available to the civilian population. Whoever has the control of the dams can cause downstream droughts and cut energy and water supplies to entire towns. The [second type of risk](#) is the release of too much water, flooding kilometers of farmland areas, killing livestock and causing casualties and displacement.

A third type of risk is the insufficient quality of water. It has been reported that IS poisoned drinking water supplies in Aleppo and Baghdad. Moreover, this threat risks to be exported in Europe. In 2015, there has been a risk of an attack on the water supplies in [Pristina](#) that was prevented just before its planned execution.

## INDIRECT EFFECTS

The effect of armed conflict on water resources can also be indirect. During the 1999 NATO air strikes in Kosovo, the destruction of refineries and other industrial facilities located in the banks of the Danube caused the release of polluting substances in the river and groundwater resources.

The report of the [Balkan Task Force](#), jointly established by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and the UN Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS/Habitat), affirms that their “findings indicate that the Kosovo conflict has not caused an environmental catastrophe affecting the Balkans region as a whole,” it recognizes nevertheless that “pollution detected at some sites is serious and poses a threat to human health.”

In another assessment report of [environmental damage in Bosnia-Herzegovina](#), UNEP observed that, during the conflict in Kosovo, the use of depleted uranium caused the contamination of some groundwater resources. Although the contamination of the sites has not exceeded the levels recommended by the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO), the UNEP study points out that the sites where the contamination have been detected and should be monitored.

The protection of water during armed conflicts should be strengthened. In 1994, an [expert meeting](#) organized by the [International Committee of the Red Cross](#) (ICRC) in Montreux affirmed that, in times of war, the lack of access to safe water and the problems of public health may kill as many people as bombing.

After more than 20 years, in 2015, an [ICRC study](#) underlines that 50 million people are affected by armed conflicts in urban areas and suffer from limitations in water supplies. Armed conflict can impact water services either directly, such as a reservoir pierced by a tank shell, or indirectly, when insecurity can prevent engineers from gaining safe access to keep water and electrical networks operational in the long run.

## THE LAW OF ARMED CONFLICT

International humanitarian law expressly mentions that military attacks against drinking water installations and supplies as well as irrigation works are prohibited ([Article 54](#) of the 1977 First Protocol to the 1949 Geneva Conventions and [Article 14](#) of the 1977 Second Protocol to the 1949 Geneva Conventions). Drinking water installations are not the only civilian objects that may be indispensable to the survival of the civilian population. Other examples include power plants providing water supplies. During armed conflicts, attacks against them are very common. One example is the bombing of the power plant in [Gaza](#) in 2006.

The 1977 protocols provide an illustrative list of protected objects. This list could be expanded to include other objects such as power plants supplying energy for water supplies. In fact, it makes no difference whether a drinking water facility is attacked and destroyed, or is made inoperable by the destruction of the electrical plant supplying its power. In either case, civilians suffer the same effects: They are denied of the use of a public utility indispensable for their survival.

Another specific rule dealing with the protection of water during armed conflicts concerns the prohibition of attacking dams. Both 1977 Protocols provide for this rule—[Article 56](#) of the 1977 First Protocol to the 1949 Geneva Conventions and [Article 15](#) of the 1977 Second Protocol to the 1949 Geneva Conventions. Dams may often provide water supplies to urbanized areas. A case in point is the Inga dam located near Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). During the occupation of some regions of DRC during the 1990s, Ugandan military forces took possession of this hydroelectric facility and threatened to cut water supplies to the civilian population of Kinshasa.

Other rules which can ensure protection of water during the conduct of hostilities deal with the protection of the environment. The First Protocol provides two articles

regarding this issue. [Articles 35.3](#) and [55](#) protect the environment against “widespread, long-term and severe damage.” The adjectives “widespread, long-term, and severe” used in the First Protocol mean that it is a triple, cumulative standard that needs to be fulfilled.

This is a very high threshold of application. The conditions of application of Articles 35.3 and 55 are extremely stringent. For example, the notion of “long-term” employed by the protocol was defined as lasting for a period of decades. The application of these articles could be only invoked in situations of extreme pollution of freshwater resources.

## COMPREHENSIVE PROTECTION

The protection of water resources and water-related installations in armed conflicts has been viewed primarily through the lens of international humanitarian law. However, this [perspective is too narrow](#). A more comprehensive protection of the access to water may be provided by the recourse to human rights instruments.

The UN Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR) Committee is charged of the interpretation of the rights embodied in the [1966 Covenant](#). In 2002, the ESCR Committee adopted [General Comment No.15](#) on the right to water, which recognizes that this right relies on Articles 11 and 12 of the Covenant. General Comment No.15 analyzes several facets of the right to water, in particular aspects linked to quality, quantity and accessibility of water.

It also explicitly recognizes the link between human rights law and international humanitarian law. In particular, it affirms that the right to water consists of “not limiting access to, or destroying, water services and infrastructure as a punitive measure for example, during armed conflicts in violation of international humanitarian law.”

A further reading of the relation between water and armed conflict concerns the protection of this natural resource as such. In this context, the development of various instruments regarding transboundary water resources plays an important role.

These instruments continue to be applied in times of armed conflict. For example, the 1997 [Convention on the Law of Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses](#) and the 2008 [Draft Articles on the Law of Transboundary Aquifers](#)



contain similar provisions dealing with armed conflicts. Article 29 of the 1997 UN Watercourses Convention affirms that transboundary freshwater resources “shall enjoy the protection accorded by the principles and rules of international law applicable in international and non-international armed conflict and shall not be used in violation of those principles and rules.”

International water law norms could provide a tool of cooperation between parties involved in a dispute. In regions that have been pointed out as at risk of “water wars,” instruments dealing with transboundary water resources have served as a basis of dialogue between riparian states.

This was the case, for instance, for the agreement concluded in 2002 between Syria and Lebanon on the [Nahr El Kabir River](#) and the 1980 [Protocol of the Joint Economic Committee](#) established between Turkey and Iraq, which allowed for Joint Technical Committee meetings relating to water resources.

The joint application of international humanitarian law and international water law has the potential to enhance the protection of water resources during armed conflicts. It is not rare for watercourse states to continue to apply international watercourse treaties in times of armed conflict. The scarcity of water may encourage the parties to cooperate while also creating riparian tensions.

The continued application of the 1960 [Indus Waters Treaty](#) between India and Pakistan in times of armed conflict represents a model of cooperation between two countries whose relationship has been very strained on several issues. Because of the vital nature of water resources and their uses, watercourse countries are willing to continue to cooperate even in time of armed conflicts. The termination or suspension of international watercourse treaties would endanger the states’ mutual rights and obligations.

## THE WAY FORWARD

While one cannot deny that norms exist to protect and cover the manifold functions of water during armed conflict, these are limited. The use of different bodies of rules such as those provided by human rights law and international water law may contribute to the strengthening of the protection of water.

Although international humanitarian law deals directly and indirectly with the protection of water and water installations, directing attention to how these rules can be further developed play an important role in dealing with water issues in a more comprehensive manner. In particular, it seems appropriate to think about the regime of protection of water in light of a larger conception which takes into account the developments on the discourse of the qualification of water as a human right and as a transboundary natural resource.

The protection of water resources in times of armed conflict must be developed in a way that takes into account the wide range of existing rules of international law. These standards are drawn from a broad corpus of international law. To protect water resources and ensure access to these resources, the law applicable to water resources during armed conflict must be read in a context extending beyond the boundaries of international humanitarian law. Such a reading of the law can limit the impact of armed conflict over water resources and, indeed, can promote conditions that foster the consolidation of peace after armed conflict.

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# A Conversation on Child Marriage With Amnesty International

Dina Yazdani and Kaitlyn Denzler

April 29, 2016

*In this edition of The Interview, Fair Observer talks to Kaitlyn Denzler, a women's rights campaigner at Amnesty International USA.*

Child marriage is on the decline, but it is a slow progress. There are currently 700 million women living today who were married before their 18th birthday—or 10% of the total global population. In the developing world, the figure is at a staggering one third of girls under the age of 18.

Early and forced marriage not only strips girls of their childhood, but also their future. Girls married young are often taken out of school prematurely, which helps perpetuate the cycle of child marriage: Uneducated girls are more likely to become child brides, while uneducated parents are more likely to marry their children off. As a result, this diminishes the prospects of girls living fulfilling lives and exacerbates gender inequality worldwide.

The international community has recognized child marriage as one of its most pressing development issues, and has made exceptional efforts to end the practice. In 2013, the United Nations Human Rights Council recognized that child marriage violates human rights, and adopted it in its post-2015 global development agenda. More recently, 13 nations in the Asia-Pacific region convened in Nepal to sign the Kathmandu Declaration against child marriage that commits participants to establish a minimum age of 18 for marriage.

Child marriage is not confined to developing nations alone—or highly conservatively religious ones—but also takes place in the West where blindness to the issue has provided a space for it to flourish. From a social experiment capturing the reactions of New Yorkers as a 65-year-old man marries an adolescent girl publicly in Times Square that went viral on [YouTube](#), to Virginia state Senator [Jill Vogel](#)'s efforts to advance a

bill to ban child marriage that has picked up national momentum, Americans are beginning to take notice of the issue.

In this edition of [The Interview](#), Fair Observer talks to Kaitlyn Denzler, a women's rights campaigner at [Amnesty International](#) USA. Denzler is a returned Peace Corps volunteer and has worked for the US State Department and International Center for Research on Women before joining Amnesty International USA in the spring of 2015.

**Dina Yazdani: Can you explain to our readers the extent of the problem child marriage represents across the globe?**

**Kaitlyn Denzler:** To quickly define child marriage—it is a formal marriage or informal union, which is of course to distinguish between marriage before the age of 18. Amnesty International and other organizations try to highlight the fact that it happens to boys as well, but it really [impacts girls more than anything](#). Early and forced marriage is widespread problem and currently impacts approximately 15 million girls worldwide. You can put it in another way—it happens to 28 girls every minute, if that's how you want to frame it.

It really touches every aspect of a child's life. Girls who marry early have little or no access to education, which directly impacts their opportunities later in life—social and economic opportunities. Child brides also face a higher risk of experiencing dangerous and life-threatening complications in pregnancy, contracting STIs, and also violence at the hand of their intimate partners. The consequences are dire, and it really impacts the whole of the girl.

**Yazdani: Which countries have the highest rate of child marriage?**

**Denzler:** Referencing [Girls Not Brides](#), Niger is number one, the Central African Republic, Chad, Bangladesh, Mali. And the list goes on—it's all across the world. It also happens in the United States. The scale is definitely different. There are organizations that are leading the work in the US. You hear cases about forced marriage almost every day, with very similar consequences: violence, economic deprivation, being ostracized by their families. The scenarios are very similar.

**Yazdani: Why are parents marrying their children off at such a young age? And what are the economic and social forces driving child marriage?**

**Denzler:** It varies. There's not one straightforward answer as to why this is happening. I can't speak for other countries, but families sometimes do it as a way of consolidating relationships between different groups or different communities. The promise of marriage can be acquired at birth or during a boy or girl's childhood, so it can happen very young.

Also in terms of the economic benefits, a girl's parents may receive a dowry from the boy's or the husband's family. So the payment of that can vary from region to region depending on income. It can be in exchange of agriculture or livestock—very, very important things for a community. So it really depends. We also see in times of conflict that this can be exasperated because people can become so desperate so it seems like a rational decision to make—we can make money this way. It's a really tough situation to be in.

**Yazdani:** Can these young girls escape from forced marriages, and what happens if they try to?

**Denzler:** We know from our research, and some of the work that our team members have done, that there are shelters all across Burkina Faso. There aren't many, but they are run by incredible people that sort of open up this space for girls. And girls definitely try to escape. That can be very dangerous for them. I don't know what the exact consequences have been for girls who have tried to escape. But Amnesty International is conducting research on the ground with our Burkina Faso team there, which will go into detail about what is happening when girls are trying to escape and what kind of support system is there for them.

Amnesty International also has a [petition where we are trying to collect as many signatures as possible](#) so that we can hand it over to the government and show that people are really concerned about this and how they are supporting girls, and what happens after the shelter— are their families going to welcome them back? So all of these questions that we don't have answers to yet until the research comes out. Stay tuned on that.

**Yazdani:** Many countries where child marriage occurs have actually adopted international agreements prohibiting it and have codified it into national law. So why does it continue to happen on such a large scale?

**Denzler:** It's such a great point, right? I mean, in a lot of these countries—including Burkina Faso—child marriage is illegal. And you said it exactly right: It is written in the law, it's on the books, they've adopted campaigns to end child marriage, or adopted national strategies or actions to prevent it, but we're seeing a huge disconnect between what's on the books, and what's actually happening in communities.

The reality is that in most places the laws are not being enforced. And that could be that there is just that gap, or that it's on the books and that we don't have the means to enforce it [because] the system is not in place, but it's also important to know that the Amnesty Burkina Faso team and local activists have really made it a point to raise awareness about it within local communities that this is the law, and that this is the consequence if you break the law. So there's also this gap in awareness that we're seeing in a lot of communities.

**Yazdani:** Why has Amnesty International decided to focus its efforts against child marriage on Burkina Faso, and what exactly is it doing to help child rights there?

**Denzler:** Our work on child marriage in Burkina Faso is a direct outgrowth of our previous reporting on the [high maternal mortality in Burkina Faso](#). The high rates of maternal mortality are caused by a number of factors, but chief among them is high child marriage—the longer a girl delays marriage, the less likely she is to die in childbirth. We will also be doing advocacy work around ending early and forced child marriage in other countries, such as Mali, later.

We have a [global petition](#). So a lot of the work focuses on promoting the petition that will be delivered to the government later in the year. And this petition is asking them to enforce the law, and to guarantee protection, as well as shelter and protection for victims of child marriages and to raise awareness throughout communities on the ban of forced early child marriage and for girls to find assistance if they are at risk. So those are our three main asks of the Burkina Faso government.

We're also, on our side of things—I'm with Amnesty International USA—have met with US government officials and Burkina Faso embassy staff to raise awareness of Amnesty's concerns and recommendations. We'll be doing a lot more advocacy work. This [advocacy around ending child marriage] is a new area for us, but we'll be doing

more advocacy on this after [our report comes out in April](#). We'll be releasing a film as well around that time which will help garner and [raise awareness](#) around that a little more.

Another thing I would mention around what we're doing, is that we had a team of Amnesty delegates meet with the Burkina Faso government and officials in 2015. The government actually signed onto an Amnesty manifesto that ensures an end to child marriage, which was a big win for us. We also found out that—after one of Amnesty's largest actions, which is called [Write for Rights](#), where Amnesty activists from all around the world take action—the minister of justice confirmed that our concerns have been heard. As a result, the ministry plans to raise the legal age of marriage for girls to 18 years—it was 17 for girls and 20 for boys—and to ensure that forced marriage is clearly defined in Burkina Faso's criminal code. So this is all very encouraging, but we still need to keep the pressure going to make sure that those words are put into action.

**Yazdani:** In December of last year, Burkina Faso adopted a national 10-year plan of action to end child marriage, which includes engaging community leaders, increasing access to education, and enforcing existing laws that respects the rights of women. Does it go far enough, and do you think it will actually make an impact?

**Denzler:** It is really a positive step that they decided to put together this strategy. It's huge, and a lot of other countries are doing this too. I think that it is to be determined if it goes far enough, because it goes back to the question you asked earlier [about] why we haven't seen anything changing, and actually making sure that the population of Burkina Faso actually knows that child marriage is illegal and that this law exists.

People knowing that the law exists means there has to be some accountability and protection for the people who try to get out of this. So I think that the strategy really is a great step and also the fact that the government has committed to ending early and forced child marriage. So we'll see. I think we need to wait to answer that question.

**Yazdani:** Is an effective method for engaging these communities to enforce the law themselves?

**Denzler:** In Burkina Faso, the team is doing incredible work in terms of promoting these conversations among different communities throughout Burkina Faso. And



they're doing it in a number of ways. They're using human rights education pieces, theater pieces, open dialogue conversations, and really sort of tailoring that boring law-stuff into what's really accessible information on what is the law and what rights do I have so that people can actually be right-holders.

**Yazdani: Going back to the US—recently child marriage has made national headlines, with some describing it as an “unseen threat in the US.” How big of a problem is it here, and in the West in general?**

**Denzler:** We do work obviously outside of the US, but we know that it is happening inside the United States. I don't know what the numbers are on this, but I know that the [Tahirih Justice Center](#) did a survey on child marriages in the United States, and they found that it is affecting all kinds of families—immigrant, and non-immigrant families—and they also found very diverse religious and socio-cultural backgrounds. So it's not like there is one place to look for this. Especially in the United States where it's kept under the rug.

**Yazdani: Is there early marriage in the US, if there is parental consent?**

**Denzler:** Yeah! It's so weird when we look at our own country instead of reflecting on what is the law here. In some states, you can get married at the age of fifteen with parental consent. It's state-by-state, [so it] is really tough in the United States to work on these issues. Would you call that early child marriage? I don't know. In the United States we rely heavily on parental consent, but when you're talking about a child or a teenager, we don't know their stories or if there's coercion behind that marriage and the backstories to that. And that's the obstacle part to this.

**Yazdani: Some [lawmakers now are making an effort to change that](#), and to change the law to 18, as it already is in so many of these developing nations. But that hasn't happened for the US yet.**

**Denzler:** It's insane. There are some things that we look at like the Convention on the Rights of a Child, governments have committed to ensuring the protection of children under the age of 18. It's a tough one.

**Yazdani: So what is the solution? How can we get to a world free of child marriage?**



**Denzler:** That is a very, very tough question. There's definitely no one-size-fits-all solution. It's going to be country to country, local community to local community, very context specific. When Amnesty is working on this, we look a lot to the law. That is the way we believe that we really can start to see a change. And we look at the longer term, which is what are we looking at in terms of attitudinal change, and how societies are changing and perceiving these issues.

Unfortunately, I will have to say that is a very long-term process. It takes a very long time to change minds. I would say it starts with the law, but for that law to actually mean something, it would take long-term attitudinal shift. And that happens in local communities. I think it's something that we can't do from outside. We really can't. And that's why the teams are working on this on a local level, and working with local leaders and local communities. That's the way it will slowly start to change.

*\*Dina Yazdani is a freelance journalist and a reporter at Fair Observer. Kaitlyn Denzler is a women's human rights campaigner with Amnesty International USA in Washington, DC.*



# America the Great is Only Months Away

Larry Beck

May 10, 2016

*Both Clinton and Trump promise a continuation of the notion that America can kill its way to a better world.*

OK world, it is time for a wake-up call. It sure looks like “the greatest nation on Earth” is going to be led in the coming four years by either Hillary Clinton or [Donald Trump](#). This will be good news for those in the greatest nation on Earth who drink the “greatness” Kool-Aid because that greatness is about the only thing the two of them agree upon. For those not living in the greatest nation on Earth, watch out. Each of these candidates has a plan for you, and neither plan includes asking you what you think about all of this.

So let me help out a bit. Let’s take Hillary first because she is easier to understand and has a long history of meddling in the affairs of other nations. She also sounds better when she says she is going to continue doing this, because she can say with that sly smile of hers: “America knows what is best for you; we will help you try to see it our way, but if you don’t, our military will be at the ready to make sure that you do.” Somehow this always yields a coalition of the willing. Hillary is also easier to swallow because when her foreign adventures don’t work out, she seems very apologetic.

## THE DONALD

Now, as for Trump, the first problem is figuring out what he is talking about, and then figuring out how long it will take one of his “advisors” to tell him that he has to change

his mind. As a clear example, Trump was quick to opine that “torture” to meet US security objectives was a good idea before and would be revived with new vigor if he were elected. Then, just to make sure our enemies got the message, he seemed to say that he would order reluctant torturers to get on with it or get out of the way. On the [next day came the inevitable correction](#).

These days, Trump is getting better at assuring an anxious nation that he is “so good” at everything that he undertakes that he will even be “so good” at things he knows nothing about. It seems that many Republicans from trailer parks to country clubs can’t get enough of this stuff.

Since Trump may actually know a lot about construction contracting, finding a company to build a big US border wall should not be much of a challenge. (Finding workers to do the work will be more of a challenge since Trump will have most of the Latinos who do this work in cattle cars headed to Mexico.) Trump also seems to know a lot about getting other people to finance his projects, so getting the Mexican government to pay for the wall might work out OK.

The whole wall project is problematic but at least it has Trump playing with money and mortar, a couple of the things that he says he is “so good” at. But let’s move on to nuclear weapons—this one would require Trump to be “so good” at something about which he seems to know nothing. Leaving aside for the moment Trump’s historically ignorant notions about nuclear proliferation, perhaps most enlightening is his repeated assertion that he would [not rule out the use of nuclear weapons to defeat the Islamic State](#) (IS or ISIS), preferring to remain “unpredictable” on this point.

To be sure, since Trump only seems willing to use nuclear weapons in someplace far away from the homeland and only when really necessary, Americans can sleep fairly well knowing that those in the Middle East are most at risk from catastrophic destruction. Even the prevailing winds work in our favor, since the nuclear fallout would blow on Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan. A small wind shift could create problems for Jordan and Lebanon, and then for [Trump’s beloved Israel](#), where he says he has “many friends” and to which he will be “very good.”

In Trump world, the surest sign for the rest of us that nuclear destruction is on the way will be the reverse surge withdrawal of all of our troops from the Middle

East. Remember, Trump will be “so good” for military personnel and their families, hardly possible if nuclear weapons are about to be deployed in their proximity.

But let’s not forget Europe where ISIS has already shown a brutal willingness to attack Western (Christian) values and surely might do so again. The Donald wants ISIS leaders to know that doing so again could result in Trump blowing up some mighty fine cathedrals and vineyards, not to mention tens of thousands of Europeans, in order to teach ISIS a lesson. Hard as it is to imagine, Trump has [repeatedly refused to take the use of nuclear weapons](#) in Europe off of the table.

The way I see this working out in Trump think, he tells a bunch of suicide bombers if they keep attacking Western values in Europe, he will drop a nuclear bomb on them in Europe. ISIS then dials back on terrorism against America because they don’t want to see those cathedrals and vineyards destroyed. If this sounds good to you, you are probably on the Trump bandwagon already.

## **WAKE UP!**

So this is where our world is headed in the next four years—a continuation of the notion that America can kill its way to a better world. In Hillary’s hands, there will be ramped up US diplomatic and military efforts to remake countries that don’t want to be remade by us, resulting in the predictable catastrophic consequences of more war, more dead and wounded, more refugees and more motivated enemies.

With Trump at the helm, his unpredictable international roadmap will have many of the same predictable consequences as America “again” marches to greatness. But also, and more importantly, there will be a palpable concern that a woefully uninformed egomaniac is in charge of America’s war machine.

Wake up world! We are headed for more dangerous and more deadly times either way.

*\*Larry Beck is a lifelong leftist, activist and retired lawyer.*



# The Media and the Fate of American Liberalism

Jonathan Krause

May 12, 2016

*If the rich and powerful get a voice and the rest of us do not, which direction is the nation likely to head in?*

In spite of Bernie Sanders' wins in Indiana and West Virginia, Hillary Clinton will almost certainly be the Democratic Party's presidential nominee. This being the case, it may seem pointless to write about the media coverage of the election at this late stage.

The biases run so deep and so clear that they have become yet another political reality that we simply take for granted. There may be some value, however, in discussing the possible results of this bias in the medium-to-long term, especially from the perspective of the Democratic race. What will it mean for American society in the future? What does it say about American society today?

In order to have this discussion, we should first lay some of the media bias out on the table. In debates, in newspapers and across the broad spectrum of digital media the current presidential primaries have been viewed almost exclusively from a set of deeply-held political biases.

These biases appear so widespread that one forgets that they are biases at all. If a politician proposes programs to support education, health care, the poor, the young or the elderly, we must ask them how they plan on paying for it.

The tone and repetition of these questions underlie the implicit argument that such things are not just expensive, but inherently too expensive. If a candidate plans on cutting taxes or expanding the military there is no need to question how they will pay for it at all.

**MONEY IN POLITICS**

On the rare occasion they are in fact asked about the cost of such policies, there is no need to harp on the point. Let the candidate lie and then amiably move on.

The Democratic primary has taken this long-established American pattern to new, and even more frustrating, lows by refusing to ask Hillary Clinton how she will pay for any of her proposals, ever (much less how she will get them through Congress). Bernie Sanders sought to pay for free public and state universities by imposing a 0.5% tax on stock trades (mirroring similar taxes in London and Frankfurt). Hillary? Well, she says she has a plan for that.

Fundamentally we should not be too surprised by the fact that the establishment seeks to protect its own. That Hillary Clinton received favorable treatment from media corporations who also contributed large amounts of money to her campaign (like Time Warner) is, again, so obvious it hardly bears repeating.

What is worrying, however, is how sharply the American left (depressingly embodied by the Democratic Party) is breaking with anything that might even remotely be construed as “liberal.” It is now the basic dogma of the Democratic Party that money in politics is not a corrupting force.

After all, if it cannot corrupt Hillary Clinton or Barack Obama (as many now contend), then how can Democrats claim that it corrupts anyone? In just under six years the Democrats have gone from viciously decrying Citizens United to broadly, if unconsciously, supporting it.

The media tended to stay away from any mention of campaign finance—it was not asked as a direct question in any of the early debates. When they did finally begin mentioning it they framed the questioning from the same perspective as Citizens United: If you cannot prove a clear and immediate quid pro quo then money in politics must not have any corrupting influence.

The media has helped normalize a cartoon image of corruption, while neglecting the trend lines in American policy that have been heavily favoring the wealthy since at least 1980. It is the job of writers, those of us who deal with the immortality of the written word, to provide readers with historical perspective. The corporate news media

has consistently failed in this regard during the primaries. The health care debate provides one small example of this.

## UNIVERSAL HEALTH CARE

Just eight years ago, Democrats were fighting over what the precise terms of a universal health care system should look like; the argument between Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama on this regard was a notable feature of their campaign.

Today, Democrats and left-leaning columnists have lined up en masse to declare universal health care “[puppies and rainbows](#)” or “[unicorns](#)” (to use the terms favored by Ezra Klein and Paul Krugman). Many of these columnists had to reverse their own long-stated opinions regarding universal health care in order to more effectively attack Sanders and his ideas. Clinton set the stage for this abrupt turn to the right all the way back in January when she boldly announced that universal health care will “[never, ever come to pass](#)” at a rally in Des Moines. “No, we can’t,” indeed.

As usual, arguments about universal health care (caricatured exclusively as single payer in American debates) center around the cost of such a system. Americans like to believe that having more costs more. There is a certain, simple logic to this line of thinking that is understandably enticing. Unfortunately, the basic facts do not bear it out. As we well know, universal coverage systems on the whole tend to be drastically cheaper than the US system. The UK spends some 9% of GDP on health care and manages to cover every man, woman and child from womb to tomb.

The US spends a shocking 17% of its GDP on health care and leaves roughly 30 million people with no health insurance at all, to say nothing of the hundreds of thousands of Americans who file for bankruptcy due to medical bills every single year. Somehow this system is considered “realistic” (perhaps “pragmatic”) whereas cheaper, more efficient and vastly more humane systems that already exist in other developed countries are “puppies and rainbows.”

The lack of imagination and independent thought that is required to reach the conclusions offered by otherwise “liberal” outlets is truly staggering. Under normal circumstances one would expect journalists to point out the gross cost of the American system and the substantial savings of moving toward a universal system. As a rule, they have overwhelmingly done the exact opposite during this election.

## A POLITICAL REVOLUTION

There was a surging hope among the shattered remnants of the American left-wing that the rise of Bernie Sanders may mean a “political revolution” (to use his own term) that would sharply pull the United States back into line with the rest of the developed world.

That this turn is not going to happen, at least not anytime soon, is now undeniable. What is truly shocking, however, is the conservative backlash that the movement has engendered in the mainstream Democratic Party. The reversal, already, of Obama’s regulation barring federal lobbyists from donating money to the Democratic National Committee (DNC) and its preferred candidates is just the beginning.

Without pressure from the left, which will almost certainly wither and recoil when Sanders formally concedes defeat, the “center” will no doubt work tirelessly to aggrandize even more political power into the hands of the wealthy few. The DNC has already engaged in a blunt form of money-laundering in support of Clinton, funneling contributions made to state party organs into the Hillary Victory Fund, thus signaling that they are willing to go out of their way to woo big money.

To the credit of most major news outlets this was widely reported. However, as usual, reporters failed to ask the logical follow-up questions. “Where will this system leave us in 10 or 20 years?” Like so much of American politics, the focus has been so narrowly limited to this one, single election cycle that no one seems to care about the medium-term implications of the decisions being made today. When the mass media—still the most prominent player in setting the “acceptable” parameters politics and policy—fails to look forward, it smothers the voice of us who do.

In this vacuum only those with access can talk about their long-term goals, usually in private (or at least shielded by a static machine). If the rich and powerful get a voice and the rest of us do not, which direction is the nation likely to head in? If we are lucky all of this money entering the system will ensure that our politics delivers more of the same. If we are unlucky, then the march toward oligarchy, a phrase uttered not just by Bernie Sanders but also by the venerable Jimmy Carter, will hasten.



For the millions of Americans who are worried about the collapse of their democracy, evidenced starkly in the [Princeton study which concluded that the US is now largely an oligarchy](#), and the new two-tier America of haves and have-nots is there any hope? Maybe.

Perhaps it is best to see the campaign of Bernie Sanders not as a flash in the pan, but as part of a broader movement that first burst onto the national scene during the Occupy Wall Street movement. These many millions are still out there, and are still upset. If they continue to fight, then perhaps Americans will one day receive universal health care, maternity leave, paid vacation and better compensation for their labor. Then again, perhaps they won't.

Perhaps America is forever doomed to play the part of Rome to Europe's Greece.

*\*Jonathan Krause is a research associate at the University of Oxford.*



# What is the American Dream?

Taif Jany

May 16, 2016

*Having fled oppression and death in Iraq and Syria, a young man reflects on life in America and its divisive election campaign.*

Ten years ago, my father and I had breakfast together before he left for work and I headed to school. I kissed him goodbye. I never saw him again.

I was born and raised in Baghdad, in a loving family of two parents and three siblings. We come from the Mandaean community—a religious minority group, one of the oldest in the world. During and after the rule of Saddam Hussein, Mandaeans have been the target of persecution and violence in Iraq, and many have fled the country in search of safety. As a result, the Mandaean community in Iraq is almost extinct today.

In March 2003, Iraq was at war with the United States. I was 13 years old. The first night of the invasion, my family and I were gathered in my bedroom watching the news. I remember hearing missiles flying over our house and detonating seconds later. I was terrified. Every time I heard a missile, I would hide under my blanket, thinking it would somehow protect me.

Shortly after the invasion, sectarian civil war erupted throughout Iraq. I grew accustomed to seeing dead bodies on the streets, watching cars explode on my way to school and hearing non-stop gunfire. At the time, my oldest brother and sister decided to seek refuge in Jordan. Kidnappings, killings and discrimination against religious minorities were an everyday occurrence. My family and I were constantly afraid.

In November 2006, the danger we feared became reality when my father was kidnapped on his way home from work by an unknown armed group. My family and I have not seen or heard from him since.

Though heartbroken, afraid and devastated, my mother insisted on staying in Baghdad for months to continue searching for my dad. She found no trace that could lead us to

him; and with him gone, I lost any sense of belonging in my own country. Fearing for our lives, we fled to Syria where we would be safe, leaving behind everything we had ever known and any hope of finding my father.

## **GO FINISH SCHOOL**

In Syria, I taught myself English by listening to American music and joined the Iraqi Student Project, established to help Iraqi refugee students complete college in the United States. I was accepted to a small liberal arts school in upstate New York, but this meant that I had to make the most difficult decision of my life: staying in Syria with my mother, or traveling to a place completely foreign to me—alone. With teary eyes and a soft voice, she told me: “All I want for you and your siblings is to succeed in your lives and be happy. Go finish school.”

I arrived to the United States in 2008 and immediately fell in love with this country and what it represents. For the first time in my life, I was not discriminated against because of my religious background. I had been given a new sense of belonging and a new sense of purpose.

After finishing college, I realized that there was no chance for me to return to Iraq. With the emergence of the Islamic State (IS) it has become even more dangerous for religious minorities. I applied for asylum to remain in the United States.

While the asylum process was rigorous, daunting and slow (it took two years before the immigration office ruled that I could be put on the long path to citizenship), the wait taught me something invaluable. Having the opportunity to spend the past eight years in the US, I have come to understand three core American values: freedom of speech, the idea that all people are created equal and that everyone has the right to life, liberty and to pursuit of happiness through hard work.

In my current job, part of my role is to explain and raise awareness about the situation in Iraq to members of US Congress. I also have the opportunity to help children displaced by ISIS in Iraq and make a difference in the lives of those in need. Most importantly, I now can have an opinion to share with people. My voice can be heard. If I was in Iraq still, I would not be able to do any of these things.

## **IGNORANCE AND FEAR**

However, I have been paying attention to the 2016 Presidential campaigns and have noticed that some candidates are set out to destroy these principles.

Theirs are campaigns based on hateful rhetoric, ignorance and fear. Discriminatory ideas like [banning all Muslims](#) from entering the country or [carpet-bombing](#) cities in the Middle East are disgusting and shameful. What saddens me is the number of people who agree with these reckless thoughts. Certain candidates serve as a megaphone to amplify their fear and their hatred of people and cultures they do not understand. It is reminiscent of the danger and oppression I fought to escape.

Some of my best friends are Muslims who came with me to the US. When I talk to them about these racist and stigmatizing ideas, they often appear confused and afraid. They, like me, came to this country to escape violence and seek shelter, to be free, to learn and to build a better future for themselves and their families. Religion and terrorism are two completely separate things and we must not confuse them together. I am living proof that the United States is a place where dreams come true with hard work. I am living the American Dream. It is real. But it is at risk.

We cannot buy into the fear and hate shouted by some presidential candidates and blindly repeated by their followers. America is already great. If we remain true to our American values, it always will be.

*\*Taif Jany is the program manager at the Education for Peace in Iraq Center in Washington, DC.*



# Thailand is Headed Down a Dark Path

Craig Moran

May 19, 2016

*The culture of fear in Thailand today has cemented the nation's status as an ailing democracy.*

The nations of Southeast Asia have collectively achieved a degree of notoriety for their structural instabilities—the typically gradual process of political change abandoned for recurring power vacuums and institutional landslides.

In this respect, Thailand is no different, and has suffered 19 separate coup d'états since the absolute monarchy was abolished in 1932. Even so, there has always been cautious optimism about Thailand's place in Southeast Asia as a liberal voice in a troubled region. With the 2014 coup, however, the same observers who have always patiently held out for Thailand's return to the democratic fold have started to betray a significant shift in their attitudes toward its current status.

Perhaps it is the Thai electoral commission's recently filed charges against [a group posting on Facebook](#)—accusing them of using foul language about the latest draft of the proposed constitution—that has stripped away the last remaining layers of hope. They were charged with sedition and computer crimes, and two are facing *lèse-majesté* charges under the notorious article 112.

That these charges are being filed at all is a direct result of coup leader Prayuth Chan-ocha's [highly restrictive laws](#) on discussing the charter. Ostensibly to deter political bodies from influencing the vote of the electorate, it has swiftly become apparent that the true motive underlying these laws is to silence any criticism of a patently undemocratic process ahead of the August referendum—a referendum that will allow Thais to vote for or against a new draft constitution.

On May 2, the 14 rules governing the limits of free speech on discussing the constitution [officially became law](#). “Rude, aggressive, or intimidating” interviews with government figures are banned, as well as wearing “T-shirts, pins and ribbons” that encourage others to campaign. Transgressors face up to 10 years in prison.

The law is already changing the attitudes of journalists and bloggers. In the words of one Facebook commentator quoted by Voice of America, “[I have to think twice about what I post and share now](#).”

The charges filed against the Facebook group, in tandem with a number of arrests of critics across the country and the [frequent censoring](#) of international media publications, have promoted a culture of fear that is clearly far removed from the electoral commission’s pretense of organizing a free and fair election. It’s no small wonder that The New York Times [decided](#) to end printing and distributing its print edition in Thailand.

The new constitution has been presented to the Thai public as the sole means to get democracy back on track—the beginning of a handover process that will see the junta’s influence recede. However, the nation’s major political parties, as well as interested human rights organizations, have been swift to criticize the most recent draft (released on March 29) as further entrenching the powers and influence of the military in Thai politics, and falling far short of the promises that Prayuth’s junta had made.

Not only has the draft given the military further scope to silence critics, with sweeping powers to arrest and detain at will, but the very possibility of returning to civilian rule is doubtful. In this new constitution, for instance, all [250 members of the senate](#) would be appointed by the junta, with six positions permanently open to appointments from the military. That senate would then oversee the country’s governance for the next five years, until such a time that it saw fit to hand the reins of power over to a democratically elected government.

Yet there are worrying hints that this already most unsatisfactory of situations might prove only a temporary compromise. Since the coup of 2014, Prayuth has repeatedly backtracked on his promises to organize elections and, in order to legitimize his heavy-handed approach to governance, the general now appears determined to riddle the new constitution with subversive clauses—most worryingly the introduction of legal avenues to provide for [an unelected premier](#).

The details regarding these avenues are, as to be expected, intentionally vague, but it is not a great stretch of imagination given Prayuth's recent track record that they might be utilized toward the end of the five years to further thwart the democratic process.

## BEYOND THE POINT OF NO RETURN?

A public vote in favor of the constitution this August is a distinct possibility—given the overriding desire of the Thai populace to get their lives and businesses back on track—and might seem something of a victory for Prayuth and his generals.

Sadly, even a public rejection of the constitution might play even more firmly [into the military's hands](#). Prayuth has already said that, if the draft is rejected, he will keep on making suggestions indefinitely until it is passed. The inference here is that the junta will only accept a democracy that is paradoxically governed by an unelected body and sanctioned by the military. Either the Thai public must legitimize the Thai junta through elective means, or have it forced upon them.

A return to a true form of civilian rule is now virtually impossible and the May 2014 coup should, therefore, be seen as a watershed moment in Thailand's political history. While many observers were expecting the junta to pass the baton in short order, Prayuth's behavior is indicative of a deep desire for a system that abides solely according to army rules and hierarchies. The ambitions of the Prayuth administration have gone beyond simply preserving the legacy of the monarchic establishment, and [King Bhumibol's ailing health](#) provides the perfect springboard for Prayuth's cynical ambitions of staying in power.

There has been a paradigm shift not only in the nation's traditionally coy affair with democracy, but also in the fundamental institutions that made it possible. We are now entering a dark new era in Thai politics more reminiscent of a time when the nation had a different name: goodbye Thailand and hello again Siam.

*\*Craig Moran is an independent geopolitical consultant.*



# How Will Saudi Arabia Revamp its Education System?

Khadija Mosaad

May 25, 2016

*Without an educated and skilled workforce, it will be a tremendous challenge for Vision 2030 to meet its target goals.*

As Saudi Arabia pursues economic diversification and sustainable development, the kingdom's progress on these two fronts requires a reformed education system. In April, Prince Mohammed bin Salman—Saudi Arabia's deputy crown prince, defense minister and head of the Council of Economic and Developmental Affairs—[announced a new and progressive plan known as Vision 2030](#), which focuses on a variety of economic reforms, business and investment endeavors, as well as cultural and entertainment projects.

Without taking into account the importance, value and overall social implications of a quality education, it is not feasible to implement meaningful economic, cultural and business reforms. Without an educated and skilled workforce, it will be a tremendous challenge for Vision 2030 to meet its target goals. Because of outdated school curricula, ineffective teaching methods and low education standards, one aspect of the vision that will require extensive improvements is in the field of education. It is estimated that [two-thirds of the Saudi population of 29 million](#) are under the age of 30.

For Vision 2030 to succeed, Saudi Arabia must take advantage of the knowledge, skills and expertise that this age group can bring to the table.

## EDUCATION GOALS

The education aspect of Prince Mohammed's vision focuses on three major areas: curriculum development, higher education advancements and building skills needed for the job market.



The [vision includes goals](#) such as “to have at least five Saudi universities among the top 200 universities in international rankings; help students achieve results above international averages in global education indicators; work towards developing the job specifications of every education field.”

At first glance, these goals seem ambitious, bold and hopeful. However, officials in Riyadh have not answered important questions regarding their implementation. Which five Saudi universities will be chosen? What standards will these universities follow? What are the global education indicators? How will educators, advisors and counselors help develop job specification for every education field?

These education goals do, however, align with characteristics needed in a knowledge-based economy, in which [reliance is placed on the skills and capabilities](#) of the individual rather than on physical inputs or natural resources. In order for these goals to be met, Saudi Arabia must revamp the structure and, more importantly, the quality of the current education system. The kingdom’s schools stress rote memorization with little emphasis on analytical and critical thinking skills.

According to Theodore Karasik, an analyst on the Gulf, “[a gap exists between two cultures: the school versus university ethos](#).” Students are not learning the necessary skills needed in schools such as questioning, problem solving and creative thinking. When Saudi students begin university, they will face a whole new slew of challenges. “Some factors that feed into this include studying in English, a lack of personal commitment to college education and inadequate study skills, Karasik notes. “The issue of studying in English is significant because physics, chemistry and biology traditionally use English as the basic language that directs approach, methodology and analysis.”

What this creates then is a society of Saudi graduates not adequately prepared to enter the workforce, and even more difficult to compete on a global level. This has, in turn, formed a society dependent on foreign skills and expertise. Will Saudi Arabia import ideas, methods and designs to implement Vision 2030, or will the kingdom rely on homegrown solutions from Saudis themselves?

In a country deeply rooted in religion, tradition and customs, Vision 2030 will require changes in the overall mindsets of individuals, families and communities. The principles of education in Saudi Arabia are strongly rooted in the teachings and values

of Islam and sharia law. At the K-12 level, there is a greater emphasis placed on learning about the religion, culture and history of the country as opposed to subjects related to [science, technology, engineering and mathematics](#) (STEM).

In order for students to be successful in STEM subjects at university level, it must first be heavily incorporated in the K-12 curriculum. In recent years, there have been efforts to build higher education institutions that stress the importance of science and research such as [King Abdullah University of Science and Technology](#).

STEM education and practices have yet to make a real significant impact on students throughout schools and universities in Saudi Arabia. According to a [UNESCO report on education in Saudi Arabia](#), the general goals of education in the kingdom besides religion is “to equip students with various skills and knowledge; to develop their conduct in constructive directions; to develop the society economically and culturally; and to prepare the individual to be a useful member in the building of his/her community.”

## SKILLS

Saudi Arabia must build a skilled and educated workforce in order to compete in the global economy. This idea is not a new phenomenon. When King Abdullah inherited the throne in 2005, he changed the education opportunities available to both men and women. The year he took power, the late king created a program called the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP) with the help and support of former US President George W. Bush. It is the largest, [fully-funded government program of its kind currently in place](#). KASP represents a massive educational effort on the kingdom’s part to send students abroad to get academic degrees and medical fellowships.

This program hoped to not only ease tensions between the United States and Saudi Arabia at a time in which tension and resentment abounded, but it also aimed at creating a new thriving generation to modernize the country.

In 2015, the [US-Saudi Arabian Business Council reported](#) that “\$6 billion was earmarked for over 207,000 Saudi students studying abroad and their families.” Under KASP, students are able to study abroad in Western higher education institutions and learn analytical and critical thinking skills, improve their English and gain real life experiences through internships and volunteer opportunities. Students who studied

under KASP and returned to Saudi Arabia are now in an integral position where they can play a crucial role in the development and the implementation of Vision 2030.

## K-12 INITIATIVES

The Irtiqaa program, an initiative included in Vision 2030, will measure the effectiveness of Saudi parents' engagement in their children's education. By 2020, 80% of [Saudi parents will have to participate in school activities](#) and the learning process of their children. If successful, this could be profound.

Typically, housemaids are responsible for raising and caring for Saudi children. This is an important component to consider when implementing such rigorous efforts. How will the dynamics change between housemaids, children and parents?

Other programs can be incorporated into school curricula to better engage students at an early age. For example, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has declared [2016 as the Year of Reading](#). Children are encouraged to read for pleasure and enhance their knowledge outside of the classroom.

This program does not seem to have had a ripple effect on other members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) as of yet. However, it provides an example of the types of programs needed to engage children at all age levels.

There is little known at this point on how these targets will be reached. Nonetheless, the education reforms are essential for promoting economic growth, facilitating development and even possibly changing the mindsets of individuals.

## THE OUTLOOK

Under the kingdom's current social climate, achieving the commitments and goals outlined in Vision 2030 will be challenging. The roles of Saudi women in society, labor laws and guardianship laws are just a few of the social issues that have hindered the kingdom's advancement, both on the local and global scale. However, just this past April, officials in [Riyadh announced new regulations](#) for the Saudi religious police (mutawaa), stripping their powers to arrest.

Will Saudi Arabia see more of these social changes?

Ultimately, to successfully implement education plans, Saudi Arabia must utilize education advisors, experts and consultants. The education sector should take advantage of those students who studied abroad, particularly in the field of education, so they can share best practices, pedagogies and standards followed in schools, universities and institutions abroad.

These ideas would then need to be incorporated within Saudi Arabia's education system in a way in which it meets the demands of not only the job market, but also the developmental needs of students. The Saudis must emphasize "non-traditional" fields of study such as humanities, political science degrees and the arts, along with STEM subjects.

Saudi Arabia needs to build an education infrastructure in which students and families have major incentives to remain in their home country for the purpose of pursuing education opportunities.

Of course, change never takes place quickly, and it is far too early to predict the fate of Prince Mohammed's Vision 2030. Only time will tell how and, more importantly, if Saudi Arabia's education will exceed expectations and break barriers at international levels.

*\*Khadija Mosaad is pursuing a PhD in Higher Education at George Mason University (GMU).*



# What Really Matters in This Election Cycle

Naomi Wolf

May 30, 2016

*Only the intellectual empowerment of Americans can stem the tide of distracting voters from real policies, says Naomi Wolf.*

The success of extremes in America's political scene speaks, these days, to how dispossessed and voiceless many Americans now feel. A new edition of an important citizen's guide and handbook—Jessamyn Conrad's [What You Should Know About Politics... But Don't](#)—explains why.

Some of the issues that are surfacing again and again in our news stream in 2016 are directly interlocking. They deal with issues of personal freedom and constitutional rights versus national security claims.

Usually, these themes are reported upon as “symptoms.” For example, a protest in Detroit within the Black Lives Matter movement is reported as if it is a discrete event. The controversy over Edward Snowden's revelations is reported as if that is simply the story of an individual making controversial individual choices.

The reportage is often personalized. Accounts of Islamic State (IS) incursions in Iraq or threats reported from IS in the United States or in western Europe are reported separately as well.

But by showing how interests are aligned or in conflict and result in legislation, this book reveals how many of these themes have common origins. How? Because a vast national security structure has been set in place with immense, and often nontransparent, funding from government sources (as well as huge profits from the private sector) with interest in militarizing domestic police forces, which in turn results in more violent crackdowns against protesters and—it is reasonable to assume—a

more aggressive policing policy, less overall respect for individual civil liberties, and more black lives lost to police violence.

Is profit part of this militarization of policing and this criminalization of civic action?

The US leads the world in imprisoning its citizens, as Michelle Alexander's [\*The New Jim Crow\*](#) revealed. Immense profits are being generated by the prison industry, and the lobbyists for those interests actually require a certain conviction-rate commitment from elected officials before they will build prisons and fill them.

Black lives matter less and less as the profit motive for locking up our fellow citizens—whose conviction rates have been proven to be higher than those of Caucasians accused of parallel crimes—escalates.

Some recent legislation, such as the Federal Prison Industries Competition in Contracting Act, shows how profitable the private incarceration sector is.

The same rise of the national security state turns a whistleblower (or traitor, depending on your perspective) such as Snowden into a lifelong fugitive. An acquittal such as that won by Daniel Ellsberg in the 1970s after leaking the Pentagon Papers—which were interpreted as being in the national interest to reveal—is entirely unlikely today.

Even the IS threat must be assessed critically in the context of these vast billions that are flowing into the coffers of stakeholders in the national security apparatus, since a new global threat, real as it may be, generates even more profit by being over reported. A bill for border security details the potential of these many millions to flow to the private sector—that is, if fear and fear reportage do their work.

## **MEDIA REPORTING**

But these pressures distort news stories. Reports from both the left and the right, ranging from [\*The Guardian\*](#) to [\*Reason\*](#), are finding that government agencies and private security companies, at times amplifying each other's efforts—as the FBI has pointed to releases from the highly unreliable private syndicator SITE Intelligence—are exaggerating or hyping up terror threats to news outlets, which often reprint assertions from these sources uncritically.

In the US, a number of key claims by the FBI about “terror cells,” as I reported in [The End of America](#), have fallen apart upon further press scrutiny, when it became clear that many cases involved confused drifters entrapped by the authorities.

Fueling more of this kind of legislation that benefits the few stakeholders and their lobbyists, instead of reflecting the needs of voters, is the Supreme Court decision, Citizens Unite. Now, it is difficult for even the best-intentioned elected official to listen more to his or her constituents rather than the lobbyists who will fund his or her next campaign.

*What You Should Know About Politics... But Don't* spells out this corruption. A billion dollars was spent in the last presidential cycle. So we are witnessing an increase in legislation that results in greater benefit for the few who can spend heavily on lobbying. This has strengthened the income inequality that commentators such as [Robert Reich](#) report.

## **ELECTION CYCLE**

Some of the issues that are emerging in the present election cycle, such as the passage of health care reform or Obamacare (depending on where you sit ideologically), run counter to the overall trend of the consolidation of power in fewer hands. Other currents, such as the development of green energy and the growing awareness of the seriousness of the environmental crisis, also pose challenges to this general trend.

Solving the crisis posed by global warming will involve communitarian rather than us-versus-them thinking. While the need for laws reducing carbon emissions is clear, the same obstacles to such legislation—the concentration of power in the hands of lobbyists, including those for the oil industry—stands in the way.

The direct challenges posed by climate change strongly suggest the urgent need for organizations that seek to empower voters in spite of lobbyists and special interests. A network of such civically oriented entities is now coalescing. These groups and resources range from Civic Hall in New York, a venture that houses many of the emerging civic tech startups, to nonprofit organizations such as the Sunlight and the Maplight Foundation, to a series of grassroots citizen movements.

Civic Tech is actually a fast-growing place in the digital ecosystem. These also include the much-harassed Occupy movement, now largely cordoned off; Black Lives Matter activists; and anti-surveillance leaders, such as those at the Electronic Frontier Foundation. Combined, these constitute the movement of our time.

It is clear that the old left-versus-right duality, the lens through which we have been asked to view American politics, is really dead—or rather, that we can now see that it is a distraction. The understanding that we are in a time in which the real conflicts are not conservative versus liberal, but the many against the few is far more widespread.

When culture-war issues, such as gay marriage or native-born Americans versus immigrants are thrown out into the electorate, many more sophisticated voters on all sides of the political spectrum are aware that these issues are trotted out in election years to ramp up the appearance of differences between the parties.

In reality, both are largely beholden—albeit in different proportions—to the Big Six, the major special interests: what I call War Inc. (and its emerging major subsidiary, Fear Inc., or the global surveillance and security industry); Big Pharma; Big Insurance; Big Oil; Big Agriculture; and Wall Street. We can probably add Big Incarceration to that list now.

## **REAL PLANS FOR REAL ISSUES**

Smart voters realize that whatever their political beliefs, it is those who don't hold power in these major industries—that is, all the rest of us: teachers and nurses, cops and factory workers, new immigrants and small business owners, the unemployed, the retired, veterans, the plain old middle and working class—who, whatever our views on abortion or gay marriage or bilingualism or gun ownership, are getting screwed. The only way for such outsiders as the rest of us to regain our seats at the table is through understanding what is going on behind the curtain.

Also in line with this shift from left-versus-right framing to a re-centering of debate around decisions stressing individual choice is the action taken by Congress to cede federal authority over much of education. George W. Bush's No Child Left Behind Act, for example, was replaced with the Every Student Succeeds Act, which gives states back much of their former influence in schools' curricula.



As I write, we are in the midst of a political campaign. Conrad's book explains why the discussion has migrated so far from political campaigns in the 1980s and early 1990s. That was the era before the Great Divide: the cleaving of the nation and its public servants into the haves and the have-nots. Before the Citizens United decision, presidential and congressional campaigns were substantially more centered on the issues that really affected ordinary people.

I remember when presidential candidates spoke about their real plans for real policies around infrastructure or investment in training; about tax cuts for ordinary people or plans to revitalize industry or grow new industries; about how to help small businesses thrive or whether to build more mass transit; and how to deal with delivering more nutritious school lunches.

Today, a third of political debate on the national stage is about IS, which is a subject the average citizen can do nothing about, and a third is anti-immigration rhetoric—a subject guaranteed to divide and distract the electorate without burning up any real political capital with special interests.

The balance is outrage over gay rights or perhaps gun ownership, or abortion and Planned Parenthood or other culture-war hot-button talking points.

While strong feelings and fierce beliefs definitely attached to these themes, the fact is that no major candidate is going to burn up any political capital with the rich folks who write the checks by focusing on demand for real reforms rather than keeping voters distracted by such volatile issues. It is a fantastic sleight of hand, but America is far the worse for it.

In this climate, only the intellectual empowerment of citizens can stem this tide.

*\*Naomi Wolf is an American author, journalist and political activist.*



## Austrian President Takes Over a Split Nation

Stefanie Leodolter

June 1, 2016

*The tightest race since 1945 has brought left-wing liberal economist Alexander Van der Bellen forward as the new president of Austria.*

Of all places, it is Austria's smallest municipality of Gramais in the Tyrolean Alps that has become symbolic for the political state the country is in. Only 51 people live in this village—39 of them eligible to vote. On May 22, [18 voters went to the polling station for the presidential election](#). Half of them chose Alexander Van der Bellen, a former Green Party leader who ran as an independent candidate and eventually won the race. The other half of voters in the picturesque village of Gramais checked the box for Norbert Hofer of the right-wing populist Freedom Party (FPÖ)—as did 49.7% of Austrians.

The match was so close that a final result could only be reached a day later. A striking number of [900,000 postal ballots](#) had to be counted, resulting in Van der Bellen overtaking his opponent, but only by a small sum of [31,000 votes](#). The election turned into an international media frenzy in Vienna, with hundreds of journalists watching the race almost as anxiously as Austrians themselves.

The reason for this high level of global interest was not because of President-Elect Van der Bellen. The world's eye was solely focused on Hofer and whether Austria would become yet another European nation led by a right-wing populist. It would have followed a drastic trend around the continent with the right turn of countries such as [Poland and Hungary](#).

**PAST AND PRESENT**

Austria has been here before. In 1986, Kurt Waldheim, a former secretary-general of the United Nations (UN), ran for president backed by the centrist People's Party (ÖVP). In his application to the UN, he lied and failed to mention his involvement under the [Nazi regime and his role in the Wehrmacht](#). Despite enormous international resistance, Waldheim was elected president by [53.9% of Austrians](#). He lasted one term until 1992 and remained widely isolated internationally; he was [declared a \*persona non grata\* in the United States](#).

This time around, the pressure against Hofer from outside Austria came from high ranking politicians, including the presidents of the [European Commission and Parliament](#), Jean-Claude Juncker and Martin Schulz, among others.

This was different from one year ago. When speaking to the public, Austrian leaders headed by Chancellor Werner Faymann of the Social Democrats (SPÖ) euphemistically presented themselves to be just fine. While the governing coalition of the SPÖ and ÖVP had taken heavy blows in regional elections in [Burgenland](#), [Styria](#) and later in [Upper Austria](#), there was no sign that their seemingly sedated political strategy would change any time soon. And hardly anyone outside the national borders seemed to be paying much attention to the alpine republic.

Suddenly on August 28, 2015, however, all eyes were on Austria and a truck found on a highway in the eastern province of Burgenland: 71 refugees—eight women, four children and 59 men—had [tragically died on their journey to safety](#). Soon after, German Chancellor Angela Merkel declared, “We can do it!” in response to the humanitarian crisis that surfaced in the movement of refugees and migrants from Syria, Afghanistan and many other countries. Faymann followed suit, opening borders and letting thousands of refugees enter Austria, most of whom did not plan on staying but instead had the aim of reaching Germany.

The Viennese regional elections served as a final wake-up call in terms of the [growing power of the far-right](#). From that moment, the “refugees welcome” attitude adopted by Faymann and his cabinet had changed. Instead, he [introduced fierce laws to keep refugees out of the country](#). If nothing else, Faymann was brought to his knees by Hofer and his FPÖ and their aggressive anti-refugee campaigning. A large part of the population had bought into the populist strategy of fear and distrust in anything and

anyone foreign. On top of that, constant disappointment and general disenchantment with politics were feeding the specter of the right-wing movement.

## ALEXANDER VAN DER BELLEN

Today, Faymann is history. Booed by the left-wing of his own party at their traditional parade on May 1, he [resigned a week](#) later. [Christian Kern](#), the former national railway (ÖBB) chief and figurehead during the refugee crisis, has taken office. With him came a hint of hope in the midst of political turmoil in Austria that a final right turn may be fended off. Kern has only a little time to get his new cabinet back on track and to prove that he is the wunderkind that he is expected to be. For President-Elect Van der Bellen's campaign, Kern's appearance was the silver lining of destructive political turbulence that seemed to be helping his rival.

But who is this rawboned, chain smoking economist who has gathered half the country behind him? [Alexander Van der Bellen](#), known by his nickname Sascha, was born in 1944 in Vienna. His father, an aristocrat of German, Dutch and Estonian descent born in Russia, and his Estonian mother had both fled Stalinism. Van der Bellen is a retired professor of economics at the University of Vienna. As a member of the Green Party, he sat in parliament for many years and acted as their federal spokesperson until 2008. During the election battle, he insisted on being an independent candidate for the presidency—although the Green Party provided not only moral, but also monetary support for his campaign.

In the end, Alexander “Sascha” Van der Bellen received 50.3% percent of the vote—many of which came his way to prevent Hofer from becoming president. Van der Bellen gathered a large committee of supporters around him consisting of influential people in politics, science and the arts. Toward the end of the race, he even managed to form unexpected alliances with the Catholic women's movement, despite leaving the Catholic Church and being without a religious denomination.

## SPLIT AUSTRIA

One thing is for certain: Van der Bellen and Hofer have managed to split the country. Their average voter types could hardly be more different. The trench between them separates women and men, urban and rural, higher and lower education levels. If one was to give into a bold thought experiment of only one gender being allowed to vote—

let us say women for the sake of the argument—Van der Bellen [would have won with 60%](#). Young women, living in the [city in their late 20s and with a college degree](#) went to the polls to pick Van der Bellen. Hofer's votes came from men up to 59 years old without a high school diploma and who were in search of a "strong president."

But Van der Bellen's victory is nothing but a faint signal of reason to Europe and the world. He will be welcomed by the international community and ought to represent Austria in an adequate diplomatic manner. However, the role of the Austrian president is not what you may think. The presidency does not hold a great deal of power inside or outside the country.

Added to that, half of Austria voted against the president-elect in favor of the antipode: Hofer and the FPÖ. This is the party's greatest success, and it is to be expected that they will benefit from this historic result at the general elections in 2018.

In April, before the first round of elections, the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF) aired a debate between all the candidates, in which Hofer said: "[You will be surprised by what can be done](#)." While he lost the election, his statement is as worrying as ever. Governments in Europe must overcome their nationalist approach to solve global challenges, which can only be tackled if member states of the European Union manage to unite and find common ground. Otherwise, Hofer's statement may well become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

President-elect Van der Bellen has acknowledged that he is taking over a split nation. In his first speech after the final result, he said the trenches had been there before and that "[maybe we did not look close enough and we will have to pay more attention](#)."

Because in the end, both halves of the population still matter. If he didn't feel presidential yet, he certainly did by closing his speech with: "You are as important as I am and I am as important as you are. And together we add up to this beautiful Austria."

*\*Stefanie Leodolter is a reporter at the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF) in radio, television and online.*



# The Fourth and Final Disappearance of Muhammad Ali

Peter Isackson

June 7, 2016

*Many of the issues Muhammad Ali brought to the fore are still here, some in aggravated form.*

An enigmatic American cultural icon disappeared this week, for the fourth and final time. Muhammad Ali is now routinely called by the media “the greatest sportsman of the 20<sup>th</sup> century,” but his iconic status had much more to do with one of the bitterest and still unresolved moments of American history than with athletic accomplishment. Ali, the defiant draft-dodger, encapsulated the complex reality of psychedelic ‘60s, remembered as an epoch of artistic innovation, rebellion, anti-authority protest, transformation, liberation and unbridled expression.

Cassius Clay emerged in 1960 as a graceful innovator in the techniques and style of boxing, quickly gained a reputation as a rebel against the manners of the age, morphed into a daring voice of protest, helped transform the notion of patriotism and justice, had a serious impact as a liberator of his race and by the end of the decade established himself a wildly creative entertainer. He left a lasting impact on Americans’ perception of themselves and their culture.

It was a time of cultural and political anguish and confusion punctuated by the promise of Camelot, the tidal wave of civil rights activism and the brutal backlash against it, the assassination of a president, the headlong rush into America’s first serious neo-colonial war and its progressive escalation, the spontaneous emergence of hippies and then yippies alongside Black Power and the militant feminism.

Clay started it off as a talented athlete with a flair for absurdly comedic public relations. His story over that decade was one of easy success on the road to the heavyweight championship followed by a deeply agonistic struggle in the social and political sphere that called into question American values concerning race and militarism. When the

butterfly Muhammad Ali emerged from Cassius Clay's cocoon in 1964, he was worse than a troublemaker. When he refused conscription, he was branded as the enemy of everything America stood for.

The construction of the comforting image we now have of Muhammad Ali on the Mount Rushmore of American sports and as a paragon of individual moral conscience was consolidated for the first time only after the confusion of the '60s had given way to disillusioned conformity of the '70s and then transformed again after his retirement from boxing, allowing him to become a symbol of the hypocrisy he had once challenged. The myth has dethroned the man and his contribution to his times. His final departure of the man behind the myth—the fourth disappearance of his lifetime—should give us the opportunity to set the record straight.

## **CREATING THE PERSONA**

Let's go back to the beginning—the launch of Cassius Clay, winner of the Olympic gold medal and future contender for the heavyweight championship. To be a contender you need to promote yourself or be promoted. Most boxers worked with their footwork and fists alone and left promotion to the professionals. Clay was different. He had the talent, if not the science, of promotion. Combined with his exceptional skills as a boxer and his flair for innovation, he created an enduring image that the media could not ignore.

An odd parallel could be made between young Cassius Clay in 1960 and Donald Trump in 2016. The young boxer built his own image, used the force of the media and [a talent for provocation as well as prevarication to sell it](#). He possessed and even cultivated an elevated level of self-esteem. And in spite of a very negative—but deliberately provoked—initial reception by the sports establishment, Cassius ensured that he would be noticed.

This was the first step in the long and complex process that would ultimately turn him into a fixture of US culture. Ali's achievement, unlike Trump's, was already more complex because based on authentic talent and skills. It would become more complex when the dramatic events of political, social and cultural history became part of Ali's story.

Today, Ali is revered as a model of personal achievement, a symbol of personal integrity. He is honored as a self-made black man who single-handedly proved his worth, successfully battling his way to the top. He has thus become the incarnation of the myth at the heart of US culture, the heroic individual who achieved success through self-reliance and self-creation.

But that wasn't how the story played out at the time. After winning an Olympics gold medal in 1960, Cassius Clay put in action his apparently conscious plan to become the most hated young man in sports, hated for his manner and hated for promoting his race. According to the codes of the time, "darkies" weren't supposed to self-promote—neither themselves nor their race. Protesting flagrant injustice, as Martin Luther King, Jr., had begun doing, was barely tolerable. Drawing attention to the beauty and culture of their race was a clear breach of good manners.

Cassius Clay was branded as a brash verbal bully, an impertinent black kid with fast hands who after his success among the amateurs in the Olympics would, without the slightest doubt, promptly get thrashed by any one of the brutal professionals he would soon face. All the pundits, experts and amateur commentators at the time expected Clay to get a quick comeuppance, if not at the hands of seasoned heavyweight ex-champions or contenders, like Floyd Patterson or Archie Moore, then surely from the unbeatable reigning champion Sonny Liston. The influential sports journalist Murray Kempton summed it up for the majority with [this comment](#): "Liston used to be a hoodlum; now he is our cop; he was the big Negro we pay to keep sassy Negroes in line." When the bout with Liston actually did take place in February 1964, Cassius Clay was a 7-to-1 underdog.

Grace and speed had overcome strength. The juvenile delinquent had schooled the cop. After that fight it became impossible to ignore the young boxer or dismiss him as a pretender, though some claimed at the time that the fight was fixed. But the new champion subsequently shook up the media even more than he had shaken up Liston after six rounds. Only a few days later he shocked the world when he announced that he was abandoning his "slave name" Cassius Clay in favor of his new Muslim name, Muhammad Ali.

Worse, he let it be known that he had formally adhered to the reviled religion of Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam, aka Black Muslims, considered to be an extremist cult. The media had no idea how to react. Journalists couldn't decide whether to cheer for



the new champion and forgive him his bad manners, condemn him for joining a terrorist cell or hope that in a rematch Liston would prematurely terminate his career. What few Americans who hadn't lived through that era realize today is that from that moment on, Ali—today's legend—was authentically vilified by most of the white establishment and universally condemned by the media. Even African-Americans didn't know what to think of him. How would this provocation affect the cause of civil rights?

Six months earlier, in August 1963, Martin Luther King had made history with his “I have a dream” speech in Washington. At the very moment when Dr. King—in spite of being himself perceived as an agitator in an age of extreme conformity zealously enforced by J. Edgar Hoover—was beginning to be accepted by white society thanks to his eloquent rhetoric and his “turn the other cheek” Christian stance, the Nation of Islam was seen as an existential threat to the American establishment, liberal and conservative alike. Southerners hated them because they were black. Northern liberals were embarrassed because they rejected their solution of tolerance and gradual integration. Dr. King still called his people “negroes” whereas the Black Muslims and the emerging Black Panthers—preaching armed revolution in the face of institutional racism—had already banished a word that sounded too close to the supreme racist epithet, “nigger.” “Are you afraid to call us black?” was the challenge both groups sent to the “ofays” and “gray boys” in the south and north alike, who proudly called themselves “white.”

For several years, only one prominent member of the sporting press, Howard Cosell, refused to call Ali by his “slave name,” Cassius Clay. Those of us teenagers who not only thrilled at Ali's ballet-like boxing skills and hungered to see him “float like a butterfly and sting like a bee,” but who also had serious misgivings about the racial climate in the US, couldn't help admiring Cosell's courage as a journalist who had the guts to take Ali on his own terms, both as a boxer and a man of conscience. Already in 1964 the battle around Ali was engaged: The political and media establishment and the majority of the population of the United States concurred in branding Ali an unwanted alien. But Muhammad Ali, the iconic hero of moral and political conscience, was still waiting to be born.

## **I SPEAK FOR THE POOR OF AMERICA**

Everything changed when in March 1966 Ali refused to step forward for the draft and accepted the promised consequences, jail time and loss of his professional status, including the coveted and quasi-mythic title “heavyweight champion of the world.” At the time, the media calmly pointed out that Ali should simply accept conscription because, as a sporting celebrity, he would have a cushy time, could continue training and would be programmed to fight exhibition matches organized by the military. It wouldn’t be any worse than Elvis’s two years of service. Any self-respecting American—patriot or not—would have accepted that.

But Ali wasn’t concerned with his own comfort. He was ready to challenge the very order of things. He felt he could not back down. He framed his refusal in the terms of an oppressed black man from the south being given incomprehensible orders by a white establishment that only needed him as cannon fodder. But his message of resistance resonated with the younger generation, who were equally called upon to go off and fight a brutal war in a distant land, conducted by a president who took office thanks to the shocking assassination of a popular young president. [Here is how Ali framed it:](#)

“My conscience won’t let me go shoot my brother, or some darker people, or some poor hungry people in the mud for big powerful America. And shoot them for what? They never called me nigger, they never lynched me, they didn’t put no dogs on me, they didn’t rob me of my nationality, rape or kill my mother and father ... How can I shoot them poor people? Just take me to jail.”

Ali had officially proclaimed himself a deserter, a criminal. But the implication went further. His position wasn’t just that of an opponent of the war who didn’t want to serve, a position the establishment could understand but obviously not tolerate. Ali’s position was that of a declared enemy of US foreign policy. He spoke from the point of view of the oppressed. And, possibly unwittingly, he was among the first to dare formulate and highlight the link between racial oppression in the US and imperialistic militarism against foreign, non-European populations.

I say “unwittingly” because Ali was never a deep thinker and never pretended to be one, to his dying day. In that sense, the braggadocio always remained humble. It’s worth noting that within a year MLK may have taken the hint from Ali to articulate the link between racist practices in the US and its foreign policy. [Here is King:](#)

“Somehow this madness must cease. We must stop now. I speak as a child of God and brother to the suffering poor of Vietnam. I speak for those whose land is being laid waste, whose homes are being destroyed, whose culture is being subverted. I speak for the poor of America who are paying the double price of smashed hopes at home and death and corruption in Vietnam. I speak as a citizen of the world, for the world as it stands aghast at the path we have taken. I speak as an American to the leaders of my own nation. The great initiative in this war is ours. The initiative to stop it must be ours.”

King went on to develop the link even further when he told his staff in 1967:

“We must recognize that we can’t solve our problem now until there is a radical redistribution of economic and political power... this means a revolution of values and other things. We must see now that the evils of racism, economic exploitation and militarism are all tied together... you can’t really get rid of one without getting rid of the others... the whole structure of American life must be changed. America is a hypocritical nation and [we] must put [our] own house in order.”

Shortly after that, in April 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated. The same mystery surrounds this event as the assassinations of JFK in 1963 and of his brother Robert in June 1968. The “house” King referred to clearly was not “in order,” and one of the methods for reinforcing the existing order now appeared to be well-planned and equally well-masqueraded mafia-style elimination.

Although clear evidence of conspiracy in all three assassinations actually does exist, each of these three murders is still officially described in history books and the media as a tragic, isolated incident perpetrated by a lone gunman. What is important to retain, however, is that the suspicion that well-organized foul play was involved has remained in the American psyche even after decades of hiding the evidence and airbrushing the facts. The public perception of this series of high-profile assassinations has contributed significantly to distrust of the federal government on both sides of the political spectrum.

Had Dr. King pushed his analysis too far for his own good? Was he treading on forbidden ground? For J. Edgar Hoover and the other masters of national security, black activists, just like lobbyists, may be tolerated so long as they remain focused on their specific agenda. US culture encourages specialization for everyone, and for

minorities in particular. Systemic thinkers who make embarrassing or unsettling links between disparate domains will always be suspect, particularly when they demonstrate not just the negative effects of the institutions but how the system actually produces those effects.

It may well be that, as [many claim](#), Muhammad Ali directly inspired Dr. King's critical positions on foreign policy. But as a public performer and an increasingly visible personality, Ali—still allied with the Nation of Islam—didn't attempt to join forces with King or follow his lead by attempting to develop and promote a coherent line of thought permitting to understand the system he was at odds with. Ali was still a boxer, though without a license. He continued to fight for his two privileged causes, racial justice and respect for the Muslim religion, without seeking to articulate the links between them or calling into question the economic and political system that actually explained how they were connected.

Ali was of course always more than a boxer but he clearly was never a thinker. He was too spontaneous, too much a performer. As Norman Mailer loved to point out, Ali was a brilliant talker. His talking, his provocative formulations, could inspire thinking in others. Ali's talents were indeed varied: He was first of all an artist of the ring, an innovator in his sport, but for the consumer public he was also a grating wit, a master of spontaneous verbal acrobatics that were both socially targeted and fun. There's even a good case to be made for considering Ali as the originator or, at the very least, [a key inspirer of the genre of rap and hip-hop](#).

## **SECOND DISAPPEARANCE: FROM ACTIVE BOXER TO LIVING LEGEND**

But three and a half years of forced retirement and age had taken its toll. With his diminishing speed and agility—the key characteristics of his original style—Ali's boxing career ended in predictable failure after lasting far longer than a concern for his future well-being should have permitted. His dexterity waned, he took a few too many punches, his health was compromised and his mental faculties diminished or perhaps seriously impaired. Ultimately he lost his voice as well.

That was worse than losing his speed. The Louisville Lip, as he was called at the beginning of his career, had lost his tongue. The decline was rapid. Curiously, it paralleled a similar contradictory trajectory of US political history at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The verbose '60s had given way to the taciturn '70s. Nixon's retreat from

Vietnam ended the decade-long bitter, seriously engaged debate about unjust wars, which had put ethics on the table as a national issue. Watergate provided a different kind of ethical distraction, focused on petty skullduggery, cover-up and the good old American preoccupation with the only original sin—lying. Remember George Washington and the cherry tree? Then came the Reagan years when American politics was put to sleep.

By the time Ronald Reagan was elected in 1980, after a decade that saw the retreat from Saigon and Nixon's resignation, what was considered the natural default position of US ideology returned: Any war we choose to engage in must be, by definition, a just war. Vietnam had thrown some doubt on this doctrine, but order was now reestablished and it has miraculously persisted right through Barack Obama.

Ali's struggle of the '60s had already lost all meaning, partly because he no longer needed to worry about it once he was able to reprise his boxing career and even regain the championship. Just as abolishing the draft and instituting a volunteer military permitted Nixon to defuse the anger and anguish of the young, who could then calmly plot out their future.

Those issues buried, Ali no longer had even a symbolic role to play with regard to foreign policy. To the extent that his life was no longer affected either by Washington's politics or the provocative doctrines of the Nation of Islam, Ali's public persona was comfortably contained within that of the comeback boxing hero, who continued to preach for the African-American cause but without shaking the walls of the house. He even managed the public relations coup of winning back his title not in Las Vegas but in Africa, which had its symbolic importance, albeit in the home of the corrupt Mobutu rather than that of the principled Patrice Lumumba, a victim of CIA meddling in the 1960s.

Ali's skill as a cultural observer of racial issues nevertheless came to the fore on occasion, as in this [lucid analysis of the Rocky phenomenon](#): "I have been so great in boxing they had to create an image like Rocky, a white image on the screen, to counteract my image in the ring. America has to have its white images, no matter where it gets them. Jesus, Wonder Woman, Tarzan and Rocky."

But thanks to his success story—always a key to redemption in US culture—Ali himself had become a celebrity with a positive image for the white population. The

marginalized rebel was becoming increasingly familiar with the establishment, enjoying the limelight, accepting his role as a star among the beautiful people. He was careful to protect his image as “the greatest” while at the same time never betraying—though sometimes forgetting—his fundamental moral choices.

But he clearly let himself be tempted by some of the comforts of being seen as a pillar of the white establishment. In 1977 he participated in Hollywood’s annual narcissistic ritual of self-celebration, playing out a scripted comedy sketch with Sylvester Stallone at the Oscars. On that occasion, Stallone called Ali “a 100% certified legend,” signifying that Ali the rebel and protester had definitively gone into retirement.

Ali nevertheless always remained committed to his two fundamental principles, which had morphed from a political orientation to a purely cultural one. The themes that moved him were racial justice and religious identity. His departure from boxing and his physical disabilities took him away from any permanent public platform, but his status as a revered legend meant that the public would be curious about, if not attentive to, his declared positions on public issues.

In 1984 the cause of racial justice led him to back the unsuccessful presidential aspirations of Jesse Jackson. Jackson represented black hopes for expanded civil rights but, most of all, recognition black assertiveness. But when Jackson’s campaign failed, Ali surprised everyone by endorsing Reagan. This time it was Ali’s second cause, religious integrity, that guided him. He needed only one simple reason: “He’s keeping God in schools and that’s enough!” The contradiction was flagrant. Why would the man sacrifice the prime of his career to oppose Johnson’s Vietnam policies and American militarism turn around and support an openly militaristic president, who at the same time was fueling a brutal war against Ali’s Shiite brethren in Iran as well as promoting American imperialism in Latin America and other places?

Through his deep Muslim faith Ali ignored all other differences, the real political issues, and apparently found an affinity with the party that identified with religious fundamentalism, albeit Christian and American. At the same time, Ali had already definitively repudiated the Nation of Islam (with its Shiite orientation) having converted to Sunni Islam. His decisions with regard to public issues, as always, were guided by his personal preoccupations and emotions, which is not to say his calculated self-interest. Ali remained committed to the ideals and humanitarian goals that had

underpinned his objection 20 years earlier to being an instrument of death for Vietnamese peasants. He simply hadn't made the links that Dr. King had made.

### **ALI'S THIRD DISAPPEARANCE: THE VOICE THAT WENT SILENT**

It was nevertheless sad to see his gradual transformation into a docile icon of the poorly-framed and often disastrously-applied ideals and proclaimed "good intentions" of the US government. He never endorsed them but he seemed to accept the reigning order. It is difficult for an observer to escape the impression that the brash, headstrong young man who had defied a nation at war had become a complacent, though in all probability unwitting, accomplice of the very military-industrial complex that had drafted him for service in Vietnam.

This was never clearer than when in 2005, alongside Alan Greenspan, he accepted the Presidential Medal of Freedom award from George W. Bush. The rapid decline of Ali's health had by that time taken away his voice. He was reduced to the ritual of miming in public the silent persona of the man of integrity and conscience on the very stage of the imperial regime against which he had rebelled. It certainly wasn't his intention but the effect was as obvious as it was sad. What would MLK have thought of an award granted by a president and a regime considered by many to be war criminals, an award received in the company of one of the greatest promoters of unbridled capitalism, Alan Greenspan?

Muhammad Ali, Martin Luther King, Jr., and even Nelson Mandela—each of them considered enemies of the state in the eras of J. Edgar Hoover, Nixon and Reagan—have all been turned, deliberately and cleverly, into icons that could be absorbed into the American mythos, their contradictions, their challenges to the system and its culture effaced. Ali and King were both highly vocal black men, strong personalities engaged in serious actions of civil disobedience, mistreated by the prevailing laws, martyrs of the system. By being turned into legends they have been made to appear as pillars of the system that formerly pilloried them. It is what the French call *récupération*—the system's method of neutralizing a threat by making it appear to be a vital part of the system itself, thereby justifying the system. It may be that because he no longer had a sustainable voice or because he remained solely focused only on the specific causes that were dear to him Ali allowed himself to be "recuperated." It is highly unlikely that he chose to do so.

## HISTORY AND MYTH

The public mythology we persist in being told is our “history” is a force powerfully managed by our media. Most of the public eulogies of Muhammad Ali have skirted the true history and painted a heavily airbrushed legend in its place. Here, for example, is President Obama’s sentimental tribute to the passing of Muhammad Ali:

“In my private study, just off the Oval Office, I keep a pair of his gloves on display, just under that iconic photograph of him—the young champ, just 22 years old, roaring like a lion over a fallen Sonny Liston. I was too young when it was taken to understand who he was—still Cassius Clay, already an Olympic Gold Medal winner, yet to set out on a spiritual journey that would lead him to his Muslim faith, exile him at the peak of his power, and set the stage for his return to greatness with a name as familiar to the downtrodden in the slums of Southeast Asia and the villages of Africa as it was to cheering crowds in Madison Square Garden.

‘I am America,’ he once declared. ‘I am the part you won’t recognize. But get used to me—black, confident, cocky; my name, not yours; my religion, not yours; my goals, my own. Get used to me.’”

The president hadn’t studied or misremembered his history. Obama’s account of the “iconic photograph” is factually wrong. The photograph he is referring to was of Ali’s rematch with Liston nearly a year and a half after winning the championship at the age of 22. Ali officially converted to Islam and changed his name in the immediate aftermath of the first bout. The man in the picture was not Cassius Clay but Muhammad Ali.

What Obama refers to as Ali’s “spiritual journey” wasn’t a simple voyage of self-discovery but a political and social struggle, for Ali himself but more significantly for his race and for justice itself. It was a struggle that exploded dramatically and chaotically in the riots of Los Angeles, Detroit and so many other inner cities through the rest of the decade. Reducing that to one man’s “spiritual journey” is a clear case of historical revision.

Obama chooses selectively to “remember” the Olympic Gold Medal (patriotic glory) and paradoxically refers to “exile,” whereas Ali was deprived of the privilege of exile when the government took his passport away, effectively preventing him from earning a living anywhere in the world.



The quote Obama cites at the end is authentic but, when spoken by Ali in 1970 in the context of his trial as a draft dodger, it was launched as an aggressive challenge, an act of defiance, a brutal calling into question of traditional white American identity. Taken out of its historical context, Obama makes it sound like an excerpt from an inspirational speech given by one of America's self-made successful entrepreneurs, not of a man humiliated and brutalized by a bellicose government.

Muhammad Ali accomplished many things. He gave us authentic thrills and moments of sublime beauty in the ring. He pulled away the veil on race relations and foreign policy at a time when the military-industrial system had begun arrogating every form of power, from military force to personal intimidation, just as Dwight Eisenhower warned in the very year Cassius Clay won his gold medal. Just as other not quite silenced voices—such as Edward Snowden's—are still reminding us today. Ali's boxing career and the deleterious effects it had on his health sadly set him on a different path preventing him from following through in his later years.

Fifty years ago, Muhammed Ali was constantly in the news, sparring with his fists, his wit and his conscience in the name of causes the American public couldn't yet understand. His contribution was immense, much greater than what the "legend of Muhammad Ali" we have since been fed will ever allow us to understand. Many of the issues he dealt with are still here, some in aggravated form. The voice of Ali of yore and that of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X still contain lessons we need to go back to their historical context to learn from.

*\*Peter Isackson is the chief visionary officer of SkillScaper and the creator of innovative solutions for learning in the 21st century.*



# A Second Insurgency in the Niger Delta

Hugo Norton

June 13, 2016

*Nigeria's government could soon see itself fighting two insurgencies, one against Boko Haram in the north and one against Biafra in the east.*

Following a spate of attacks against oil pipelines in the Niger Delta, Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari has promised to hold talks with local leaders to address their grievances. But recently-announced cuts to the amnesty program that brought an end to a previous bout of militancy in the region only serve to reinforce the view held by some that the problems in the Christian east are neglected when a northern Muslim, like Buhari, holds the presidency.

This belief has fueled a resurgent independence movement that harks back to the ill-fated Republic of Biafra that attempted to break away from Nigeria in 1967, precipitating a ruinous civil war. Unless it treads carefully, the government could see itself fighting two insurgencies: one against Boko Haram in the north and one against Biafra in the east.

The latest flare-up in the Delta seems to have been instigated by the issue of [arrest warrants](#) for former leaders of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND)—a militant group responsible for thousands of deaths and kidnappings and the sabotage of oil infrastructure that cost the Nigerian state billions of dollars in lost revenue. In 2009, an amnesty was signed with MEND whereby in return for giving up their weapons and vowing to keep the peace the government would invest in training and job creation for its 30,000 insurgents and the wider unemployed youth of the region.

## AMNESTY

For 7 years, the amnesty program seemed to be working and the government could turn its attention to fighting Boko Haram in the northeast. However, in February, the government issued indictments for fraud, theft and money laundering against a dozen former militant leaders relating to security contracts they had been offered in exchange for peace.

Shortly after this, a previously unknown group calling themselves the [Niger Delta Avengers](#) announced its presence on the scene with a string of attacks targeting pipelines, power stations and platforms operated by Shell, Chevron and ENI, reducing Nigeria's oil output to a 20-year low in the process. Output fell by more than 50%, to 1.1 million barrels a day, while electricity production lost more than 1,000 megawatts. The deteriorating situation has only been exacerbated by the announcement of a [70% cut to the amnesty program](#) in the latest budget.

President Buhari had promised to meet with local leaders in the Delta region to discuss their grievances, but then [backed out](#) of the visit in a last-moment cancellation. This bodes ill for the president's commitment to rehabilitate the Delta's ecosystem, despoiled by decades of oil extraction. The task is immense; a recent assessment by the [United Nations Environment Program](#) (UNEP) estimates that it would take upwards of 25 years to restore the habitat of the delta. The UNEP report found that pollution of soil, sediment and swampland was extensive, citing one location close to a Nigerian National Petroleum Company pipeline where "where an 8 cm layer of refined oil was observed floating on the groundwater which serves the community wells."

The cancellation might have something to do with the fact that the Niger Delta Avengers have dismissed Buhari's overtures with [mockery](#), staking their claim instead for obtaining full independence. In so doing they go further than their predecessors in MEND ever did as the group aligned themselves with the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). For these groups, the problems surrounding the oil industry in the region are just a symptom of a more deep-seated malaise that can only be remedied by the region's secession from Nigeria and the creation of an independent state. For nearly 40 years these aspirations had lain dormant following a catastrophic civil war between 1967 and 1970 that saw 3 million Biafrans killed and starved by the forces of the central government.

In recent years, however, with the advent of the MASSOB and IPOB, a small but growing chorus has tried to rekindle the cause of Biafran nationalism. Despite claims to being peaceful movements dedicated to achieving independence via democratic means, the government in Abuja has likened them to Boko Haram, cracking down hard on protests and arresting leaders. Most recently, at an annual remembrance rally to commemorate the victims of the civil war, security forces killed a number of protesters.

In February, several people were [killed during a demonstration](#) by supporters of IPOB calling the group's leader, Nnamdi Kanu, to be released from prison where he continues to be held without bail while he faces charges of treason. Similar acts of state violence against peaceful protestors have intensified since Buhari came to power in 2015, according to [Göran Sluiter](#), a lawyer with an Amsterdam-based law firm, who has filed a complaint with the ICC alleging a campaign of human rights abuses against Biafrans.

Buhari's weak leadership and the ghastly state of the economy will do little to alleviate tensions. If in past years the government used its substantial cash reserves to appease the rebels, the current climate of low oil prices has sent cash-strapped Nigeria running to the markets for liquidity. Unless Buhari somehow manages to put a stop to the billions lost every year to graft or unless world oil prices recover to [last year's benchmark of \\$52 a barrel](#), tensions will only continue to grow.

With the Niger Delta Avengers now entering the fray, and with the apparent breakdown of the MEND amnesty program, it seems that the acrimonious atmosphere in the Delta is only likely to worsen. Cornered from all sides, Nigeria is well on its way to becoming anew the "sick man of Africa" and a threat to the interests of its neighbors and the international community.

*\*Hugo Norton is an Africa policy analyst and advisor at an economic consultancy firm in Brussels.*



# Violence Comes to My Hometown

Gary Grappo

June 14, 2016

*The unspeakable violence of the Middle East that we have come to abhor has come to America.*

Like so many people around America, my wife and I awoke Sunday morning to the incomprehensible news of the horrendous slaughter of innocents at a [downtown nightclub in Orlando, Florida](#). Only for us, it came as a special shock. Orlando is our hometown.

It was the town where she was born and raised. The town where I had grown up since age 5, gone to grade and middle school, and played high school football. It was the town where we kept so many wonderful friends and even more wonderful memories. It was the town that, even after so many years, we loved returning to: its azalea-strewn parks, its brick-paved, southern oak-lined streets, its 1,000 placid lakes that invited quiet evenings with friends over the barbecue and swatting mosquitoes, and its hundreds of places of worship that still draw crowds on Sundays and Fridays. And it was the town where we were married and where we returned for the births of two of our three children.

## ORLANDO SHOOTING

The nightclub scene of this horror was located just down the street from the hospital where my wife was born, and where my brother and I had our tonsils removed. It's on the same street where she and I grew up, played amidst orange groves and rode our bikes every day. The nightclub was merely blocks from my route as a newspaper boy aged 9-11.

But the shocking irony of this incident for us is that when she and I left Orlando those many years ago for college and careers, we subsequently chose to submit ourselves to a life of unpredictability and violence. As an American diplomatic family, we were assigned to worn-torn Nicaragua in the mid-1980s and assignments to Middle Eastern

countries far more familiar with the kind of senseless violence that struck our hometown on June 12.

The patrons of that nightclub made no such choice, opting instead for a Saturday night of fun, friends, music and dancing. The unpredictability was in the choice of the next song; the “violence” in an unanticipated bump on the dance floor.

My mother had grown accustomed to praying for my family and me on our seemingly perilous peregrinations. In 2003-05 and again in 2009-10, in high-threat assignments in terrorism-plagued Riyadh, Saudi Arabia and war-wracked Baghdad, Iraq, respectively, she learned to never ask what was happening or what I was doing. She was too afraid to know the answers.

So, it was: “How are you doing?” “Are you well?” “Are you getting enough rest?” “Are you getting enough exercise?” And, of course, the standard line of any Italian-American mother, “How are you eating?” She had learned from my dad, a veteran of World War II and the Korean War, never to ask, “Are you in danger?” Nor did she want to know.

In Riyadh, just hours after a suicide bomber had driven an explosive-laden truck into a residential compound and detonated it less than one mile from the US Embassy, I visited the site and, while doing an interview for local media, watched as the bodies of children were removed from the rubble and carried away. In Baghdad, I felt the embassy shake one morning as a massive truck bomb exploded next to an Iraqi government ministry, killing more than 100 Iraqis, including dozens of small children in the ministry’s nursery for children of employees.

Such violence always saddened me, of course. But it had become commonplace in a region afflicted with violence, extremism, red-hot discontent and always simmering unrest.

On Sunday morning, my wife and I stared at the television screen and scenes of what, for us, had been familiar in the Middle East: people screaming and crying for missing loved ones, police and rescue vehicles racing to and from the scene, somber-faced journalists reporting every shred of information gleaned—and often not always relevant or accurate in the turmoil and uncertainty of the moment—and just the chaos of a community and world turned upside down.

But this wasn't Baghdad. It wasn't Riyadh. Nor was it Damascus, a city my family and I had visited often in our Middle East travels.

This was Orlando! It was our hometown. They were naming streets like Kaley Avenue and Orlando's showcase main street, Orange Avenue. They were names so familiar to us that they instantly conjured pictures in our minds of just how they were those many years ago.

They were showing our hometown. How could such inconceivable violence come to our hometown? A town better known for theme parks, family fun and lots of classic Florida hospitality and sunshine. Once proudly known as "the City Beautiful," now they're calling our hometown the scene of the worst mass killing in American history.

## **THE MOTIVE?**

Unlike the many pundits and politicians offering instant analysis of the shootings, I have no immediate answer to how such a horrendous act could happen in my hometown or, indeed, anyone's hometown in America. It will take authorities days, if not weeks, to fully investigate the incident and the man responsible for it. We ought to let them do their work. I am confident that they will do it thoroughly and that that we will have our answers.

But we may not know what spurred Omar Mateen to initiate his fatefully fatal task in the early hours of Sunday, June 12. What was truly in the man's mind? Did he hate gays? Was he motivated by the extremism of the Islamic State? Was he mentally disturbed as his ex-wife has claimed? Did he have some grudge against a society he felt owed him something he could not have? Or was he motivated by the "fame" of having carried out the most spectacular homicidal rampage in American history?

Whatever his twisted motivation was, he could not have slaughtered so many people in so short a time had he not had deadly semi-automatic weapon, an AR-15. Fifteen years ago, when such weapons were banned, such a crime would have been very difficult—not impossible, mind you, since criminal minds do have their ways, but exceedingly difficult. But this man was legally in possession of a weapon intended only for killing lots of victims very fast. It's senseless.

I spoke by phone on Sunday with a close high-school friend. He was as shocked and saddened as I. For the victims, for their families and for our hometown. “We are just not that kind of community,” he affirmed with palpably emotional resolve.

Nor were all the other hometowns in America: Blacksburg, Virginia, home to Virginia Tech; Newtown, Connecticut; Roseburg, Oregon; San Bernardino, California; Ft. Hood, Texas; Aurora, Colorado; and all the many others.

The unspeakable violence of the Middle East that we’ve come to abhor has come to our hometowns. But unlike that region of the world, we live in a nation where citizens are empowered. We can speak out. We can act.

What will we do about it before the memory of someone else’s hometown is shattered?

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# The Human Factor in the Politics of Fear

Anna Pivovarchuk

June 19, 2016

*With Brexit looming amid the tragic death of a British MP, the political climate has turned ugly.*

We go through our daily lives, if not exactly forgetting the cruelties of injustice and grief that exist on every corner, but cushioned in our protective bubble of optimism that helps us deal with that knowledge by giving hope in the good of the world and the people who inhabit it. But ever so often, something so devastating happens that it bursts through our shield of comfort, making the world a dark, wretched place where you search and question yourself, and all of humanity, for the purpose of it all.

The savage attack on a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida, was one such event. The targeting of a community that to this day faces unprecedented levels of persecution and hatred, in one place where it thought itself safe and accepted, broke hearts across the world. Men, women, transgender, gay, straight, religious, atheist, black and white, young and old, people have bonded over this tragedy as a rejection of the malice it embodied. The endless thousands of those who came out in memory of the victims in cities across continents was a testament of the will to believe in something good, in a climate of divisiveness, vitriol and angst that is today's pre-election America.

## KILLING JO COX

The shocking murder of the young British parliamentarian Jo Cox was another such event. The attack on the mother of two brought back memories of the attempt on US congresswoman Gabby Giffords in Arizona in 2011. Except that Cox did not manage to survive.

Not yet well known to the wider public, Cox was elected to Parliament in 2015 following her decade-long career [in humanitarian work with Oxfam](#) that took her to some of the

world's most desperate places. She had vociferously spoken out against the war in Syria and urged for action to protect civilians, holding the UK and US governments accountable for inaction. She stood against racism and in favor of immigration, campaigning for the Vote Remain camp in the upcoming Brexit referendum. It was at one of the so-called open surgeries—a British tradition of meet-and-greet with members of parliament (MPs)—that she was shot and stabbed by a 52-year-old man with what appears to be [far-right sympathies and a history of mental illness](#).

It was not the first such [attack on British politicians](#), but it is the first death since 1990, when an IRA bomb killed Conservative MP Ian Gow. But Cox's murder has hit the entire country to the heart because of who she was, what she believed in and what she was willing to do to fight for her beliefs. In today's political climate of dissonance, she was, as the media will remind us now, one of the "good ones"—a person who served politics the way it was intended in its ideal, not what many have since perverted it to be. It is extremely rare to see a tribute to a political figure where tears flow so freely, from those who knew her and strangers equally.

## THE MOOD IS UGLY

"The mood is ugly, and an MP is dead," as per [The Guardian](#). Indeed, it seems almost impossible to view this very personal tragedy and loss as separate from the unease of pre-Brexit Britain. Both sides of the debate have been vitriolic and aggressive, supported by a whole ministry of misinformation, fact-bending and outright lies. Like the widely publicized claim by the Vote Leave campaign that the [£350 million Britain sends to the European Union](#) (EU) weekly that can be used to build a hospital a week in the UK. In case you have missed the Conservative Party's policies toward the National Health Service (NHS), the welfare system, single mothers and disabled people over the course of their tenure, then you would have to be beyond remarkably naive to even think that this money would be used to build new hospitals.

There are endless arguments about the economic pros and cons of Brexit, many of which we will not find the answers to until the fateful referendum takes place on June 23. But the nasty tone of the immigration debate is having a palpable effect on the mood in Britain, and I find myself in the middle of it.

I have lived in the UK for nearly 15 years—in Scotland, down south and now, for the past 6 years, in London. I have come here to study, and have paid my fees, first as an

international student and then as an EU citizen. I work for at an international nonprofit, I pay tax, I give to charity. And yet every once in a while I hear that I am here to take someone's job, steal someone's big London salary or push someone out of the housing market, somehow corrupt British culture even.

I am Russian, educated at an American school in Austria, and I came to the United Kingdom because I felt a kindred spirit with its people, for whom characteristics like gender, race or religion might come in useful in compiling a missing person's report, but not as a means of judging someone's worth. I, like many of my friends, have come to London because we felt like it was more open, tolerant and endlessly more multicultural than many of the European cities we call home.

Just a few weeks ago, I cast my postal vote in the Austrian contest that missed electing a [right-wing president by some 30,000 votes](#). I have chosen to live in the UK because I thought something like that could never come to pass here. And then I saw Nigel Farage's latest [immigration poster](#) and something inside me shuddered.

The debate about what economic way forward Britain should chose has become a quarrel about "other people." EU, non-EU—all are suddenly outsiders, with no say or part in the discussion that affects us more directly than anyone. The orphaned Syrian children that Jo Cox campaigned for being given asylum, the Polish plumber, the German banker—to use a few handy stereotypes—are all suddenly part of the palpable discomfort that a significant part of the British population seems to feel toward foreigners. Not to say that xenophobia never existed here, but I don't remember it being so unabashed.

## PEOPLE, NOT NUMBERS

Thomas Meir, [the man charged with Cox's murder](#), has given his name in court as "death to traitors, freedom for Britain." The questions about mental illness and terrorism and which term to use in the case of the man whom the media have been describing as a [quiet gardening enthusiast](#) are subject to another discussion. Much like [Omar Mateen's personal history](#) that suggests a struggle with his own homosexuality, the line between murder in the name of a political cause or ideology and private chaos is often blurred. But the fact remains that these two very different people, from two very different countries, have tapped into the undercurrent of social malaise and nurtured

their hate and obsessions on rhetoric and sentiment that we should all be working to eliminate from social discourse forever.

When the going gets tough, as it seems to be at the moment around the world, it is easy to forget that we were all cut from the same rib. Jo Cox internalized this belief in a common destiny, a refusal to see people as numbers, and fought to her death for an ideal society of justice and humanism. The 49 people who lost their lives inside the Pulse nightclub in Orlando understood the struggle to be accepted into this common destiny all too well, too.

The politics of hate and fear will always exist. I have no illusions. But in light of the last few days, when I had to struggle to remind myself that we do, indeed, live in the best and safest of times in human history, I can only hope that people like Jo Cox, along with more than [23,000 donors who have raised over £700,000](#) in her name in just two days, and all those who have held up a candle or closed their eyes in silence for the victims of the Orlando attacks will continue their vigil for the better angels of our nature.

*\*Anna Pivovarchuk is the deputy managing editor, culture editor and co-founder of Fair Observer.*



# Refugees Suffer the Monster of Our Indifference

Maria Khwaja

June 20, 2016

*The people who suffer the most at the hands of our monsters are the ones we do not care to see, says Maria Khwaja.*

It is 3:50AM in Amman, Jordan. The call to prayer echoes across the city. I have just finished suhoor, the morning Ramadan meal. We are meant to be 30 minutes from the Syrian border today visiting refugees who live outside the camps. In over a decade of working in East Africa, the Middle East and South Asia, the worry that eats at me is always the same.

There are so many children. Children in the streets, children in overcrowded classrooms, children excitedly following us around and shouting muzungu, ajnabee, Amreekan.

There are so many children.

I've seen it in Karachi, where bright-eyed Afghan children watched me from behind cement walls. In Jordan, we have already spent time being followed by dusty mobs of Palestinian children in Gaza Camp. One ramshackle playground, under the watchful eye of an elderly headmaster, exists for them to play away from the danger of cars and strangers.

These children are all growing up in conflict and post-conflict zones, victims of the wars we are all involved in and victimized by corrupt systems and corrupt politicians in expensive cars. There is little education—overcrowded classrooms and haggard staff—and little hope for the future. It is a trick of contemporary media that our definition of “refugee” means a quick image of fragile boats in the Mediterranean without consideration for the generational ramifications of what we are allowing to exist.

They are alive, that's about all we can say. Making sure they have jobs, homes and health care is not our problem, after all. We feed them like we feed street cats and are pleased that they are still alive.

## **OUR FRANKENSTEINS**

Robert Fisk theorized that it was the asceticism and the stark despair of the refugee camps in Pakistan that molded the views of the Taliban. I know, personally, good people who the Pakistani Taliban blew up or shot in Karachi. I know, and have held, children who sit in their homes traumatized by firecrackers because they sound horrifyingly like a Kalashnikov.

I had tea once in a cement courtyard with a woman from the Northern Areas in Pakistan. She had been bombed out of her home by the Pakistani military trying to force out the Taliban who had crossed the borders. Her mother, a wrinkled old woman wrapped in a traditional chador, came out weeping, carrying a black comb and whispering in Pashto that it was the only thing she had left of her home.

Muslims, refugees embrace or encourage extremism? As they say in Turkey, the political horses dance, but it is the innocents, the grass under their feet, who are trampled. Extremism across the entire world, in hate speech and government posturing, is the great plague of our times. Let's not pretend there's only one brand of it when, in America, a classroom full of 6-year-olds doesn't stir us to action.

Our Frankensteins were not born from nothing.

The people who suffer the most at the hands of our monsters are the ones we do not care to see—the ones who live in an endless round of overcrowded government offices and weep at the end of sanitized photos.

We have a word for it in Urdu that I hear used often: majboori. It is a word that is difficult to translate, but equates roughly to what people must do in a state that academics might call “capability deprivation.” It is the blank faces of the men I have seen sitting on street corners who must work dangerous construction jobs because they have no other option to provide for their children. It is the blatant, startling inflation of rent prices by Turkish landlords that must be paid, the faces of mothers who follow

me in the street begging for milk for their children, the Kurdish families in Istanbul who pick through trash instead of going to the camps because of the harassment they would receive as Shias.

Part of me, the same part that taught in an urban American classroom, is jaded. I expect the begging and pleading, the fingers that reach out to grab my shirt and wave UNHCR registration papers. I expect the stories of drug abuse and fatalism. Generational trauma is a documented phenomenon and we don't even have enough social workers for our own population, much less those abroad, not because we can't fund it but because we don't prioritize human dignity.

We cannot feed children guns and expect them to survive. We cannot write entire populations off as collateral damage.

## **REFUSE TO YIELD**

I don't have feelings anymore toward these things because there is nothing to say except no. No, there is no justification for taking a life or for proxy wars. No, I will not be afraid of pointing out the problems I see in US foreign policy. No, I will not turn on my neighbor. No, I will not stop insisting on reform within Muslim communities. No, I will not apologize for a death cult, much like I will not apologize for the Taliban, because I see the faces of the people they terrorize firsthand and, trust me, I hate them more than you do.

No, I will not forget the faces of the children who made me promise to come back.

We are taught in Islam that there is a great karmic blessing in giving, in lifting the majboori off another. If we have enough for one and another arrives, we are meant to split our food in two. It is no accident that the Middle East is known for hospitality, that in Swahili and Arabic the words heard most often are karibu and marhaba (welcome). If we have even a little, we are meant to give it away joyfully because there is no loss in the sharing.

I have shared in fresh honey in a Nepalese village with Tibetan refugees and witnessed the same practice. There is no loss in providing sweetness, comfort and dignity to another. There is no loss in sharing.

Perhaps this is why I cannot stomach the attitude of “it’s not my problem.” Or perhaps I am wondering what is to become of millions of children without a future.

No, I will not let the comfortable thought of a full belly and a soft couch and hours of Netflix lull me into forgetting. This is why I fast in Ramadan, like all of my community if they choose, because in abstaining I am reminded of what matters in the end: discipline, integrity, compassion, serving others to the best of our ability.

These are lessons I was taught as a Muslim, but they are lessons that are not unique to Islam or to any religious tradition. These are the lessons the world learned from Muhammad Ali and celebrated after his death, forgetting that he was an unapologetic black Muslim man. They are human lessons.

We must refuse to yield, like Ali, in the face of fear and despair and grief. We must remember that there are entire generations that we are choosing to forsake. The war against extremism and corruption and indifference will be lost only when good people are too frightened or apathetic to say anything. In memory of those whose lives should not have been taken on every side, we cannot yield. In constant compassion toward those who suffer daily on all sides, we cannot yield.

We cannot stop standing up for each other, unified, because that is when extremists on all sides win.

*\*Maria Khwaja is the founder of Elun, a nonprofit organization dedicated to teacher education in the developing world.*





# Britain Should Stay in the European Union

John Bruton

June 20, 2016

*British voters should consider how they can make the European Union better, says former Prime Minister John Bruton.*

The fact that British voters are free to hold a referendum, and [free to decide to leave the](#)

European Union (EU), shows that the EU is a voluntary union. It is not an empire that a country is not free to leave. Nor is it a federal union like the United States, which does not permit its member states to leave either.

The EU's voluntary character is one of the reasons why a number of states are still looking to join the union.

## **FIRST TIME IN 60 YEARS**

On June 23, it will be the first time in the EU's 60-year history that any state has contemplated leaving. This is a serious matter not only for the United Kingdom, but for all EU member states.

So, British voters, acting as citizen legislators, ought to think of the risks that a decision to leave might create for neighboring countries in the Europe.

They should also consider the risk that a [Brexit](#) could weaken the bonds that hold the remaining 27 countries together. Parliament has passed to British voters the responsibility for deciding if a possible breakup of the EU would really be good for the UK and for Europe. It's a big responsibility.

Stability in Europe has been a long-term British goal. In the 1790s, Edmund Burke favored a Commonwealth of Europe. Castlereagh worked for a Concert of Europe, with regular summit meetings like the EU now has, after the end of the Napoleonic Wars. Winston Churchill, in 1930, advocated for a United States of Europe.

These statesmen did not push for these ideas out of some sort of dewy-eyed sentimentalism. No, they had a hard-headed appreciation of the fact that stability on the continent meant greater security for Britain, and they made their suggestions to achieve that end.

Now it is British voters, not British statesmen, who must decide what is best for Europe: a union with the UK on the inside, or a fractured union that Britain has left on its own freewill.

## **BREXIT COULD DOUBLE THE REGULATORY BURDEN**

We hear much about EU regulations and the burdens they impose. But even if the UK leaves the EU, it would still have regulations of its own on things like the environment, financial services and product safety. Indeed to the extent that a Britain outside the EU wanting to sell goods or services to Europe would have to comply with two sets of regulations: British regulations for the UK market and EU regulations for the EU market.

Arguably, the duplicated post-Brexit regulatory burden on British business would be greater than the present one.

Some also believe that the UK could leave the EU and then quickly negotiate a free trade agreement, which would allow British firms to continue selling in EU member states.

An agreement of some kind could eventually be worked out, but it would not be quick. Switzerland negotiated trade agreements with the EU, but that took 9 years. Canada negotiated a free trade agreement too, but that took 7 years.

The British agreement would be much more complicated than either of these because it would involve new issues like financial services, freedom of movement and access to

health services—for Brits living in Spain, for example. It would also have to cover agriculture.

Even with maximum goodwill from the European Commission, a post-Brexit EU trade agreement with Britain would become prey to the domestic politics of the remaining 27 EU countries, each of whom would have their own axes to grind.

There would be a lot of uncertainty over a long period of time.

The British people should accept that entities like the European Union, which provide a structure within which the forces of globalization can be governed politically, are essential if the prosperity that flows from globalization is to be shared fairly.

Rather than leave, British voters should consider how they can make the EU better than it is, and there is plenty of scope for that.

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# The Mad White Man and the Colored Terrorist

Ahmed Ezzeldin

June 22, 2016

*The threat of Islamic fundamentalism is perceived to be coming from the outside, even if the perpetrator grew up in the target country.*

A mass shooting and a political assassination on both sides of the Atlantic have highlighted the two versions of terrorism dominating the world today.

In the United States, Omar Mateen, a man motivated by radical interpretations of Islam, carried out the [biggest mass shooting in the history of the country](#). In the United Kingdom, Thomas Mair, a 52-year-old neo-Nazi, [killed British parliamentarian Jo Cox in her constituency](#).

As the two incidents shocked the world, the attention paid by politicians and the media to the existing threats they pose was very different.

In the US, politicians bombarded the media with statements condemning radical Islam and its threat to global stability. Donald Trump, the presumptive Republican presidential candidate, was even delighted to be proved right on the threat of radical Islam. He also used the opportunity to reemphasize his [proposed ban on all Muslims entering the US](#).

The media worked relentlessly to interview every person who had possibly known the terrorist to uncover his radicalization story. Although many witnesses claimed that Mateen was [socially unstable, lenient toward violence and not even religious](#), the story of the brown terrorist of Afghan descent was shaped to convince us that there was nothing but radical Islam that motivated him. Underlining his Afghan origin made us forget that he was born and raised in America.

Simply put, the image of the terrorizing brown man with foreign blood had to be at the forefront.

In the UK, we know almost nothing about Thomas Mair. Both politicians and the media paid tribute to his victim, but with barely any comment on the underlying threat that the crime signals.

In fact, this follows a trend. Mair was labeled a “murderer,” not a “terrorist.” This is not surprising as similar incidents of “[white terrorism](#)” in the US have been attributed to “mentally disturbed” individuals. Yet digging deeper behind most, if not all, of these acts of “white terrorism” reveals the role of neo-Nazi ideas that motivate all those “not-really-terrorists.”

Why the discrepancy?

One possibility is because radical Islamic terrorism is more common. But this isn't exactly true. The case of the US is very revealing in that respect. According to [data from the National Security Agency](#) (NSA), the US has witnessed 28 terrorist attacks since September 11, 2001—18 of those were committed by far-right supporters, while only 10 were committed by jihadists.

Not only is the frequency of attacks by right-wing fanatics higher, but the death toll of such attacks was also higher prior to the latest Orlando shootings.

So, Trump's proposal to ban Muslims must be accompanied by a more critical one of banning all right-wing supporters, his main constituency, if it were to be a remotely sound idea.

In modern-day Europe, neo-Nazi terrorism has never disappeared. The most remarkable was the 2011 [Norway attacks committed by Anders Behring Breivik](#), a right-wing extremist who killed 77 people and injured 242. Outside Norway, European right-wing extremists have been perpetrators of [political violence in Italy, Germany, the UK, France and elsewhere](#).

## THREATS OF EQUAL IMPORTANCE

Thus, “white” extremism has proved to be no less violent in terms of frequency and scale than Islamic extremism. But “white terrorism” is riskier for an additional reason. Since it is usually committed by “lone wolves,” right-wing terrorism is harder to predict,

prevent and control. Therefore, it should be ideologically countered at the same level like radical Islam. Instead, however, the ideological bases of “white terrorism” are always considered anomalous and are ignored, which facilitates breeding more terrorists.

If the two threats are equally important, why is one emphasized and the other marginalized?

The answer is politics. The threat of Islamic fundamentalism is perceived to be coming from the outside, even if the perpetrator grew up in the target country. It is the “other” attacking us, and this is cheap fuel for the rage of voters who suffer from the economic misfortunes and social insecurity of their countries.

If the terrorist is a white conservative, then there’s nobody to blame but ourselves. It is always the threat of the “outsider” that unites the people, while the threat of the insider divides them.

As right-wing politicians are on the rise in the West, right-wing terrorism risks being further ignored as no politician would label his or her own people as “terrorists.”

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# Why Brexit and the Success of Trump Should Not Surprise You

Yasmeen Sami Alamiri and Ryan J. Suto

June 27, 2016

*The global economic crisis has greatly contributed to the rise of far-right politics in the West manifesting itself in outcomes such as Brexit and the unprecedented rise of Donald Trump.*

On June 23, the [United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union](#) (EU) with the full effect of the economic, social and political ramifications of the decision still unknown. While the historic decision has disturbed and surprised many, the foundation for such a seismic change is squarely the product of profound social and cultural tensions—some of which are being simultaneously echoed by the United States.

Aside from the weight of the decision to leave the EU, the demographic breakdown of those who voted to leave—with a median age of over 65 years old—is notable. The bloc of voters vehemently behind the campaign for the UK to remain part of the EU had a median age of 21, [according to British pollster YouGov](#). The discrepancy is both stark and important. Those who decided to leave the EU would ostensibly only have to “live with the decision” for 16 years, while those who fought to stay in will live with the ramifications for an average of 69 years.

## BABY BOOMERS

The parallels to the US are hard to dismiss. The demographic that has supported Donald Trump, the candidate many initially wrote off as an impossibility, has now been carried to the position of the presumptive presidential nominee for the Republican Party. Reports have shown repeatedly that [baby boomers are bolstering Trump's candidacy](#), the person to return them to their America—a time of greater economic stability and a more demographically homogeneous population. [A 2015 Rasmussen poll](#) showed that 56% of voters over the age of 40 want to build a wall along America's

southern border, while only 36% of those aged between 18-39 support building the wall with Mexico.

Contextually, landmark events have changed the way that the US—and other Western democracies—have come to function. The events of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent War on Terror, as well as the economic down turn in 2008, have colored the way Americans regard both national security and economic stability.

The global economic crisis, combined with the rise of social media, has greatly contributed to the rise of far-right politics in the West manifesting itself in outcomes such as Brexit and the unprecedented rise of candidates such as Trump. The ability to connect exclusively with individuals and organizations that share ideologically-driven struggles and fears has exacerbated the impact of rising economic inequality, political extremism and xenophobia.

Trump himself, while visiting Scotland, made the linkage, [tweeting](#) that “many people are equating Brexit, and what is going on in Great Britain, with what is happening in the U.S. People want their country back!” This argument assumes that the countries have been taken away. It also assumes that the rise of immigration somehow works to unravel a nation’s very fabric.

Coincidentally, Western democracies have been grappling with the so-called “refugee crisis” that has been born of the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East, but namely Syria. Though the US is [well behind its goal](#) to accept 10,000 refugees into the country by the end of 2016 (it has only accepted 1,285 thus far), the idea of granting asylum to refugees from Syria has only widened political divides.

The American right has argued that allowing in refugees from the Middle East will be a direct threat to US national security and stability, and has viewed all immigration policies with high scrutiny. The new perceived threat, paired with resentment over economic hardship and underemployment, has led some Americans to believe that the country needs to either be “taken back,” or “made great again.”

The decision to Brexit comes at a time when European nations [have accepted](#) over a million migrants and refugees in 2015 alone. In 2015, Germany, an EU nation, received over 400,000 asylum applications. The decision to allow in refugees only grew resentment, especially in light of the November 2015 Paris attacks, for which the



Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility, and the [2015-16 New Year's Eve sexual assaults in Germany](#), where the perpetrators were thought to have come into Europe among the flow of migrants and refugees. The sentiments only grew following the March 2016 bombings in Brussels—the location of the European Parliament.

## **BALLOT BOX OR THE STREET**

While our international norms of tolerance and human rights have evolved quickly since the 1945 establishment of the United Nations, the all too human mix of fear and tribalism [remain unmitigated by the secular, liberal democratic world order](#) that Western elites created in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. To this point, George Orwell's "England Your England" has been invoked in the Brexit debate, as the writer in 1941 wrote of "the famous 'insularity' and 'xenophobia' of the English," particularly of the "working class."

The occurrence of Brexit and the success of the Trump campaign—both deemed unprecedented and surprising—are born of greater social and economic narratives. The Western assumption that the world is destined to reach a more tolerant, equal and stable condition has been questioned by the success of those narratives among baby boomers. The insular proclivities of Western elders will lead to increased conflict along demographic lines, thus ensuring the self-fulfilling prophesy of tension between the West and the rest.

Democratic ideals are either preserved at the ballot box or lost in the street. In the face of growing economic inequality and fear of the "other," insularity and fear have proved intoxicating for elders longing for an idealized past.

The onus then falls on the young to maintain faith in equality and toleration to ensure that liberal democracy remains a political reality. That reality of what the decisions to potentially choose a renegade presidential candidate, or to Brexit, will soon be revealed.

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