

Make Sense

of 2017



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Fair Observer

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ABOUT FAIR OBSERVER

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Time is Running Out for The Gambia's President

Hugo Norton

January 16, 2017

Will there be a peaceful transition of power in The Gambia?

It's clear that Adama Barrow, the president-elect of The Gambia, has the support of most African nations and the wider international community. His inauguration—scheduled for January 19—marks a watershed moment for the Gambian people and the nation's democratic future, one that some pro-reform analysts see as a harbinger of hope for other African nations too.

There's just one problem: The Gambia's outgoing president, Yahya Jammeh, won't leave.

Barrow attended the 2017 Africa-France Summit in Mali on January 14, where he had the chance to provide an update on the Gambian impasse to more than 30 African heads of state, primarily from Francophone nations. He left Banjul with the unsuccessful Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) mediation team, led by Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari, who had hoped to persuade Jammeh to honor the vote for the second time. "We have made a strong gesture. First, we have received the president," Malian President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita told reporters, referring to Barrow, who was

an unexpected but welcome summit guest.

Keita said much of the summit's focus was on Barrow's tiny West African nation, and leaders expressed hope that Jammeh will at last step aside in a peaceful transition, avoiding what Keita called a bloodbath. They have been waiting for Jammeh to do so since December 1, 2016, when The Gambia held elections that gave Barrow the win with 43.3% of the vote. At first, the incumbent president conceded the loss and affirmed the will of the Gambian people, but it wasn't long until Jammeh, who has ruled for over 22 years, reversed course and refused to accept the results, demanding a re-run.

DECLARATION OF WAR

In the meantime, Alieu Momarr Njai, the head of the Gambian Independent Electoral Commission, went from praising Jammeh's stepping down as a rare moment in the history of Gambian politics, to seeking asylum in neighboring Senegal, fearing for his life. Gambian diplomats abroad were recalled, with one in the United States publicly stating that he too feared for his safety and wasn't planning on returning until he had considered all of the developments.

Faced with the chaos, Gambian military leaders shrugged and said that Jammeh writes their checks, confirming to media outlets that they intended to take their orders from him, and thereby protect Jammeh as he demands a new election

through courts that are themselves wholly dysfunctional and incapable of doing so until spring.

The jubilation of political prisoners released in the immediate wake of Jammeh's defeat was stilled as new rounds of arrests began. Barrow's promise of a free and open society was put on hold, while Jammeh shut down at least three radio stations and silenced voices opposed to his grip on power. The misty-eyed exiles living in the diaspora who dream of returning home had to put their hopes on pause once more.

Meanwhile, the iron-fisted Jammeh twice went on state-owned television to condemn ECOWAS mediators and challenged those seeking to put an end to his regime. "Who are they to tell me to leave my country?" Jammeh asked during one broadcast, while on New Year's Eve he publicly warned that the threat of any ECOWAS military intervention to ensure that Barrow is securely installed as the democratically elected president would be viewed as aggression.

"Defending our sovereignty and total independence is a sacred duty of all patriotic Gambians," Jammeh said, vowing that there would be no compromise. "It is in effect a declaration of war and an insult to our constitution," he said of the ECOWAS stance. "It is therefore absolutely unacceptable."

BLOODLETING AND INSTABILITY

On January 13, the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council met to discuss the political crisis in The Gambia and reiterated its support for ECOWAS authority on intervention. The AU statement commended ECOWAS decisions made at a December 17, 2016, meeting in Abuja that include "the consideration to use all necessary means to ensure the respect of the will of the people of The Gambia."

As important, however, is the announcement that as of January 19—the inauguration date of the legitimately-elected Barrow—the AU will no longer recognize Jammeh as the country's president.

Multiple reports in recent days indicate that Nigeria has at least 800 troops at the ready in the event that an emergency military intervention is necessary. Senegal, a nation whose border completely envelops The Gambia, is set to lead any ECOWAS military response if all diplomatic efforts prove unfruitful.

Instead of intervening militarily, some voices have argued for sanctions. "From Liberia to Sierra Leone, Cote D'Ivoire, among others, West Africa has seen so much bloodletting and political instability," pleaded Ike Ekweremadu, former speaker of ECOWAS parliament and current deputy president of the senate.

"We must all acknowledge the fact that Gambia is a sovereign state," he said, warning this week against military

action, adding that Gambian legal processes for challenging the election should first be allowed to proceed. “We must take all necessary steps as a sub-region to steer the West African nation and indeed the entire community away from any looming bloodshed and monumental destruction.”

Yet there’s still just one problem: The Gambia’s outgoing President Jammeh doesn’t seem like he’s going anywhere soon, and time is running out for him to finally put the peace and prosperity of his people above personal considerations.

Hugo Norton is an Africa policy analyst and adviser at an economic consultancy firm in Brussels. He is also an aspiring freelance writer and passionate observer of the politics and lifestyle in Africa.

A Stress Test for Democracy in South Africa

Hayley Elszasz
May 10, 2017

In South Africa, there is a new branch of the ANC emerging that calls for radical change and advocates against corruption.

Riding on Nelson Mandela’s promise of freedom, equality and opportunity, the African National Congress (ANC) has exercised unchallenged electoral dominance over South African politics

for decades. While South Africa has become an exceptional model of liberal democracy and economic development on the continent under the party’s leadership, the ANC is now facing a crisis.

The current head of the ANC and president of South Africa, Jacob Zuma, has downgraded both the democratic credibility and economy of the country through his scandals, cabinet reshuffles and corrupt dealings. Many South Africans have been increasingly angered and dismayed by Zuma’s misuse of public funds and disregard for protocol. Mass protests against Zuma and invigorated mobilization by the opposition suggest the potential decline of ANC hegemony. Increased inter-party competition, however, also has the potential to herald in a new era of democratic competition, which could result in a stronger and more accountable ruling party.

The opposition has begun to take shape in the form of protests and increased support for the ANC’s electoral competitors. On April 12, the discontent culminated in a mass protest of over 80,000 people — including representatives from all major opposition parties — when they marched on the government buildings in Pretoria. Many protesters were reacting to Zuma’s unceremonious firing of the finance minister and deputy finance minister at the end of March, which shook investor confidence in the South African economy.

In addition to the recent protest, the ANC is facing never-before-seen threats at the ballot box. The Democratic Alliance won three municipalities in the August 2016 local elections, more than any opposition party in the history of the country's democratic rule. As further evidence of ANC fracture, a large number of candidates with competing visions for the future of South Africa are vying to be the new president of the ANC this December.

Within the crowded field, most candidates fall into two camps: pro-Zuma and anti-Zuma. The pro-Zuma faction is status quo, while the anti-Zuma candidates are running on platforms of change and targeting corruption as a main grievance with the current administration.

Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, President Zuma's ex-wife, leads the contingent in favor of the current president. The former African Union chairperson has the president's and the ANC Women's League's backing. Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa — the leader of the anti-Zuma faction — came out strongly against the current president with a speech tying Zuma to corruption and state capture. Ramaphosa has support from the South African Communist Party and the Congress of South African Trade Unions, but he will need to collect all sides of the anti-Zuma struggle to beat Dlamini-Zuma with her state backing in the December election.

TEST FOR DEMOCRACY

The significance of this internal battle in the ANC extends far beyond the borders of the country. South Africa has long been considered a bastion of democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa. However, some commentators contend that, during Zuma's rule, South Africa has lost its exceptional edge due to the rampant clientelism, corruption and poor governance by the ANC.

The enlivened inter-party competition on display during this election, therefore, could be a healthy sign. More competition means more critique of the current state of politics in South Africa and invigorated mobilization of people demanding new, accountable leadership.

Early in his campaign, Ramaphosa is refocusing toward a people-centric ANC and away from the clientelistic practices of the Zuma era. In a speech in April, Ramaphosa called for the ANC to ask, "Why have the people turned against us?" Further, he lamented that the influence of a small group of private individuals in the government has "undermine[d] our economic progress and diminish[ed] our ability to change the lives of the poor."

There is a new branch of the ANC emerging that calls for radical change and advocates against corruption. This factionalism has the potential to strengthen the ANC in the long run by increasing dialogue, calling out government corruption and fostering debate about the future trajectory of the party. Out of chaos, there is hope that

South Africa will emerge as a stronger democratic partner.

Hayley Elszasz is the 2017 Africa fellow at Young Professionals in Foreign Policy. She is also an assistant with the Africa Program at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. Her interests include constitutional law and electoral politics in East Africa. She graduated from Williams College with a BA in Political Science and Global Studies, focusing on African politics.

Kenyan Elections: The Most Hotly Contested Since Independence

Peris Tarus

August 8, 2017

Despite familiar faces, this election might mark the end of an era and the emergence of new actors in Kenyan politics.

The general elections on August 8 are the most competitive and hotly contested in Kenyan history. This year, President Uhuru Kenyatta is seeking re-election while opposition leader Raila Odinga is probably running for the last time. It may be the last time Kenyatta is running too because the constitution prohibits a third term.

Opinions polls place Kenyatta and Odinga neck and neck. According to an Infotrack poll, Odinga could beat Kenyatta. He is merely one percentage

point ahead with support of 47% of voters in contrast to the 46% that Kenyatta commands.

However, an earlier opinion poll by Ipsos Synovate had Kenyatta at 47%, with Odinga trailing at 43%. Both polls agree that no candidate is likely to get more than 50% of the vote that each needs to be declared the winner. Each candidate also needs to win the support of at least 25 out of the 47 counties in the country.

Another poll by the Centre for Africa Progress puts support for Kenyatta at 53% and Odinga commanding a mere 42%.

CAN OPINION POLLS BE TRUSTED?

Opinion polls are largely favoring Kenyatta. However, there are doubts over whether they can be trusted. Many incumbent leaders have been voted out in Africa over recent months. In The Gambia, Yahya Jammeh, who ruled as a dictatorial president from 1994 to 2017, was defeated by Adama Barrow. In Ghana, people voted in Nana Akufo-Addo, ousting John Mahama. An opposition victory is possible in Kenya too.

In the 2013 general election, Kenyatta and Odinga were the top two presidential candidates. William Ruto and Kalonzo Musyoka were the running mates of Kenyatta and Odinga respectively. They have lined up again in 2017.

In 2013, criminal charges were filed against Kenyatta and Ruto at the International Criminal Court (ICC) for the violence that erupted in the country after the 2007 general election. Both of them were later acquitted, but the charges brought the two of them together. This is ironic because Kenyatta is Kikuyu and Ruto is Kalenjin. These are the two tribes that have been rivals for resources such as land, especially in the Rift Valley. They clashed ferociously after the 2007 elections, leading to much violence and destruction. Once both Kenyatta and Ruto faced charges at the ICC, they kissed and made up. Both gave yet another lease of life to the adage that politics makes strange bedfellows.

Mutahi Ngunyi has declared his “tyranny of numbers” hypothesis, which allowed Kenyatta to win because of Kikuyu-Kalenjin support, to be dead. As per this hypothesis, winning Kenyan elections requires the backing of two big tribes and one small. Kenyatta has two big tribes but no small one. Besides, Ngunyi points out that there is “zero passion; zero excitement” in the Kalenjin nation to “wake up at dawn” and “ferry the sick to polling stations in wheelbarrows” to protect Kenyatta’s presidency.

According to Barrack Muluka, a political analyst and expert on public relations, the new tyranny of numbers in voter registration favors Odinga. Kenyatta’s strongholds have 7.4 million registered voters while Odinga’s bastions have 8.2 million. Battlegrounds like Nairobi have another 4 million. Opinion polls may be

wrong and Kenyatta might not win as easily as many expect.

KENYATTA-ODINGA FEUD: THE FATHERS

Kenyan politics is dynastic. Its first president was Jomo Kenyatta, the father of the current head of state. Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, the father of the opposition leader, was the opposition leader. Initially, both were members of the Kenya African National Union (KANU), which was the leading party that fought for independence against the British. Odinga served as the vice chairman of KANU, while Kenyatta was the party president. KANU’s membership was then dominated by the Kikuyu and Luo tribes.

After independence in 1963, Kenya became a one-party state with Kenyatta as president and Odinga as the second-in-command. Harmonious relations between the two soon gave way to ideological differences and political enmity. Odinga criticized Kenyatta, marking the beginning of opposition politics in the country.

When Pio Gama Pinto, then a member of parliament, was assassinated in 1965, Odinga became more vocal against Kenyatta’s government. Pinto was the first Kenyan politician to be assassinated after independence and his family migrated to Canada two years after his death. In 1966, Odinga formed the Kenya People’s Union (KPU) to challenge Kenyatta.

Matters got tense in 1969. During Kenyatta's visit to Kisumu, a confrontation broke out between Kenyatta and Odinga. As a result, the crowd started throwing stones at the president. Kenyatta's security fired at the crowds, causing what is now known as the Kisumu Massacre that reportedly left many dead and hundreds injured.

Kenyatta followed this massacre with the banning of KPU and the arrest of Odinga. Till date, the Luos have neither forgotten nor forgiven the Kenyatta clan and the Kikuyus for the violence of 1969. Similarly, the Kikuyus continue to distrust the Luos.

Kenyatta Jr. and Odinga Jr. continue the rivalry their fathers started. This election might be the last time that the Kenyatta and Odinga clans clash in this generation.

TRIBAL POLITICS

Even if the Kenyatta-Odinga feud ends, Kenya's tribal politics will continue. Since independence, Kenya has been ruled by presidents from two communities. In a country of 44 tribes, the Kikuyu and the Kalenjin have maintained a duopoly on power.

Kenya's first, third and fourth presidents have all been Kikuyu, while its second president was Kalenjin. Kenyans vote on tribal lines. For instance, Kenyatta's Jubilee Party has a following among the Kikuyu, Kalenjin and the Cushitic communities in the northern part of Kenya, including the Somali, Borana,

Rendile, Ormo and Gabra peoples. Raila Odinga's National Super Alliance has followers from the Luo, Abaluhya, Abagusii, Turkana, Kamba and Mijikenda tribes, dominating the coastal part of Kenya in particular.

To be fair, voting is not entirely along tribal lines. The Abaluhya support candidates from any tribe and have a reputation for being the most democratic of all Kenyan communities. Yet tribal identity matters. Those who are not Kikuyu or Kalenjin often feel neglected and marginalized by the government because the dominant two tribes have garnered a lion's share of the country's resources. These two tribes tend to vote as a block and so do the others. That is unlikely to change significantly in the forthcoming election.

FEMALE AND INDEPENDENT CANDIDATES

Women are greatly underrepresented in Kenyan politics. In 2013, the only female candidate for the presidency came sixth. This year, the only woman who was running for president was banned for failing to abide by election rules.

Kenya forms part of a pan-African pattern. Out of the 54 African countries, Liberia is the only country with a female president. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the first elected female head of state in Africa, is unlikely to have any company from Kenya.

A record number of independent candidates are running for office. Of the

15,082 candidates in the 2017 general elections, 3,752 are independent candidates. In 2013, this number was 350. Three independent candidates are running for the presidency itself. The promulgation of the new constitution in 2010 has led to the delegation of powers to the counties of the country. This increased democratization has been accompanied by a huge rise in independent candidates.

Women may not yet be competing for the top job in Kenya, but the Kenyatta-Odinga feud is coming to an end and democracy is deepening, even if messily.

Peris Tarus is a Kenyan journalist and radio presenter. She is currently the head of programs at Radio Upendo in Eldoret. Tarus previously worked with the government-owned Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC).

The Nigerian Health Sector: A Cat with Nine Lives

Oyepeju Abioye
August 28, 2017

Nigeria's health industry struggles on despite the odds.

In order to understand the full extent of Nigeria's health crisis, all you need to do is walk into any hospital in the heart of Lagos or any city across the country. What you will see is the real-life meaning of a cat having nine lives.

Nigerians have learned to survive by going through the motions when it comes to the provision of health care. With patients in dire need of services and health practitioners in dire need of rest, the whole system mirrors what you would call a colossal misdirection of fate. The prayers of ordinary Nigerians are directed toward the betterment of the situation in this critical industry and, as a matter of fact, of most other public sectors. But with maternal mortality rate as high as 560 per 100,000 live births, under-5 mortality at 117 per 1,000 live births, and overall mortality rate of 12.7 deaths per 1,000 people, these prayers seem rightly justified.

Some of the reasons for the high death rate include the lack of funds, both from the government and among the general population, with over 60% of people living below the poverty line of \$1 per day. The troubling part is that despite this widespread absolute poverty, over 90% of payments for health care are out-of-pocket, with concerned doctors often contributing the outstanding payment for patient care. With health insurance virtually nonexistent across the country, out-of-pocket payments have severe consequences for health care access and utilization and are especially catastrophic for the poor.

According to the 2010 World Health Report, "millions of people cannot use health services because they have to pay for them at the time they receive them. And many of those who do use services suffer financial hardship, or are

even impoverished, because they have to pay.”

In Nigeria, health care is seemingly partitioned, and while the rich can of course get excellent services from top-notch private hospitals, the poor have to resort to the relatively affordable government hospitals, where they sleep in the hallways while their relatives are receiving care. Government officials visit these only on commissioning and during unavoidable public events, but never to be treated. Although these institutions provide relatively affordable care when compared to privately-owned hospitals, the level of care provided is often below par.

Nonetheless, the poor flock to these institutions because this is all they can afford. In fact, most of the doctors who work in these public institutions own private practices where they provide a high standard of care while doing very little in these government institutions, most of which are dilapidated.

Why does it have to be this way? Take for example the moral quagmire of a doctor who finds him or herself bound by hospital policies not to attend to patients, even in cases of dire emergencies, simply because they are unable to provide down payment. Or think about how impossibly frustrated a health professional must feel when he or she cannot perform a simple procedure because of the lack of funds to buy materials and basic equipment needed. This is not a situation someone in the

developed world would ever find oneself in.

Or how about parents watching their 7-year-old son die of Burkitt's lymphoma because they cannot afford chemotherapy, or the entire family crying at the ward's doorway because the mother of the household is slipping away through the tight ropes of breast cancer as it ravages her body because there is no money for either surgery or chemotherapy? We don't even need to go as far as talking about radiotherapy: Only two radiotherapy machines are working in the entire country.

No one is more befuddled than the 16-year-old pregnant girl who is not granted permission to go to the hospital without her 47-year-old husband's knowledge and, therefore, she might end up losing her baby due to obstructed labor. Even if she were to defy orders, you can be guaranteed that she would lack the means to settle her hospital bills.

Yet the Nigerian health sector has managed to shoulder its responsibilities, albeit shakily, mostly because these shoulders have been hardened by time and spite. Still, medical professionals are churned out of the system on an almost daily basis, totaling over 2,500 annually, but only a limited number will practice in the country. And having been born with a mentality that embraces struggle, Nigerians try as much as possible to make do with whatever little materials in their possession — even if surgery has to be performed with the aid of a lantern in a hot theater without

scrubs and only a pair of gloves serving as the precautionary measure, in extreme cases.

Somehow, the Nigerian health sector stays alive, in spite of all this. It stays alive because this cat, you see, has nine lives.

Oyepeju Abioye is a doctor by day and a writer by night. She is an observer and a documenter of life as it occurs in her environment, believing that every medical case is a story and that there is a story in every moment of our lives. Her pen is her most prized possession. She runs a blog and is an avid contributor at African Freelancers.

How Federalism Can Work in Somalia

Yusuf Hassan
November 29, 2017

To restore unity, Somali federal and state leaders need to cooperate and work together for the interest of the country as a whole.

The October 14 bombing that killed over 400 people, mostly civilians, near Mogadishu's busy Zoppe Square was the single worst attack in East Africa since the armed insurgency erupted in Somalia in 2006. The harrowing attack became another agonizing testament to the country's prolonged and ruthless conflict, the unresolved security vulnerabilities and the weak institutions

of the Federal Government of Somalia. It was, also, a passing moment of national unity, as Somalis from all regions and walks of life rushed to aid recovering victims. That momentum of solidarity, however, was short-lived. Within days, infighting within government institutions was underway — business as usual.

In a country where 70% of the population is under 35, entire generations of Somalis have become accustomed to a nation without a government. When the state collapsed in 1991, two decades of lawlessness and conflict followed. Violence became commonplace, social relations were torn and the economy foundered. In 2012, at the end of a 12-year political process, the federal government was formed following the first election held in Somalia since 1969.

By 2017, the country's first-ever bicameral federal parliament was formed. Then, at parliament's first joint session in Mogadishu in February, Somali legislators elected a former prime minister, Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed, also known as Farmajo, as the new president of Somalia.

It was the culmination of a long, arduous procedure. Observers noted that the electoral process was flawed, characterized by corruption allegations and vote buying. However, after Mohamed was declared victor, the widespread jubilation in Mogadishu and other cities surprised many. It was significantly indicative of the electoral

outcome's legitimacy and popular support and of the people's aspirations for a better future under what many hoped to be a patriotic national leadership.

MANDATE TO LEAD

The new government came to power with a strong mandate to lead; the nation had suffered for far too long, and it was time for change. The incoming government recognized the monumental task that lay ahead: restoring peace and national cohesion in Somalia, after decades of fragmentation. Still, the new government's pronounced vision decidedly focused on fighting terrorism, corruption and poverty, yet it was not clear how that was to be done.

Like its predecessors, however, the government led by President Mohamed and the political newcomer, Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khaire, is struggling to regularly pay salaries, adequately manage the federal structure or contain disputes among the political class. This has ensured that the government remains distracted from working on federalization, economic recovery or the much-needed security and justice reforms.

Even more troubling, the new administration seems to have followed the path of its predecessor, President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud. It wasted time and resources attempting to shape the state formation process through political manipulation and direct interference. In Jubaland, for example,

such interference led to armed clashes in Kismayo in June 2013 and, in Galmudug, to the election of Abdikarim Hussein Guled, then-President Mohamud's close associate.

The Khaire administration should learn from mistakes of its former government. The outcome could be more political tensions exacerbating fragile conditions and derailing the country's hard-earned political transition. To maintain public support, the administration will depend on whether or not the government enacts sound policies and corrective action without which it remains a weak, self-defeating and underperforming institution, dashing public hopes after election euphoria.

NEUTRALITY IN REGIONAL CRISIS

For generations, world and regional powers have vied for power and influence in Somalia due to the country's strategic location connecting the Indian Ocean region, the Middle East and East Africa. With untapped natural resources, the country is a key regional security pillar and has great potential for investment and economic development.

In June 2017, when the Gulf crisis pitted a Saudi and UAE-led coalition against the state of Qatar, Somalia's federal government announced its neutral position and called for regional dialogue to resolve the diplomatic crisis. The decision provoked regional states to contradict the federal government's official position. State leaders argued they had a right to be consulted on

major national decisions, and that the federal government violated the draft constitution by alienating regional voices. Needless to say, the regional states' unilateral decisions bewildered the Somali public.

For the Somali government, the Gulf crisis was an opportunity to articulate its federalism strategy and foreign policy priorities. Such a strategy could help consolidate its domestic authority while augmenting its international stature. Instead, when Mogadishu unilaterally declared its position, it unwittingly instigated a domestic political row. Leading a fragmented and war-ravaged nation, the Somali government's primary goal should be to build consensus around a national interest and recognition that such a feat requires the cooperation and input of the regional states.

FEDERALIZING SOMALIA

Federal institutions and the regions have not agreed on a model to complete the federal system. The draft constitution is notorious for its vague stipulations, and both the federal government and the regions have misused the constitution to justify policies or frustrate the federalization process.

The constitutional review process has faced delays and is often associated with committees that work in secrecy. State governments have demanded a transparent constitutional process, which builds political trust and is vital to

a fragile state rebuilding its democratic foundations. Particularly, roles and responsibilities between the Somali government, parliament and state governments in political negotiations remain undefined, often shrouded in controversy or locked in dispute.

For example, will the prime minister and the state presidents negotiate directly, or will federal and state parliament subcommittees have an active role in federal-state negotiations?

Political friction between Mogadishu and the regions continues to be high, sabotaging the federalization process. Most recently, on October 10, five regional presidents issued a 16-point communiqué in Kismayo. Without any federal officials present, it was clear that the meeting was an effort to isolate the federal government.

In late October 2017, President Mohamed invited the state presidents to Mogadishu for a week of talks. In theory, the two sides seem to have agreed on key principles. However, without a harmonized federal arrangement and an agreed model for power and resource sharing, similar deadlock cannot be prevented in the near future.

COOPERATIVE FEDERALISM

Article 54 of the draft constitution grants the federal government power in matters of foreign affairs, national defense, citizenship and immigration, and monetary policy. But the constitution envisions a form of cooperative

federalism (as opposed to dual federalism) where power and institutional balance is harmonized between the center and the periphery. Such a system largely relies on consensus-building leaders at all levels of government.

The Somali government's unilateral decision and lack of consultation with the states undermines that spirit of cooperation.

The constitutional requirement of federal-state consultations forms the basis for preventing a return to the tyranny of centralized rule, while an incomplete federalization process, unaddressed community reconciliation and lagging security and political integration define the constitution's realpolitik considerations.

Conversely, the regions' contradicting the federal government's Gulf crisis policy undermines national unity and reconciliation efforts. There are other political and institutional avenues whereby the states could express their dissenting voices, including through a federal parliament or judicial process.

FOUNDATIONS OF SECURITY

Somalia's complex security challenges cannot be addressed solely through police action and military offensives. The Somali government needs security cooperation and coordination with state governments, while ensuring tangible commitment to building the foundations of security: community reconciliation,

equality under law and institutional and socioeconomic balance.

Facing the burden of geopolitics, the government's decision to stay neutral in an international dispute was a positive move. But Somalia should benefit from its foreign policy decisions: think trade deals, investment and economic incentives.

The government must balance between its foreign policy interests and local concerns. The practice of consultations and consensus building prior to making decisions affecting specific regional states' economic interests will create trust and prevent future political crises.

Finally, there must be genuine political will — especially among the federal and state leaders — to cooperate and work together for the interest of the Somali nation.

This is, perhaps, the most difficult task. It is also the only way Somalia can restore unity, confront security vulnerabilities and bolster national governance.

Yusuf Hassan is a Somali-American journalist, political and media analyst, and communications adviser.

The Asia Pacific in 2017

Chye Shu Wen

January 2, 2017

Chye Shu Wen provides a round-up of events in 2016 and highlights what can be expected in 2017.

There is no doubt that 2016 will go down as a year that overwhelmed the Asia Pacific: Brexit and the victory of Donald Trump sent shockwaves across the region; the electoral wins of Taiwan's first female president, Tsai Ing-wen, and Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines resulted in both countries recalibrating their bargaining powers in regional and international politics; political scandals plagued Malaysia and South Korea; Hong Kong's legislative elections sent a strong signal to China; and the Rohingya refugee crisis continued to make hit headlines.

While 2017 promises to be as tumultuous as the year before, what are some key events and trends we can expect?

TRANS-PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP

The electoral victory of Donald Trump has marked the end of the Obama administration's "pivot to Asia," with the president-elect promising to withdraw the United States from the yet-to-be-ratified Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) on his first day in office.

In a Brookings Institute article, Mireya Solis says the TPP has the potential of gaining a new lease of life sans the US. However, it remains to be seen how it will fare against three competing trade deals that are bringing China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to the centerfold: the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, the Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific, and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.

While the Philippines has been cozying up to China in an attempt to shore up more credibility as a reliable partner in Asian economic integration, most countries in the region are unlikely to turn their backs against the West completely.

APPROACHING WITH CAUTION

The South China Sea dispute will continue to make headlines this year. China's quick dismissal of The Hague ruling in July 2016, which declared that Beijing had violated the Philippines' sovereignty over the Spratly Islands, only led to the superpower continuing its build-up of military defenses on the islands.

Observers have commented that confrontation on open waters between China, the US and other countries that have competing claims on the islands is likely, given that Trump's unpredictable and assertive nature toward policies like the "One China" principle has already drawn criticism from China.

There is, however, a possibility that Chinese President Xi Jinping's administration will refrain from being overtly aggressive or hostile as it will be busy with housekeeping issues in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

The CCP's 19th National Congress in late 2017 will be one of the biggest political events of the year, with the ruling party selecting and announcing the country's next leaders. President Xi will be expected to be given a second term, having declared himself to be the "core leader" of the CCP in October 2016.

This National Congress is expected to produce the greatest shakeup in the politburo standing committee, where four or five top leaders of the CCP will retire and be replaced with Xi's allies. All this is part of President Xi's long-term plan of securing his position of power until 2022 or beyond. And during this precarious year of power transitions, China is unlikely to be overtly hostile to the two countries that have been causing it many grievances of late: Taiwan and Hong Kong.

Relations with both countries will continue to be tested. For Taiwan, President Tsai Ing-wen is likely to push the boundaries to show her country's rejection of the "One China" principle. For neighboring Hong Kong, the chief executive elections in March will be a major litmus test for pro-democracy and pro-independence camps, which have suffered setbacks after two elected pro-

independence activists were ousted from the legislature.

This year also marks the 20th anniversary of Hong Kong's return to China from the British. It is an anniversary in which the pro-democracy camp might capitalize on to drum-up support for pro-democracy/independence sentiments, given that China has been using a carrot-and-stick approach in implementing the "one country, two systems" policy in recent years.

Beyond China, two elections in East Asia and Southeast Asia will also be worth looking out for.

First, in South Korea, the impeachment of President Park Geun-hye has resulted in disarray in the country, and a protracted political crisis is only likely to worsen domestic economic problems. Troubles in Seoul have also encouraged North Korea to ramp up its nuclear capabilities to heighten tensions, and it might not come as a surprise if Tokyo and Beijing decide to increase its nuclear security and capabilities in the name of defense.

Second, in Thailand, the death of the longest reigning monarch, King Bhumibol Adulyadej, might mean that general elections that had been promised by the military junta might be forestalled, given that the country is in mourning for a year.

AGAINST THE TIDE OF INTOLERANCE

The most pressing issue that ASEAN will be dealing with over the next few months is that of the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar and the glaringly obvious state of emergency Rakhine State is in. The exodus of Rohingya refugees to Malaysia, Thailand and Bangladesh—which began in 2015—increased dramatically in the last quarter of 2016 following the Burmese government’s security crackdown after border raids by Rakhine militants. Reports about Burmese soldiers torturing villagers, raping women and burning down homes in Rohingya villages have sparked protests by Muslims in Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand.

A recent report by Refugees International recommended that ASEAN address the root causes behind the crisis “by engaging the government of Myanmar on solutions, including granting citizenship to Rohingya in the long-term and freedom of movement in the short-term.”

While State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi did fulfill this by calling the foreign ministers from ASEAN to Myanmar on December 19, 2016, to discuss accusations of “genocide” and “ethnic cleansing” taking place, the Nobel laureate’s plea for “time and space” for her government to “resolve” the Rohingya crisis should be taken with a spoonful of salt.

ASEAN has to continue its engagement with the government to ensure that humanitarian assistance is allowed to reach affected areas within Rakhine

State. The ASEAN members who are housing thousands of refugees should also walk the talk of recognizing the rights of Rohingya by ensuring access to basic services, including healthcare and education in their countries.

The urgency to “resolve” the Rohingya crisis should also be viewed through the rise of Islamic populism and race-based politics in countries like Malaysia and Indonesia in recent months.

Fears of radicalization developing within the Rohingya communities are, therefore, not unfounded. The longer this crisis drags on, the more challenging it will be for the Myanmar government and ASEAN to find viable solutions if terrorist groups such as Harakah al-Yaqin become deeply involved with their cause of liberating the Rohingya by triggering a spiral of violence.

The Asia Pacific has a mammoth task of treading an altered world order that has been marred by the volatility of populist politics. But it might be worth taking a leaf out of Beijing’s book for its sense of humor toward politics for the rest of the year, beginning with the creation of a Lunar New Year rooster statue in China that bears a resemblance to President-Elect Donald Trump.

Happy New Year!

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Indonesia's Dealmaker in a Trump-Led Asian Order

Bradley Wood

March 15, 2017

Caught up in the South China Sea tensions between Washington and Beijing, Indonesia needs to rethink its foreign policy approach.

President Donald Trump's administration has brought an increased probability of rivalry between the United States and China in the South China Sea. This has created a renewed sense of internal and external anxiety for Indonesia, which now requires a rethinking of President Joko Widodo's (or Jokowi, as he is known) foreign policy approach.

Just prior to Trump's inauguration, an op-ed credited to the Indonesian Coordinating Minister for Maritime Affairs Luhut Pandjaitan appeared in The Straits Times gesturing to the incoming US president that Indonesia was a friend. Luhut wrote that Indonesia belonged both to the "new geography of American power" under a Trump administration and to the "cartography of an Asia reshaped" by the rising powers of China and India. However, he

emphasized that Indonesia, as a leading Southeast Asian country, did not want to pick sides and requested that Indonesia's independent and active foreign policy be respected.

It is odd that it was Luhut expressing this position and not Wiranto, the coordinating minister for politics, law and security, responsible for the cooperation between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defense, as well as the Indonesian armed forces (TNI), police, and State Intelligence Agency (BIN). Nor did it come from Foreign Minister Retno LP Marsudi or, more importantly, President Jokowi himself.

The article was presumably published in Singapore's most-read English language newspaper as a deliberate signal to Indonesia's regional neighbors and the United States that key decision-makers within the Jokowi administration remain anxious about the future of a Trump-led Asian order, particularly in the South China Sea.

The subtle message here is that Luhut has made something of a comeback since he was reassigned in last year's ministerial reshuffle, which was widely viewed as a demotion to serve Jokowi's 2019 re-election plans. Luhut, however, has re-emerged as Jokowi's spokesman on important defense and foreign policy issues concerning the big powers and regional security partners. The extent of Luhut's new political role—as a tactical domestic decision or a strategic one—will become evident if Jokowi sends

Luhut abroad when he visits Washington or Beijing.

CHANGING TIDES

Luhut's outlook on Indonesia's position highlights the country's intention to navigate this new era of great power relations through the continuation of its non-aligned, independent and active foreign policy approach. The Jokowi administration's policies, however, have made this an increasingly complex task.

Jokowi has encouraged closer ties with China, which is now the third largest direct investor in Indonesia, and possibly the largest foreign investor if Chinese-linked subsidiaries based in other countries are taken into account.

Jokowi has looked to China for important infrastructure investment as the China-led Maritime Silk Road and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) are viewed as complementary and an opportunity to secure funding for his developmental agenda.

On the other hand, Indonesia has also forged closer economic relations with the US. Following his congratulatory phone call with Trump, Jokowi revealed that the new US president claims to have many friends in Indonesia, as well as business interests. Jakarta's economic relationship with the US will likely be strengthened by the resort development projects in Indonesia that directly involve President Trump's conglomerate.

Likewise, the planned natural resource exploitation of the Natuna Islands archipelago exclusive economic zone (EEZ)—which overlaps with China's nine-dash South China Sea claim—is in cooperation with the US firm ExxonMobil. The consortium consisting of Esso Natuna Ltd (an ExxonMobil affiliate) and PTT Thailand is currently negotiating a production sharing contract with Indonesia's state-owned oil and natural gas corporation, PT Pertamina, with a plan to extract the 46 trillion cubic feet of recoverable hydrocarbon gas.

Rex Tillerson, former chairman and CEO of ExxonMobil and now secretary of state in the Trump administration, recently stated during his confirmation hearing that the US will have to send a clear signal to Beijing by stopping and blocking access to China's seven artificial islands constructed in the southern part of the South China Sea. This has created a sense of anxiety that has reverberated across the region, demonstrated by the timely appearance of Luhut's article following Tillerson's confirmation hearing.

This threat is strengthened by the fact that ExxonMobil—under Tillerson's leadership—was willing and capable of challenging China in a similar context by signing a production-sharing contract with Vietnam in 2009 that was knowingly in conflict with China's nine-dash line.

While Tillerson has been required to step down from his chairmanship and CEO role at ExxonMobil and distance

himself from ethical conflicts of interest, ExxonMobil's growing interests in the South China Sea will no doubt be a consideration in Trump's foreign policy deliberations regarding the region.

And given that there are projects in Indonesia linked directly to President Trump's personal business interests, as well as key decision-makers within his administration, these have put Jokowi in a difficult position. Trump's foreign policy will likely be tailored to serve "America first" at the expense of other countries in the region, such as the Sino-Indonesia bilateral relationship.

UNCERTAIN TIMES

On the day of Trump's inauguration, Indonesia announced it was boosting its police force on the Natuna Islands from 5,000 to 12,000 personnel, and upgrading the police command from a type-B force led by a one-star general to a type-A force led by a two-star general. Indonesia also plans to establish a mobile police brigade (Brimob) division in Natuna—a paramilitary police division tasked with anti-riot, counter-separatist and counter-insurgency duties.

The increase in national police presence is an attempt to strengthen the pre-existing military territorial structure that is currently the subject of ongoing modernization deliberations that could involve foreign defense financing. Indonesia has already agreed to increase defense spending to boost its military presence and improve defense

facilities on the island, despite wide cuts to the annual defense budget.

This is an effort to boost the deterrence effect of Indonesia's armed forces following maritime incidents in the country's EEZ with China in 2016. This demonstrates not only that there is a preexisting perceived external threat on Indonesia's northern borders near the South China Sea, but the recent push for more police to reinforce the military structure is an indication of a perception that rivalry in the resource-rich area may also involve internal forms of subversion by external actors.

Indonesia's perceptions of insecurity emanate from all fronts: Its archipelagic make-up, population size, cultural diversity and history of religious, ethnic and secessionist conflict have meant that internal threat perceptions have remained the dominant influence on foreign and defense policy, and a lens through which Indonesia continues to perceive its external environment.

To the north, Indonesia sees a rising Asian power incrementally expanding southward along the maritime domain, one that is also connected to the Southeast Asian mainland that stretches along its western flank to the Malay Peninsula. To the east is a global superpower under a very different leadership, with the projection capability to impact the region significantly, and one that has recently shown signs of challenging a rising China just north of its borders. To the south is a middle power with a history of confrontation and

a close security ally of the US, as well as a strategic partner of Indonesia's nearby western neighbors, Malaysia and Singapore.

Rhetoric by the commander of the Indonesian armed forces, General Gatot Nurmantyo, has centered around the fear of external powers using an "invisible hand" to capitalize on internal social challenges within Indonesia's democracy. He has used the November 2016 protests against incumbent Jakarta Governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama for alleged blasphemy as a prime example.

Gatot has interpreted Indonesia's current internal social challenges as an opportunity for external powers to engage in a proxy-war in competition for Indonesia's vast resources. He has referred specifically to the Five Power Defense Arrangements (FPDA) countries—the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia, Malaysia and Singapore—as well as the United States and his perceived threat from China.

Indonesia's self-perceptions of internal vulnerability to external interference have also been recently articulated by Luhut. He has recently advised Australia not to interfere with Indonesia's domestic issues, using the example of Papua. This comes after the recent incident between the two countries that resulted in the temporary limited suspension of some joint military language training programs following the use of politically sensitive material in an Australian joint training facility.

THE NEW MAN IN WASHINGTON

Indonesia's external threat perceptions are also likely to be influenced by the key appointments by the Trump administration. US Secretary of Defense James Mattis has previously made comments about political Islam being not in America's best interest. The appointment of Pam Pryor—who was in-charge of faith and Christian outreach during Trump's election campaign—to the State Department is a further sign that it will play an important role in assisting Trump's pro-Christian policies that favor Christians within Muslim-majority countries.

Trump's first major attempt at policy implementation to operationalize his anti-Islamic radical terrorism policy position resulted in the temporary travel ban on seven Muslim-majority countries, listing amongst other reasons the persecution of religious minorities as one of its criteria justifying the ban. While Indonesia was not among those banned, this policy move comes at a time when the country is experiencing increased levels of religious intolerance of minority groups.

It has been reported that it was President Trump's chief strategist, Steve Bannon, who played a key role in designing and implementing the executive order empowering the travel ban. Bannon's appointment is also not without controversy, as he has also made clear his position on Islam, previously stating that the US is in an "outright war against jihadist fascism."

Bannon has also been recently appointed as a full sitting member of the Principles Committee of the National Security Council (NSC). This has placed him above the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and director of National Intelligence, who attend only on issues relating to their direct area of responsibility. This makes Bannon the most influential person in the Trump administration outside the president's immediate family.

These developments are likely to be interpreted by some in Jakarta as a sign of an anti-Islamic ideological shift within the US government. Luhut has argued that the “demographic centre of gravity” of Islam lies in Indonesia, however, these appointments run contrary to Luhut's judgment that the Trump administration will “likely adopt a non-ideological and non-confrontational approach to a diverse political world.”

Furthermore, Trump's pro-Christian and anti-Islamic appointments come at a time when Islamic radical groups in Indonesia are utilizing the post-reformasi democratic space, amplified by the proliferation of social media, to raise the profile of political Islam on a mass domestic scale in Indonesia to achieve their political objectives.

This is a clear push in the opposite direction in Indonesia—an ideological shift toward a greater role for political Islam within Indonesia's democracy and something that could influence the Trump administration's future perception of Indonesia.

The Jokowi administration faces a unique challenge in handling the important relationship with America under Trump's unpredictable leadership, which so far continues to uphold the security of the current Asian order. He also faces the challenge of managing the economic powerhouse of China that now underwrites the much-needed investment capital to fund his developmental agenda, which is crucial to keeping Jokowi in power beyond 2019.

One small mishap could set off a chain of events that would force Indonesia to tailor its independent and active foreign policy to align both its security and economic interests more closely to the US or China. To avoid this alternative, Jokowi needs to avoid miscommunication and misunderstanding with these important powers and Indonesia's regional neighbors. This will require a new approach in a Trump-led Asian order, one that allows Indonesia to leverage its strategic weight in Southeast Asia to secure both domestic and regional objectives in the run-up to the 2019 elections.

A NEW ROLE

This is why Jokowi chose Luhut as his spokesman over other significant portfolio ministers. Wiranto has a poor international reputation that limits Jokowi's ability to get Indonesia's message across without the risk of a backlash is the Western media, which is now designated an enemy of the current

US administration. He is far more valuable to Jokowi as a legitimate domestic political actor to achieve domestic political objectives such as securing TNI support for Jokowi's 2019 election ambitions.

Vice President Jusuf Kalla is unlikely to run in 2019, and this leaves a vacancy that needs to be filled by someone who has wide domestic support and the ability to influence the armed forces. Whether Wiranto will take this position is still unclear, however, the prep-work needs to be done for other possible contenders such as Gatot, National Police Chief General Tito Karnavian or Luhut himself.

In a new Asian order where US policy is announced in 140 characters on Twitter, defense issues are too important to be miscommunicated by outspoken TNI Commander Gatot Nurmantyo or Defense Minister Ryamizard Ryacudu—a lesson made clear by the poor handling of the recent bilateral incident with a close US ally: Australia. Gatot claims not to have been reprimanded over the issue after reports suggested he was given a warning by Jokowi.

This has required Luhut to reaffirm this political line, stating that Gatot and Jokowi have laughed off the matter. However, Gatot has been far more constrained in his remarks following the incident, and he is no longer seen wearing a white peci—a traditional male Muslim cap—when officially attending religious events. This is perhaps a subtle indication that he has toned down

his nationalist Islamic zeal, at least for now.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno L.P. Marsudi will likely be focused on strengthening the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as a key pillar of Jakarta's "omni-enmeshment" strategy of managing great power relations. Poor regional leadership by Jokowi has resulted in declining influence of ASEAN in dealing with China. Jokowi's policy considerations have been far more inward-looking than his predecessor Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. This has prompted Indonesia's leading strategic thinkers to call for a more reinvigorated leadership in ASEAN this year, as the region is expected to experience an ongoing strategic flux.

Another important task for the Foreign Ministry will also include building closer links with the South Pacific as part of Indonesia's Look East policy, in an effort to offset the attempt of the United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP) to further gain influence among the members of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG). This will likely require a diplomatic maneuvering in combination with Australia—a bilateral relationship that requires a diplomatic effort and delicate handling on both sides, not to mention managing different interests in the South Pacific.

Retno is also a career diplomat without a business or military background, and she lacks the business deal-making experience that will be an essential skill

in negotiating great power relations in a Trump-led Asian order. This will make her an unsuitable candidate for the task at hand in the eyes of Jokowi, and she is unlikely to be well received by the Trump administration, which will prefer to deal hand to hand on important regional defense and foreign policy issues.

This leaves Luhut. One of Jokowi's close advisors, he's a former military officer with an extensive well-regarded reputation and former ambassador to Singapore (another important regional US security relationship). He has held positions of trade minister and coordinating minister for politics, law and security, where he played an important role in settling tensions with China after last year's maritime incidents. Luhut is also a fluent English speaker and a successful businessman with experience in deal-making and the politics behind it.

In a Trump-led Asian order, Jokowi's choice is clear: He requires someone who can coordinate the coordinators as well as their subsequent ministers. Jokowi needs an experienced dealmaker, not a deal-breaker who can think big, protect Indonesia's interests, maximize Jakarta's options and contain the costs: the art of the deal—the Indonesian way.

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The Fall of North Korea

Sebastien Smith
March 17, 2017

If Secretary Tillerson isn't bluffing, the Kim dynasty's days may be numbered.

Breaking with what had been a quiet start to his job, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson warned on March 17 that the Trump administration might be forced to take preemptive action "if [North Korea] elevate[s] the threat of their weapons program" to an unacceptable level.

He ruled out any more negotiations with the Hermit Kingdom to freeze its nuclear and missile programs, and declared: "The policy of strategic patience has ended."

It is hard to imagine the increasingly paranoid North Korea shrugging off such a statement. Indeed, these are not words to be snuffed at. Tillerson's warning represents the toughest stance

against North Korea that a US administration has taken in decades. The quiet American's words may serve as a spark to dramatic and devastating change upon the Korean Peninsula.

METHOD IN THE MADNESS

Probably by calculation, Tillerson's statement is vague. It is unclear where the Trump administration may draw the line in regard to Pyongyang's weapons program, but that's likely the point: to deter any further progress or to give the United States a chance to strike without warning.

Besides, drawing a line will not matter. Since coming to power in 2011, North Korea's supreme leader Kim Jong-un has shown no tendency toward compromise on the issue. Political scientists have often concluded that the north maintains and expands its nuclear program for the country's very survival.

Though not without risk, an arsenal of nuclear weapons prevents the threat of invasion. So wherever a line is drawn, Kim is sure to ignore it. For the regime, a North Korea without nuclear weapons would mean no North Korea at all. Neither did the secretary of state clarify whether preemptive action would be limited to destabilizing the north's nuclear facilities or committing to a full-scale assault with the aim of regime change.

Again, it may not matter. Even a limited strike would take the region down a path not seen since the Korean War.

If the regime survives a preemptive strike, the retaliation will be devastating for the peninsula. Just 35 miles from the border that separates the two Koreas, Seoul is within a path of destruction. Japan, an old imperialist foe of North Korea, may also find itself within the regime's crosshairs. Sensing an inevitable death, it is unthinkable what vengeance the Kim regime may unleash in its dying days.

If Tillerson really prefers action over strategic patience, then it is of utmost importance that the Trump administration should have a plan to limit the damage. Neither can the administration continue down its unilateral path. North Korea's nuclear facilities must be destroyed immediately and Pyongyang brought down with limited civilian casualties. And the US must cooperate with South Korea to best protect its population. China and Japan, too, will need to prepare for a conflict that could spillover beyond the peninsula.

Even in a better turn of events, cooperation and caution is everything. If a limited attack quickly brings down an already unstable Kim dynasty, the US, South Korea and China will have to confront an exodus of North Korean refugees pouring over the borders. And then there is the question of North Korea's future as a nation state.

Of course, world events seldom take such an optimistic path. Great upheaval, even for the better, comes at great costs.

And from the U-turn over the One China policy to infuriating a British intelligence agency, the Trump administration has tended to lurch from one foreign policy mishap to another. This is a cause of great concern. For the sake of millions of lives, a crisis on the Korean Peninsula is a test the administration must get right.

It is now North Korea's turn to respond to the US government's new stance. But Tillerson needs to be several steps ahead.

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Saudi Arabia's Colliding Interests in Myanmar

Daniel Wagner & Jesse Schatz
April 18, 2017

Saudi Arabia's support for the Rohingya Muslim minority in Myanmar is expected to continue for some time.

Despite Aung San Suu Kyi's decades-old image as an embattled political prisoner and proponent of ardent reform as an opponent of the previous military government in Myanmar, her new role

as state councilor has resulted in criticism from a variety of quarters domestically and internationally, as she juggles her predisposition toward humanitarianism with a pragmatic approach to governing. Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy (NLD) have been roundly criticized for their presumed complicity in what many international observers have deemed a process of ethnic cleansing and genocide against the Rohingya minority residing in the country's rural Rakhine State.

While advocacy on behalf of the Rohingya has come from predictable sources in the West, it has also come from Saudi Arabia. The kingdom started providing financial assistance to the Rohingya when the situation began deteriorating in 2012. With its valuable investments in Myanmar's oil infrastructure, located largely within Rakhine, Riyadh has undoubtedly wished to hedge its bets and play both sides of the same coin. Since then, armed resistance from the Rohingya people toward the Burmese government, including a 2016 attack on security forces linked to funds from Saudi and Pakistani actors, has motivated an increased Burmese military presence in the region.

On numerous occasions, the United Nations as well as human rights organizations have documented abuses leveled against the Rohingya. Earlier this year, Human Rights Watch released a report that identified widespread and systematic human rights violations

targeting Myanmar's Muslim citizens in Rakhine State. The report has been disputed by the government. Suu Kyi disagrees with the findings and has denied that the government is guilty of ethnic cleansing.

The roots of the violence in Rakhine State are multifaceted and rooted in British colonial officials' failure to include the word "Rohingya" in censuses taken of the then-British colony, which was subsequently used as a means of falsely characterizing the Rohingya as illegal immigrants from neighboring regions, with no historical legitimacy in Burma. The former military regime and the current democratically-elected government have both denied the Rohingya full citizenship, strictly limiting basic freedoms of movement and suffrage. Suu Kyi finds herself in a precarious position, reemphasizing her support for non-violent political change, while at the same time referring to the Rohingya's disrespect for the "Rule of Law" as a justification for a strong military presence in Rakhine.

Prior to 2009, Saudi Arabia's late King Abdullah recognized the plight of the Rohingya and offered permanent residency for in excess of 250,000 Burmese Muslims, but Saudi authorities segregated many Burmese upon arrival to the kingdom. Most Burmese expatriates in the Gulf have worked low-skilled/low-pay jobs and have faced challenges similar to those of other poor Southeast Asian migrants in Saudi Arabia. Following the death of King Abdullah, King Salman detained 3,000

Rohingya families in Jeddah prisons and planned to deport them back to Myanmar for reasons that remain unclear.

SAUDI ARABIA AND MYANMAR

Such reversals have further complicated Riyadh's policy toward the Rohingya. This year, Saudi officials announced the kingdom would accept a total of 190,000 Rohingya refugees over a four-year period, in conjunction with providing limited financial assistance to the Rohingya. In 2013, the Saudi government publicly condemned the Burmese government's treatment of the Rohingya at a UN meeting — something it has rarely done. Perhaps the ability to lecture other countries about human rights was one of Saudi Arabia's original objectives for having first become embroiled in the Rohingya issue.

At the same time, Saudi Arabia has been working with the Burmese and Chinese governments to industrialize natural resource production and distribution within Rakhine State. Saudi Arabia and its smaller Persian Gulf neighbors became deeply involved in Myanmar's oil industry in 2011, when Riyadh and Beijing signed a Memorandum of Understanding in which China pledged to provide 200,000 barrels of crude oil per day through the just-completed Sino-Burma oil pipeline. The United Arab Emirates has also built roads and hotels to supplement Rakhine State's booming oil industry, and in 2014, Qatar began transporting methane to China via Myanmar, further

emphasizing the critical role of Burma in connecting China and the Arab Gulf states. Although Saudi Arabia has maintained its support for the Rohingya, other Gulf Cooperation Council members, such as Qatar, appear willing to ignore the situation altogether if it counteracts their wider regional strategy — particularly if doing so creates tension with China.

The Burmese government is unlikely to reverse its position on the Rohingya in the future — with or without Suu Kyi at the helm. By the same token, Saudi Arabia's support for the Rohingya may well continue, to the extent that it does not jeopardize the kingdom's business, commercial and investment interests in Myanmar, particularly at a time when officials in Riyadh are increasingly focused on securing greater cooperation from members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) for advancing Saudi Arabia's ambitious Vision 2030.

Can Saudi Arabia have its cake and it eat too by strengthening Riyadh's ties with Beijing via their mutual interests in Myanmar, while having the luxury of maintaining the kingdom's continued support for a repressed Muslim minority group?

The tangled web Saudi Arabia has weaved will in all likelihood become more complicated, yet the kingdom's support for the Rohingya should be expected to continue for some time, given Saudi Arabia's clearly demonstrated view that throwing its

weight behind this Muslim minority group in Myanmar yields more net benefits than disadvantages in the forum of global public opinion.

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Looking Back at the Asian Financial Crisis

Ravindran Navaratnam
July 15, 2017

Twenty years after the Asian financial crisis, it is important to understand the situation from a Malaysian perspective.

In July 1997, the Bank of Thailand withdrew from intervening (pegging Thai baht to US dollars) to defend the baht

when its foreign reserves effectively dropped to just \$7.5 billion after taking into consideration off balance sheet obligations of \$23.4 billion. Therefore, it simply became untenable for the bank to continue defending the baht.

Arguably, that was the “official” start of the Asian financial crisis. Twenty years on, it is an interesting story to share especially when told by those privileged to serve Malaysia and who were given an opportunity to formulate and execute the solutions during that period.

CAUSES OF THE CRISIS

The cause of the Asian crisis will probably be long debated by economists and political analysts even after the 20th anniversary. The underlying reasons range from fixed exchange rates, current account deficits, reckless lending and currency speculation to crony capitalism.

For example, one end of the spectrum lays the blame squarely on crony capitalism in the emerging market economies of East Asia, and the other on foreign parties that were hell bent on destroying Asian economies and creating a new dawn for neocolonialism.

The two extremes aside, aspects such as managing trade balances, sound credit practices in the banking industry, and realistic exchange rates are generally accepted as matters that governments are expected to adhere to in order to avoid future crises.

However, there are claims that the weakness was due to a “directed economy” and “capital allocated” based on government influence, enabling high growth achieved by the East Asian economies before the financial crisis, but this remains debated by economists. Similarly, the argument for a free, unfettered flow of capital and unrestricted trading practices, including short selling to derive profit — championed by the advocates of capitalism against the proponents who argue for the rights of nations to safeguard the welfare of their citizens via regulations and restrictions on capital — will continue to be debated.

REACTION

Once the crisis began, the reactions and approach taken to resolve it differed. Though many were ready to acknowledge the crisis, some were still in denial and continued to insist that stress tests undertaken by the regulators on banks showed a sound financial system. Moreover, some of the measures such as the establishment of Danaharta, an asset management company, were deemed merely as pre-emptive.

However, a more likely scenario was that the weakness in the banking system existed pre-crisis and the exchange rate decline was a mere trigger to the full-blown credit crisis. The renowned Professor Edward Altman pointed to back testing data for the three other Asian crisis countries by the World Bank, which proved such weaknesses in

the banking system existed before the crisis. Perhaps those in the know in Malaysia would concur with a similar view on the country's situation. Indeed, the combined level of nonperforming loans (NPL), including those acquired by Danaharta, reported by banks and those under the Corporate Debt Restructuring Committee (CDRC) at the peak of the crisis in 1998 was 18.6%, which exceeded the 10% NPL ratio synonymous with the benchmark on what is recognized as a credit crisis.

Notably, during a lunch at the Lake Club to introduce the newly-formed management team of Danaharta to senior central bankers, discussion on concerns of a lost decade ensued. For those who were young, probably foolish and still brimming with the confidence of Malaysia in the 1990s and the "can-do" attitude, it was never doubted for a moment the ability to turn around the situation. Regrettably, this was more likely a case of foolish bravado rather than deep intellectual insights over the situation or intuition of finding the right solutions.

LEARNING FROM OTHERS

At the beginning of the crisis, uncertainty prevailed when deciding on strategies and tactics moving forward. Indeed, advice from global consultants was sought and, in some aspects, their inputs were invaluable. For example, Arthur Andersen contributed to the legal team's efforts in drafting the Danaharta Act. Other advice proved to be polite but was less than effective. Yet some

foreigners genuinely helped by sharing their real-world experiences they had from earlier credit crises such as that in Sweden.

An excellent example was that there was no need to raise USD debt, or for that matter any new "money" to acquire the NPLs. The approach to raise the debt was originally planned to be undertaken by a large global investment bank that would have enjoyed substantial fees had the bonds been issued. These multibillion USD borrowings based on commercial rates were considered necessary to maintain Malaysia's financial policy independence by shoring up reserves with USD funds raised, converted into Malaysian ringgit and then used to acquire NPLs.

This negated the need to approach the International Monetary Fund and allowed Malaysia to manage its financial matters independently. However, borrowing USD at commercial rates on the international debt market would have been a disastrous undertaking, given that Malaysia's sovereign rating had fallen to just one notch above junk status.

The former CEO of Securum pointed out that an NPL is a funded position and does not need new funding. As such, an asset management company (AMC) merely needs to borrow from the bank (i.e. an existing lender to acquire the NPL). The lesson learned that an NPL is a funded position proved to be invaluable. Like many other foreign

ideas that were borrowed, this idea was adapted and enhanced with Malaysian innovations. To this end, Danaharta's zero coupon bonds were created, tied in with a novel incentive program for the banks, which sold their NPLs to share on the upside as well as provide a window for liquidity via Bank Negara Malaysia (BNM). This not only resolved the funding issue, but sped up the carve out of NPLs, which then accelerated commercial banks' return to their critical lending activities that had all but ceased at a substantial number of financial institutions with the onset of the credit crisis.

That idea of revamping an existing workable model was not only applied to Danaharta, but also when its chairman and management were subsequently requested to chair and operate the CDRC. The CDRC was originally set up based on the London approach toward debt resolution, and the first model operated using a rotating chairman picked from amongst the lenders and implementation was based on a consensus view. However, what became apparent was that senior bankers with frontline responsibilities for their own bank could not dedicate their time, nor consistently apply policies and decisions compared to what a dedicated full-time chairman of lenders meeting could perform. Therefore, one of the key improvements was centralizing the chairman of the creditors meeting.

Moreover, the new team tightened and enhanced its procedures on achieving milestones, and also introduced greater

“persuasion” from the central bank in respect of reaching consensus and coordination with Danaharta on the possibility of using the Danaharta Act to reduce the majority required to approve schemes of arrangement. BNM, via its press release on July 23, 2009, stated that the “CDRC was first established during the 1998 financial crisis and was successful in resolving 57 cases with a total outstanding debt of RM 45.8 billion, helping to accelerate the country's economic recovery.”

BROADER ECONOMY

During the crisis, the policy trilemma from an economic perspective was truly understood. The policy trilemma, also known as the impossible or inconsistent trinity, states a country must choose between free capital mobility, exchange-rate management and monetary autonomy (the three corners of the triangle in this diagram).

The point was reiterated by Noble Prize-winning economist Paul Krugman in 1999:

“[Y]ou can't have it all: A country must pick two out of three. It can fix its exchange rate without emasculating its central bank, but only by maintaining controls on capital flows (like China today); it can leave capital movement free but retain monetary autonomy, but only by letting the exchange rate fluctuate (like Britain—or Canada); or it can choose to leave capital free and stabilize the currency, but only by abandoning any ability to adjust interest

rates to fight inflation or recession (like Argentina today, or for that matter most of Europe)."

Businesses in Malaysia required stable exchange rates as the country continued to have an open-trading economy that had large imports and exports denominated in USD. It was clear that interest rates could not influence exchange rates in a crisis without severe repercussions as previously proven elsewhere in the world — e.g. the British pound crisis during the departure from the exchange rate mechanism. Early attempts in increasing interest rates proved disastrous. The increase in interest rates had several severe impacts, including higher unsustainable cost of debt, fall in demand and decline in asset values.

It should have been clear to all and sundry that the policy by the IMF and World Bank to advise on an increase in interest rates was flawed and would worsen the crisis. Only when currency and capital controls were established could interest rates be brought down significantly, insulating monetary policy from volatility due to fluctuating currency. This allowed businesses to breathe, increased confidence, provided stability and caused asset prices to rise.

Moreover, in respect to asset price rising, residential property prices could increase as interest rates began to fall and new products such as the base lending rate (BLR) plus zero financing began to emerge in response to falling

interest rates. Also, the pegged exchange rate was set at a mark that people were confident that ringgit was undervalued and there was no hurry to take out the monies through the black market. The strong trade surplus that followed also ensured that the exchange rate could be sustained. Fortunately for Malaysia, the policy misstep with regard to increased interest rates adopted at the onset of crisis was brief — as seen by this graph — and did not have the debilitating effect on the economy it had in other Asian crisis countries.

THE RESULTS

This graph from a book entitled *Dangerous Market, Managing in Financial Crisis*, shows the comparisons between country performances in the period relevant to the Asian crisis. As seen by several of the measures, Malaysia outperforms those countries that followed the IMF prescription.

One of the reasons for this success was the coordinated effort by the National Economic Action Council (NEAC) and BNM, with specialist agencies created during the crisis with specific roles. "Malaysia has achieved considerable progress in implementing these reform in comparison to other crisis countries.

The approach adopted by Malaysia (and also Korea) in resolving bad loans problems and restructuring banks involved a high degree of government involvement, which had the advantage of speed and coherence."

Whether or not exchange control played a significant role is still debated because, at that time, a fair degree of stability had been established in the region and there was consensus that ringgit was undervalued. However, unorthodox approaches to crisis resolution has gained wider acceptance. Iceland is a more recent example of a crisis country that implemented unorthodox solutions and posted better results compared to Ireland which, at the onset of the global financial crisis, did not have as severe a problem as Iceland.

This graph at The Washington Post compares the growth in GDP between Ireland and Iceland followed by between Iceland and Greece.

Iceland sharply reduced spending, more than Ireland, and increased interest rates up to 18% to rein in inflation. The country allowed its banks to go bust (did not repay foreigners for their reckless lending) and let its currency collapse whilst putting capital controls in place. Certainly, Iceland's economy has outperformed Greece, which remains beleaguered with economic malaises and severe hardship for its people. It takes bravery to force an economic reset that addresses the underlying issues, but Greece cannot pull the same trick because its currency is the euro.

It is acknowledged that significant financial and balance sheet reform took place in Malaysia following the Asian crisis. Weaker banks were merged with stronger banks rather than being

liquidated, and domestic financial institutions were recapitalized and, therefore, this reduced the catastrophic events associated with bank closures. This lesson was learned from the crisis in the 1980s and thus the option of bank mergers was pursued rather than bank closures, unlike in other Asian crisis countries. Infrastructure-related privatization was brought into the government fold and corporations' balance sheets were improved.

However, whilst restructuring did take place, it was mainly financial but not so much on critical operational restructuring. But this criticism is perhaps unfair as corporate exercises such as mergers and acquisitions arose following the aftermath of the Asian financial crisis, which led to the revamped Air Asia; a merger of various banks in Malaysia forming CIMB; and the formation of SapuraCrest and later with Kencana Petroleum, forming Sapura Kencana — which are some of today's leading corporations in Malaysia.

There are also cases of foreign ownership that had benefited the country, and companies with stronger balance sheets were able to grow successfully. It was recently pointed out by a leading economist from an investment bank that following the Asian crisis, the efforts in the 1990s at expanding infrastructure and investment into manufacturing and reformation of the financial sector spurred economic growth and paid dividend in the 2000s — i.e. the economy did grow well in the

period following the tech bubble bust right up to the global financial crisis without large growth in credit expansion or high oil prices.

Total public debt over GDP has been increasing for the first few years post-crisis, as corporate investment has increased along with fiscal stimulus plans by the government. Subsequently, total public debt over GDP has been fairly consistent post-2005, suggesting macroeconomic stabilization (steady growth in credit).

LESSONS LEARNED

For completeness and as a useful conclusion, some of the lessons learned are set out below.

First, no doubt the leadership provided by the government was instrumental in managing the crisis successfully, in particular after the initial stage of being decisive, focused, demonstrating the ability to adapt and being steadfast on the direction once it was clear. Strong government facilitated the passing of important legislation during the time such as the Danaharta Act, which was an important factor in debt resolution.

Second, the presence of strong economic institutions such as the NEAC, MOF, BNM (CDRC, Danaharta and Danamodal coordinated by BNM) and the securities commission enabled the policies and approaches to be implemented effectively with credibility and instilled investor confidence.

Third, debt was substantially denominated in Malaysian ringgit and not in foreign currency. Even foreign currency debt can be a manageable problem if it is not sovereign-related or implied sovereign guaranteed — i.e. private sector-related as in the case of Iceland.

At worst, debt of domestic corporations denominated in foreign currency can be written off once assets are foreclosed and, therefore, the losses would be limited and shared by foreign lenders.

However, if debt is in foreign currency and sovereign-related, the implication of default is severe as foreign banks and bond holders leverage on this point at the expense of the nation. Argentina and, more recently, Mongolia are examples of countries with high levels of sovereign debt denominated in foreign currency when they defaulted.

Fourth, the driving force of the economy is entrepreneurs. Therefore, the preservation of genuine entrepreneurs is critical, and this is also positive for banks and lenders. Entrepreneurs are the people best placed to turn things around even in distress as they know the business, have the entrepreneurial drive, risk appetite and, above all, the willingness to put risk capital into the business. Contrast this with liquidators who, despite being professional, have diametrically opposite characteristics.

In any case, supporting entrepreneurs is also in the best interest of lenders, which is well known to most bankers in

bank recovery divisions and restructuring specialists. Danaharta provided comprehensive data in its final annual report, which supports this proposition.

Fifth, the importance of bottom-up analysis on credit markets and capital deployed so far has indicated that “back testing” some of the Asian crisis countries by the World Bank showed that financial weaknesses could be clearly identified before the crisis. The exchange rate crisis was a mere trigger that set off what was an existing weakness in the economy and quality of credit. Similar analysis has also indicated that Greece and the US exhibited the same characteristics prior to the global financial crisis.

Sixth, having the right people remains one of the most important factors. During that time, a great number of bright people were drafted to serve Malaysia. They were not only highly-talented individuals, but they also had the capacity to learn quickly, adapt and innovate. Rising above all challenges during the time, they worked well as a team of Malaysians that produced exemplary results.

This was well acknowledged and many went on to advise other countries facing a financial crisis or those that were keen on setting up their own asset management company.

Finally, probably the most important lessons are what the late Yang Amat Mulia Tun Raja Mohar Raja

Badiozaman advised at Danaharta: to work diligently and with integrity. Moreover, he emphasized that we should keep proper records of deliberations and decisions made, as he mentioned that once we are all gone, only the records remain. To him, these records would eventually be the only things available to stand up to the scrutiny of third parties.

No doubt that many should be named for their contribution during that time, but the special mention is made only of Tun Mohar because he was an immense pillar of integrity and reason during the darkest days of the Asian financial crisis.

Ravindran Navaratnam is the managing director and co-founder of Sage 3 Capital, a specialist advisory firm advising on distress resolutions for major corporations in Malaysia and Singapore. He was formerly the general manager responsible for strategy and corporate finance at Danaharta, Malaysia’s asset management company at the height of the Asian financial crisis, at its inception. Navaratnam’s views have been sought by senior government officials via his role as an advisor for major national initiatives to restructure non-performing loans. In this respect, he has had invitations from government agencies in China, Thailand, Vietnam, the United Arab Emirates, Ireland and Indonesia to advise on the matter.

Afghanistan: The Stolen Tale of Khorasan

Laura Cesaretti
February 22, 2017

Afghanistan's Khorasan region is often associated with war and social conservatism, yet it has a rich history of religious tolerance and a passion for art.

Whether known to be the graveyard of empires or the land of lions, Afghanistan has always been perceived as the motherland of fearless, rural fighters. Yet the view of a mountainous, ruthless country does not give justice to the beauty of this historic land, regulated for centuries by codes and institutions that incorporated progressive thinking. Over 30 years of war and an unstoppable campaign against local tribal customs have contributed to enforce this conventional wisdom, portraying Afghans as conservative extremists who oppose any form of modernization.

Not surprisingly, this stereotype is also used by the Islamic State (IS). The group first set foot on Afghan soil in 2014, and it announced the establishment of the so-called Province of Khorasan the following year. "The people of Khurasan in general love Islam and warfare," Shaykh Hafidh Said Khan, the appointed wali of Khorasan, told the IS Dabiq magazine, "and because of this, the region has a dormant force for supporting tawhid and jihad."

The use of the term Khorasan is not casual. Historically, it refers to a broader area that includes northern Afghanistan and other Central Asian countries such as Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. The actual boundaries, however, have been the subject of tales and narratives that extend them to include the southern-central provinces of Afghanistan.

A controversial hadith (sayings of Prophet Muhammad), in particular, has later engraved the region with a deep symbolic meaning across many Islamist groups. It is said that an army will rise up from this region bearing a black banner, and it will lead Muslims to the final victory against the enemies of Islam. This has encouraged speculation, particularly referring to Afghanistan, spreading the belief that the Taliban or other groups like IS could be the prophesied army.

RELIGIOUS CROSSWAYS

What many, including the Islamic State today, ignore is how the Afghan Islamic tradition is profoundly unrelated to this apocalyptic view. Throughout history, Afghan nationalist movements have been inspired by an Islam that did not fear to include elements of Hinduism and Zoroastrianism, for centuries making Afghanistan one of the most spiritual and tolerant religious crossways. Even nowadays, in the old city of Kabul you can find an old temple where people worship Baba Ratan, a Sufi saint for Muslims and a guru for Hindus and Sikhs, famous for having professed miracles across India and

Afghanistan, including Jalalabad, Kabul, Peshawar and Khorasan.

The impact of his teachings and poems is still alive in today's Afghanistan, along with the spiritual footprint of other Sufi thinkers. Popular poetry, strictly related to religion and society, uses vocabulary of human rights and national pride, and Sufi scholars are believed to be the real architects of Afghan society.

This ascetic approach toward life is not relegated to the intellectual Afghan class. Afghan politicians recite lines of poetry in their speeches, and farmers use their birds as metaphors for life, recalling, perhaps, the lines that Iman Ghazali, the great 11th-century Sufi, wrote during his last state of illness: "A bird I am: This body was my cage/But I have flown leaving it as a token." Even conservative clerics often use poems in Friday prayers, and the most violent warlords prefer to have pictures of themselves taken with flowers rather than an AK47.

"Many Muslims around the world do not agree with the way of Sufism, and this is saying a lot about Afghan people. Things have changed in the past years, but most of our people are still very moderate, compassionate and caring about each other. We are one of the few cultures which have to allow Sufism to grow," explains Mahmud Kaber Khalili, grandson of the great poet Khalilullah Khalili and son of the political leader Masood Khalili. In his book, *Afghanistan Decoded*, Mahmud Khalili has dedicated an entire chapter to his family's

historical hujra—a meditation room built in 1962 decorated only by poems.

Even during wartime, the hujra has been preserved with the highest respect by mujahedeen and Taliban alike. Poetry, in fact, has always been considered to have a powerful social role in Afghanistan, and people from different economic and social background pay the same level of respect to poets. Poetry festivals are held regularly in many provinces of the country, even the ones controlled by the Taliban, who have a long-standing poetic tradition.

Poetry of the Taliban brings together over 200 poems about grief and battle, as well as love and mysticism. Contrary to music, banned under the Taliban as religious propaganda, poetry had little to do with political ideology, and more with local traditions that characterized the Afghan identity.

CULTURAL PECULIARITIES

The Afghanistan Ministry of Information and Culture has repeatedly lamented this misinterpretation of Afghan culture, and how the international community has paid so little attention to this fundamental peculiarity of the Afghan life.

"We are the victim of terrorism," says the spokesperson of the ministry, Haroon Hakimi. "It is unfortunate that birthplace of so many scholars who were spreading peace and love to the world has been affected by war, and known mainly for that."

Sufism, in fact, has been used as a counterterrorism strategy by the West, but not as a source of interpretation and understanding of a great civilization. Khorasan's Sufi intellectuals and poets such as Rumi are popular in the West, but not well-known for their religious beliefs and spiritual interpretations.

Indeed, the Khorasan region is also home of rigid interpretations of Islam, such as the Deobandi school, to which groups such as the Taliban belong. This interpretation is not much different from the Wahhabi teachings that inspired the Islamic State, and yet the space for political and social debate has always characterized this part of the region.

Baqi Hilaman Ghaznawi, a Sufi scholar and writer of many books in Dari and Pashto, explains: "Taliban are not al-Qaeda or Daesh [Islamic State]. In the 1990s, when they arrived, they respected our spiritual traditions."

It is this spiritual narrative that characterizes the Khorasan region more than war and conservatism. The aesthetic passion for poetry and emotion of Afghans is something that can be felt in every aspect of their every day life. Yet neither the West nor the Islamic State are ready to recognize it.

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It's Time to Make in India

Ankita Mukhopadhyay
March 6, 2017

The Make in India campaign is an attempt to encourage foreign investment and manufacturing in the country.

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi took over the reins from his predecessor Manmohan Singh in 2014, he made it very clear that he was a man with a purpose: to make India a global manufacturing hub that would attract foreign investment. The first step he took in this direction was to give a 100% allowance to foreign direct investment (FDI) in many key sectors. This means that a foreign company can now easily set up shop in India, without requiring an Indian partner.

Then he launched a flagship program—Make in India—to encourage investment in sectors such as aviation, automotive, steel and defense. Modi's India finally seems to be walking toward a future where the traditional reliance on red-tape and high-level bureaucracy is fading in the minds of foreign investors.

If India gets rid of the various obstacles posed to investment in the country, it will become a profitable venture for companies, for it has an excess availability of labor. With over 80% of youth showing an interest in

engineering—the highest in the world—India has the potential to blast its way into the league of developed nations in the coming decades. India also has four zones of production, forming an axis across the country: Delhi-Gurgaon-Noida in the north; Mumbai-Pune in the west; Jamshedpur-Kolkata to the east; and Bangalore-Chennai-Hyderabad to the south. However, many factors hinder the success of Make in India.

BUYING LAND AND MANAGING LABOR

India allows 100% foreign direct investment in crucial sectors such as automotive and pharmaceutical industries. Earlier, carmakers such as Japan's Suzuki Motor Corp had to reach out to an Indian partner such as Maruti to invest and manufacture in India. Now, that roadblock has been removed by the Modi government. But the biggest problem plaguing large companies is the availability of land, production facilities and labor unions.

In September 2016, Mamata Banerjee, the chief minister of the eastern Indian state of West Bengal, said that she was in talks with BMW, a premium automaker, to open a manufacturing plant in the state. The road ahead is tough: Less than half a decade ago, Tata Motors was pushed out of West Bengal after completing construction of its factory after Banerjee alleged the land was illegally procured from farmers. West Bengal also has a chequered history of labor strikes, which reduce productivity, and it lacks proper access

to production sites in south India, from where parts for sedans and sports utility vehicles need to be procured, reducing cost-effectiveness.

Buying land alone doesn't reduce problems in India: Maruti-Suzuki's Manesar plant, in the northern state of Haryana, faced losses of over \$375.2 million in 2011-12, with a 6% fall in market share, after permanent and contract workers went on strike three times to demand better working conditions.

Coupled with these issues is the tussle between the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the opposition, the Indian National Congress party, over the 2013 Land Acquisition Act. According to the tenets of the act, the government can acquire land for certain infrastructural and developmental projects. But it is difficult for the central government to find a foreign partner in its projects amid such uncertainty.

WHERE IS THE MONEY?

India has 29 states, each autonomous in its own way while still being part of the nation. This structure has spiraled into a multistoried taxation system, with each state implementing its own system, creating a problem for every manufacturer transferring/procuring parts from another state. While the Indian government is trying to fix this through a uniform goods and services tax (GST), scheduled to be implemented very soon, there is still uncertainty as to its uniform implementation.

Currently, the presence of a toll tax hinders mobility between states. The Indian government has also withdrawn the exemption on payment of a minimum alternate tax (MAT) on special economic zones (SEZ)—an area demarcated with relaxed financial policies. This has considerably reduced activity in the regions, hindering investment and production.

For investment, India needs infrastructure, for which, in turn, it needs money. In February 2016, India's bad loans totaled \$60 billion, with a large proportion coming from the corporate sector. State-controlled banks, like the State Bank of India, are still mired in losses, with a stronger bankruptcy law for smoother closure of companies yet to be passed.

According to an employee working with a top automotive firm in India, Make in India has turned the country into an assemblage platform for vehicles, but the reputation for Indian-made vehicles is still low. For example, Suzuki launched its Indian-made Baleno sedan in Japan last year and had to specifically iterate that “there was no problem with quality” to encourage customers to buy the car.

India still has a long way before a scheme like Make in India can be successful. Rather, Make in India needs to walk a longer road before it sees success. India has a large pool of labor that is still unskilled, and despite availability of land, its status as a largely agrarian economy still hinders the

possibility of opening a plant on farmland.

The scheme is ambitious and needs time to grow amid various organizational and bureaucratic changes. The trouble is: Will its short-term shortfalls make any coming change in management reconsider its stance on the scheme?

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An Indian Revolution: From Indira's Congress to BJP's Modi

Manu Sharma & Atul Singh
March 12, 2017

Narendra Modi has given the opposition a thrashing and emerged as the most powerful Indian leader since Indira Gandhi.

On March 11, India's rambunctious democracy took a new turn. Five states had gone to the polls. Of these, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Goa and Manipur are relatively electorally insignificant in a

country of over 1.2 billion people. Everyone was waiting for the result in Uttar Pradesh (UP), the 800-pound gorilla of Indian democracy.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has led the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to a historic victory in India's most populous state. Over 200 million people now inhabit UP, more than 16% of the Indian population. Even after all the influx of refugees and migrants, the population of Germany was below 83 million at the end of 2016. The number of people living in the United States was a touch more than 323 million on July 4, 2016.

With its population, size and location, UP has always held the key to power in Delhi. Every pan-Indian emperor from Samudragupta to Akbar rose to power by conquering and controlling UP. Once India won independence in 1947, no Indian prime minister has become powerful without winning elections in UP. Indira Gandhi ruled India like a queen because she had UP in her back pocket or, to use an Indian analogy, tied away in the end of her sari.

WHAT HAPPENED?

Modi has emulated Indira and won a landslide in UP. While Indira's Congress party won 309 seats in 1980, Modi's BJP has set a new record by winning 312 out of a total of 403. So, what is going on?

First, Modi has short-circuited traditional channels of power that have long held sway in Indian politics. Like India's

infamous caste system, power and patronage in the country have been deeply hierarchical. It works like this: The chief minister lords it over his ministers. They in turn like bureaucrats to kowtow to them. These bureaucrats then dispense goodies to relatives, loyalists and favorites of their political masters. They dip their hands in the cookie jar in the process.

Power brokers play an important role in this traditional dispensing of spoils. Industrialists such as those of the Bombay Club once had the power to make and unmake ministers and even prime ministers. For too many journalists in Delhi have long given up speaking truth to power and focus on brokering deals with the purveyors of power. The Lutyens' media, as this jet set group of journalists is termed, has been in bed for decades with politicians and bureaucrats who operate out of the imposing edifices that Edward Lutyens once designed for the British Übermensch.

Not only national but also local power brokers abound. They range from India's fabled holy men to local financiers. The latter bet on candidates and aim to back the winning horse. The entire retinue of such brokers clogs India's political system and ensures that little gets done. With Modi's emergence as prime minister, many power brokers are in hot water. In fact, the prime minister connects directly with the voters, and such is his popularity that the BJP did not even announce a chief ministerial candidate for UP.

As the BBC rightly points out, the UP election was a referendum on Modi as prime minister, and the former chaiwalla (tea seller) has won big time. The very fact that Modi began life as a chaiwalla has played to his advantage. He connects directly to the voters. This makes power brokers redundant. It also makes regional leaders of the BJP irrelevant. Modi has inaugurated a new experiment in Indian politics of a de facto presidential style of government within the de jure Westminster model of parliamentary democracy—and people are voting for it.

Second, Modi has emerged as a man of action that Indians are so enamored of in their movies. While Barack Obama pitched the audacity of hope, Modi has successfully sold his energy. Voters see him as someone with the clarity of mind and the courage of conviction to implement tough decisions such as surgical strikes against Pakistan and demonetization of high-value currency notes. Over the last three decades, such decisiveness has become alien to India. The last bold and decisive leader of India was none other than Indira, who nationalized banks, conducted a nuclear test and broke Pakistan into two during the 1971 war.

Third, Modi is first right-wing politician with several firsts to his credit. The man who began life as a chaiwalla is the first person of a backward caste to head a traditionally Brahmin-led party. Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the last BJP prime minister, was a classically educated Brahmin who wrote poetry and loved

culture. Modi has little time for such luxuries and is infamous for being a hard driving taskmaster who works round the clock.

For the first time, Modi is marrying the fervor of Hindu nationalism to the muscle of capitalism. As chief minister of Gujarat, Modi pushed forth industrialization and courted foreign investment. In more ways than one, Modi is the Indian version of Margaret Thatcher. Like her, he has taken over a party of the established elite and commandeered it to embrace markets more closely. Like her, he has made the bet that private enterprise is the way forward for the economy. And like Thatcher, Modi believes in a muscular foreign policy backed by a robust military strategy.

Modi is also the first right-wing Indian politician who has been able to set a benchmark for good governance vis-à-vis his left-wing rivals. He has championed his abilities as an administrator, while pointing to his rivals' record of corruption, patronage and incompetence. Pre-2013, the BJP was like the Indian cricket team of the 1960s and 1970s with upper caste genteel leaders who lacked the killer instinct. Under Modi, the BJP has turned into a mean if not lean fighting machine.

Unlike Vajpayee, Modi has made the BJP into the natural party of power and transformed himself into the leader of the nation. It helps that his rivals have lost the plot. Arvind Kejriwal, the chief minister of Delhi and leader of the Aam

Aadmi Party (AAP), has been in a hurry to win elections in other states before establishing a track record in Delhi. He wants to run before he can walk and acts not as chief minister of Delhi, but of the entire country. The AAP began with much promise, but is now a one-man band that has now become a caricature of monumental proportions.

SOCIALISM IN INDIA

The parties of the socialist fold that have produced two of the last five prime ministers are in disarray. When they unite as they did in Bihar, they can still win. But the Samajwadi Party (SP) and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) are locked in a fratricidal battle of mutual annihilation. Furthermore, they are too narrowly focused on the interests of a few castes and capturing the Muslim vote. This has proved to be their undoing, allowing the BJP to change what the BBC calls “the social arithmetic of Indian elections.”

The SP, until recently the ruling party of Uttar Pradesh, is primarily a party of Yadavs. They are members of the agrarian landholding caste who have taken over the instruments of the state over the years. Identity politics is the name of the game, and caste matters, not merit. While Yadavs get to be illiterate teachers and dancing policemen, the SP buy the Muslim vote by roping in powerful leaders from the community, patronizing the Urdu press and handing out subsidies to Islamic institutions. It is not without surprise that

Mulayam Singh Yadav, the founder of SP, is often called Mullah Mulayam.

Apart from identity politics, the SP is infamous as a party of trigger-happy thugs. Even The Wall Street Journal has reported on SP’s “goonda raj” (rule of goons) and its wanton record of violence. SP’s reputation for brutality is matched only by its record of venality. SP’s own legislators such as Mohammad Ziauddin Rizvi have bemoaned that “corruption is at its peak” in UP with administrative and police officers demanding bribes even from legislators. Some of this money purportedly goes right to the top in UP. It is little surprise that one of Yadav’s sons drives a Lamborghini. Democracy is messy even in America, but it is downright dirty in UP.

In the 1970s, India experienced a great wave of socialism. Leaders like Jayaprakash Narayan, Satyendra Narayan Sinha and Karpuri Thakur campaigned against corruption and misrule. Narayan—popularly known as JP—led the JP movement and the fight against Indira when she assumed dictatorial powers during the Emergency from 1975 to 1977. JP was locked up for his protests and so were thousands of others. These socialists were honest, upstanding and principled. The same cannot be said about their successors.

The socialist parties of northern India have been taken over by landholding agrarian castes. Once, they wanted liberation from the top castes such as Brahmins and Rajputs. Once in office,

they developed a taste for power and realized that India's colonial state could serve their selfish interests. Ironically, instead of these landholding castes turning socialist, they have transformed socialist parties into feudal bastions of self and patronage.

All of these parties have also turned dynastic. The Indian National Lok Dal is dominated by the Devi Lal clan; the SP by Mulayam Singh Yadav's family; the Rashtriya Janata Dal is run by Laloo Prasad Yadav's household; the Biju Janata Dal is run by Biju Patnaik's son; and the Janata Dal Secular is the fiefdom of the sons of Haradanahalli Doddegowda Deve Gowda, a former prime minister. This is worse than the caviar communism that has made communist parties in India unelectable.

SECOND TERM IN 2019

The election results of March 11 have demonstrated that the Indian opposition is in disarray. The historic Indian National Congress may have won Punjab, but it has no presence in UP. The party's base has largely been decimated and is led by fifth generation scion who lacks ideas, energy and verbal fluency. Rahul Gandhi is a modern-day Louis XVI who lacks the ability to lead, the energy to campaign or the interest to govern.

For all their faults, it is India's socialist parties that are the only challengers to the BJP. They are the only obstacle in the path of Modi and his utter domination of the Hindi heartland.

However, until socialists curb their venality, brutality, nepotism and divisions, the field is clear for Modi for a second term in 2019.

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Atul Singh is the founder, CEO and editor-in-chief of Fair Observer. He has taught political economy at the University of California, Berkeley and been a visiting professor of humanities and social sciences at the Indian Institute of Technology, Gandhinagar. He studied philosophy, politics and economics at the University of Oxford on the Radhakrishnan Scholarship and did an MBA with a triple major in finance, strategy and entrepreneurship at the Wharton School. Singh worked as a corporate lawyer in London and led special operations as an elite officer in

India's volatile border areas where he had many near-death experiences.

Coming Together to Rebuild Afghanistan

Bakhtiar Safi
April 3, 2017

Afghanistan's diaspora around the world needs to take an active role to maintain the positive changes currently taking place.

It is winter in Afghanistan. The snow covers in white the glorious peaks of the country's mountains and plains, but the smoke from wooden stoves pushes up, joining the clouds that are limiting the beauty of the view. To Afghans, their future is subjected to the same obstructions—a feeling that better and brighter days are coming is there, but daily struggles make them too difficult to truly envision.

An existence guided by peace, stability and prosperity has always been a hope for Afghans, but it is only lately that the idea has acquired a concrete foundation. The positioning and engagement of youth in government, the notable reduction in corruption, a significant increase in the number of children attending school, the fall of maternal mortality rate and the steady but constant economic growth have certainly contributed to vivifying this hope.

A number of initiatives, including Afghanistan's accession to the World

Trade Organization (WTO) and the opening of the Chahbahar port in Iran, are now offering many potential trade opportunities.

A COMMON HISTORY

Afghans have historically dedicated and sacrificed their lives to their rich and beautiful country. Nevertheless, Afghanistan has suffered countless political upheavals, from Alexander the Great to this very day. For centuries, this fearless nation has fought and maintained independence with the high price of blood and devotion from countrymen and countrywomen alike.

It is not the sole glory of one person, clan or ethnic group. The pride belongs to all those Afghans who were involved directly or indirectly through their tangible or intangible contributions.

Those engaged directly in the fight have normally taken most credit for their dedication and heroic actions in resisting foreign occupation. For Afghans, they are the ones who are highly esteemed, and history will continue to praise their remarkable service in the name of their country.

Afghans have many to remember from the pages of history, such as Malalai of Maiwand, a 19-year-old girl from Maiwand, Kandahar, who reunified local fighters against the British troops at the 1880 Battle of Maiwand. She fought alongside Ghazi Mohammad Ayub Khan, emir of Afghanistan, and is a national hero of Afghanistan, her told in

Afghan schoolbooks, and many schools, hospitals and other institutions named after her across the country.

Another memorable event is the 1979 Herat Uprising against the Soviet-sponsored regime—the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA)—after it declared new socialist reform that contradicted traditions and values of Islam. People stood against the government and were joined by Afghan army troops. They held the city for about a week, but the regime recaptured the city with the support of Soviet air support. According to estimates, some 25,000 died in this uprising. This day has been continuously celebrated for years by the people in different parts of the country, particularly in Herat.

Many of those fighters were the so-called mujahedeen, leading the resistance against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and gaining a lot of support across the Muslim world for their jihad.

THE DIASPORA

But it was always patriotism that inspired the majority of these figures. A deep love for the motherland, the ultimate respect for their fellow countrymen and women who deserve a better future ahead. Until now, millions of Afghans living overseas have not lost this passion and remain strongly and emotionally connected to home.

The majority of them might be blue-collar workers, but they support the families and friends that have remained

attached to the land. They wear Afghan clothes on Fridays, Nowroz and Eid, respect the famous Afghan tradition of hospitality, and contribute to educating the world about the social and cultural values that make all Afghans so proud.

They are also active in the political life of Afghanistan, engaging in debate on social media and other platforms. “Every Afghan child is a politician,” said President Ashraf Ghani during his election campaign, and no sentence can describe better the deep passion that all Afghans have for their nation. This enthusiasm, however, sometimes leads to political frustrations.

Due to the lack of extensive media coverage and the difficulty of accessing credible information, many Afghans limit their understanding to the news feeds on social media, which are rarely accurate. Any discussion with the absence of facts and figures leads to misunderstanding, sometimes resulting in heated exchanges of words. Very sensitive posts and comments made by friends often end in strong debates, mostly due to misunderstandings and lack of credible arguments and information used to sustain a point.

In one instance the social media became abuzz with the news of the death of Sadiq Fitrat Nashnas, a prominent and much loved Afghan singer. Despite refutation by many people, including the singer himself, this fake news remained a topic of heated arguments for many days.

In another instance, the Afghan government executed a number of notorious criminals after a legal process. A section of Afghans, including the diaspora, started lionizing these characters on social media, based on mere hearsay. These two incidents further exhibited the difference of views between the resident and non-resident Afghans.

The most common altercations, however, happen when the expectations between Afghans abroad and those in the country clash. The Afghan diaspora sees the developments, standards, rules and regulations in the West and wants that change for Afghanistan at a snap of its fingers. That is not realistic.

SHARED GOALS

The changes that have taken place did not happen overnight. Afghans started from scratch not just once, but many times over. The unrest initiated as a result of the revolution in 1978, the subsequent deployment of Soviet troops and the mujahedeen resistance culminated in the establishment of a hardline Taliban regime in 1996, followed by the war efforts by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) that dislodged the Taliban in 2001. More than 30 years of war have affected our society deeply. It should be obvious that it would take a long while for opportunities present in developed countries to become a reality.

Afghans at home also understand and feel the absence of standard schools,

standard health services and jobs. According to the latest reports, almost a third of all children across the country are unable to go to school, and the unemployment rate is above 40%. The majority of our students are still studying under the burning sun without furniture or blackboards, mothers do not have access to reproductive health facilities. They have more realistic expectations about the timeline for change.

Long debates on how to reach the best result are pointless if we don't understand that our struggles are aimed at shared goals. We have to join the forces to prove that changes can come, and lost reputation can be regained.

The recent developments show that we are on the right track. Those who used to wait to invest in construction and logistics projects are now thinking of production lines and long-term investments. According to the World Bank's Afghanistan Development Update, the domestic revenues increased from 8.7% of GDP in 2014 to 10.4% of GDP in 2015. This will create jobs and other employment opportunities.

The representatives of young people and women are more visible in the media and official discussions, showing the emergence of new ideas. The recent Transparency International report shows that Afghanistan is not on the list of top three corrupt countries anymore.

This is a notable achievement, reached in part because of initiatives such as the

first-ever anti-corruption commission sponsored by the President Ashraf Ghani and inaugurated last July.

The Afghan diaspora has done an excellent job in serving the country and contributing to these achievements, particularly when the country needed them most. According to the one estimate by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the remittances accounted for around 30% of GDP in 2006. But now, with access to education, jobs and new technologies, the diaspora's help is even more valuable. Afghanistan needs our love and patriotism, and each of us should contribute to this rebuilding phase without giving up.

MAKING UP FOR SHORTAGES

Even a positive and motivational word can bring a notable change in someone's life. Afghans abroad should avoid never-ending debates that only keeps the country divided. We need a hand in any way possible to not let these divisions happen again. It can be financial support, standardization of education, mobilizing funds, assisting and connecting Afghan students to international universities, filing their applications for scholarships, advocating for gender rights, translating books—including books for children—or visiting Afghanistan during the holidays to contribute directly to the population.

We have many shortages within the country and any type of contribution by our family members, friends and

sympathizers abroad is fundamental. One example of this is Mahir Momand and his Moska Mobile Library. Momand is an Afghan who lives in Australia and in 2016 created the very first mobile library for the children of Afghanistan. A full-time librarian distributes books on a daily basis, traveling throughout the most remote areas and villages of the country. Since the project started, 35,000 children have received not only colorful storybooks, but also educational material on co-existence and peace.

Another remarkable man is Baaz Mohammad, the head of Baaz Welfare Association in Nangarhar province. This association distributes wheelchairs and artificial hands to disabled Afghans. He mobilizes support for this project mainly via his Facebook page and his social media connections. He posts financial updates, reports and field pictures on his timeline to ensure transparency and accountability on his project. According to his last report, 494 wheelchairs and 70 artificial hands have been distributed in Kabul, Nangarhar and Laghman provinces—20% going to disabled women.

Similarly, Ghousdin Ferotan, The CEO of first Afghan magazine for children, AKO BAKO, recently released the first copy of the magazine thanks to the technical and script support of members of the Afghan diaspora.

There are many other lesser-known initiatives out there, including many efforts made by Afghans in sending money to family members or people in

need at home. The generosity of our community would never stop to surprise, and I am confident that it contributes significantly to the wellbeing of people back home.

This is why there should not be competition between those who have remained and those who have left. We all share an emotional and deep attachment to our roots. If you cannot contribute to the unity, you should certainly not contribute to disunity. Our divisions have blocked our rich culture for too long and contributed to the misunderstandings about our nation around the world.

Inspired by the works and efforts of Afghans abroad and home, this attempt is to make my contribution by engaging in a call for patriotism and love. We Afghans have to remain united, even when far away from home. A positive journey toward a modern Afghanistan is in place, and it is incumbent upon us to at least maintain at present pace.

Let us focus on the way forward where everyone will benefit. It could start by contributing to our economy. The open market is ours: Instead of investing in other countries, invest in Afghanistan—to prove to foreigners that we ourselves believe in the change. Modern times need modern heroes. You and I, and all of us, are the heroes of our change.

Bakhtiar Safi is an international civil servant based in Somalia.

The Next Two Years for Modi

Umang Goswami

April 13, 2017

To truly win the respect and trust of the people, the Indian government should focus on three issues.

The recent legislative electoral wins for the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) are partly a verdict on its policies of the past three years and partly due to anti-incumbency factors working in its favor. Electoral politics in India is perhaps the most complicated in the world. With no major legislative elections till 2019, albeit one state, the government should step on the pedal and take advantage of this two-year window to implement some path breaking if not big bang reforms.

Many issues require attention, but there are three that will have far-reaching impact and give a strong visceral feeling of progress to its citizenry.

First, the legal system is the elephant in the room. People have suffered the painfully slow system for decades. The court visits and expenses break their spirit and turn their hair gray. This broken system is the biggest and most urgent crisis in India, and no political party has really taken a serious look at this problem and offered any comprehensive solution.

This is because of two reasons. It suits parties to have a lethargic system since political parties increasingly have criminal elements in their fold with

ongoing cases. And an exponential rise of cases as a result of the population explosion, combined with an outdated system of procedures and processes. This problem impedes private corporate sector progress too, with foreign investors often citing this as a major reason for not investing in India. The government, along with the judiciary, must come up with creative ideas.

Second, on the economic front, Prime Minister Narendra Modi fought the 2014 general election on the promise of minimum government. Not much has moved on that front. While the debate on more vs less government is an ideological one and there are pros and cons to both, there are certain areas where, as Margaret Thatcher put it, “the government has no business being in business.”

Hotels, airlines and certain non-strategic manufacturing sectors need to see a swift government exit. Unfortunately, the Indian bureaucracy is especially status quoist and unimaginative. Abysmal performance and boundless corruption thrives in these sectors.

Courtesy of low oil prices, the government has enjoyed a long leash on the fiscal space front and has felt no urgent need to push the privatization program for revenue shortfall. Nonetheless, the government must implement the program for the sake of getting rid of inefficiencies. It should reenter this space with renewed enthusiasm and determination.

The resources from privatization should be utilized in health care, education and modernizing armed and police forces. Privatization is a very sensitive topic since it involves restructuring and dealing with powerful unions, but the next two years provide enough legroom to implement a decisive program. Not share sale, which is a privatization-lite approach, but shutting down inefficient programs and units and the sale of profitable ones.

Third, the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Campaign) is well intentioned but perhaps lacks innovative thinking. It's not an easy problem to tackle because of behavioral and cultural issues in India. The country remains as dirty as it was three years ago.

African nations have tackled this problem in a better fashion. Big cities all over the world like London, Toronto and Paris have successful programs where garbage collection and maintaining the city furniture is completely in private hands. The private company is given a return and also the right to use the refuse to generate electricity outside the city as an added incentive.

In India, these responsibilities are with the municipalities, which are rapaciously corrupt and not incentivized at all. The issue requires courage and political will because the municipalities in India are tiny political party fiefdoms and a source of revenue through corruption. This is a state issue, but the center can start with some guiding principles for states to

follow. Something new and brave has to be done about this issue.

These are just three issues but perhaps the most important ones. The BJP might get reelected even if it doesn't do much in the next two years because of a weak, unmotivated opposition, and caste and religious-related political machinations.

But if the government truly wants to win the respect and trust of the people across the spectrum of urban and rural, it must do something about these issues. The resolution will have a trickle down or push up effect on other sectors, too, like infrastructure and foreign investment, which are pet projects of Modi.

Failing which, we just stumble along in the crowded flea market of perpetual easy going achievers.

Umang Goswami has several years of experience in energy finance and climate change issues. He was an infrastructure specialist at the World Bank focusing on Africa. Subsequently, he worked with a bank in London on energy-structured finance and financing projects in the Middle East and North Africa. Most recently, he was the head of finance at a Silicon Valley solar company in India. Goswami holds an MBA from the University of Chicago, Booth School of Business.

EUROPE

How Will Emmanuel Macron Govern?

Cécile Guerin

May 8, 2017

France breathes a sigh of relief after Emmanuel Macron's victory in the presidential election.

Former banker and Economy Minister Emmanuel Macron emerged victorious over Marine Le Pen in the second round of the 2017 French presidential elections on May 7. Unknown two years ago and never elected to public office before, the founder of the independent movement En Marche! (On the Move!), which he described as “neither right nor left,” became the youngest president in the history of the French Republic. Macron's pro-business and pro-European platform clashed with Le Pen's anti-globalization message throughout his campaign.

Sweeping 66% of the vote, Macron has temporarily pushed back the tide of populism in France. While his victory is giving hope to European and French liberals, Macron's status as a political novice with no established party and a former adviser to the unpopular incumbent president François Hollande highlights his difficulties in the forthcoming parliamentary elections in June. Securing a parliamentary majority will be instrumental for Macron's ability to deliver his agenda of economic modernization. The 2017 elections have

rewarded outsiders and remapped French politics by dealing a blow to traditional parties. Without a party apparatus Macron will nonetheless struggle to form a workable majority.

The election campaign was marked by regular parallels between the Macron and Le Pen runoff and Jacques Chirac's victory against Le Pen's father, Jean-Marie, in 2002. Yet Macron is operating in a radically different political context. While Chirac pulled 82.2% of the vote in 2002 over Le Pen's 17.79%, Marine Le Pen considerably increased the National Front's margin in 2017 (33%). In the aftermath of Macron's victory, Le Pen hailed her party's results and claimed that the National Front had become the "first opposition force in the country."

In 2002, Jean-Marie Le Pen's qualification for the second round of the election sent shockwaves throughout the country. For the past 15 years, the National Front has become a stable feature of French politics and progressively managed to bring its core election themes (immigration and security) to the center of French political debate.

During the 2002 runoff with Le Pen, Chirac explicitly stated that he would not consider every vote in his name as an expression of support — an attitude that Macron has not replicated in this election. Effectively, Macron only secured 24% of the vote in the first round, while some polls indicated that more than 50% of voters chose him by default as the best adversary against Le

Pen, who was certain to reach the final stage. The fact that abstention exceeded 25% on Sunday, its highest level since 1969 for a presidential second round, is a clear sign of the electorate's dissatisfaction with the alternatives on offer. In addition, 11% of those who voted cast a blank ballot, thus explicitly rejecting both candidates and the voting process.

THE RISE OF THE OUTSIDER

Macron's victory was facilitated by the collapse of traditional parties, the conservative Les Républicains and the left-leaning Socialist Party. The two parties that have structured French political life for the past 50 years were eliminated in the first round of voting. While the Socialist Party's campaign was torpedoed by President Hollande's historically low popularity, the Republicans' campaign was undermined by allegations that its candidate François Fillon had paid his family close to €1 million worth of taxpayers' money in fake parliamentary jobs.

Despite being a former adviser to François Hollande, Macron managed to cast himself as an outsider to France's mainstream politics by leaving the Socialist Party in 2016 and creating his own political movement.

After their defeat, the Socialists and Republicans were nonetheless quick to announce that they will campaign on their own in the parliamentary elections and will seek to reinvent themselves.

Fillon, who is widely seen as the architect of the Republicans' defeat in the election has stepped down, and several young candidates with presidential ambitions have emerged as potential party leaders. The Socialist Party is arguably in disarray and could provide a pool of support to Macron, although a number of Socialist parliamentarians have refused to do so.

FORMING A PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY

France will hold parliamentary elections on 11 and 18 June, in which the new president will be seeking to form a working parliamentary majority in the lower house of parliament, the *Assemblée Nationale*. The parliamentary elections will show whether Macron's movement can morph into a fully-fledged political party. With no representatives in parliament, no local branches and a party apparatus that does not match its political opponents', Macron's movement will be leading an improvised and hasty campaign. In the same time, traditional parties will benefit from their campaigning experience and are likely to win most seats.

Macron will have to seek support from parliamentarians on both sides of the political spectrum and appeal to the center-right and the center-left to form a coalition of moderate Republicans and Socialists. How reliable such a makeshift majority will be during Macron's five-year presidency remains uncertain.

After the announcement of his victory, a number of senior French politicians from the right and the left indicated that they would not be associated with a centrist government.

Macron's political honeymoon may be brief.

Cécile Guerin is a London-based freelance writer.

A Fifth Act for the Fifth Republic

Peter Isackson
May 11, 2017

France offers us an unfolding drama with a cast of thousands.

On May 7, nearly two-thirds of French voters boldly elected Emmanuel Macron president for the next five years. Or should I say two-thirds of French voters bravely refused to consider electing the representative of something that is closer to a neo-fascist dynasty than a right-wing political party?

In the immediate aftermath of the election, most of the French media have stuck with the first interpretation, which gives a good grade to French democracy, but the second clearly comes closer to reality. And yet neither of those conclusions sums up the deeper meaning, or plethora of meanings, of this election. Here are some of the more significant ones.

ALL THE TRADITIONAL PARTIES ARE IN DISARRAY

In the first round of the presidential election, the Socialist Party, in power since President François Hollande's upset victory over Nicolas Sarkozy five years ago, barely achieved the 5% threshold required for public reimbursement of campaign costs reserved for competitive parties. With Benoît Hamon garnering just over 6% of the vote, the great majority of traditional Socialist voters chose to back the renegade Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who now finds himself in a strong position to redefine the left, essentially composed of four groups: the Socialists, Mélenchon's Insoumis movement, what's left of the once powerful Communist Party and the Ecologists.

The Républiquein party, launched by discredited one-term President Nicolas Sarkozy and his followers in 2015 as the latest avatar of the center-right tradition dating back to Charles de Gaulle and the foundation of the Fifth Republic, was already in trouble when François Fillon snatched the nomination in the primary from the Jacques Chirac acolyte, Alain Juppé, before getting mired in a financial scandal that doomed his candidacy. As the French say, between the Sarkozy wing of the party, including Fillon, and the Gaullists "there was water in the gas" (a spanner in the works).

Given the amount of gas President Sarkozy and Prime Minister Fillon produced already during their five years

in power, the prospect of a second round showdown between Fillon and Marine Le Pen and furthermore of a full term of Fillon as president was certain to depress everyone on the left and at least half of the traditional political class on the right. On the sensitive question of immigration and religious tolerance, Fillon aped Le Pen, hoping to draw votes away from her toward a more respectable candidate, much as the Socialist Manuel Valls had done, believing that hatred of an enemy is the key to unifying the masses.

The result was discord and a lingering malaise on each side of the political spectrum. While everyone acknowledges that terrorism is a very serious problem, political attitudes toward it have in their way become an even more serious one. The politicization of racial relations — and in particular the jingoistic posturing around it — can only have destructive effects on social harmony, however useful it is for a particular candidate to get elected.

Finally, Marine Le Pen's Front National, founded by her father, has emerged wounded and deformed by what is perceived as a humiliatingly weak score, especially when compared to some of the more sensational forecasts and, more particularly, to the populist triumphs of Brexit and Donald Trump. As the results were being announced, Le Pen promised to go away and redefine the party, even to the point of giving it a new name. In doing so, she hopes to attract a sufficient number of Fillon voters away from both the right

and the center, those who reluctantly voted for Macron. With a bit of retooling, she imagines she can even appeal to working-class voters who were attracted to Mélenchon, though the success of that strategy would depend on Mélenchon being seriously marginalized by the now weakened Socialists.

Furthermore, the media, sensitive to dynastic intrigue, immediately began suggesting that in the wake of Marine Le Pen's poor finish, a third member of the family — 27-year-old Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, Jean-Marie Le Pen's granddaughter and Marine's niece — could be poised to become the new leader. Two days later the same media reported, to its own astonishment and Grandpa Jean-Marie's chagrin, Marion's sudden and total withdrawal from politics.

Ironically, some see Marine's decision to rebrand and redesign the party as inspired by Macron's example, the man who got elected by building a party around his own personality. Marine's limited but very real success in the past has been achieved by distancing herself from her father, perceived as an extremist. Marion was closer to Jean-Marie. The new-look party appears to be a gesture to sever for good the umbilical cord that existed between her father's and her image.

NEW PARTIES SHOULD EMERGE, UNLESS STIFLED BY THE OLD GUARD

As Cécile Guerin has reminded us in an article on Fair Observer, both historical

and purely electoral logic dictate that new forces will emerge and remodel the political landscape. Macron's promised but still virtual party — *la République en marche!* — is the obvious novelty. No one knows out of which bricks or which combination of building materials it will be constructed, but Macron will need to don his Superman costume to have it in place before the first round of the legislative election on June 11. True to his inclusive approach and thanks to the absence of preexisting party loyalties, he will draw as opportunistically as possible from the center, the right and the left by offering floating political personalities the chance to be part of a "presidential majority." This follows the implicit logic of the Fifth Republic, built around the authority and gravitational pull of the president. Failing that, Macron will have to settle for a coalition and eventually — as has happened in the past — a "cohabitation" with a prime minister drawn from the opposition.

At the same time, and partly because Macron has already attracted into his retinue some key personalities from the Socialist Party, a recomposing of the left appears inevitable. The unexpected success of the resolutely left-wing and increasingly popular Jean-Luc Mélenchon has put this former disciple of François Mitterrand in a position to put away the old Socialist hierarchy discredited by Hollande's lackluster and ineffective presidency, former Prime Minister Valls' unpopularity and candidate Hamon's utter failure to draw votes.

Do the young generation even remember who Mitterand was, the man who brought the left to power in 1981 and positioned the Socialist Party for decades as a responsible party of government? A diminutive man but a towering political personality, Mitterand created the myth that kept the Socialists in the picture right up to President Hollande's election in 2012. Party stalwarts are still counting on the continuity of that tradition, but Mélenchon has done them one better — cleverly and very subtly hijacking the memory of Mitterand by invoking his own historical link with the Mitterand revolution. Rather playing on the nostalgia for the good old days, Mélenchon generates his own revolutionary fervor and insists on moving forward toward a Sixth Republic, which would be a revolution. This is more than Mitterand. It's de Gaulle, who created the Fifth Republic. But it's also an authentic revolution in the sense that Mélenchon wants to abolish what he calls the “monarchic” premise of the Fifth Republic — so expertly exploited by both de Gaulle and Mitterand — and invent a new type of parliamentary system.

Can Macron — whose voters, to the tune of 43%, say they voted against Le Pen rather than for the former Rothschild banker — create the majority he needs in the assembly or even a coherent coalition capable of governing, given that everyone across the political spectrum is vying with everyone else, either to keep whatever grip they

already have on power or prevent others from getting any new advantage?

THE CENTER WILL TAKE ITS CHANCE, ATTEMPTING TO SAVE THE FIFTH REPUBLIC

The center has had an ambiguous status throughout the Fifth Republic. It proudly exists and has been represented over the decades by several high-profile politicians, such as Edgar Faure, Jean-Louis Borloo and François Bayrou. But for the most part it has been resigned to keeping a low profile. Giscard d'Estaing identified himself as the leader of a centrist party, but he was left with no choice but to appoint the quintessential Gaullist Jacques Chirac as his first prime minister and thereby accept to live in the shadow of Gaullist logic. When he managed to rid himself of Chirac in 1976 and appoint in his place Raymond Barre, an academic economist — confirming the popular perception that centrist politics was pure technocracy — his presidency began a rapid decline, preparing the way for Mitterand's triumph in 1981, followed by a repeat performance in 1988.

To any observer France is a profoundly bureaucratic and ultimately technocratic nation built around its extensive *fonctionnariat* (civil service). It is run by an elite trained in its *Grandes Ecoles* as “*ingénieurs*” (a much higher distinction than the term “engineer” in English), but French culture hates to admit, let alone celebrate that obvious fact.

Today, the French perceive Macron as a technocrat with a talent for PR, an apprentice politician who deftly squeezed through the suddenly widening gap opened between the decomposing left and right. His style and personal image as a technocrat can reassure, but it will spark no passion. In an odd way, in the immediate aftermath of the election, his victory in France feels a lot like Tony Blair's in Britain back in 1997, marking the end of the Margaret Thatcher era. There is a sense of a break with the past and a vague hope for a future guided by a young man no longer constrained by the rituals and obsessions of the elites of the past.

But the comparison only holds so long as the observer remains focused on the personality, the youth and the attractive demeanor of the new leader. The historical conditions couldn't provide more contrast. Blair rose to power by promising to bring the Labour Party up to date, to make it compatible with an economy that Thatcher had spent nearly two decades redesigning. Blair called it the Third Way and it sounded reasonable and modern. Similarly, Macron describes his party as "neither left nor right," a negative version of the same message. Though less affirmative and visionary, this negativity may appear appropriate at a time when, in most developed countries, voters are more focused on rejecting the parties in power than on offering any one of them a mandate.

Blair understood that Thatcher's successful political ethic rested on two

pillars: loyalty to capital markets and openness to opportunistic war, whenever it may be required to consolidate the leader's political reputation. Although these two principals were antithetical to traditional Labour ideology, Blair seized the opportunity of aping Thatcher's success. The Labour Party had no choice but follow the leader who had brought it back into the corridors of power. Success breeds success. And that indeed is how politics works in the age of political mass marketing: power first, policy later. And even then, you go with the policy that you calculate as sufficient to ensure the continuity of power. It isn't rocket science, but it is political science, at least in its modern form.

The Labour Party claimed the working class as its historical base. By the end of the 20th century, it consisted essentially of people employed as office and service workers rather than in industry and manufacturing. As a group, this generation of employees continued to feel a lingering loyalty to the Labour Party as the voice of all ordinary working people, whether middle or lower class. Blair spoke in their name while following the new rule book bequeathed to him by Thatcher. Surrounded by marketing experts and hype managers, he supplemented this somewhat cynical but well-meaning foundation with a brazen PR strategy aimed at mystifying both the media and a population momentarily confused by the erosion of its sense of the strict class distinctions that had so long defined English, if not British culture. In other words, Blair capitalized

on two contrasting and fundamentally opposed traditions, leaving the contradictions to reemerge much later, most dramatically when the 2016 Brexit vote brought them back into focus.

Blair could manage this contradiction and serve three terms because he took over a well-structured party that — fed up with being on the outside looking in during the Iron Lady’s lengthy rule — willingly handed him the reins. Macron’s case is very different. He flirted with the Socialist Party as its finance minister, but resigned before having the opportunity to integrate the party apparatus and ascend in its ranks. Understanding the party’s weakness and his own inability to rise to a position of leadership — parvenus are never welcome within France’s institutions — he prepared his path as a presidential candidate by inventing a movement purported to be a political party, but which in reality was a purely fictional one. He gave it a name in the form of a slogan terminated by an exclamation point: “En Marche!” Political PR at its finest! In terms of historical comparisons, this puts Macron much closer to Silvio Berlusconi who, in 1993 created, ex nihilo, Forza Italia, than it does to Blair who took over Labour in 1997. Perhaps Macron had become familiar with Guy Debord’s “société du spectacle” and sought to mobilize its logic to his personal advantage.

In the days following his election, weeks before the now impending legislative election, no one can predict how Macron’s strategy will play out. Will he

succeed in creating a presidential majority in the form of a party by drawing in ambitious and insecure personalities from the existing parties? On election night, François Bayrou, the valorous but persistently disappointed leader of multiple presidential campaigns, could gloat, suggesting his long prophesied time had come. Bayrou is a possible prime minister. He represents the persistence of the center, to which he adds a marked humanist, left-leaning tendency. Significantly, he was among the first to support Macron and actively oppose Fillon.

We can expect Bayrou to pull as many strings as he has within his grasp to build Macron’s party. But no one, not even Bayrou, is sure of how solid any of those strings may be in a political landscape that currently resembles bumper cars more than it does a super-highway. When everyone is jockeying for position, not just for the present but also an amorphous future, predicting even what might entice the people you know best becomes an ungrateful and even perilous task.

THERE IS NO EASY TRANSITION IN VIEW

As Atul Singh recently reminded us in *The World This Week*, because of the profound complexity and inertia of its institutions, for things to change durably in France, revolution rather than reform tends to be the chosen way. Macron, in some ways, represents the last real or illusory hope for change via reform. In the immediate aftermath of the

presidential election, the French people appear willing to let that hope take shape and probably would endorse a new presidential majority. But the political establishment — essentially the ancient régime — can be counted on to defend its fiefdoms and ensure as best it can its long-term survival. It will do so either because of its conviction that Macron lacks the capacity to construct and manage a coherent majority, or simply out of inertia and the instinct of self-preservation.

So, what should we expect?

In all probability, there will be a relatively short observation period, assuming a presidential majority or coalition can be defined by September. Some reasonably stable transitional political environment, assisted by a resurgent Europe (if such an evolution is feasible), could take form. That would depend on a lot of hypotheticals converging, concerning Europe, the political class and the emerging populist movements on the right and left. If, however, Macron fails in his effort to turn the result of the legislative election into a viable tool of government, an ambiance of chaos will ensue.

Today's calm may simply be like the eye of the hurricane. Unless a discernible path toward a brighter future is made clear, the discontent that already permeates an electorate that clearly didn't plebiscite Macron's program, even though they voted the man in, will gather force from both the left and the right. This will immediately provoke a further

but more chaotic reconfiguration of the parties and movements.

This scenario of incremental chaos would be the best hope for the Front National and probably represents the strategy Marine Le Pen is now preparing. But her lower than expected result in the election diminishes her current leverage within a party whose future shape and orientation is unknown. Capitalizing on the revolt from the right, spurred by xenophobia and a taste for authoritarianism, Le Pen will now have to face the consequences of Mélenchon's success. His personality and program have increasing appeal to the working class, neglected by the very elite that Macron and previous leaders and ruling parties represent. The Front National has successfully exploited that emotion over the past three decades, stealing vast swaths of voters from the formerly powerful Communist Party. Mélenchon appears to be reversing that historical tide.

If this were a play, we would still be in Act I. In the weeks leading up to the first round of the legislative election, the political *société du spectacle* — its parties and personalities — will offer observers drama and intrigue, bombast and emotion. Act II, preceding the second round, will be a phase of serious readjustment and repositioning. Act III, the somnolent summer months, will allow Macron to escape unwelcome media attention and engineer what he hopes will be a viable platform from which to govern at the *rentrée*, in September, when the nation returns

from vacation. At that point, the internal tussles within the newly emerged and fundamentally fragile alliances will dominate Act IV. And then in Act V, sometime over the next six to 12 months, all the protagonists and antagonists will be on stage simultaneously, acting out a play for which no script exists since no author has had the capacity to pen or even envisage a climax, never mind a denouement.

It's the English who muddle through, thanks to their stiff upper lip. With the French, however the first four acts of the drama finally play out, there will be two options for the fifth: comedy, which inevitably ends with marriage or possibly multiple marriages (new parties, new coalitions), or the blood and thunder of tragedy — aka revolution.

Or, who knows, the fifth act could be followed by the Sixth Republic.

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London's Calm Response to Violence

Stephen Chan

June 5, 2017

The long and destructive campaign by the IRA not only hardened the citizens of London and Manchester, but increased their open-mindedness about how to deal with terrorism.

In the wake of the June 3 terror attacks in London, Mayor Sadiq Khan assured Londoners of their safety. He said this as part of a statement about the readiness of the police. He also tried to put this into the context of such attacks now being an unavoidable part of life in the world's biggest cities.

Indeed, the response of the London police — and medical services — was superb. From the first emergency phone call to the shooting dead of the three attackers by special police units, there was a gap of eight minutes. The entire area London Bridge and Borough Market was flooded with police and ambulances immediately. Everything was part of an immensely-prepared plan, which is also part of life in urban cities.

Yet Mayor Khan had to endure not one, but two tweets of criticism from US President Donald Trump. It was as if Trump thought that a Muslim mayor would be an easy target. The response of Londoners was very much on the side of Khan, and there were huge displays of solidarity across the religious spectrum — as there were after the May 22 attack in Manchester.

Three terror attacks in three months, all perpetrated by insurgents with fundamentalist Islamic motives, and yet Londoners and Mancunians refused to enter a response by hysterics. Much like the French refused after suffering their own attacks in 2015 and 2016.

THE IRISH REPUBLICAN ARMY

Part of this is a long history of being attacked. In France, there were many post-war attacks by insurgents on both sides of the Algerian question. Carlos the Jackal tried to assassinate President Charles de Gaulle. In the United Kingdom, the long and very bloody and destructive campaign by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) not only hardened the citizens of London and Manchester, but arguably increased their open-mindedness about how to deal with terrorism.

Apart from a long list of atrocities in Northern Ireland, the attack of the IRA against the British mainland claimed a huge list of “successes” and near successes. Discounting the “minor” acts of violence, some of which took place within a block of where I lived or worked

— at the level of bus bombs — the more spectacular attacks included the assassination of Lord Louis Mountbatten (1979); the assassination of Cabinet Minister Airey Neave, outside Parliament itself (1979); the attempted assassination of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher by bombing her hotel in Brighton (1984); the mortar attack on Heathrow Airport (1994); the audacious mortar attack on 10 Downing Street while Prime Minister John Major was conducting a Cabinet meeting (1991); the rocket attack against the headquarters of the MI6 intelligence agency (2000); the city attacks using truck bombs against Manchester (1996) and London’s Canary Wharf financial district (1996), both causing damage of several hundred million pounds; these followed earlier city attacks against Manchester (1992) and the City of London’s Baltic Exchange in the financial district (1992); and these were in addition to the 1982 bomb attacks against military personnel in London’s Hyde Park and Regent’s Park.

This was despite a ferocious, sometimes literally no-prisoners-taken campaign in Northern Ireland by the British Army and Northern Irish Garda (police force). But no one in Manchester or London called for the imprisoning or deportation of the Irish. No one shunned Irish pubs. No one recoiled from sharing a bus seat with someone called Paddy.

In the end, the Northern Irish “problem” was “settled” as much by long and patient negotiation as by the use of force. The process was helped by

foreign negotiators who were regarded as “honest brokers” on both sides: people like US Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell and former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari. What became the Good Friday Agreement was the culmination of a torturous process in which neither Mitchell nor Ahtisaari lost patience, nor resorted to name-calling or cheap shots in any media. US conflict settlement diplomacy in Western Europe probably achieved its highest post-war regard under Mitchell, and we long for his like again.

Of course, there is no single Islamic organization with which to negotiate. Those that are engaged in war and violence seem to have no agenda but destruction and death. There seem to be huge qualitative differences between the Irish and the Islamic questions.

AN IRON GLOVE

There are two points here. The first is key to creating a climate for possible, even if distant negotiation. No one in England thought it was helpful or desirable to deport or imprison anyone called Patrick Fitzgerald. The second is that there are Muslim communities, civic and religious leaders, role models, and even pop idols and actors who can be mobilized in a way that they enter dialogue and, yes, negotiation, with the radical elements that dwell — often hidden, though also often suspected — in European communities.

Here is where a US president addicted to tweeting starts being marginally

useful. The one thing that political and community leaders can't do, but must learn to do, is master modern communications in the way the Islamic State and other groups can. The drama and persuasiveness — dare I say it, the moral message — of the videos, podcasts, sermons, websites and the black net all speak to a mastery not only of instruments of communication, but a mastery of how to pitch a message of rebellion against all odds and against an enemy in all its manifestations, and against an enemy at its weakest points.

The narrative that competes against this will not come from blanket condemnation, and not come from calls to expel Muslims or imprison them or ostracize them. Interning US Japanese did not help the war effort against Japan. You cannot kill or imprison ideas, but you can make them grow stronger by trying to kill and imprison them.

Mancunians and Londoners at least have reached the point not of turning the cheek — there was deep approval of the ruthless police response on the evening of June 3 — but of extending one hand while cloaking the other in an iron glove. The two go together but, in the true difficulties of a vexed and complex world, not both at once and not the iron glove alone.

In international terms, it means completing the defeat of the Islamic State, but it also means, although it seems it will not be led by the current US president, some long and unpleasant negotiations — with an iron

glove nearby — in Saudi Arabia. That may be the missing piece in the terrible jigsaw of today's violent world.

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20 Years After Diana, Princess of Wales

Ellis Cashmore
August 1, 2017

Even the most sober account of her life and death seems like a fairytale that got out of hand.

In March 1982, there was a charity preview of the Lillian Hellman play *The Little Foxes* at London's Victoria Palace. The star of the show was Elizabeth Taylor, playing her first full stage role.

Making a late entry into the theater's Royal Box was Diana, Princess of Wales, then pregnant with her first child. "It seemed impossible that anyone would ever manage to upstage the

Princess of Wales, but in the last two weeks, a 50-year-old woman with a turbulent past and an uncertain future has succeeded in doing so," advised R.W. Apple Jr. of *The New York Times*.

It was the last time anyone would upstage Diana. She would blaze her way transcendently into history, mainly through her charity work and her media appearances, but also because of her troubled, loveless marriage. Diana was a kind of heiress apparent to Taylor: fame and notoriety overlaid and invaded both of their lives. If Taylor created what film critic Dave Kehr calls "a new category of celebrity," Diana became its distillation.

Apple Jr. described how Taylor's arrival in London two weeks before the preview "prompted a riot among news photographers" and that her every move from that point had been chronicled by the British media. He was writing for a New York newspaper, of course. Four years later, when Diana made her entrance to the US, the scenes were comparable.

Diana swept into Washington, DC, to attend a gala dinner at the invitation of President Ronald Reagan and his wife Nancy in 1985. She mixed with movie stars and politicians, danced with John Travolta while Americans watched in rapture. Diana had her critics, but the unseen emotions she seemed to radiate had powerful effects. To her countless acolytes she was a force of nature, animating the spirits of whomever she touched, bringing vitality to wherever

she traveled. Twelve years later, she was gone.

LADY SPENCER

Diana had married Prince Charles in 1981. She was divorced in 1996, the year before her death. Long before that, Diana had reconciled herself to being unique and unrivaled as the paparazzi's favorite subject. Up till her arrival, interest in the British royal family had for long been largely reverential. Onlookers were exactly that: detached observers, watching as subjects rather than participants. Only Queen Elizabeth's sister, Princess Margaret, induced a more involved curiosity — her trysting occupying the paparazzi, though without sending them into frenzy as Diana did.

Born in 1961 at Park House, the home that her parents rented on Queen Elizabeth II's Sandringham estate, Diana was the third child of Edward John Spencer, Viscount Althorn, heir to the seventh Earl Spencer, and his first wife Frances Ruth Burke Roche, daughter of the fourth Baron of Fermoy. So, her aristocratic credentials were sound.

She became Lady Diana Spencer in 1975, when her father became an earl. Returning to England after finishing school in Switzerland, Diana grew close to Prince Charles. They announced their engagement in February 1981 and married later that year. The wedding ceremony was televised globally. Their first child, William, was born in 1982 and

their second, Henry, or Harry as he was to become known, in 1984.

Over the next eight years, interest in Diana went global. Already the most admired and, perhaps, accepted member of the royal family, she contrived to remain imperious while developing a common touch. Time and again, people would testify that “she touched me” even though they might never have met her or seen her in the flesh. There was a tangible quality not so much in her presence, but in even her sheer image. And this was made possible by exhaustive media coverage that occasionally, in fact once too often, became dangerously invasive.

Diana was a beautiful, yet lonely princess imprisoned in a loveless marriage with a prince whose suspected infidelity with an older and less attractive woman was the talk of the court. Trapped and with no apparent escape route, she seemed defenseless against a powerful and uncaring royal family. Diana made an enchanting victim, a vision of mistreated womanhood smiling serenely at her millions of faithful followers.

Her popularity seemed to grow in inverse proportion to that of her husband. Diana threw herself into charitable work and aligned herself with great causes, visiting people living with AIDS, children in hospitals and other sufferers, all of whom responded empathically. People, especially women, from everywhere were drawn to

someone who, in her silence, seemed to speak for everyone.

WORST KEPT SECRET

The separation was one of those worst kept secrets. When it was finally announced in 1992, both Diana and Charles continued to carry out their royal duties. They jointly participated in raising the two children. Diana continued with her charitable endeavors, attracting battalions of photojournalists wherever she went. If there was a high point during this period, it came in January 1997 when, as an International Red Cross VIP volunteer, she visited Angola to talk to landmine survivors. Pictures of Diana in a helmet and flak jacket were among the most dramatic images of the late 20th century. In August, she traveled to Bosnia, again to visit survivors of landmine explosions. From there she went to see her companion, Dodi al-Fayed, in France.

Late in the evening of August 30, 1997, Diana and al-Fayed, their driver and bodyguard left The Ritz hotel in Place Vendôme, Paris and drove along the north bank of the Seine. Ever vigilant, the media were soon alerted and pursued the Mercedes in which the party was traveling. Remember, by 1997, Diana's every movement was closely monitored. Interest in every aspect of her life was genuinely global. Not only was she fêted the world over, she was inspected too. At 25 minutes past midnight, nine vehicles carrying the media and a single motorcycle followed Diana and al-Fayed into an underpass

below the Place de lama. As the Mercedes sped away from the pursuant pack, it clipped a wall and veered to the left, colliding with a supporting pillar before spinning to a halt.

There followed a few moments while the chasing photographers paused to consider their options. Inside the wrecked Mercedes were four motionless bodies, including that of the world's most famous, most esteemed, most adored, most treasured and most celebrated woman. Photos of the wreckage would be hard currency. But to delay helping her and her fellow travelers might jeopardize their chances of survival. The paparazzi took their shots.

Diana was still alive when she was freed and rushed by ambulance to a nearby hospital. Attempts to save her life were futile and, at 4am, doctors pronounced her dead. Of the Mercedes passengers, only Trevor Rees-Jones, al-Fayed's bodyguard, survived. None of the others were wearing seat belts. It was later revealed that the chauffeur, Henri Paul, had been drinking earlier in the evening. The media people were cleared.

OUTPOURING OF EMOTION

There followed the most extraordinary expression of public grief ever. This is unarguable: The scale, scope and intensity of the response to her death distinguished it from any comparable manifestation of sorrow. The response to Diana's death is usually described as an "outpouring of emotion," suggesting

an unrestrained expression of heartfelt grief all over the world. In the days leading up to her funeral on September 6, over a million people flocked to pay their last respects, many leaving bouquets at her London home at Kensington Palace. Her funeral attracted 3 million mourners who cast flowers along the entire length of the journey. A global television audience of 26 million watched the day's events.

A foretaste of the exploitability of Diana came when the first issue of *Time* magazine following her death sold 750,000 more copies than usual. Sales of a commemorative issue exceeded 1.2 million. The *National Enquirer*, in a somewhat hypocritical gesture, refused to publish pictures of Diana's death scene, despite having headlined a cover story the week before, "Di Goes Sex Mad." The copies were pulled from the newsstands.

Then came the merchandise. A planned comic book featuring Diana raised from the dead and invested with superpowers and entitled (following the James Bond movie) *Di Another Day* was ditched by Marvel Comics amid protest. But less offensive products such as statuettes, decorative plates and Cindy-like dolls began to appear on the shelves within months of the tragedy. The near-inevitable conspiracy theories surrounding the death were equal to those of the moon landing, the JFK assassination or 9/11.

More rational attributions of blame centered on the chasing pack of

paparazzi. Diana's brother, the Earl of Spencer, offered this view: "I always believed the press would kill her in the end. Every proprietor and editor of every publication that has paid for intrusive and exploitative photographs of her, encouraging greedy and ruthless individuals to risk everything in pursuit of Diana's image, has blood on his hands."

If the paparazzi had not been so voracious in their attempts to track down Diana, they would not have pursued her car so heedlessly. So went the argument. Few wanted to extend that same argument further. If they had, they would have concluded that the paparazzi were motivated by money offered by media corporations that could sell publications in their millions to consumers, whose thirst for pictures and stories of Diana seemed unquenchable. In the event, the photographers were cleared of any wrongdoing by a French court in 1999. The fact remains: All parties, from the paparazzi to the fans, were connected as if by invisible thread. And then something interesting happened.

NARRATIVE TRANSFORMATION

The audience not only watched the Diana fairytale reach its denouement, but saw themselves as bit part players in that same fairytale. This narrative transformation was both revealing and concealing. The media's part in the death of Diana might have been laid bare, but audiences' complicity, though recognized, was left unexamined, at least not in a deep or critical sense.

While audiences might have agreed with the Earl of Spencer and condemned the media, they rewarded them with high sales and record viewing figures.

Perhaps transformation overstates the change. Anyone who was aware of Diana — and it's difficult to imagine anyone who was not — was forced to inspect the way in which news values had been subverted by entertainment values. After all, Diana's greatest triumph was not so much in ushering in world peace or saving the planet, but in offering so much pleasure to so many people.

Yet the inspection was momentary. It did not bring to an end the gathering interest in figures who, like Diana, offered pleasure while presenting absolutely nothing that would materially alter their lives or the lives of any other living thing. The interest in recognizable people was probably interrupted by Diana's death. Then, after a spell of earnest introspection and critical evaluation of the media, the interest resumed.

In the 1960s, when Elizabeth Taylor was the world's most famous, most scandalous and perhaps most revered woman, the most adventurous clairvoyant would have been hard pressed to predict the tumult of interest in Diana. Diana was news: not just what she was doing or saying or even wearing; people seemed to gasp in wonder at the very mention of her name.

Something happened. Not to Diana, but to *us*. We, the living human beings who attributed her with so much celestial power, were the ones who changed. And, after her death, we would go on changing. Following the death of Diana and al-Fayed, *Time* magazine writer Margaret Carlson observed: "By the time of the couple's dinner at Paris' Ritz Hotel, the rules of engagement sometimes observed between the photo hounds and the princess had gone completely by the board, as the street value of a grainy shot of Diana with al Fayed reached six figures."

Carlson's phrase carries connotations of the principles that bind the actions of parties involved in some sort of conflict or competition. That was not the case here, though the circumstances of Diana's death certainly had the elements of opposition. Carlson's point is that "the run-ins between celebrities and those who take pictures of them are growing increasingly ugly."

The paparazzi were not exactly received with open arms by stars of the 1960s, but they became parties to an initially uneasy accommodation, which later became symbiotic, benefiting both.

The glare may have tormented Diana, but her children, William and Harry, learned to live with it, both in their different ways, responding to an environment populated by an expanding number new species of the paparazzi genus.

There were other evolutionary diversifications. For example,

the *National Enquirer* and other tabloids with their relentless focus on the exploits of famous personalities were reducing the scope of world events to individuals. We, in turn, became habituated to a softening of news in which entertainment — and I use this in its widest sense: anything that amuses or occupies us agreeably — became an increasingly large staple in our intellectual diets. Our interest in politics took on a personal focus, as we were drawn to politicians as much if not more than their politics.

We started to understand the world through people rather than events, processes or actions. Interest that, in the 1960s and perhaps 1970s, would have been seen as unwholesome or downright salacious became much more commonplace. The scandals precipitated by Taylor's affairs may not have started this, but Diana's emergence was the single most important episode in the transition to a culture in which almost everything we knew arrived via the media and everything we did was designed to take us closer to a life of endless novelty, pleasure and consumption.

As celebrities go, Diana was ne plus ultra — the highest form of such a being. No woman or man had ever commanded such reverence, respect and collective love from such a wide constituency, in her case the world. Even the most sober account of her life and death seems like a fairytale that got out of hand. It has the staples of love and death, as well as liberation, tragedy

and immortality. Like most great fairytales, its central motif was transformation.

As raggedy servants are transformed into glass-slippered belles of the ball, and sleeping beauties are awakened by the kiss of handsome princes, Diana was changed from ingénue kindergarten teacher in a London school to the nearest the 20th century had to a goddess.

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The Future of Spain's Territorial Integrity

Kinga Brudzinska
November 16, 2017

It is unlikely that recent developments in Catalonia will have an impact on the territorial organization of Spain.

Politicians in Madrid and citizens all over Spain accept the fact that Catalonia's dream is to become an independent republic. However, nobody thought that the pro-independence coalition would go so far as to make its recent (and reckless) attempt to declare unilateral separation. Catalonia's regional president, Carles Puigdemont,

completely ignored both the signals of cooperation coming from Moncloa (Spain's central government) and the rulings of the Spanish Constitutional Court. As a result, Catalonia has seen its autonomy suspended and most of its leadership imprisoned.

To further complicate matters, thousands of companies have moved their headquarters from the region, Spaniards are boycotting Catalan products, and Barcelona has just lost the chance to host the EU Medicines Agency after it relocates from London.

Spain has faced numerous crises over the past decade. The deep economic and financial crisis of 2008 was followed in quick succession by the anti-austerity Indignados movement in 2011, multiple corruption scandals at both central and regional levels, and a year-long process of forming a stable government in 2016.

Conversely, a recent survey conducted by the Center for Sociology Report (CIS), a Madrid-based pollster, found that Catalan independence ranks second (29%) among Spain's three top problems, behind unemployment (66.2%) and just ahead of corruption and fraud (28.3%).

Accordingly, the recent crisis over the Catalan question following its illegal referendum and non-binding declaration of independence is another symptom of the country's wider problems. The crisis also underpins a complex clash of democratic legitimacies, where inter-periphery tensions constitute a

permanent feature of Spain's political landscape.

This is amply demonstrated by the findings of another poll conducted by the Catalan-based Center for Opinion Studies. While the overwhelming majority of respondents want Catalonia to gain more autonomy from Madrid (64.6%), many are also in favor of remaining part of (49.3%), rather than separating from, Spain (40.2%). Not to mention the fact that many Spaniards from Valencia, Galicia or Andalucia would also like to have a greater say on the future of their country.

Indeed, the 1978 Spanish Constitution states that sovereignty resides with its people, which, in turn, implies that all Spaniards would have to agree on letting Catalonia leave the union.

OPERATION DIALOGUE

That said, separatism in Catalonia is partly rooted in its culture and history. While the region has never been independent in the modern sense, it nevertheless retains a strong regional identity and its own language, and was not fully incorporated into Spain until the early 18th century. In more recent times, nationalist parties have contributed to Spanish governance (1977-2012) and signed up to the constitution.

However, mutual mistrust between the regional and central government has intensified, especially since the last economic crisis hit Spain. Madrid's response left the majority of Catalans

unhappy and feeling that Spain simply takes too much of their money.

The mobilization of nationalist sentiment and civil society gathered further momentum in 2010, following the Constitutional Court's decision to partially outlaw the 2006 Catalan Statute, which was approved both by a local referendum and the central government.

While reviewing the statute, which defines the scope of self-government within the Spanish state, the court decided that promoting Catalan as the region's main official language and calling Catalonia a nation violates the Spanish Constitution. What followed was years of inactivity on both sides to ease tensions.

It's hardly surprising, therefore, that the "operation dialogue" launched by Mariano Rajoy's government in 2016, which consisted of frequent visits by the deputy prime minister to Barcelona and a promise of €4.2 billion in infrastructural investment by 2020, was destined to fail.

It is unlikely that recent developments in Catalonia will have an impact on the territorial organization of Spain, as it will most probably remain part of the kingdom for several reasons. First, secessionist parties have failed so far to win a clear majority in the Catalan Parliament, and many Catalans remain wary of independence.

This feeds into the second point that support for independence may be crumbling. Prior to recent events, the ousted regional government failed to deliver on a key promise made to the Catalan people: a binding and effective referendum with legal guarantees. Moreover, even though the Catalan government claimed to have the required legitimacy, it did not in the end declare independence. Additionally, some high-profile secessionists have recently downplayed their enthusiasm for independence; these include former regional President Arturo Mas, who admitted that Barcelona was "not ready for it."

It should also be pointed out that Catalonia's political parties were very quick to accept the new reality of Article 155 that removed the incumbent Catalan government and called for regional elections.

Finally, world leaders are hardly falling over themselves to welcome Catalonia into the international fold, with the exception of Venezuela. As the European Commission was quick to point out, even if a referendum were to be organized in line with Spain's Constitution, it would mean that an independent Catalonia would fall into the so-called "Barroso doctrine" and find itself outside of the European Union.

WHICHEVER SCENARIO

The upcoming regional elections to be held on December 21 will be key in determining the future political

landscape of both Catalonia and Spain. Recent polls suggest that non-separatist parties will win a majority (52%) in Parliament with the pro-independence Esquerra Republicana being the largest party (27%).

It's a scenario that should inspire both sides of the independence debate to moderate their positions and become constructive coalition partners. Smooth cooperation at the regional level would also vastly improve relations with Moncloa. This "new beginning" would not lead to a review of the Spanish Constitution, which could address the steps of a potential secession by Catalonia, but it could result in Catalonia being granted even more autonomy.

At the end of September, Spain's government said it was willing to discuss giving Catalonia "more money and greater financial autonomy if the region backed down from its demands for independence." Back then the offer was not accepted, but it means that there is a room for maneuver on both sides.

On the other hand, if the pro-independence movement does the unlikely and wins big on December 21, it will have a strong enough mandate to negotiate with Madrid for a countrywide, binding and effective referendum with legal guarantees. What will then follow is discussions regarding constitutional amendments that pave the way for secession.

Whichever scenario becomes reality, Madrid and Barcelona must stop

blaming each other and restart genuine cooperation. Christmas would be the ideal time for Moncloa to begin a meaningful dialogue on all levels of society, taking care to include Spain's youth, representatives from the nonprofit sector, businesses, finance and academia.

Only by erasing misunderstandings and ignorance on both sides will it be possible to turn the current negative dynamics into a positive and forward-looking development for all Spaniards, the region and the EU.

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After NAFTA: New Trade Opportunities for Mexico

Daniel Kapellmann
March 20, 2017

Mexico currently faces tough negotiations with the United States over the future of the North American Free Trade Agreement.

At the beginning of January 2017, Ford canceled plans to build a \$1.6-billion car factory in San Luis Potosí, following criticisms by then President-elect Donald Trump.

The project was expected to generate 2,800 jobs. Whereas it took some 10 years to negotiate and enforce a mechanism to strengthen commercial bonds between Canada, the United States and Mexico, today, after 23 years in existence, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) may be overrun in just a couple of months.

After US President Donald Trump presented a series of accusations against the Mexican government taking advantage of the treaty clauses, his counterpart, President Enrique Peña Nieto, announced at the beginning of February that no asymmetric negotiations would be accepted.

In parallel, the US government started driving investment out of Mexico through

different threat mechanisms that include the announcement of potential tax increases of up to 35% on Mexican imports.

Given the current tensions between both governments in terms of security and trade, collaboration within the North American region may soon suffer robust adjustments. Even though potential modifications to improve NAFTA have been discussed over the past few years, the demands currently presented by the US may lead to an impasse.

NEW TRADE OPPORTUNITIES

Although any reconfiguration of NAFTA is unlikely to take place at least before the end of the year, the Mexican government should be prepared to handle the potential negative effects of this change on its economy.

This will be no small feat because at the present time the country is a low-skilled, export-oriented economy tied to the North American market as the Bertelsmann Stiftung's Sustainable Governance Indicators (SGI) project analyzes in its latest Mexico report.

Over the past two decades, trade between Mexico, Canada and the US increased from \$290 billion in 1993 to more than \$1.1 trillion in 2016. Several industries will most likely be affected by a reconfiguration of the current agreement.

That includes automobile manufacturing, agriculture, food and

beverages, as well as the production of other goods such as electronics and house equipment.

However, in a scenario that sees the suspension of NAFTA, the US is also not likely to be benefited in the long term. The lack of access to cheaper labor and products from the Mexican market may ultimately increase internal costs in the US, thus increasing the price of its products against other competitors such as China.

For this reason, any modifications in the treaty could probably become temporary or limited to certain areas. In spite of all the difficulties that the current reconfiguration of US-Mexican relations could bring along in the worst-case scenario, new doors are opening too, providing relevant opportunities for Mexico to start diversifying its economy and increase trade with countries other than the US.

In fact, as the SGI shows, even before relations with its northern neighbor deteriorated, the Mexican government has actively participated in international trade negotiations to reduce its dependence on the US. However, the SGI also notes that the Mexican government has had only limited success in this respect.

Given the uncertain future of a favorable agreement between Mexico and the US in terms of trade and labor, the intensification of commerce with South America, Europe and Asia will now most

likely become an even greater priority for Mexican policy-makers.

During the first months of 2017, Mexican government started a third round of negotiations to renew its agreement with the European Union and manifested its interest in establishing a new deal with the United Kingdom.

Additionally, negotiations related to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP, recently abandoned by the US) seek to strengthen the commercial bonds with Peru, Chile and Colombia. Attention has also been placed in maintaining close communication to exploit mutual interests with Canada and collaborate with Argentina as well as Brazil for obtaining alternative sources of products such as grains.

In the case of Asia, Mexico could seek to increase the flow of goods and services, as well as foreign direct investment with countries such as China, Japan and South Korea. China is currently placed as the second major business partner of Mexico and potential alliances could take place, for example, in the automobile industry.

RECONFIGURING THE MEXICAN MARKET

However, intensification of trade with other regions will not be a simple task. It is not just because of its geographic location that Mexico is such a close trade partner of the US but also because of the complementarity of both economies.

For instance, Mexico sends 80% of its manufactured goods across its Northern border which are made out of goods that contain up to 40% of goods manufactured in the US.

In order to push for changes, the Mexican government will have to carefully evaluate the strategic redistribution of products between the different regions to avoid potential disruption of production chains. A drastic reconfiguration of the Mexican market could probably strengthen the country's economy, but it would most likely represent a complicated and long process in case NAFTA negotiations reach an impasse.

Although in the short term the Mexican economy may suffer temporary contractions, following these strategies would ultimately support the country to expand and become more independent through the establishment of stronger ties with other nations.

It seems that there are alternative paths that may also lead to making the southern part of North America great.

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Defeating Systemic Corruption: Colombia's Next Major Challenge

Glenn Ojeda Vega

March 24, 2017

If corruption is not eradicated to level the political playing field, the systemically flawed democratic process will destroy any prospects of a lasting peace in Colombia.

Colombia's big city streets are full of ambulant vendors offering you anything from chewing gum to a single cigarette to prepaid cell phone minutes. Walking through Bogota's roads during the first weeks of 2017, you could also purchase a small booklet detailing the new public conduct code. For the first time in over two decades, the government has updated the code that now includes significant fines for offenses such as loitering and jaywalking.

This new reality for the average Colombian contrasts starkly with the political corruption currently pervading the government, so it is not just average Colombians who need to revise their code of public conduct. Today, international corruption scandals such as those disclosed in the Panama Papers have stained the reputation and credibility of the highest echelons of the Colombian political class.

Corruption is an urgent issue that must be tackled if Colombia expects the ongoing implementation of the peace treaty with the Revolutionary Armed

Forces of Colombia (FARC) to succeed in achieving a lasting peace and a robust democracy.

DARK FORCES AND DIRTY MONEY

To many observers, and even some political figures, the implementation and execution of the peace deal would represent the end of dirty money and dark forces within civil society and politics in Colombia. However, as the dust of armed civil conflict and fratricidal war begins to settle for the first time in half a century, Colombia must tackle the swamp of corruption that has been quietly spreading within the country's leading institutions.

Recent corruption scandals throughout Latin America have highlighted the importance of a free and robust press as well as the systemic weaknesses and lack of transparency of Colombia's democratic institutions. For instance, throughout the last two decades, it is estimated that the Brazilian construction giant, Odebrecht, paid some \$800 million in political bribes throughout a dozen countries in order to secure the construction of public projects.

Another major source of corruption controversies in Colombia is the state-owned petroleum company, Ecopetrol. For instance, a decade ago, Ecopetrol began construction on the ambitious Reficar project to build South America's largest oil refinery in the coastal city of Cartagena. Today, the project is yet to be completed, has gone over budget by \$4 billion dollars, and ongoing

investigations point towards mass contracting fraud, possibly implicating the ministerial cabinet.

It is tragic that the FARC has intended to advance its political agenda through violent means for more than fifty years. However, the level of systemic corruption uncovered puts into perspective other deep-seated issues facing the country. Furthermore, the reliance on corrupt practices by mainstream politicians and political parties in Colombia will be a severe impediment to the successful implementation of the peace treaty with the FARC guerrillas.

As part of the peace treaty with the national government, the FARC is set to transition into a democratic political formation—a FARC political party, yet to be officially formed—with representation in Congress and participation in electoral politics.

This has sparked contentious debate within Colombia given that the FARC party is guaranteed a number of seats in the national Congress during the next two electoral periods while it completes its transition into national politics. While some politicians argue that this measure is necessary for the FARC to successfully become a non-violent political movement, those who opposed the peace treaty claim that such a concession to the FARC is too generous and undemocratic.

UNFAIR ADVANTAGES

Nevertheless, given its extremely polarizing nature, the eventual FARC party will be held to higher standards and put under higher scrutiny in terms of transparency and financing than Colombia's traditional political players. The freedom with which mainstream political formations in Colombia utilize dirty money to finance their campaigns and keep their electoral machines running is shamefully evident to all sectors of civil society.

After weeks of mounting public pressure and revelations, President and Nobel Peace Laureate Juan Manuel Santos made a public declaration on March 14, 2017, recognizing the presence of illegal funding during his 2010 presidential campaign. President Santos stated that he was unaware of said funding at the time and called for those responsible to be punished.

The uneven playing field that will exist between the FARC and mainstream parties in Colombia could jeopardize the proper functioning of the democratic transition agreed to in the peace deal. The transition mandates that all guerrilla fighters convene in specified camps throughout the country to hand over their weapons and begin reintegration into civilian life, all of this under the supervision of the United Nations.

Simultaneously, mid and high-level FARC officials will go through a special court process where they will confess their illegal activities in exchange for shorter and alternative sentences. Finally, the FARC party commits to non-

violent political participation without funding acquired through illegal activity, under the supervision of the competent national authorities. In this regard, the corrupt practices that are part of the machinery of mainstream political parties will represent an unfair advantage over the FARC party and could give the FARC a legitimate reason to cry foul against the government, potentially undermining the negotiated peace itself.

If corruption is not eradicated to level the political playing field, the systemically flawed democratic process will destroy any prospects of a lasting peace. Even though some 6,000 guerrilla members have already demobilized as part of the implementation of the peace treaty, several members are defecting and hedging their position by staying in place while the process evolves. Some of these are FARC elements involved in illegal economic activity that could easily morph into drug-financed non-state actors. They include the Daniel Aldana mobile column and the Teófilo Forero column as well as Front 48 and Front 57.

As Colombia traverses a unique and historic moment, the Colombian people must pressure the political class to revise its own code of public conduct and possibly hand out booklets throughout the power halls of Congress. If not, we can expect new non-state actors to emerge either as fully rogue criminal groups or as political proxies for the FARC party. The latter scenario is

particularly likely, especially if the future FARC party decides that it needs a dirty political machine to do its groundwork.

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The Tragedy of Journalism in Mexico

Maria Fernanda Tapia Cortes
May 20, 2017

Journalism is facing a crisis in Mexico, leading to protests calling for an end to violence.

“A murdered journalist means one less voice in favor of the people.” These words, written in Spanish, were placed on a blanket outside a memorial for Javier Valdéz, a reporter for La Jornada who was murdered on May 15. He is the fourth journalist to be killed in Mexico this year and the second assaulted that day.

On May 16, hundreds of journalists gathered outside the attorney general's office in three cities calling for justice. In the capital Mexico City, protesters held photos of the victims along with placards

reading, “They are killing us.” Since President Enrique Peña Nieto entered office in 2012, 36 journalists have been killed and 23 are still missing.

PRESS FREEDOM IN MEXICO

Journalism is a risky profession as it can involve investigating and telling stories that many do not want to be told. As per the United Nations, more than 700 journalists have been killed in the line of duty over the past 10 years. This year alone has seen nine cases, according to Reporters Without Borders, including the deaths of Javier Valdéz and Miroslava Breach.

In Mexico, the situation is coming to a head. Four of the nine were killed in that country, while two died in Iraq and one in Afghanistan, Russia and Syria. Another report by the organization Article 19 says that every 22 hours, a member of the Mexican press suffers an attack.

The worst part is that 99.7% of those cases remain unpunished, according to the latest report by the Special Prosecutor's Office for Crimes Against Journalists. From 2010 to 2016, 798 formal investigations for crimes against the press were registered, but just 101 had the alleged perpetrator presented to court and only two were sentenced. In fact, 53% of attacks against journalists in 2016, including two extrajudicial executions, were committed by public servants, according to an annual report by Article 19. The state is believed to be

the number one aggressor with 226 cases versus 17 by organized crime.

This partly explains why violence against journalists has kept growing despite the creation in 2012 of a special government office to protect human rights activists and journalists, along with the constant promises of President Peña Nieto to take action. The other reason comes from the inefficiency of these entities. Lines where no one answers, panic buttons without signals and cameras that take months to be installed characterize the experiences of those who have sought assistance from the office.

Given the situation, the efforts of agencies like the Committee to Protect Journalists, Article 19 and Reporters Without Borders have not been enough to help journalists in trouble.

DYING FOR A DOLLAR

Attacks, impunity and the criminalization of journalism are not the only factors killing Mexican media. Low salaries and minimal security are also common. According to the Federal Labor Observatory, journalists earn around 10,000 pesos (\$535) a month — enough for a single person but not a family. And that's if you're lucky: There are many like Gregorio Jiménez who, with five children and a wife depending on him, earned just 20 pesos (\$1.05) per article — one of which got him killed in 2014.

Apart from the low pay, some media outlets do not provide security for their

employees, even when sent on dangerous assignments. Journalists at La Jornada, for example, do not have life insurance even though two of the four journalists murdered this year worked for that organization.

An important aspect of the economic crisis that journalists face comes from the changes in the way people consume information due to social networks. Mistrust in traditional media has increased worldwide. The view of journalists as being subjective, corrupt or enslaved to power has become a dogma among the least rational part of society — Donald Trump's outspokenness against liberal media proves this phenomena is not limited to Mexico. This portion of society is the least rational because its people do not realize that journalism is and will remain a fundamental tool for democracy.

In a world where “fake news” spreads with the speed of a virus and anyone with a smartphone has the ability to broadcast information of whatever quality, we need people who can verify the truth with a method, use reliable sources and make sense of facts through documented analysis. It is true that journalists (and media outlets) have a point of view that could define what they cover and how they do it — after all, they are people too. But with most journalists, those opinions will not be reflected in their work. Impartiality means looking for all the possible versions of truth that can be proven through objective and verified facts, in

order to present the most genuine portrayal of reality.

Assaulting journalists and subjecting them to fear-based self-censorship means attacking our own fundamental rights of freedom of expression and access to information, enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. So too does re-victimizing them and keeping quiet over the abuses they suffer.

Carmen Aristegui, a Mexican journalist who lost her job on the radio after investigating President Peña Nieto's "White House," said on May 16 in Mexico City: "We have to convince society that the death of a journalist is the death of society, it is the death of our liberties, it is the death of an attempt for democracy and for an harmonic life." She also had it right when saying that today the portrait of Mexico has the face of a murdered journalist.

"You can kill journalists but you can't kill the truth." That is the hashtag — #NoSeMataLaVerdadMatandoPeriodistas — which represents the movement for press freedom in Mexico. The problem is that, even when truth is revealed, the voices of the world are usually dead, just as it was written on the memorial for Javier Valdéz.

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Trump's Wrongheaded Choices on Puerto Rico's Humanitarian Crisis

Carlos Figueroa
October 1, 2017

Americans need real presidential leadership because it is sometimes a matter of life and death, and not about ratings, popularity or reality TV.

By September 20, weather experts were already forecasting that Hurricane Maria, characterized as a category 4 storm, had potential to cause major catastrophic damage in Puerto Rico, a United States territory.

President Donald Trump also initially acknowledged the severity of the storm through his Twitter communications that seem to bypass, if not displace, traditional White House communication practices, when he tweeted, "Puerto Rico being hit hard by new monster Hurricane. Be careful, our hearts are with you — will be there to help." This was Trump assuring Puerto Ricans, who are also US citizens, that the federal government would be ready to assist immediately post-Hurricane Maria.

When Trump delivered this direct message to Puerto Ricans most would have assumed, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, that his confident posture stemmed not from his usual campaign-style bravado, but rather from knowing he had fully anticipated the needs of the island's residents and physical damage of Puerto Rico, and thus stood ready to send aid and recovery resources to the US territory.

Yet in reality, the president's rhetoric amounted to more symbolic gestures and less concrete political action. Instead of reacting promptly to these citizens' urgent needs, Trump chose to distract the American people and the national media, wasting precious time that should have been used to deal with the Puerto Rico crisis.

He finally reacted to the devastation facing Puerto Rico largely because of media pressure and critical comments on how slow the federal response was in comparison to other recent American crises in Texas and Florida. Strong criticism came from Puerto Rico Governor Ricardo Rosselló and, more recently, San Juan Mayor Carmen Yulín Cruz. Thus, when US citizens in Puerto Rico needed presidential moral and substantive leadership, Trump made the wrong choices, which he continues to downplay or blame others for and not his failed leadership.

Trump had the chance to show real leadership by immediately sending the necessary resources to Puerto Rico, where US citizens are lacking sufficient

food, water and electricity. Puerto Rico is now a major humanitarian crisis. At least 16 deaths have been reported, and some estimate that over \$30 billion in physical and economic damages will accrue.

The federal government's slow response under Trump's callous attitude — despite his tweets otherwise — reflects something fundamental: the president's increasingly wrongheaded choices since assuming office in January.

First, his decision not to waive the Jones Act/Merchant Marine Law of 1920 — this law means that “any foreign registry vessel that enters Puerto Rico must pay punitive tariffs, fees and taxes, which are passed on to the Puerto Rican consumer” — as he previously did following Hurricanes Harvey and Irma in Texas and Florida, and second, his failure to visit Puerto Rico within hours/days after the hurricane reveal his fundamental disconnect with the gloomy realities developing on the island.

Trump lost an opportunity to enhance his credibility, and his divided Republican Party's too, among Puerto Ricans and Latinos more generally (although it would not have made a difference considering at least 60% of Latinos have historically supported Democrats).

Trump only reversed his decision on the Jones Act (a waiver that will only be in effect for 10 days) because of mounting pressure from Puerto Rican officials,

Democrats in Congress and national media. Trump's lack of empathy for his fellow US citizens in Puerto Rico is consistent with his failed presidency, which is only several months in and already showing signs of rapid decline with another cabinet member resigning on September 29.

PUERTO RICANS ARE AMERICAN CITIZENS

Indeed, Puerto Ricans have US citizenship under the Jones-Shafroth Act of 1917 and have historically served honorably in the US military. Nevertheless, the US federal government has restricted not only individual political rights, but also the island's economic liberalism and overall development. For example, even former President Barack Obama, as a supposed progressive liberal, chose to protect bondholder interests over the rights of ordinary US citizens in Puerto Rico.

The US federal government's full economic control of Puerto Rico is the main contributor to the current post-Hurricane Maria humanitarian crisis. In a recent New York Times opinion piece, Nelson A. Denis shows how much of the current crisis is due to Puerto Rico's "captive market" under the heavy weight of US colonial policies. In fact, Puerto Ricans have historically migrated to the broader US searching for financial and socioeconomic stability because of these policies — traveling for more jobs and educational opportunities to places like New York, Illinois and Florida. Yet

when you couple these factors with events due to climate chaos like the recent Hurricanes Irma and Maria that hit Puerto Rico (Maria has been called the most powerful hurricane in 80 years), you get climate refugees. However, having US citizenship does not automatically mean Puerto Ricans enjoy full political and social rights and privileges as others do on the mainland.

As a US citizen from Puerto Rico, I take President Trump's slow response to the island's humanitarian crisis seriously, as should others. I was born in Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico, which is located a few miles south of San Juan, and raised in New York City and Trenton, New Jersey.

My perspective is not unique, but I share it solely to highlight the fact that, since at least the mid-2000s, Puerto Rico's population has declined from 3.7 million to 3.4 million partly due to having access to mainland economic markets through a limited statutory form of US citizenship on the island.

Puerto Rico's longstanding colonial territorial status, deceptively called Free Associated State or Commonwealth, means the US Congress not only maintains complete sovereign rule over the territory, including having the final word over the political status question, but also controls over 80% of the island's economy. The Jones Act, as already mentioned, reinforces the colonial ties between the US and Puerto Rico, which diminishes any form or level of individual citizenship.

Trump's divisive politics is obviously not new — it was evident even prior to the surprising November 2016 presidential election outcome. What is outrageous is the extent of Trump's bluster and wrongheaded choices now as president. His explicit promotion of white nationalist ideology and disregard for the US Constitution should raise real concerns among moderate and even right of center Republicans, let alone the rest of Americans.

As a candidate, Trump was tolerated by the conservative and GOP establishment that hoped to regain the White House while keeping out of national power another Clinton. Yet Trump as president, and tweeter-in-chief, has continued to divide the American public and those around him, even when fellow US citizens are experiencing dire conditions that reach the level of life and death in Puerto Rico.

PRESIDENTIAL LEADERSHIP

Finally, let's look at Puerto Rico's humanitarian crisis from a slightly different perspective, and think more clearly about Trump's wrongheaded choices.

Puerto Rico has a current population of approximately 3.4 million, which means there are more US citizens living on the island than there are in at least 17 mainland states: Iowa (3.1 million), Utah (3), Arkansas (2.9), Kansas (2.9), Mississippi (2.9), Nevada (2), New Mexico (2), Nebraska (1.9), West Virginia (1.8), Idaho (1.6), Hawaii (1.4),

Maine (1.3), Rhode Island (1), Montana (1), Delaware (0.9), South Dakota (0.8), and Alaska (0.7).

If any of these states were to experience similar levels of devastation presently facing those in Puerto Rico, I doubt Trump and the federal government would have taken so long to provide the necessary assistance, resources and funding.

Trump as president and a businessman should have known the complexity surrounding Puerto Rico's pre- and post-Hurricane Maria humanitarian crisis beyond saying, "This is an island surrounded by water. Big water. Ocean water." This is about making the right choices for US citizens in Puerto Rico and elsewhere.

We need real presidential leadership because it is sometimes a matter of life and death, and not about ratings, popularity or reality television.

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The Caribbean Needs Better Access to Information to Get Ahead of Climate Change

John Martin

October 6, 2017

Many Caribbean nations lack the proper information infrastructure to help them weather natural disasters.

In September, Hurricane Irma devastated the Caribbean and Florida, killing at least 82, leaving thousands homeless and millions without power. Irma was one of the most powerful hurricanes in recorded history to come over the Atlantic Ocean.

However, it may be far from an anomaly. Scientists have long predicted that global climate change would lead to more frequent and more intense natural disasters, leaving many speculating that Irma could simply be the new normal.

This makes access to information more important than ever, as the ability to receive information during, and in the immediate aftermath of, an emergency plays a critical role in one's chances of survival and recovery.

Nevertheless, despite their vulnerability, many Caribbean nations still lack the proper technological infrastructure to fully inform all their citizens. Economic development will be essential to mitigating this information gap, and would assist these nations' ability to advise their citizens during such cataclysmic events.

The 2013 World Disasters Report, prepared by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), regards access to information as a basic need in "at-risk communities," or communities most likely to experience natural disasters.

Those who wield the technological resources necessary to retrieve vital updates from governmental institutions and emergency response centers in times of crises are more able to prepare for oncoming disasters in a timely manner.

Whereas "information starved" individuals, typically those living in impoverished areas, are typically forced to rely upon secondhand information from friends or neighbors, which could very well be inaccurate or outdated and lead to inadequate preparation. To put it plainly, people with internet access are less likely to die during a natural disaster than people without.

Caribbean nations are certainly not the worst in terms of internet access. Most have usage rates between 50% and 70% of their population, barring a few exceptions like Grenada (38.8%) and Haiti (12.1%). Nevertheless, this still leaves millions of islanders without any personal capacity to obtain information online.

Given that Caribbean nations are some of the most disaster prone worldwide according to the 2016 World Risk Index, having so many people without internet represents a massive loss of potential to

inform citizens about flood warnings, evacuations, water contamination and so on.

Hurricane Irma's hefty toll on the Caribbean was made all the worse when considering how many islands lack adequate infrastructure for even the most basic telecommunications, thus allowing the storm to severely impede their ability to communicate with the rest of the world.

After Irma, no one was able to make contact with Barbuda for over 12 hours, meaning Barbudans were left in the dark for half a day following the hurricane. The island has over a thousand people living on it and experienced 95% structural damage during the storm. There should be no reason why its inhabitants should have to wait so long to reestablish contact with foreign countries, let alone its sister island Antigua.

Such failures needlessly delay recovery efforts and place many lives at risk.

This is not an innovational issue, but a developmental one. The technological remedies needed to improve access to information in the Caribbean already exist. The question that remains is how we make said technology more widely available to the people living in the region. Foreign aid might be the first answer that comes to mind, but this is not a reliable nor long-term solution.

After all, telecommunications are continually advancing, so dependency

on outside funding would eventually result in outdated infrastructure. Instead, the answer lies in economic growth. Wealthier countries naturally have better-off citizens, who are more able to afford devices such as cell phones, laptops, Wi-Fi routers, as well as disaster-related technologies like generators. When such growth occurs, access to information becomes far more widespread.

So what could foreign countries do to stimulate the economies of the Caribbean? First, they could establish free trade agreements, which would allow Caribbean industries to sell their products to a much broader customer market compared to their current domestic markets.

For instance, Haiti's textile manufacturers have benefited greatly from the Haitian Hemispheric Opportunity through Partnership Encouragement Act of 2006, which has allowed employment to grow in the country despite its agricultural sector being in decline.

Additionally, maintaining foreign direct investment in the Caribbean's tourism industry will grant many islands the opportunity to continue to develop through these disasters. Approximately 90% of St. Martin's economy relies on tourism, and many other islands, such as Barbuda, also heavily depend on a strong tourism sector to thrive.

The quicker their resorts and small businesses are able to recover from

Irma, the sooner tourists will flock back to the area.

Fortunately, tourism is on the rise in the Caribbean. Hopefully this trend will remain regardless of the increasing amount of hurricanes afflicting the region.

Only through economic growth will more people in the Caribbean be able to acquire technologies that improve access to information. With more Irmas on the way in the coming years, having better access to information will be crucial to the survival of the region's inhabitants.

This recent storm was simply another reminder. People deserve to know the dangers they face in times of crises. With the right approach, this can become a reality for all people of the Caribbean.

John Martin is the 2017 global transparency fellow at Young Professionals in Foreign Policy (YFPF). He earned his BA in International Relations from New York University.

MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA

What Lies Ahead for Yemen in 2017?

Omar Mashjari
January 8, 2017

For Yemen, it's a case of: there's only one way up when you're at zero.

As the old saying goes, only once we have hit rock bottom can we rehabilitate ourselves. Usually the preserve of the individual, this saying can also be applied to countries in distress. And perhaps no more so than the complicated Yemen.

Located on the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, Yemen is surrounded by wealth, of which it has none, whilst also being situated in a dangerous neighborhood means Yemen isn't exactly on the rise right now. The Middle East is locked in a battle for hegemony between a Shia-dominated Iran and a Sunni-ruled Saudi Arabia. Most notably, this battle is being played out in Syria, with the general consensus being that the Saudis are aligned with the losing team.

But Yemen, too, has also become an arena for this battle of Islamic ideology. And like Syria, both sides of the wider conflict have stakes involved. For nearly two years, Saudi Arabia has led a coalition of Sunni states against a ragtag Shia rebel group called the Houthis. Though Zaidi Shia, the Houthis took control of the country from the

legitimate government of Yemen and are allegedly supported by Iran.

IS YEMEN ON THE BRINK?

Yemen has always been relatively poor in financial terms and slightly out of place in a region associated with oil money. Most importantly, the Saudis have always perceived Yemen as a backwater that they control. Accordingly, even at the suggestion of a threat of an Iranian-backed takeover of the country, the Saudis leaped into action.

However, their success has been limited. The Saudis continue bombing Yemen and the Houthis continue holding most of the country, including the capital Sanaa. In the midst of this political to-and-fro, Yemen's basic infrastructure has been ravaged and half of the population is now starving to death.

Commentators have long muffled of how Yemen was "on the brink," crisis after crisis, whether it be al-Qaeda in the early 2000s or the Arab Spring in 2011. Yet now there is a stark realization among Yemenis that the country has firmly fallen. There is no longer any talk of a brink, or an edge, or any other idiom that reflects a crucial moment in the downfall of a state.

By all accounts, 2016 was a terrible year for Yemen. New lows were reached starting as early as March, and even the country's central bank finally gave up its peacetime pretense by November. To borrow another overused metaphor, it is

fair to say that Yemen is firmly down the rabbit hole.

It is likely that 2017 will prove to be even more of a divisive year. The Saudis appear to be showing no signs of stopping, and it would be a just assessment to say that they are committed to securing Yemen at all costs.

The Houthis and their ally, former strongman President Ali Abdullah Saleh, have little to lose personally for continuing their resistance. Political efforts to negotiate a peaceful settlement under United Nations patronage have failed, meaning that their defeat in the conflict will more than likely signal the end of the road for their political ambitions at the least, and perhaps their continued existence at the worst.

Faced with such circumstances, the Houthis are likely to adopt a fight or die mentality in 2017. This is likely to take hold even more strongly as the rebels and their allies run low in funding and weaponry.

Assuming there is merit in the alleged Houthi-Iran alliance—of which little evidence to substantiate it has surfaced—it is unlikely that Tehran will be able to save their brethren. This is because any effort by Tehran will need to overcome significant logistical barriers, as it must try to find a means of transporting arms to Yemen, which is nearly 2,000 km away and subject to a Saudi naval blockade.

However, the Saudis also face challenges. Coalition airstrikes have raised concerns over the breach of international law. These concerns have been heard by their Western sponsors, primarily the United States and Britain. In exchange for a continued supply of arms, Washington and London are now demanding greater accuracy in bombing targets and more transparency in aftermath reporting by the Saudis.

LOOKING TO COLOMBIA PERHAPS?

All in all, whichever way the conflict goes, the picture does not bode well for civilians. In this regard, perhaps Yemenis may take some solace in knowing that once rock bottom has been reached, the country can only rise.

The example of Colombia, which not so long ago was a crime-ridden country famous for drugs and murder, is a useful reminder. Over the past 20 years, Colombia's the murder rate has fallen by 60%, its inflation has dropped by 87% and unemployment has gone down by half. While foreign direct investment reaches \$15 billion annually and the government's borrowing deficit has fallen to only 2% of gross domestic product (GDP).

If Columbians were able to rehabilitate their country once it hit rock bottom, Yemenis could do the same in 2017.

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Mosul is Pivotal in US Counterterrorism Strategy

Dan Heesemann

January 9, 2017

Long-term consequences could abound if the US does not strike a balance in Iraq.

A coordinated attempt by Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and Kurdish Peshmerga forces supported by US-led coalition air power to liberate Iraq's second largest city, Mosul, from control of the Islamic State (IS) began in October 2016. The outcome of the battle, for better or worse, is certain: it will mark a turning point in the global counter-IS campaign. Furthermore, it could lend credibility to the often-debated effectiveness of the "light footprint" model of operations, which emphasizes regional partner leadership over US intervention when faced with a security crisis.

The United States has faced sharp criticism for its "lead from behind" strategy, which many point to exacerbating regional civil wars by preventing US forces from intervening and curtailing these conflicts. While the strategy clearly does not fit every situation, Mosul could serve as proof that it does work—on a level much larger than successful "light footprint" operations, including those against the

Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in the Philippines and Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in Colombia.

In a region where US policy has been chided for “half measures,” adhering to the “light footprint” model would not only demonstrate a commitment to the strategy’s success, but more critically form a strong base for future improvements in Iraq as the next US administration seeks to prevent a reemergence of extremism. This should include not only military operations, but governance and peacebuilding support amongst various stakeholders in northern Iraq, namely the Sunni tribes, Kurdish people and the Shia militias who help to liberate the city.

COUNTERTERRORISM

There are a number of situations that, if not thoroughly accounted, could make Mosul another case of “light footprint” failure rather than the blueprint for further operations against IS. The military plan developed by the ISF is arguably the least complicated aspect of the city’s liberation.

The main challenge is ensuring that the various actors at play maintain their promises to stay within defined operational areas. The ISF and Kurdish Peshmerga roles are clear, but the Iranian-backed Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) has little in the way of direction. Despite an ISF spokesman indicating that the PMF would likely be used to secure the outlying areas of the

largely Sunni city in order to minimize sectarian conflict, the Shia PMF sees the recapture of Mosul as a “national and religious duty.” This confluence of actors could lead to troubles after the city has been liberated as groups attempt to use battle merit to justify territorial gains.

The question of Mosul’s governance post-IS still remains largely unclear. Yet it is the resolution of this issue that will likely be the metric by which the success of the Mosul liberation is measured in the long run. The often-discussed Sunni-Shia balance that will factor heavily into any governance agreement has the potential to be hijacked by both the Turkish and Iranian governments to advance their own geopolitical goals as Mosul’s liberation progresses.

Finally, the human toll of military operations is underrepresented next to the above issues. Humanitarian efforts recently became a concern after the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees announced that it may not possess sufficient resources to handle the maximum number of refugees that may result from the operations being conducted in and around Mosul. IS has shown that it will attempt to force these civilians into staying to serve as cannon fodder.

The real challenge in Iraq will be ensuring that political and military leadership can effectively reestablish a presence in and around Mosul, and do so in a manner that does not inflame

sectarian tensions or otherwise engender the Islamic State's resurgence in the city.

PHILIPPINES, COLOMBIA AND SOMALIA

Providing training and advisement to foreign militaries became a pillar of US counterterrorism policy after September 11, 2001. The Philippines and Colombia represent operations, where according to a RAND study on the latter, "relatively intact governments found the will and resources to lead such efforts, despite facing severe security, corruption, and long-running socioeconomic challenges."

The outgoing and incoming US administrations should examine instances of successful of holistic counterterrorism operations such as Colombia and the Philippines while heeding the warnings of Somalia where, despite consistent tactical victories, long-term counterterrorism efforts have proved strategically ineffective.

US special operations forces (SOF) have been supporting and training Somali National Army units for almost a decade but have yet to permanently defeat the al-Shabab insurgency. Critics point to an emphasis on military training and direct action operations over support for the Somali government to build a functioning state that is capable of defending itself from threats and supporting its citizens. Joint Somali-American military operations have successfully targeted al-Shabab

leadership and training facilities, yet Somalia looks only marginally better than it did in 2011 when the Federal Government of Somalia wrested control of Mogadishu from militants.

Support for effective governance and a stable economy—two factors that can often help defeat insurgencies—are noticeably lacking in US aid for Somalia. Furthermore, any such provisions are concentrated in the capital Mogadishu, not the southern and central portions of the country, where population-centric counterinsurgency would bolster the military operations to degrade al-Shabab's control over the regions.

Somalia demonstrates that even a militarily effective counterterrorism strategy cannot truly succeed unless support for governance and conflict resolution is as robust as support for direct action.

A post-operational report on US counterterrorism efforts in Colombia emphasized the importance of utilizing civil affairs units in supporting the host nations in governance and development operations over the years following the resolution of a conflict. A reliance on SOF troops is among the policy recommendations. While this may have been the case in Colombia, Iraq certainly requires a more nuanced approach.

The US should employ civil affairs units while involving members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) with a history of training police units

such as Italy. Civil affairs troops could provide the necessary interlocution training to develop stable governance and de-conflict amongst rival groups, while effective police would allow the ISF to move on knowing the city remains secure.

Additionally, the Colombia report rejected a focus on short-term projects as these yielded only short-term results. Direct action raids are necessary for any successful counterterrorism operations, but at a certain point, the effort needs to shift to policing, governance and education. These population-centric operations will, in the long term, enable residents to return home with a sense of security and allow the government to effectively resume its duties.

While training ISF units in direct action operations should not cease, the US focus should shift to raising local police units that can take the place of ISF troops in the city. This will make the return to normalcy easier for the Moslawi population.

The RAND report on the Philippines concluded, after conducting interviews with Philippine and American security personnel, that transitioning from a military-centric security presence to a police-centric security model would be critical for internal security once operations against the ASG had concluded.

In 2011, Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines was beginning to shift from direct action against ASG to post-

conflict governance. US SOF advisors began training the Philippines National Police Special Action Force (PNP SAF) to take over internal security in populated urban areas. Once established, the SAF proved to work both independently and in concert with the Philippine army to ensure the safety of major towns and cities in provinces where insurgents were most active. SOF commanders also set up eight fusion centers for intelligence sharing between US analysts and Philippine police and military units.

This gradual drawback of US “boots on the ground” proved effective, at least in the short term, but as of 2014, ASG has gained a slight boost when one of its main factions pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the caliph of IS.

It is important to ensure that the strategy, going forward, emphasizes a balance between collaborative direct action and population-centric counterinsurgency operations in a hybrid Colombia-Philippines model. As the military campaign against IS begins to wane, supporting effective governance in Mosul and Nineveh Province should take precedence for the US. After all, one of the driving reasons behind the Islamic State’s rise in Iraq was poor governance by Nouri al-Maliki’s government.

Therefore, it should be a priority to reinstate effective, non-sectarian government in areas formerly controlled by IS. Moderating the post-Islamic State reconstruction effort will likely be more

important to the long-term stability of the Iraqi state than the ongoing military operations. It will be crucial to have non-military forces to de-conflict the inevitable issues that will emerge amongst the various actors in Mosul once the city has been liberated.

It is imperative for the US to shape its post-conflict strategy for Mosul now, funding both government and nonprofit governance and aid initiatives that will be ready to work when Mosul is cleared militarily. Waiting until the conflict has subsided to formulate a reconstruction plan will give external forces time to foment sectarian tensions and prevent a complete resolution of the violence that has plagued Iraq since 2003, leaving the proverbial wound in Iraqi society open to infection by other extremist groups.

DEFEATING THE ISLAMIC STATE

To be sure, it is unrealistic to apply the strategy for the Mosul offensive to Raqqa in Syria and other theaters where IS claims affiliates. However, a successful prosecution of the Mosul operations and a stable governance structure in the aftermath would produce lessons that could be adapted to contexts where the US wishes to defeat an enemy while maintaining a minimal troop presence on the ground.

Mosul could also showcase what a united Iraqi front composed of different groups who are often ethnically and religiously at odds with the other are capable of doing, providing the Iraqi state hope for its future.

The above goals are ambitious and, as outlined, the variables that could result in the implosion of the Mosul liberation operations are more numerous and already in play.

With the opening skirmishes of the Mosul operations being livestreamed, the global audience is now front and center to what is a benchmark for the global counter-IS campaign. This, coupled with a media-savvy enemy that seems to be able to put a spin on even crippling defeats, could lead to a backlash affecting not just the Iraqi counter-IS effort, but the global US-led push to defeat the group.

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Erdogan Wins the President's Referendum

Tahir Abbas

April 16, 2017

Is Turkey headed for autocracy disguised as a presidential system of democracy, or a new era for society and politics with internal cohesion?

The results of the presidential referendum have just been declared in Turkey. As predicted by most pollsters, just over half voted "Yes." Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir, however, voted "No." Interestingly, Danish and German Turks voted "Yes," while 80% of British Turks voted "No." In Turkey, it is also possible to see that the "Yes" vote was concentrated in Anatolia, the heartland of the country, from which herald the more pious but less well-educated Turks.

Europe-looking Turks in the Aegean coastal towns and Kurds concentrated in the southeast wholesale voted "No."

Is this a de facto retrospective vote for an autocratic dictatorship disguised as a presidential system of democracy? Or is it the beginning of a new era of confident Turkish society and politics with internal cohesion and a self-assured poise looking East and West?

The reason the Anatolian Turks elected to stick with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is that so many are easily swayed by the powerful rhetoric of the man. It also reflects being dependent upon existing political, social and

economic structures for net well-being for groups who were otherwise distinctively left behind by the secular republican elite until the last 15 years or so.

These Turks have gained much from the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and hope to continue to do so over the next decade and a half when Erdogan remains the supreme leader of Turkey, unencumbered and unchallenged.

The fact of the matter is that judges in Egypt have more freedom than judges will now have in Turkey. The powers that Erdogan will hold give him unprecedented authority to stamp his legacy onto the history of Turkey for the foreseeable future.

This has not come about, however, through the will of the people. Half of the population, including most in three of the biggest cities in Turkey, voted "No." It has occurred in the context of accusations of intimidation, spying and bullying, leaving "No" voters silenced and cowered. The final "Yes" vote came in a state of emergency, called after the events of the failed coup of July 2016. With this in the background, the fact of a narrow win suggests that not all remains well.

Let us not speak of the million or so people purged or directly affected by the purges initiated by Erdogan in the wake of the failed coup. Let us not speak of the hundreds of journalists and writers who face indefinite incarceration for, effectively, reporting on Turkey with an

independent voice. Let us not speak either of the virtual monopoly over news media that the AKP now has. Let us not speak of the accusations of election fraud that will be made in the next few days.

If only just under 50% of the population voted “No” under these circumstances, think of how many may well have voted differently had they felt the freedom to do so.

None of this was unexpected. Many felt that Erdogan would be successful in the end. He has what he wants. He can now narrate his own legacy and that of Turkey in his own image. He will have until 2029 to do so.

If positive reforms can be introduced to rebalance the economy, flatten out social mobility and open up to the world again while sorting out all the internal issues going back to the foundation of the republic in 1923, then there is a chance of something new and great.

Neutral Turkey watchers will want the best for the country and its people. We wait in hope.

Tahir Abbas is an assistant professor at the Institute of Security and Global Studies at Leiden University in The Hague, and a visiting senior fellow in the Department of Government at the London School of Economics and Political Science.

The Not So Cooperative Gulf Cooperation Council

Gary Grappo
June 6, 2017

The situation for Qatar is precarious, says former US Ambassador Gary Grappo. Its best bet may be diplomatic intervention by a friendly neutral state.

Barely two weeks after Saudi Arabia provided the dazzling stage for the great gathering of Arab and Muslim nations to come together for a new American president to announce a re-centering of US policy in the Middle East, the core group of Gulf nations, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), is unravelling. Fake news may be the proximate culprit, but real divisions run deep.

On June 5, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Yemen and even the Indian Ocean state of the Maldives took drastic measures to sever ties with Qatar, the mega-gas-exporting Gulf mini-state.

The ostensible reason is allegedly untoward remarks attributed to Qatar’s Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, including asserting support for Saudi arch-enemy Iran, for Hamas (and bizarrely Israel — go figure) and for Hezbollah, and claiming US President Donald Trump may not last a full four-year term.

For its part, Doha has denied the statements, declaring its website was hacked. Nevertheless, the claimed

remarks served as more than adequate justification for the Saudis and Emiratis, emboldened by re-invigorated American support, to go after the Qataris for a laundry list of long-outstanding claims, especially closeness to Tehran and support for the reviled Muslim Brotherhood.

While not the first time the GCC states have experienced a falling out — the last was in 2014 but was patched up after quiet talks — this may prove to be longer lasting unless the Qataris knuckle under.

Moreover, this dispute has received much wider public attention, with respective governments appealing to a broad range of regional and Western media to make their grievances known. Such a public display of the quarrel is uncharacteristic for the subdued Gulf state monarchies and suggests backing down is not an option for them, least of all Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Moreover, the Saudis, Emiratis and Egyptians doubtlessly feel that with American backing, they can act forcefully to bring Qatar under Riyadh's control.

That seems clear by the media splash, and it places the ruling al-Thani family in an impossible situation. Resignation would impact Doha's decades-long strategy of staking out an independent foreign policy that allowed for close ties with the Taliban, Tehran, Hamas and Hezbollah but also with America,

including host to a large US military presence.

In addition, the contrarian Doha-based Al Jazeera news channel has taken an editorial line often at odds with Saudi Arabia, the UAE and other Arab states. All that may now be on the line if Qatar expects to resolve this row.

The situation for Doha is indeed precarious. Its best bet may be intervention by a friendly neutral state such as Oman. But one has to wonder whether Muscat — itself often accused of being too cozy with its cross-Strait neighbor Iran and insufficiently supportive of the Saudi war effort against the Houthis in Yemen — is up to the task. It may be a bit much for the Omanis to take on without jeopardizing their own delicate relations within the GCC.

The next candidate would have been Egypt, but President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has thrown in his lot with the Saudis, et al. The incident probably offered the Egyptians an opportunity for payback for Qatar's support of the Muslim Brotherhood. And one wonders whether even the Pakistanis, known for their close ties to Riyadh, would be willing to stick their hand in this latest GCC wood chipper.

DOES THAT LEAVE US MEDIATION?

It may be left for the Americans to try to patch this breach. Washington has its own issues with Doha, but it cannot afford to see President Trump's

triumphant visit, which seemingly brought together the Arab world in the fight against violent extremism and Iran, marred and the new alliance unravel in a family feud.

US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, traveling in Australia, urged dialog among the parties, suggesting he may not yet be fully briefed on the depth of this fallout. The parties appear much too far apart for dialog to happen without an influential, friendly and trusted state stepping in.

Cue the US. But this is an untried and very inexperienced administration. With all but two of its senior appointed posts in the State Department still vacant, it lacks the diplomatic skills to massage this problem toward resolution. It might be referred to an equally untried National Security Council, where diplomatic experience and Gulf Arab rapport are also sadly lacking.

And then there is Donald Trump. One has to wonder if family counselling is anywhere in his repertoire of deal-doing talents. Or would he even want to? Unless someone close can persuade him of the importance of keeping the GCC alliance intact, he might opt to stand down on this one. And anyone seeking his intervention should be prepared for offer a quid pro quo. It's how America does business now. It's called "America First."

Even if Qatar's assertion that it was hacked and made a victim of fake news is proven, the damage has been done.

The Saudis and Emiratis mean to see their Qatari brethren brought to heel.

Gary Grappo is a former US ambassador and a distinguished fellow at the Center for Middle East Studies at the Korbel School for International Studies, University of Denver. He possesses nearly 40 years of diplomatic and public policy experience in a variety of public, private and nonprofit endeavors. As a career member of the Senior Foreign Service of the US Department of State, he served as Envoy and Head of Mission of the Office of the Quartet Representative, the Honorable Mr. Tony Blair, in Jerusalem. Grappo is chairman of the Board of Directors at Fair Observer.

Trump Botches Jerusalem Opportunity

Gary Grappo

December 8, 2017

America's self-styled master dealmaker didn't leverage recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital to advance the peace process. Instead, he set it back.

There is a good deal less than meets the eye in President Donald Trump's decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital and move the US embassy there — albeit at some unannounced later date. To anyone familiar with the issue or who has visited Israel, West Jerusalem long ago became the effective capital of the

Jewish state. It has proclaimed Jerusalem as its eternal capital since 1948.

The Knesset, Israeli Supreme Court, Israeli prime minister's and the president's residences and offices, and almost all government ministries are based there. They're permanent and not going anywhere, regardless of the outcome of any future Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

So, America's acknowledgement of the reality, as the president put it, does not change Israel's calculus one iota. For Israel, therefore, as delighted as it may be to have recognition from its closest ally, it marks no real significant progress or even victory. Israel is no more secure and certainly no closer to resolving its conflict with the Palestinians.

Life in Jerusalem is unchanged, save for some New Year-style revelry the day after. Not surprisingly, the Israeli government did very little campaigning to move the administration in this direction; not that much was needed.

For the US, the decision addresses none of the myriad challenges it and its allies in the region — Israeli and Arab — face in the region. Iran continues its march toward apparent regional hegemony. Conflicts in Yemen and Libya rage on, both racking up horrific humanitarian tolls. Syria's civil war may conclude on terms very unfavorable to the US, Israel, Jordan and, most especially, the millions of Syrians hoping for something better than Syrian dictator

Bashar al-Assad's renewed lease on life and brutal governance. The Arab Gulf states remain in disarray in the wake of a foolhardy diplomatic blockade of Qatar, marching toward an effective breakdown of what had been the region's most effective alliance, the Gulf Cooperation Council. Al-Qaida, a diminished Islamic State, Hezbollah and other extremist groups still threaten the region and the West.

ISRAEL GETS A FREE PASS

Washington becomes even less popular with the very moderate Arab and Muslim friends it so desperately needs to help address these imposing problems. The decision advances no overriding American national security or foreign policy interest. In effect, then, America's dealmaker-in-chief defaults to his now predictable role of disrupter-in-chief. Overturn the Middle East chess table and see what happens.

Arab governments will undoubtedly fulminate, somewhat justifiably, over the announcement. However, over the last five-six years they already had begun to distance themselves from the Palestinian question.

Plagued by political and social problems stemming from the Arab Spring, declining oil prices and the concomitant poor economies and rising budget deficits, the Iranian challenge and terrorism, the Palestinian cause no longer commanded the attention it once did. There was also fatigue from, inter alia, the endemic corruption of the

Palestinian Authority, the ongoing saga of the Fatah-Hamas feud and a highly unpopular and ineffectual PA President Mahmoud Abbas.

In the blood sport known as Middle East peace negotiations, all sides know that there is never a free lunch. A party must always give in order to get. But Israel got a free pass from the bungling, inexperienced and ill-informed Trump administration — recognition of its capital — and one it really didn't need.

Failing to secure something in return from the Israelis — for example, a pledge to suspend even temporarily West Bank settlement expansion, or a promise to negotiate a border between the contending sides of the city at a future time, or some other meager bone to assuage the Palestinians — sticks out as a major blunder.

This becomes all the more apparent as the president's hapless and ill-equipped son-in-law, Jared Kushner, plows ahead in some unknown direction to resolve the region's longest running conflict. In an administration in which tweets pass for policy and bluster for strategy, one can't be really surprised. It becomes just so much more disruption.

But such a pledge might have served to jump start Kushner's negotiations with the Arabs, and perhaps even the Palestinians, and salvage some slight appearance of an honest broker.

Instead, the decision poses significant risks. It will spark unrest and anti-

American and anti-Israeli demonstrations, with the likelihood of violence in several places with particular risks for American diplomats and military personnel in the region.

The region's terrorist organizations from ISIS and Hamas to al-Qaida and Hezbollah will doubtlessly serve this up in their propaganda to inflame anti-American and anti-Israeli furor. State sponsors of terrorism like Iran and Syria will follow suit.

Even in Israel, the decision may likely embolden right-wing groups and settlers to pick up the pace of settlement expansion in the West Bank. "America is with us!" may be their banner.

NEGOTIATE NOW OR MAYBE NEVER

For the Palestinians, there can be nothing but dark days ahead. The nuanced language of the president's announcement — calling for negotiations by the two sides to determine the actual future borders of the city — will be lost in the larger message that this administration has thrown in its lot entirely with Israel with no possibility of playing even the quasi-honest broker it had attempted in the past.

Previous patrons, like Saudi Arabia and Egypt in their own versions of "America First" will readily sacrifice the Palestinian cause for American support against Iran, terrorism, Hezbollah and the Muslim Brotherhood.

The biggest loser may be Abu Mazen himself, weak and widely disliked already. There will be little faith in his ability to deliver via negotiations on the promises — on a Palestinian state, right of return and a Jerusalem capital — made over the last 70 years to Palestinians. It also will likely erode the last vestiges of the Palestinian pro-negotiation camp, igniting increased calls for violence against Israel and Israeli citizens, and throwing more support toward Hamas. The latter, itself reeling from its criminal mismanagement of an impoverished and disaster-ridden Gaza, may have gained a negotiating advantage in the ongoing Fatah-Hamas reconciliation.

For Abu Mazen in particular and Palestinians more generally, the window is closing. Interest in their cause is declining in the US, Europe and within the region.

And for the avowedly pro-Israeli US administration, this may be only its first step. Possible recognition of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, already all but a formality for most of those along the Green Line, and even formally calling for a permanent Israeli security force inside a future Palestinian state may be in the offing down the road.

As counter-intuitive as it may sound, Abbas and his team must begin to look in earnest at restarting a genuine negotiation process with Israel while they still have something left to negotiate. Further delay only ensures, as all previous delays have, that the

embattled Palestinians will have less to negotiate over and ultimately end up with less.

Gary Grappo is a former US ambassador and a distinguished fellow at the Center for Middle East Studies at the Korbel School for International Studies, University of Denver. He possesses nearly 40 years of diplomatic and public policy experience in a variety of public, private and nonprofit endeavors. As a career member of the Senior Foreign Service of the US Department of State, he served as Envoy and Head of Mission of the Office of the Quartet Representative, the Honorable Mr. Tony Blair, in Jerusalem. Grappo held a number of senior positions in the US State Department, including Minister Counselor for Political Affairs at the US Embassy in Baghdad; US Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman; and Charge d’Affaires and Deputy Chief of Mission of the US Embassy in Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. From 2011-13, he was President and CEO of The Keystone Center. He currently serves as CEO of Equilibrium International Consulting, providing analysis and policy guidance on foreign affairs to businesses, institutions and the media. Grappo is chairman of the Board of Directors at Fair Observer.

Obama Out, Trump In

Peter Isackson

January 19, 2017

As Donald Trump becomes president, we must remember: We are all observers of history.

On January 20, the United States enters a new era. It will no longer be the same country. It will be different from what it has been for the past eight years under Barack Obama. It will also be different from the previous eight years under George W. Bush. Not, as many believe, because Donald Trump is unlike any previous leader or because he isn't qualified to be president. A similar case could be made for Bush and even Ronald Reagan. No, this time something has radically shifted in the basic paradigm of American democracy. The script has been rewritten. Where it will lead no one can reasonably predict. The suspense begins. In more than a metaphorical sense, the world of American politics has become an extravagant TV reality show, with a cast of millions.

In the coming months we can count on President Trump—simultaneously assuming the roles of tragic hero and Greek chorus—to guide us through the experience with his usual deluge of tweets intended, in his mind, to function rather like the subtitles on a foreign film. We will never be expected to understand the actual text, but by

paying attention to his tone we may hope to get the drift of his and the other actors' intentions. Then we will simply have to follow the twists and turns of the plot as the different characters—Democrats and Republicans—step up to challenge the new leader and bend him to their will.

Whether the model is reality TV or Greek tragedy (some have suggested comedy), we need to acknowledge that the barrier between fiction and historical reality has at least momentarily dissolved. This is hyperreality at its purest. Think of it as a combination of a classic Hollywood catastrophe film—about a massive earthquake, for example—and a play by Samuel Beckett. The title of the piece might be, *Waiting for the Big One*.

The seismic shock in November 2016 stunned the entire world. The professional pundits and political scientists are now monitoring the region around the epicenter for the arrival of a tsunami as Trump settles in to the Oval Office. We know there will be damage to the political foundations that have been in place since the end of the Second World War. And we know it will be massive. It remains to be seen whether the mainstream media, who will be tasked with interpreting the data, manage to make sense of it, or whether the politicians who will be required to act can find the means to adjust to the new reality, repair the damage and rebuild the structure. Bad habits, artificial loyalties, complacency and ingrained ignorance die hard. The myths we

formerly lived by tend to endure, long after their sell-by date.

By the time the dust settles and Trump's new team is installed in Washington, lucid observers will have noticed two essential things about American civic culture that only became obvious in the wake of the 2016 election. They concern the media and the political system.

MEDIA AND POLITICS

The popular media in the United States have clearly lost their bearings to the point that they can no longer distinguish between reality and the hyperreality they have themselves created—between reporting based on verifiable information subjected to critical reasoning, on one hand, and the fake news that's so much easier to sell to a willing public, on the other. Fake news has become an object of public debate, but to some extent the debate itself is a fake debate. That is a characteristic of hyperreality.

The motor that everyone counts on to power the system of government is clearly out of order. The stability of the two-party system that has been operative since the late 19th century is seriously compromised. Both parties are now acting like wounded beasts, bellowing wildly and struggling to find their footing. It requires superhuman optimism to believe that the storm will soon be over and that the experienced managers who have kept things ticking over for so long will in due time be able to get everything back in order.

If the picture the media paint of today's world is hyperreal, the current political landscape has become simply surreal. When a president-elect preparing his inauguration—traditionally a moment of glorious triumph in Act I of his heroic play—lashes out at the entire political establishment, sounding more like Richard III at the battle of Bosworth in Act V, it becomes clear that what we are witnessing resembles more the end of an unraveling story than the beginning of a new one. Here is a sample of Trump's recent tweets: "Totally made up facts by sleazebag political operatives, both Democrats and Republicans – FAKE NEWS! Russia says nothing exists. Probably..."

Reading this we can easily imagine the next scene when Trump will be shouting, "a horse, a horse my presidency for a horse."

Well over a million people—some estimate close to 2 million—attended President Obama's first inauguration in 2009. On January 20, 2017, the numbers are expected to be significantly lower. On the other hand, some estimate that more than 100,000 people will be on hand to protest at the inauguration, refusing to acknowledge Trump as their legitimate president. And they won't be Democrats only. Fellow Republican and former presidential candidate John McCain is the designated "sleazebag" who supplied the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) with the dossier on Trump's ties to Russia.

On the Democratic side, the struggle for control of the party is just getting underway, but the battle lines are beginning to appear between the Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren wing and whoever manages to step up to mobilize the traditionalists from the Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama and Joe Biden side of the party. The first skirmish has begun over the election of the chairman of the Democratic National Committee (DNC). For the moment, both sides are gathering arms as they wait to see the lay of the land once Trump takes office.

As 2017 begins, the nation faces a paradox. The Republicans have won everything but are in total disarray, reduced to a state of aggravated agitation. The Democrats are still too stunned to realize that they have nothing other than their hatred of a few chosen villains to guide them. Those villains have names: Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin, James Comey, Julian Assange. Declaring war on any or all of them seems to make them feel better about their own sense of failure and miscalculation. The Russian bugbear they find particularly pleasing, since it places the blame for their own failures on the other side of the world in a place Americans have long been conditioned to think of as a den of evil.

Something essential in the system is clearly broken. For any reasonable person, once the effect of the November shock subsides, this should be the time for reflection that seeks a deepened understanding of what is clearly a complex and historically unique

situation. It's too early to expect it from the politicians lost in their world of woe or from the mainstream media, committed to perpetuating their hyperreal universe.

SEARCHING FOR CLUES

Popular political culture in the US has always been too close to entertainment culture to have cultivated or developed a taste for systemic analysis, even in moments like this where a previously stable system is clearly in peril. Reactions and reflections abound, but for the moment, predictably enough, all eyes are focused not on the system itself, but on the personalities. After all, personality is what the media does best. Look at the headlines of any newspaper or news service and the subjects of the articles will jump from Barack Obama to Kim Kardashian or Taylor Swift, from Paul Ryan to Justin Bieber or LeBron James. All are on an equal footing in a celebrity culture. Hyperreality at its most concentrated.

Consequently, the final phase of this transitional post-election/pre-inauguration period has assigned two jobs to be done by the media: assess Obama's legacy and anticipate the effects of Trump's unpredictable, unconventional personality. As the Democrats shed copious tears over the departure of their dignified African American president—who from the start made history in a way that always impresses the American public, simply by being different—they fail to notice the historical reality that Obama was more

an exotic symbol than a leader. Symbols are easier for the public to identify with than political leaders, whose job it is to weigh options and make decisions.

In contrast, the Republicans find themselves with a symbol they didn't really invent and which they do not quite understand. Instead of savoring their victory, the "true" Republicans—the Ryans, McConnells, McCains—find themselves gesticulating erratically in all directions as they attempt to understand and clarify their relationship with the man who has replaced President Obama, more a sinister gargoyle than the kind of noble figurehead Obama turned out to be.

TAKING STOCK OF OBAMA

The disturbing truth behind the current confusion is the realization that Obama may well be the last of his kind. For the mainstream media, presidents are public personalities who should be admired even when criticized or gently derided. Fox News tirelessly complained about Obama's policies but did so with a measure of respect for the man. The tradition always sought to elevate presidents and place them on a pedestal of respectable celebrity, however virulent the criticism of their policies. The mainstream media realized it was essential that political leaders retain the real or artificial dignity of their celebrity status, even when denigrated in the most outrageous and insulting terms by the pundits of talk radio or late night TV satirists. It's an integral part of the law of celebrity. In some sense, the

true proof of political stardom is the privilege of being "roasted" in public, by friends and foes alike.

As a celebrity president, Obama invited and responded masterfully to the initiatives of the media, playing his role with the brio of a celebrity chef, never forgetting to toss in the additional spice of his personal story—the one that launched him as a future star at the Democratic convention in 2004. He created and then embodied the perfect 21st century Democratic Party leader, no longer a pure white establishment figure like John Edwards or John Kerry, but rather an exotic outsider who is nevertheless at ease in establishment culture. The Harvard credentials and a law degree of course helped.

Above all, Obama had the look, the voice, the style and the speech cadences of a political celebrity. He was young and energetic, represented the advantages of diversity, and was particularly skilled at reformulating the party's Jeffersonian ideals in the form of simplified resonant slogans ("yes we can", "change you can believe in"). With his daring rhetoric and sonorous voice, none better than he could appeal to those who identified with the Democrats' traditional progressivist ideology—however compromised and diluted by the "realism" of Bill Clinton's New Democrat worldview.

Over two terms and eight years, President Obama has consistently demonstrated the celebrity's skill of keeping his image intact, not an easy

task for a president who is continually faced with complex foreign policy dilemmas, an undisciplined and frankly obstructive legislature and multiple forms of civil unrest. In the final weeks of his presidency, Obama, alongside his co-star Michelle, was shown all the honors by his fans and supporters and showered with tributes in the mainstream and social media. None of them greater than the privilege of leaving office to the resounding echo of his public vociferously chanting, “four more years.” Just as he received the Nobel Peace Prize mainly for not being George W. Bush, his status as a great president has been sealed by the comparison with his unworthy and unpopular successor.

DRAMATIC ARTS

The artist formerly known as President Barack Obama has always understood how to play his part. In 2008, his performance was so consummate he stole the show from the top-billed Hillary Clinton at the precise moment when she had put on her Annie Oakley gear and mounted her steed, on cue to ride into glory as the first female president. Her clear path to victory seemed assured as she advanced on the not yet frayed coattails of her husband—a man remembered by the public as the last president to ensure peace and prosperity.

To Hillary’s surprise and chagrin, she found herself facing a young, sassy, inexperienced Obama, whose profile just happened to be that of the ideal

post-Bush, 21st century Democratic candidate. He not only spoke with the voice of the party, pushing the themes of peace and economic justice further than the more calculating Clinton, but as the first black candidate nominated by a major party, presenting himself as an anti-war militant after two terms of Bush, he had everything required to motivate a new generation of voters.

And though his politics proved far less radical than his campaign discourse suggested—ultimately provoking severe criticism from some of his most enthusiastic supporters (such as Cornel West, who said: “It’s like you’re looking for John Coltrane and you get Kenny G in brown skin”)—and for two full terms he successfully maintained both the rhetoric and the celebrity image, the Democratic faithful see him today as one of the greatest presidents in American history.

Obama’s success in building and maintaining his image may have been his finest accomplishment, one that should not be underestimated in a culture that relies heavily on adulation of public personae. But, however impressive, this achievement may already be the relic of a bygone era. Trump’s over-the-top narcissistic sociopath persona may not be the new model, but Obama did his part in discrediting the old one by cultivating his image rather than realizing his ideals.

From the very first months of his presidency, Obama’s image as a resolute change agent quickly began to

tarnish. He continued to speak nobly of peace, but threw himself with very real enthusiasm into the logic of war, eventually promoting and to some extent perfecting the latest form of state-sponsored terrorism: drone warfare. In his public pronouncements, he appealed to the most generous ideals of freedom, honesty and sincerity, but then led an enduring campaign to suppress whistle blowers. He preached respect between peoples and nations while prosecuting multiple wars and military operations conducted through unholy alliances with autocratic regimes. He ever so discreetly engaged in the well-established post-World War II tradition of attempting to overthrow regimes—despotic and democratically elected ones alike—that made the mistake of failing to align with American economic interests. And, of course, the single deed that he and his administration were most proud of—even six years after the fact—was an assassination.

It could be said that like Obama himself, Osama Bin Laden was more a symbol than a leader. And in politics, even in nations that swear by all the political saints that they are wedded to the rule of law, symbols are routinely given more importance than laws.

Nevertheless, history and the hope for peace between peoples and nations, to say nothing of the notion of the rule of law, would have been better served by the capture and trial of Bin Laden than by his illegal and deliberately disrespectful murder by SEAL team 6.

The American media saw it as an act of bravery and efficiency, two key components of US culture. It certainly stood out as a spectacular moment in history, the long awaited coda to 9/11, served up by the media to an avid public. After President Bush's shame at failing even to locate Bin Laden, his assassination shaped up for Obama as the equivalent to a buzzer-beater in his beloved game of basketball. In his farewell speech in Chicago, Obama himself cited with pride the assassination of Bin Laden as one of his four major achievements, alongside Obamacare, the Iran nuclear treaty and renewed relations with Cuba.

“OBAMA OUT”

The election of the sleazy real estate mogul Donald Trump ensures that Obama will be immediately regretted by many. Not only for the professional dignity he exuded compared with Trump's exaggerated vulgarity. He will also be regretted because of the chaos that America will experience in the wake of Trump's inauguration. One of the terrible ironies of history in 2017 is that, in comparison to his successor, President Obama will appear that much greater for having produced his greatest political failure, one that will mark the history of the nation in the 21st century: the failure to secure a stable succession.

Donald Trump represents not just the decline of the American empire—which was already under way despite Obama's concerted effort to maintain it

militarily—but also and more significantly, the collapse of American democracy. This starts with the collapse of the belief in American democracy. Elected with nearly 3 million fewer votes than his rival, Trump triumphed thanks to an unusual combination of circumstances. First among them, of course, is the curious relic called the Electoral College, an ad hoc institution designed for the needs of a confederation of disparate states rather than those of a unified nation.

More significantly, Trump profited from the deep contradictions of a political culture nourished for decades by both parties. Democrats and Republicans alike have consistently attempted to justify themselves and build momentum by reciting credos that increasingly diverged from the reality of their policies.

The Republicans maintained the myth of an economy fueled by small entrepreneurs and family businesses while aligning their politics on the needs of multinational companies and global capitalism. The Democrats maintained the myth of caring for the common man while equally aligning their policies on the needs of global capitalism, the inevitable source of finance for their campaigns.

The Republicans proclaimed their active faith in trickle-down economics. They did so in the name of absolute liberty, with no channels to ensure that the trickle arrived in any particular place. Nature would do the rest. The Democrats allowed capitalistic greed to

seed the clouds of economic success, but promised to build onto the rooftops of businesses the gutters and drainpipes that would send the rainwater into selected irrigation channels that benefit the common man.

Obama's Affordable Care Act exemplified this approach. It started by honoring the capitalist principle of profit for powerful private enterprises, the insurers, and then busied itself by building the drains that would irrigate a greater number of people who could afford and opt for health care.

FATAL TRENDS

Voters lining up with both parties continued to buy into these dogmas, comforted in their choice by the fact that the economy remained globally prosperous, whoever was in power, and that the consumer society continued to deliver the goods they craved. But cracks in the foundation began to appear. The numbers of voters identifying as either Republicans or Democrats fell over time to levels that no longer radiated the effect of moral adherence to a set of ideals that has always been the key to keeping democratic institutions stable. By 2016, both parties had fallen below 30%, ceding the plurality to independents, people with no fixed dogma or vision of governance.

Bernie Sanders, an independent culturally affiliated with the Democrats, made his move against the would-be Democratic dynasty of the Clintons,

while Trump—of no fixed party persuasion—countered and quickly eliminated the designated heir of the Bush dynasty on the Republican side, before side-lining all the others.

One other crucial factor doomed the Democrats: their obstinate belief in the pseudo-science of political marketing and candidate branding. They held the demographics of party loyalty to be an infallible science. The historical trend that resulted in a mathematical weakening of the white majority, a phenomenon that Obama's two elections appeared to conclusively validate, promised a bright future for Democratic organizers. This belief, coupled with the well-honed professional ability to fashion a platform pleasing to the targeted public and model the candidate's discourse around themes identified through "scientific" polling, led not just the Democrats but also the media and the pollsters to believe Hillary Clinton's victory was inevitable.

The icing on the promised cake was their mistaken confidence in the brand value of dynastic names. They should have called this feature of the campaign into question as soon as Jeb Bush faltered in the Republican primaries, fatally wounded by Trump's unscientific but highly effective bandying of the epithet, "low energy."

The year 2016, therefore, became the perfect electoral storm to weaken the foundations of the two parties that had shared power in Washington for more a

century and a half. We are now left wondering whether either of them can survive intact. If not, we must ask: What might replace them, and what new source of talent can be identified capable of running a complex global political, economic and military machine?

The obvious answer suggested by Trump's victory and his initial efforts to form a cabinet is business leaders, the captains of finance and industry. This may seem contradictory with Trump's campaign promise to liberate the government from the grip of Wall Street. But it turned out to be a clever strategy on Trump's part. If we go back and listen to what he said at the time, we will notice that he was only promising to liberate campaign financing, not government, from Wall Street—in order for him to ride to victory on his own fortune.

The real question we should ask is not whether the parties can or should survive in their traditional form, but whether the political culture that they thrived on will survive. It was built on two levels of implicit trust: 1) trust in the capacity of the party structures to manage and ensure the legitimacy of a bureaucracy that made things work; 2) trust in a powerful economy to find ways of rewarding the population. Many feel both of those forms of trust have faded beyond redemption. The repeated historic failures in Congress of both parties and the more than apparent disconnect between discourse and reality have pushed distrust to the

tipping point. With the impending chaos of a Trump presidency, the moment of paradigm shift may be upon us.

THE WEIGHT OF HISTORY

We are witnessing the accelerated disarray of a political system, one that for several decades had confidently gone about its business of electing parties rather than leaders to its highest office. The logic of the system dates back to the aftermath of World War II, when the US resolutely assumed the role of the leading global power. Given the scope of the organization required to build and run a global political economy, it was no longer physically possible for individual politicians to assume and execute the role of visionary leader and bold decision-maker.

Franklin D. Roosevelt was the last one to play that kind of role, which had previously suited George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson, Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson. John F. Kennedy was the first post-war president to understand the attraction of that role for the public. He was also the first to turn it into a public spectacle focused as much on his lifestyle as it was on pragmatic political programs.

Even if Kennedy had wanted to, he couldn't have succeeded because the system had matured to the point of governing itself. Presidential politics could henceforth be defined, in electoral terms, as a popularity contest for political celebrities, while in the

background a system of complex interests with global implications held the reins over government organization and action.

This reflected an approach to the political economy and organization that had first successfully developed by none other than Adolf Hitler, who had benefited from the assistance and complicity of top American industrialists and bankers in the 1930s. The great German novelist, Thomas Mann, who fled Hitler's Germany in 1938 to become an American citizen, was one of the first to notice the resemblance in the years following the Allied victory. His observations were not well received. In 1952, after brushes with HUAC, Mann moved back to Europe, disillusioned to the point of claiming that Hitler had won the war, not for the Third Reich but for the type of powerful military-industrial system he had created. Thomas Mann died in 1955.

The public first learned about the American version of a system with German design when outgoing President Dwight Eisenhower described the all-powerful military-industrial complex days before leaving office.

Despite Eisenhower's warnings, the trend continued for decades. Every president since Eisenhower has found the means to hide the reality from view. To clarify how far we have come since 1961, Glenn Greenwald reminds us of the current state of play: "The threat of being ruled by unaccountable and unelected entities is self-evident and

grave. That's especially true when the entity behind which so many are rallying is one with a long and deliberate history of lying, propaganda, war crimes, torture, and the worst atrocities imaginable."

The deep state now includes the formidable information gathering capacity of the National Security Agency (NSA), exposed by Edward Snowden, capable of accessing nearly everything that circulates on the internet. In 1961, the internet hadn't even been imagined yet. The power of the military-industrial complex has grown incomparably since Eisenhower's warning.

WHO CALLED THE SHOTS?

During Obama's eight years in office, the public had the opportunity to appreciate the tepid efforts he made to scale down the wars in the Middle East and applaud his intentions.

Many who appreciate his personality and style have, nevertheless, blamed him for betraying his early campaign promises. He not only failed to end those wars, but engaged in new ones (Libya, Syria, Yemen). He never closed Guantanamo. He refused to take the opportunity to defend civil liberties by challenging the overreach of the security state when its abuses were revealed by Snowden. He never punished or reformed Wall Street, but he did take measures to stabilize the economy, thereby forestalling a citizens' revolt against Wall Street. He continued a foreign policy of interference and

intervention in the politics of other nations—from Honduras to Somalia and beyond.

For his critics on the Democratic side aware of these issues, Obama was acknowledged as a great communicator but an ineffective president.

One can draw one of three obvious conclusions and mention for the record a supplementary delusional one, popular in some channels. Most Democrats affirm that Obama had nothing but good intentions but was thwarted by Congress on every initiative he took. The minority of cynics on the Democratic side will say that he had no wish to change anything, but was content to be a "good guy" president and represent the ideals of the Democratic Party. Critics on the Republican side saw him as a typical naive Democrat, ignorant of the laws of the marketplace and, therefore, incapable of getting any serious business done. Cynics on the Republican side, who have the occasional platform on Fox News, continue to believe that he wanted to install a socialist regime under Islamic law, abolish the Second Amendment and that it was only the patriotic obstruction of the Republicans in Congress that prevented him from succeeding.

The most rational explanation is the one for which President Eisenhower provided the clue. Whatever he knew, thought or had the intention to do, Obama was a prisoner of what today we

call the deep state: the nebulous entity Eisenhower termed the military-industrial complex. He was its spokesman, its political press secretary, or rather the talented actor who could learn the script and play the role. Or perhaps less like a player on the stage and more like a player of video games, he had choices to make but they were circumscribed by the algorithms fabricated by the deep state.

Government has itself become a video game, designed and produced by an industrial-military-financial conglomerate. The man or woman we like to call the most “powerful in the world” is simply a skilled user of complex piece of interactive software produced by a largely anonymous team of designers.

Obama was perfect for the role. The question now is, what about Trump? On the surface, he doesn't seem to suspect that that's what it's all about. Will he be the unwitting agent of change who exposes the sham, like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz? Or will he be eliminated through impeachment or some other procedure of neutralization? Once in office, will he learn the skills and adapt? Or will the deep state find the means of physically or morally lobotomizing him?

WHAT NEXT?

The show is about to begin. History has led us to a turning point. This is the question we need to ask and reflect on: Will we see emerging a new art of

government, kinder, gentler or more sinister?

It has become standard discourse among those who were stunned by the result of November's election to speculate on whether Trump will attempt to impose a neo-fascist regime because of his apparent narcissistic, solipsistic, xenophobic and racist instincts.

At the moment the new administration takes over, the real questions we need to ask ourselves are these: Will Trump's ham-handed style and Twitter addiction end up exposing the whole charade of politics programmed by the deep state? Or in the event that the political status quo of electoral politics traditionally guaranteed by the “good” Republicans and the “good” Democrats actually does implode beyond recognition, should we expect that a cabal composed of military-industrial personalities may come to the fore to re-establish order as in a banana republic?

It actually did nearly happen in 1933 with the Business Plot. Today, it seems a more likely scenario than that of Trump establishing a fascist regime under his personal control. He simply lacks the leadership skills.

We are all observers of history. But with the means of communication that exist today and the weakening of traditional political power networks, we may also become actors in a new form of democracy whose architecture is yet to be defined.

American citizens have been used to the routine of calling themselves Democrats or Republicans and showing up to vote (or simply watch on the sidelines) every four years.

The system of calling the population to vote in pre-programmed elections, first within primaries and then in a general election, has failed. It is no longer a viable model for democracy. We need to acknowledge the opportunity this represents to become engaged in the model that will replace it.

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Democracy Check: Trump at 100 Days

Ryan J. Suto

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An assessment of institutional democracy at the onset of the Trump administration.

Since his election to the US presidency on November 8, 2016, there has been much discussion as to whether Donald Trump is a rising authoritarian strongman who will bring the downfall of liberal democracy in the United States. Has this commentary been hyperbolic? While there are legitimate concerns regarding his presidency, are America's democratic institutions healthy enough to impede the policy agenda of Trump and his far-right administration?

In order to explore these questions and accurately assess the state of America's structural democracy at the 100-day mark of the Trump administration, this article uses *Assessing the Quality of Democracy: A Practical Guide* by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance as a source for required institutions in liberal democracies.

To limit the analysis, the article only considers actions and occurrences since President Trump's inauguration on January 20, 2017. As such, there is no analysis of campaign rhetoric or the 2016 US election. The following institutions are addressed below: transparency mechanisms, the legislature, the judiciary, the security

sector, the media, political parties and civil society.

TRANSPARENCY MECHANISMS

Transparency is the ability for citizens to know the actions of government, how tax dollars are spent and who benefits from governmental actions. This broad concept is a crucial element of democratic governance. Ideally, citizens should have access to information on the performance and decisions of politicians in order to cast informed votes in the next election. In the US, there exist various reporting and transparency requirements in administrative law, along with the Freedom of Information Act, designed to keep the public apprised of government action. Without legal transparency mechanisms, the public can easily be kept in the dark with respect to corruption, self-interested deals and the funneling of tax dollars to friends and family.

The first 100 days have seen Trump break with traditional, but not legal, transparency mechanisms: he is the first elected president since Richard Nixon to not release his tax returns, he refuses to disclose who meets with him at the White House, and he has ignored US Office of Government Ethics recommendations to divest from his assets that present conflicts of interest with his role as president.

Whereas President Jimmy Carter famously placed his peanut farm in a blind trust upon assuming office in 1977,

President Trump receives periodic updates from his son on the financial progress of his companies, to which he has financial access with no disclosure requirements. Notably, the president's proposed tax code reforms would directly and significantly benefit his own companies.

This is not an abstract discussion for academics: In full, The Atlantic produced a detailed list of nearly 40 potential conflicts of interest between Trump's government position and his private investments. The White House website has promoted the first lady's jewelry line, a senior White House official potentially violated federal law by promoting the president's daughter's clothing brand in an official interview, and the State Department and several embassies circulated a blog post that was merely a detailed profile of Trump's Florida property, Mar-A-Lago. On April 6, the Chinese government granted Ivanka Trump lucrative trademarks, the same day she met with the Chinese president in her capacity as the US president's daughter — who also holds an official position within the White House along with her husband.

Neither Trump, his family, nor his staff have faced legal ramifications for any of the above actions. Continued corruption and co-option of state resources for personal gain can undermine the rule of law, creating a culture of graft and governance as a means of profit. However, at present, the US has insufficient mechanisms for combating corruption and enforcing transparency:

the country has relied on informal traditions, voter discretion and an independent legislature to ensure America's executive does not gain or distribute improper spoils from the public coffers.

Those mechanisms have failed. The US has no effective office at the federal level that is un-elected, nonpartisan and dedicated to monitoring the use of public resources and investigating corruption with subpoena power. While the attorney general should fill this role, the position is nominated by the president and, as Trump has shown with respect to acting Attorney General Sally Yates, can be removed by the president. Trump's brazen corruption has exposed and exploited a weakness in America's democratic institutions, one that should be mitigated as soon as politicians who are willing to do so are elected.

LEGISLATURE

In democracies, the role of legislatures is clear: to create law, check the power of the executive and provide public debate and discussion as representatives of the citizenry. In a parliamentary system, the legislature can remove confidence in the prime minister and call for early elections. In the US, the bicameral structure requires that bills satisfy a variety of geographic constituencies before reaching the president's desk, allowing the chief executive only the ability to sign or veto legislation. However, various national crises and wars in US history have allowed for more power to concentrate

in the president's hands. At present, US presidents take an agenda-setting role with respect to Congress, especially within the first 100 days when the president is often most popular.

As Trump is no mainstream, entrenched member of the Republican Party, he has found difficulty in keeping a sufficient governing coalition in areas such as infrastructure investment and the construction of a wall along the US-Mexico border. Real divisions exist among congressional Republicans; the failure to repeal the Affordable Care Act (ACA), a conservative rallying cry for 7 years, despite presidential support and majorities in both Houses, remains an important example of both Trump's limited influence within Congress and the GOP's internal divisions.

Trump has shown little respect for the legislature during the first 100 days, however. He has signed more executive orders, which do not require action by Congress, than any other president since World War II. And when the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office provided estimates for the ACA replacement bill he supported, Trump attacked the assessment as, "just not believable," lending no legitimacy or deference to a non-partisan source widely respected on both sides of the political aisle.

The most problematic occurrence with respect to democracy and the rule of law is Congress' refusal to seriously investigate President Trump's financial conflicts of interest or his campaign's

potential coordination with the Russian government. The sham of an investigation by the Senate Intelligence Committee had no dedicated full-time staff to the endeavor until April 24, more than three months after the investigation formally began, and only amid public and Democratic pressure. In the House of Representatives, little effort has been made to subpoena testimony or documentation with respect to Michael Flynn, Trump's former national security adviser who failed to disclose payments from the Russian government. Congressional Republicans have spent much the first 100 days under a Republican president overlooking potential for corruption for foreign influence at the highest level of governance in favor of political loyalty and pet legislative goals.

According to a poll published in The Wall Street Journal, the American people are not surprised, having little confidence that a Republican-controlled Congress can effectively act as an independent check against a Republican president.

While Congress may not have acted as a rubber stamp during the first 100 days of the Trump presidency, it has shown a problematic willingness to turn a blind eye to executive behaviors which, if unaddressed, can undermine the democratic foundation of the US federal government. The extreme partisanship that has led to this propensity must be addressed; otherwise, divided government will mean only gridlock and unified government will mean only blank

checks for governmental malfeasance and corruption.

JUDICIARY

In a liberal democracy, the judiciary is tasked with navigating the tensions between a liberal ideal of inherent rights and the popular currents that ebb and flow within society. Ideally, judges are insulated from political consequence, theoretically allowing them to issue legally just decisions, irrespective of public sentiment or policies of elected officials. The judiciary generally maintains no armed force nor wins any election, requiring other political actors respect the institution itself instead of power or popularity. Without the respect, confidence and deference of politicians, government officials and citizens, the judiciary is merely a handful of lawyers in robes.

In the United States, the Constitution's structure implies the ability for courts to rule government action unconstitutional, as detailed in *Marbury v. Madison*, 5 U.S. 137 (1803). While a vast majority of US history has seen Congress and the president respect those derived and implied powers, there have been exceptions. President Andrew Jackson famously ignored the Supreme Court's attempt to protect Native American property in *Worcester v. Georgia*, 31 U.S. (6 Pet.) 515 (1832), and Abraham Lincoln ignored the federal court decision *Ex parte Merryman*, 17 F. Cas. 144 (C.C.D. Md. 1861) (No. 9487). More recently, the Warren Court period of the Supreme Court, from 1953 to 1969,

regularly struck down governmental action in favor of individual liberties, seeking to limit discrimination based on race, national origin, religion or gender.

During President Trump's first 100 days in office, the administration has shown no respect for the powers of judicial review outlined in *Marbury v. Madison*. After a federal judge issued a temporary restraining order with respect to his Muslim ban, Executive Order (EO) 13769, Trump referred to him as a "so-called judge" and the administration claimed "unreviewable authority" in the arena of immigration. The Court of Appeals affirmed the judge's decision, leading to Trump's veiled threat to "break up" the Ninth Circuit from which the ruling originated. Trump then issued a second Muslim ban, EO 13780, which was again blocked by federal judges, one from Hawaii.

Thereafter, Attorney General Jeff Sessions stated: "I really am amazed that a judge sitting on an island in the Pacific can issue an order that stops the president of the United States from what appears to be clearly his statutory and constitutional power." Slight toward Hawaii notwithstanding, this statement shows either a misunderstanding of or disagreement with the fundamental principle of American democracy that the judiciary can declare governmental actions unconstitutional.

In striking down the successive Muslim bans, as well as blocking an executive order removing funds from cities that are uncooperative with federal immigration

enforcement, the judiciary has acted as intended: a protection of minority rights against the popular passions of the people.

Challenges to democracy remain, however: there are many areas of policy, called Political Questions, where the US federal judiciary traditionally refuses to weigh in. Further, in 2016, the Republicans took the politicization of the judiciary further than ever before with the refusal to even hold hearings on President Barack Obama's nominee to the Supreme Court, giving Trump his first choice for adding to the court in Neil Gorsuch. However, despite Republicans' general lack of respect for, or trust in, judges, the judiciary remains the most respected branch of the federal government among the general population, likely because judges are traditionally not overtly partisan.

As Trump cannot arbitrarily remove judges for dissent, and that the American people generally trust judges more than politicians, the judiciary remains a strong guarantor of democracy for the US.

SECURITY SECTOR

One way in which democracy can be imperiled is through the weaponization of the security sector. The military and law enforcement agencies have, in various authoritarian and failed democratic contexts, become either politicized or turned against specific groups in society which have drawn the ire of the chief executive. Further,

without civilian control over the military, popular generals have engaged in coup d'états in otherwise democratic states. Intelligence agencies have surveilled on opposition leaders to either expose or fabricate wrongdoing, and police forces have targeted unpopular or minority groups as part of a broader authoritarian agenda.

During the first 100 days, the US military has shown promising developments for the maintenance of democracy. Secretary of Defense James Mattis has contradicted the president on several occasions with respect to issues such as the role of the media, selecting Pentagon staff and the existence of global climate change. A career military man, Mattis seems to understand the institutional and limited role the US Army plays in maintaining and protecting American democracy. If Trump has any intention of utilizing the military domestically in a direct threat to democracy, there is no evidence it would happen on Secretary Mattis' watch.

Nonetheless, Trump has shown some troubling domestic intentions for his use of America's broad and expansive security sector, such as threats to the traditional insulation of the FBI and CIA from White House intervention and political meddling. Trump aides have unethically and potentially illegally intervened in ongoing investigations of Trump's presidential campaign, troubling and ongoing concerns that must be monitored as his presidency continues.

Most troubling, however, was the vague language of his Muslim ban executive orders, which gave little guidance to officers on the ground, or their supervisors, on how to properly enforce the order within existing constitutional limits of search and detention. Further, as the unions representing Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents and border patrol officers endorsed Trump early in his candidacy, many individuals tasked with enforcing the policy were fully onboard with Trump's xenophobic messaging, empowered to carry out the intention of Trump's policy. As accounts of abuse by federal agents of legal permanent residents, tourists and some non-white citizens bubbled from the terminals of international airports around the nation, Trump offered no enforcement guidance or condemnation. Even after a court order enjoined the Executive Order, officials continued to enforce Trump's wishes, likely in violation of federal law.

Over a month later, episodes continue to surface of Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents acting beyond their constitutional authority — met only by the administration's desire to decrease hiring standards in order to increase the number of CBP agents on the ground. Importantly, by not making law enforcement policy in a centralized manner high in the chain of command, Trump allowed for the intent of the language to be interpreted later by individuals on the ground tasked with enforcement. This chaos and discriminatory application was not a glitch in Trump's policy, but rather a

crucial aspect in how it was intended to be enforced.

If any doubt existed that the Muslim bans were created with the intention to incite nationalistic animus, Trump has provided further evidence: he issued an order requiring the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to “make public a comprehensive list of criminal actions committed by aliens,” created VOICE, an office dedicated to providing information about illegal immigrants who have committed crimes, and habitually ignores terrorism committed by white people.

MEDIA

Journalism’s position as the only profession mentioned in the US Constitution is representative of its uniquely important role in liberal democracy. A press, free of both imposed- and self-censorship, is required to uncover wrongdoing, inform citizens of government performance, engage in policy debates that inform voters and hold officials accountable for their actions. Because of this, the Supreme Court has recognized broad protections for the press under the First Amendment. While the press experiences at least some friction with all presidential administrations, journalists in the US have generally enjoyed relative freedom to pursue their stories.

However, both before and during the first 100 days in office, the Trump administration has been openly

antagonistic toward the press. The White House Correspondents Association has been forced to advocate more with this administration than any other in recent memory for the ability to ask questions required to function as independent checks on the government. The president has such open contempt for any criticism that, according to nine First Amendment experts, the administration’s barring of credentialed press from a press briefing based on editorial viewpoint may have violated the Constitution.

As of this writing Trump has tweeted the phrase “fake news” 30 times since taking office, aimed at any organization or story that may be critical of the president’s narrative. In fact, the president described the “intent” of The New York Times to be “so evil and so bad.” But most alarmingly, at the Conservative Political Action Conference, Trump referred to the media as the “enemy of the people” and his chief strategist Steve Bannon referred to them as the “opposition party.”

The likely goal of the White House is to undermine public trust in any article or organization that does not paint the administration in a positive light. “Any negative polls are fake news,” Trump tweeted on February 6. The president also threatened to “open up the libel laws” in order to sue news organizations. This was presumably uttered to intimidate journalists from publishing criticism, though a vast majority of libel law is found at the state

level, far beyond Trump's power to reform. Nonetheless, any attempts to limit press access or independence threaten an important pillar of democracy.

Despite the hostility, media organizations have challenged the president when the White House has repeatedly proffered spurious claims, though ideologically aligned outlets have furthered government statements uncritically. Many organizations have combated the fury of demonstrably false statements from the White House with fact checks within headlines themselves.

A less visible, though equally pernicious, threat to democracy is self-censorship: the act of rejecting, toning down or avoiding overtly negative reporting in the interest of future access, to avoid retaliation by officials or to satisfy readers. In Washington, where many journalists and administration officials know each other by first name, a reporter can easily justify self-censorship in hopes to maintain a contact or satisfy a risk-averse editor, especially under an administration that pays such close attention to critical coverage. However, in fear-based societies, self-censorship prevents the public dialogue and precipitates repression. If the press is to continue to provide Americans with an objective and critical understanding of the presidency, their coverage must remain "uninhibited, robust, and wide-open" in the interest of the health of our democracy.

POLITICAL PARTIES

Despite the general disdain for the two major parties among American voters, a political party system remains vital to modern institutional democracy. Parties allow for voters to easily understand a candidate's stances on a wide array of issues, build capacity for civic engagement and hold other parties accountable for government abuse or overreach. Those roles can be compromised, however, if an executive can unfairly tip the playing field to advantage or favor one party above others, or co-opt the governing apparatus to serve the political interests of a particular party.

Regardless of having sweeping majorities in both Houses of Congress, President Trump has raised no notable concerns with respect to the existing party structure. While Trump has brought into his administration Reince Priebus, the former chair of the Republican National Committee, this is not unusual for American presidents so long as the aides formally hold no position within the political party during their White House tenure. The Democratic Party, while currently possessing little power in Washington, has seen a surge of candidates declare for the 2018 midterm elections — potential evidence of renewed energy among the party's new base.

At present, both major political parties remain independent of the government and inappropriate regulation, such as election laws, ballot access reforms or

targeted IRS action which disproportionately hinder or favor political parties unequally. No policies furthered by Trump at this time threaten the Democratic Party itself or favor the Republican Party as an organization. While there are drawbacks to having only two nationally effective parties, one clear benefit is they are likely too powerful for an individual to easily coopt or marginalize.

CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil society consists of formal and informal groups and organizations formed within a society that are fully independent of the structures of governance. Civil society need not be political: everything from your local chess club to the Boy Scouts of America count. As democracies require citizens to be independently active, be familiar with leadership positions and maintain a culture of power-sharing, civil society is viewed as crucial in creating and maintaining citizen participation in, and vigilance over, state governance.

The United States has a robust culture of civil society, but has been criticized since the turn of the century for calcifying in apathy. However, the Tea Party protest movement on the right, springing to life amidst the 2010 midterm elections, showed that grassroots ad hoc civil society in the US can impact governance at both local and national levels.

Since Trump took office 100 days ago, Americans have engaged in grassroots

politics at a level not seen in a generation, with the possible exception of the Tea Party. The scene has mostly been in major cities, beginning with the Women's March the day after Trump's inauguration where over 2 million people flooded city streets, which has set the tone for nearly all events that have since followed. Following Trump's Muslim ban, tens of thousands of Americans gathered in US international airports around the country to protest the executive order. Thousands of businesses in cities across the US closed on a declared "Day Without Immigrants." In the weekends leading up to the 100-day marker, over 120,000 participated in the Tax March and hundreds of thousands for the March for Science, both occurring in cities from coast to coast. Elsewhere, usually routine town hall meetings for Republican lawmakers have been flooded with protesters. The American people are paying attention to Washington and are showing their frustration.

President Trump, for his part, has dismissed all of the above events as being fueled by "paid protesters," exclaiming that the "election is over!" — similar to rhetoric used by the Obama administration in response to the Tea Party, though more forceful. However, Trump has gone further than Obama ever did; for example, he threatened the University of California, Berkeley with a withdrawal of federal funding when protesters forced the cancellation of an event featuring an alt-right speaker. Further, Trump's inexplicable obsession

with asserting demonstrably false accounts of the size of the crowd at his inauguration compared to that of Obama's may be an intentional attempt to blur the lines between truth and falsity, ensuring his supporters trust White House claims above all others when he seeks to refute objective criticism.

There has also been a disturbing aspect to civil society under Trump: The country has seen an explosion of hate groups recently, emboldened by the president's xenophobic and nationalistic rhetoric. White nationalist groups are becoming more open about their racist goals and are preparing for violence.

Taken as a whole, the president himself is in no way an ally of civil society and active public engagement. He sees dissenters as illegitimate agitators and publicly ignores the racism and crimes of his allies. However, despite these factors and the disturbing increase in hate groups around the country, the past 100 days have shown that citizens of all stripes in the US are paying close attention to their elected officials and are vocal to oppose them when they see fit.

THE ROAD AHEAD

In viewing the first 100 days of the Trump presidency with respect to America's liberal democratic institutions, a worrying trend appears. The president himself, and those he surrounds himself with, has little to no regard for structural or conceptual limits to his office or his role as an employee of The People.

Trump's actions betray a desire to unilaterally exert control over much of the American body politic, a decidedly illiberal and undemocratic aim. More kakistocracy than meritocracy, however, this administration stands as much in its own way of cementing unilateral rule as any other segment of American political society. Its failure to court a broader range of the congressional Republicans and insistence on positioning both the judiciary and media as his enemies have neutered Trump's potential to consolidating power. Judges, activists, journalists and minority groups have proven willing and able to marginalize the administration when necessary.

This should bring no comfort, as America's democratic institutions must be updated for the 21st century if they are to prevent 21st-century authoritarianism. Trump's first 100 days have shown that strong anti-corruption institutions, the legalization of transparency traditions, law enforcement reform and broader support for objective journalism are needed to enhance American democracy, to say nothing of needed electoral reforms regarding gerrymandering and campaign finance.

While the US Constitution has not changed, gone are the days of emperors and revolutionaries who dramatically seize control of the state. This outdated notion of authoritarianism has been replaced by a gradual erosion of public confidence in governing institutions, a growing cultural acceptance of corruption and increased

incentives for self-censorship. While President Trump will not achieve these aims during his four-year term in office, without targeted reform the next authoritarian-leaning politician may lead America a step further from liberal democracy.

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Trump's Extreme Vetting Charade

Samuel Guzman
June 20, 2017

The scant new vetting measures the administration has imposed have all the flavor of the extreme vetting Trump has promised, without any of the punch.

Donald Trump keeps trying to tout the need for a travel ban on visitors from six Muslim-majority nations, despite the latest legal setback to his crusade. A second federal appeals court slapped down his revised travel ban, following a similar decision in May by the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals. Earlier this month, seemingly increasingly exasperated over his apparent inability to impose the ban, the president

tweeted: "In any event we are EXTREME VETTING people coming into the U.S. in order to help keep our country safe. The courts are slow and political!"

Yet as Anthony Romero, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), puts it, "The manner in which they have been pursuing the legal case undercuts the argument for the urgency of the executive order." After the first ban was shut down and an appeals court declined to reinstate it, Trump's attorneys requested more than a month to write the second version of the ban instead of fighting over the original one. When federal judges blocked the second version of the ban, the Justice Department asked the Supreme Court to review the case — not in an expedited process, but as part of its normal proceedings next fall.

Such a meandering approach by Trump's lawyers — combined with the slow manner in which the administration has been reviewing existing measures — raises the question of whether the rhetoric is nothing more than a ploy to appeal to the president's base. After all, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the State Department, the two main agencies that deal with border control and visa approvals, have always had a vast mandate to evaluate potential threats and to tightly scrutinize visa applicants. DHS alone has roughly 2,000 staff spread across 80 countries running programs targeting high-risk travelers, making Trump's insistence on the need for more extreme-vetting

measures all the more ludicrous. His disingenuous and myopic obsession with border control will only succeed in destroying the global reputation of the United States while doing little to protect its people.

Indeed, the scant new vetting measures the administration has imposed have all the flavor of the extreme vetting Trump has promised, without any of the punch. For instance, Trump's promise in August 2016 to impose tests to discover hostile ideologies in potential immigrants and to select only those who "we expect to flourish in our country" are still unrealized. Expert groups, such as the American Immigration Lawyers Association, have so far seen very few concrete changes to the screening process.

The only new vetting measure that has been publicly acknowledged will, it seems, add a new hurdle to the visa application process while doing little to actually tighten security. For example, in late May, the administration approved a new questionnaire that asks US visa applicants to divulge all the social media handles and email addresses they have used in the previous five years. The new step is likely to produce a great deal more paperwork, but it is doubtful that it will do much to stop aspiring terrorists.

Tashfeen Malik, for instance, a US permanent resident from Pakistan who committed the San Bernardino terrorist attack with her husband in 2015, had made her extremist sympathies clear on Facebook, but mainly in the form of

private messages or posts, raising the question of just how useful the new questionnaire would be.

The policies Trump is pursuing stand in stark contrast to the European Union, which has a much more pragmatic approach to border control and visa processing. The EU's 26-nation Schengen area already allows passport- and visa-free travel within its borders. And even though more terrorist activity has occurred in Europe recently, the EU continues to strategically lift visa restrictions for certain countries, part of a drive to boost trade, tourism, exchange and, therefore, economic growth. This policy is founded on the fact that most terrorist incidents in Europe — as is also true in the US — are carried out by long-term legal residents, not recent immigrants or temporary visitors.

Most recently, for instance, the EU approved visa-free travel for Ukrainian citizens holding biometric passports, a fulfillment of a longstanding commitment, part of a drive to undercut Russian influence in the country following its annexation of Crimea. Several months earlier, in February, the EU approved a proposal on visa liberalization for Georgia.

Both sides view visa-free travel to Europe as part of a geopolitical dispute with Russia over Georgia's Western inclinations, which Moscow opposes. In 2016, Brussels signed a short-stay visa waiver agreement with Peru. Peruvians' newfound access to Europe was

bolstered by their new biometric passports, made by a consortium led by France's Imprimerie Nationale. The measure is expected to boost travel from Peru by 15% in the first year.

Europe's continued drive to streamline border entry systems, in contrast with US policies, are both supporting some of Brussels' geopolitical goals and making the continent a far more welcoming destination for tourists, academic talent and businesspeople. Meanwhile, last month, more than 50 US academic and educational groups sent a letter to the State Department warning that "unacceptably long delays in processing" could hurt the ability of American higher education institutions to recruit top international students.

There has also been a significant drop in US tourism, known as the "Trump slump," which is predicted to result in 4.3 million fewer visitors this year, adding up to a loss of \$7.4 billion in revenue. If Trump really wants to "make America great again," he should give up his "extreme vetting" charade and make the country more, not less, welcoming to travelers.

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Racism in America Is Alive and Well

S. Suresh

August 18, 2017

Fifteen decades after abolishing slavery, a non-contrite America is still a slave to its racist past.

It is 152 years since the bloody civil war that tore America apart ended and slavery officially abolished. While blacks are no longer slaves today, are they truly free? In a country where all are equal, why would we still need movements like Black Lives Matter?

The truth is America has not really come to terms with its ugly, racial bigotry and injustices. Certainly not in the way South Africa has managed to heal and rebuild after enduring one of the most brutal racial divides of the 20th century. South African poet and writer Don Mattera explains succinctly how a nation can take collective responsibility in righting the wrongs of its past: "Sorry is not just a word — it's a deed, an act." It took leaders of the stature of Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu to not only lead South Africa out of apartheid, but aid in its subsequent healing.

In strong contrast to that caliber of leadership, America has elected Donald Trump as its 45th president. His rise to ascendancy was driven by a campaign that not only lacked basic human decency, but was filled with xenophobia, Islamophobia and misogyny. His hateful rhetoric has successfully managed to stoke the simmering racial tensions in

the country, culminating in the events in Charlottesville, Virginia on August 12.

SENSATIONALISM?

American media have never helped the nation look within and confront the ghosts of the past. While it is no surprise that right-leaning media choose to turn a blind eye to the truth, it is disappointing that the left-leaning ones also choose sensationalism over substance. The handling of Trump's campaign and his ill-thought-out tweets has made a mockery of news, creating a reality presidential show.

Still, when it comes to describing hate perpetrated by white men, the media choose their words carefully. You will not hear the words terrorist, racist and riots when it comes to describing actions of white men. Instead, you will hear the phrases freedom of speech, shooter and mentally disturbed. A year after the Charleston church shooting massacre, covering the trial of the racist, white supremacist perpetrator, CNN's headline read: "Mass shooter Dylann Roof, with a laugh, confesses, 'I did it.'"

Yet when it comes to protests driven by the need to stand up for basic human rights and dignity, riots and unruly behavior are the terms that will dominate the airwaves. You will be hard pressed to find a headline that describes the incidents in Ferguson following Michael Brown's death as "unrest." The killing of Brown, who was shot dead by Officer Darren Wilson, caused the Ferguson unrest in August 2014. When

a grand jury comprising nine white and three black people did not indict the police officer, a second wave of unrest followed in November. While there are innumerable instances of blatant racism, what happened in Ferguson epitomizes the racial injustice prevalent in America today.

FREEDOM TO HATE?

While the First Amendment guards an individual's right to free speech, should it also protect extreme viewpoints that espouse hatred toward others? Certain aspects of speech such as obscenity, defamation, blackmail and threats are considered unprotected.

What happened in Charlottesville, Virginia was not an expression of freedom of speech. Calling themselves white supremacists and assembling to "Unite the Right" to take back the country is a veiled threat that ought not to be considered free speech. That this rally was organized to protest the dismantling of Confederate statues speaks to the lingering racial tensions from decades past that have never been properly quelled.

A compilation by the Southern Poverty Law Center has identified that there are 917 hate groups functioning within the US. These groups hate others in the name of race, religion, color and sexual orientation. The explosive growth seen in the number of hate groups since the turn of the century is in part attributed to the rise in immigration and the

prediction that by 2040, whites will no longer be a majority in the country.

America is at an inflection point today. Led by a combative president who unabashedly aligns with white supremacists and an attorney general who promises to toughen its already broken criminal justice system, it is now up to the people of this nation to take on healing this racial divide lest it becomes an insurmountable chasm.

COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

A nation of immigrants that committed unspeakable acts of horror that virtually decimated the indigenous people of the land has no moral right to exclude people fleeing persecution elsewhere or seeking to improve their economic well-being by coming to America. The collective responsibility of the nation, its lawmakers and the president is to welcome them with compassionate policies, perhaps taking a measured approach, rather than build walls around us.

Abolishing slavery in 1865 did not mean the dawn of equality. On the contrary, America witnessed systematic racial and ethnic cleansing aimed not just at African-Americans, but Native Americans and Chinese-Americans during the lynching period until 1930s.

African-Americans were also subjected to persecution and segregation by Jim Crow laws until 1965. In the post-civil rights era, racial tensions are high strung from the War on Drugs and

police brutality against African-Americans. The period since 1980 has seen a staggering increase in incarceration rates following the War on Drugs with a disproportionate amount of African-American and Hispanic population being locked up.

With so much blood in its hand, America will, at some point in time, have to stop everything in its tracks to acknowledge its failings and atone for sins of its past.

Life, liberty and pursuit of happiness are unalienable rights given to all human beings. Not just white men. Pursuing happiness in life cannot be at the cost of hating others because of their race, color or sexual orientation.

And if we must explicitly call out hateful rhetoric as no longer protected by freedom of speech, it is our collective responsibility as a nation to make it happen.

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Why the National Anthem Protests Were Doomed to Fail

Charles Hoskinson

October 12, 2017

Protests of the US national anthem by athletes are doomed to failure because they are perceived as attacks on America itself, not just racism.

Now that the National Football League (NFL) has blinked in the showdown over players sitting and kneeling during the playing of the US national anthem, it's a good time to look at why the protests were doomed to failure from the start.

The protesting players wanted to raise awareness about abuses of power by police. Concerns over such abuses are widespread and have the potential to unite liberals, conservatives and libertarians in the search for solutions. But the method chosen by the protesters couldn't have been more divisive, dooming their effort to failure.

The national anthem and the flag are symbols of the American nation, serving the same unifying purpose as those of other nations across the world. Absent their symbolic value, they would just be an old English drinking song and a piece of red-white-and-blue cloth.

It's that symbolic value which prompted protesters to target the anthem, drawing a negative reaction from most of their fellow citizens.

Since the 1980s, the fight against illegal drugs and rising rates of violent crime produced a political climate that allowed police in the US to greatly expand their power and limit their accountability for abuses. Though crime rates began to fall in the 1990s, fear of crime remained high in public perceptions, bolstering support for expanded, more aggressive policing combined with weak oversight.

But recent widespread reports of abuses — many seen as racially motivated — have left many black Americans in particular feeling as if they are powerless to influence how laws are enforced in their communities. Even in cities where black leaders dominate the political and judicial structure that controls law enforcement, many minority residents believe racial bias permeates the system, and they have reacted with protests and street violence.

Though race has been a factor in some of the well-publicized police abuse cases, there are bigger factors at play, most notably the militarization of police, as detailed in journalist Radley Balko's book, *Rise of the Warrior Cop*, which has led to them being seen in many communities as an occupying army. Impunity also is a factor, even in cases where officers overreacted, like the shooting of Philando Castile in Minnesota.

Calls for reform from both liberal and conservative activists and politicians had come long before quarterback Colin Kaepernick decided to sit for the national anthem at a San Francisco

49ers game on August 26, 2016, triggering a nationwide protest by football players and other athletes that mushroomed after President Donald Trump jumped in during September 2017 and said NFL owners should fire protesting players.

But Kaepernick had already fatally doomed the protest by setting a tone for it that was guaranteed to draw opposition from most Americans. In a statement released by his team after the first protest, Kaepernick said: "I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color."

THE LEFT IN AMERICA

It's not unusual for protests from the left to target national symbols. The practice of flag burning as a form of political protest emerged out of the anti-Vietnam War movement of the 1960s and has been declared a constitutionally-protected form of free expression. Though legal, it's not without a social cost: By targeting universal symbols of the American community, the left has marginalized itself as a political force relative to its strength in other countries.

The protesting athletes see themselves as heirs to the civil rights movement. In fact, they are kneeling into a headwind of disapproval from most Americans who see disrespect for the national symbols as disrespect for the nation itself. They are inviting their fellow countrymen to disregard their opinion

because they are delegitimizing the community itself.

It's one thing to protest racism in policing in America. It's something entirely different to claim America is racist.

This was not the moral tone set for the civil rights movement by Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1963 speech at the Lincoln Memorial. King, who was a master of rhetoric, portrayed racism and discrimination as anti-American, and declared that black people were entitled to the promise of the nation's founding documents as much as anyone else.

"When the architects of our Republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir," King said. "It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned."

The protests may drag on as NFL owners consider whether to require them to end amid complaints that the league is stifling the free speech of players. But they have already failed because Americans, including those who agree with the underlying issue of police abuses, stand against them.

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