

# Fair Observer

Monthly



May 2017

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

# Fair Observer Monthly



May 2017

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# ABOUT FAIR OBSERVER

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# Fair Observer Monthly

Atul Singh

May 31, 2017

For years, the US has engaged in “democracy-building” exercises around the world. This month, its own democracy appeared to be in peril. President Donald Trump fired James Comey, the director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. On television, Trump fired contestants on regular basis. Now, he has taken this habit to the White House. Sadly for American democracy, the White House sang in too many tunes to describe the Comey firing. Immediately after getting rid of the FBI boss, Trump met the foreign minister and ambassador of Russia. Naturally, this has not gone down too well in a country that fought a bitter, protracted Cold War against the land of Uncle Joseph Stalin.

James Fallows rightly argued that Trump’s Comey affair is much worse than Richard Nixon’s Watergate. War veteran Nixon was a complex character. He was both crook and statesman who created the Environmental Protection Agency and reached out to China. In contrast, Trump is an oafish conman with “woolly thinking, horrendous reasoning, stupefying ignorance and delusional confidence.” Yet such has been the withering of the American social contract that Trump is far less accountable than Nixon for his many misdeeds.

While the hopeful US was the source of grim news, crisis-ridden South Korea offered hope. Moon Jae-in was elected president. He is the son of refugees from North Korea who was once jailed for protesting against military strongman General Park Chung-hee. The general’s daughter was president until recently, but a sordid corruption scandal involving chaebols — South Korea’s infamous family-run conglomerates — and her close confidante proved too much for the country to swallow. As the economy tanked, protests grew and this young democracy has now turned to an awkward civil rights lawyer to reform the economy, deal with North Korea and maintain a fine balance between China and the US.

Fresh faced Emmanuel Macron offered hope too. He is the new president of France who is promising reform. After eviscerating the traditional parties of the left, Macron has won a spectacular victory. In some ways, it was a foregone conclusion, but the 39-year-old now has to reform an economy that has suffered from over 10%

unemployment since 1980 and that has rather poor social mobility despite all the money it pours on its welfare state.

Venezuela was in focus this month. Poverty, inflation, food scarcity, medicine shortages, crime, killings and injuries spiraled out of control. After years of populism, the limits of *Chavismo* are catching up with Venezuela's authoritarian regime. The country is facing "economic free fall, social upheaval and political chaos," and the opposition has turned to the streets. So, have supporters of the government. Instead of settling differences through debate and discussion, the government and the opposition are locked in a mortal combat that reduced Venezuela to discord and distress.

Islamic extremism was another source of distress in countries as far apart as Egypt and the Philippines. It also caused alarm in the UK with a bomb attack in Manchester. In 1996, this was where the Irish Republican Army detonated the biggest bomb in Great Britain since World War II. This time, the bomb was smaller but deadlier. In the aftermath of the tragedy, Mancunians demonstrated commendable solidarity, but hate crimes still doubled immediately afterward. This reminds us that violent ideologies and primal identities continue to be powerful and we have to guard vigilantly against them.

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



# How Will Emmanuel Macron Govern?

Cecile 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.

*\*Cecile Guerin is a French writer and analyst based in London.*

## **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 an Africa fellow at Young Professionals in Foreign Policy.*

# New Thinking on Education Needed to Compete in the World

Steve Westly

May 10, 2017

*To compete in the 21st-century global economy, America needs a 21st-century education system.*

Income inequality in America is at its [highest point since the 1920s](#). For all our divisions, Americans understand that too much of the wealth our economy is producing is going to those at the very top, while millions see stagnant or declining wages. We will not solve income inequality until we provide better equality of opportunity to all Americans. That effort begins with a commitment to public education that prepares every American to succeed in the 21st century.

In the 20th century, our public schools were the envy of the world and the foundation of our economic growth. Today, we've fallen behind. Only four countries spend more per student than the United States, yet American [high school students rank](#) 38th in the world in math and 24th in science. The next generation of Americans will not lead the global economy unless we restore our global leadership in public education.

To get there, we need to recruit the next generation of great teachers, update school curricula and empower teachers and students with tools fitting the 21st century.

The evidence is clear: The strongest driver of a student's success is the quality of their teachers. A landmark study in Tennessee found that when comparable 8-year-old students were given different teachers — one a high-performing teacher and one a low-performer — the student with the better teacher outperformed the other by 50% within three years. In 2011, [research](#) by Stanford economist Raj Chetty found that replacing a teacher in the bottom 5% of the teaching force with an average teacher increases a student's lifetime income by over \$250,000.

Recruiting the next generation of great teachers is our highest priority. This is not a new idea; it's what the world's most successful school systems are already doing. South Korea only recruits teachers in the top 5% of their graduating classes. Finland

recruits teachers in the top 10%, and Singapore and Hong Kong recruit teachers from the top third. By contrast, fewer than one in four teachers in the United States comes from the top third of their graduating class. In high-poverty districts, it's closer to one in 10.

To recruit the next generation of great teachers, we need to treat the teaching profession with the respect it deserves. Top-performing countries recognize that effective teaching demands rigorous training. In Finland, all teachers must have master's degrees. In Singapore, teachers must complete intensive education courses and 100 hours of professional development each year. Rigorous certification requirements make the teaching profession more attractive, not less. The result is a feedback loop: As we increase the prestige of teaching, we will recruit more and more talented graduates to join, further lifting the status of teachers in our society.

We can also amplify teachers' effectiveness. New technologies also make possible "blended learning" or "flipped classroom" approaches to teaching. Schools have already begun replacing classroom lectures with online tools that allow students to learn at their own pace. These tools allow teachers to serve as personalized coaches, identifying and responding individually to students' needs. Over 15 million students visit the free website [Quizlet](#) every month to take tests ranging from multiplying fractions to conjugating Spanish verbs. Schools can integrate these tools to let students learn at their own speeds and give teachers instant feedback about each student's progress.

These tools also offer alternatives to high-stakes, end-of-year tests that stifle creativity. Finally, it's time to bring school curricula into the 21st century. The world is changing at warp speed, yet our students still study the same subjects taught to their parents a generation ago. Starting in elementary school, students should be exposed not just to STEM — science, technology, engineering and mathematics — but to computer science and coding. Students know these principals intuitively; half the children in the world already use smartphones. Elementary school students can use educational programs like Sphero, Wonder Workshop and Lego Mindstorms to learn basic programming and design. Middle and high school students can learn basic programming languages like Python and statistics for data science and analytics.

America cannot compete in the 21st-century global economy without a 21st-century education system. To build it, we need to recruit the best teachers and make sure they have the tools to teach students the skills they need to succeed. America became the

envy of the world by investing in a public education system that built a strong middle class. It's time to rethink public education so that we provide every child an equal shot at achieving the American dream.

*\*Steve Westly is the founder of The Westly Group, a large sustainability venture capital firm.*

## 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 *Républicain* 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 grand-daughter 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 principles 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 *ancien 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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# The Case for Safe Zones in Syria

Shehab Al-Makahleh

May 13, 2017

*Jordan's unsecured borders pose a threat of even further chaos in the Middle East.*

Six years into the Syrian Civil War, Russia and Syria have spread their special operation forces to Syria's southern border with Jordan in an attempt to stop any sudden deployment of US or allied troops. This fact is going to change soon: According to Jordanian government spokesman, Mohammad Momani, American and British intelligence services are planning to start operating in Syria's south to pave the way for a wider ground intervention in that area to help establish safe zones.

The future scenario of the war in Syria will be determined after June, when Americans and Russians will sit down together to decide the possibility of setting up a humanitarian buffer zone to address the issues of refugees in northern Jordan.

In mid-April, there were talks about an American-led military intervention in southern Syria to establish a safe haven for refugees who heavily burden Jordan financially. Talks are ongoing to determine priorities. One move is to start an all-out war on the Islamic State (or Daesh) in Raqqa and Deir Al Zour, which may force the faction's fighters to seek an escape through southern Syria, imposing a threat to the Hashemite Kingdom. Another is creating a suitable and sustainable safe zone to soften the flow of refugees into Jordan, amid the violence following Daesh's loss of its stronghold in Raqqa, to alleviate Jordan of the burdens associated with its already crowded refugee centers.

Thus, with intensified fighting in southern Syria, where the Russian and Syrian armed forces are increasing their military operation to retake the city of Deraa, the tactical result will be to isolate this pocket from the Israeli and Jordanian borders.

This will mean the end of war in Syria, followed by a presidential election and a new constitution, with the Russians allowing Bashar al-Assad to decide whether he wants to proceed with his candidacy. Many Syrians would prefer to restore stability in the country rather than contest Assad's position as many long for the days of peace before the Arab Spring.



## **A VIEW FROM AMMAN**

Currently, the situation at the Jordanian-Syrian border appears stable due to high levels of coordination between the Russians and Jordanians to avoid incursions into Jordanian airspace and strikes on Jordanian territory by any party fighting on Syrian soil. Some sources in Jordan say that security and military coordination between Moscow and Amman is higher than ever.

In addition, Russia knows that neither Amman nor Damascus is interested in a clash in southern Syria as Jordan believes in the state of non-intervention in other countries' affairs. Amman, since the inception of Syria's Arab Spring, has voiced support for a peaceful solution to the conflict, leaving it to the people of Syria to decide their own future. Jordan, like many Sunni Arab states, welcomed the American cruise-missile strikes on the Syrian regime's Al Shuayrat Air Base near Homs.

The calls from various countries to establish a safe zone in southern Syria are important for Jordan. The Jordanian Armed Forces are stretched, with more than 50% of its troops deployed at the Jordanian-Syrian and Jordanian-Iraqi borders. In March, Sami Kafaween, chief of Jordan's border guard force, said that more than half of the Hashemite Kingdom's armed forces are devoted to securing Jordan's borders with Iraq and Syria. Since Jordan witnessed a number of terrorist attacks by the Islamic State in 2016, its armed forces are now coordinating with allies to keep the southern parts of Syria clear.

## **SAFE ZONES**

Following the May peace talks in Astana, the opposition and the Syrian government — with Turkish, Iranian and Russian approval — agreed to create four safe zones. The first will be in southern Syria, near the Jordanian border, to avoid any spillover of Daesh fighters into the kingdom. The second will be in northwest Syria, stretching across Aleppo, Idlib and Latakia. The third will stretch from the suburbs of Homs down to the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights to avoid military escalation in that area between Israeli and Syrian armed forces, where Hezbollah fighters and Iranian troops have a presence — a concern for the Israeli security officials. The fourth zone will be around Damascus, to contain Daesh fighters and other terrorist groups who may flee into

neighboring states in case of escalation of military action against its fighters. These areas will be announced at the end of the month.

This deal was a culmination of [Russian and American coordination](#), and the meeting between Russia's President Vladimir Putin and US President Donald Trump at the G20 in July 2017 is in line with this cooperation. The agreement was achieved following weeks of talks in Astana, welcomed by the Syrian government as a prelude to ending the war, now in its seventh year, which has already claimed more than [400,000 dead](#), displacing more than 11 million and causing extensive damage to the country's infrastructure estimated at \$600 billion according to Syrian government figures.

Recent visits by Syrian and Jordanian officials to Moscow and Washington are to secure guarantees that the border dividing the two countries will be honored and protected by establishing safe zones in Syria. Both Damascus and Amman recognize the repercussions of a breakdown in order on the Jordanian border and the broader consequences for not only Middle Eastern powers but also international actors such as China, Russia and the United States.

If Syria is weakened and new borders are demarcated, this will help set up new states in these zones that will consist mainly of non-state actors known to be uncontrollable, who present a threat to regional stability as well as to the interests of Beijing, Moscow and Washington in the Middle East.

Meetings between Iranian, Turkish and Russian defense ministers have led to these states shifting their positions on the concept of safe zones and a division of efforts may emerge between safe zones in both the north and the south of the country. Safe zones are a fundamental necessity that must be supported by a stronger military intervention in Syria to provide security and constabulary functions. Protecting Jordan's border this year is a fundamental requirement. Any failure may lead to a change to the Middle Eastern map, further shattering the Sykes-Picot deal during its centennial anniversary.

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# WannaCry: The Role of Government in Cyber-Intrusions

Gavin E.L. Hall

May 18, 2017

*What role should governments play when it comes to cybersecurity?*

The WannaCry cyber-incident of May 12, which involved the British National Health Service (NHS), has received a good deal of coverage. Comments focused on whether the attack was [preventable](#) and if it presents increased vulnerability for [public sector organizations](#), with substantive focus on the [use of the outdated Windows XP](#). Such analysis does, however, gloss over an essential question: What do we want the role of the government to be and, indeed, what could it or what should it be?

The role of the government in cybersecurity has two essential debates. First, the dividing line between corporate — including the public sector — and government responsibility. Second, if some role for the government is accepted, then which branch of government should have primacy or be involved at all? The [2016 National Cyber Security Strategy](#) attempts to delineate the responsibility of the individual, corporate and government.

The strategy established that the NHS and other public bodies had “the responsibility to safeguard the assets which they hold, maintain the services they provide, and incorporate the appropriate level of security into the products they sell.” In light of the [WannaCry malware infestation](#), from the operational perspective, the failure lies within the NHS itself as opposed to the government. However, with the strategic level in mind, it remains within the purview of the government “to protect citizens and the economy from harm” and that the government “is ultimately responsible for assuring national resilience ... and the maintenance of essential services and functions across the whole of government.”

In order to begin to think about the roles and responsibilities in UK cybersecurity, consider who holds the information regarding cyber-intrusions and malicious activity in the cyber-environment. The [National Cyber Security Centre](#) (NCSC), as part of the UK

Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), is the central data coordination point for government oversight of cyber-activity.

In March 2015, however, the government emphasized the [role of insurance companies](#) in managing and mitigating risk in the cyber-environment. Indeed, the cyber-insurance market has been growing in recent years and is expected to [grow significantly](#) following the WannaCry incident. Insurance companies, therefore, have an increasing amount of information on the preparedness and vulnerabilities of UK networks. How much of this information should be shared with the NCSC?

The immediate response is all of it. Considering that the exploit used by WannaCry was "[identified long ago](#)" by the US National Security Agency (NSA), perhaps a government agency as the central collation point for all cyber-environment data is not necessarily in the interest of enhancing security within the UK cybersecurity or, indeed, in the global commons.

So what could the government do?

The simple answer is not a lot. The removal of geographic boundaries, the increase in actors, the deniability of actors, the variations in potential target groups and the overall impact on social cohesion mean that the job is beyond the scope of the government as primary provider of cybersecurity for the nation, hence the blurred delineation seen in the 2016 strategy. Attempting to continue on the present course is reliant on the hope that no significant intrusions occur.

But cyber-intrusions will occur and the individual, corporate and public-sector bodies that utilize the cyber environment need to have a clear understanding that their data is their responsibility. The first step is an educational starting point that a cyber-intrusion will happen and you will lose data. The question then becomes how to minimize the loss and recover lost data, known as resilience. This role should be the government's concern in the cyber-environment to help minimize the harm suffered by an intrusion across all levels of the UK cyber-environment.

Furthermore, the accountability for individual, corporate or public sector aspects of cybersecurity should be transferred to the insurance industry. This means that body X with good investment in cybersecurity will pay a lower premium than body Y which has negligible investment or reliant on out-of-date technology. The effect of such a shift

would be that all entities would be forced to take cybersecurity seriously or face higher premiums and hit to the bottom line. For the public sector, not only will IT procurement have to be considered, but also a cost-benefit analysis of increasing premiums versus new infrastructure. It would be interesting to see a future intrusion in the public sector if the government has to admit that it chose the cheap option with its citizens' data.

*\*Gavin E.L. Hall is a doctoral researcher at the University of Birmingham*

# Kashmir Has Been Through Worse

Abhinav Pandya

May 19, 2017

*What lies behind the violence in Kashmir?*

It wasn't far back when we all jubilated over the peace process in Kashmir within the framework of [kashmiriyat](#) (Kashmir's cultural and political values), [jamhooriyat](#) (democracy) and [insaniyat](#) (humanity). Atal Bihari Vajpayee had declared a [unilateral ceasefire](#) for the holy month of Ramadan, and it seemed that some sort of breakthrough would be achieved soon. The breakthrough did not come, but at least there was fresh hope of change and peace. It seemed as if, even when a stable solution wasn't achieved, then at least the peace process would continue and Kashmir would retain an emotional connection and hope for New Delhi.

However, the Kashmir of 2017 looks very different. [Ikram Ullah writes in Foreign Policy](#): "India is losing whatever support it had among the general Kashmiri public, and this trend will continue unless it brings about a radical change in its Kashmir policy." He says the Indian government has been dishonest in dealing with Kashmir. It has continued with economic packages, but there is not even a distant hope of any breakthrough in the security situation.

Further, [Kashmiri youth are joining militant groups](#), and this feeling of alienation among Kashmiris can be seen in the large number of civilians attending the funerals of Hizbul and Lashkar militants with jihadi credentials like Burhan Wani, Shariq Ahmad Butt and Abu Qasim. This is an alarming development as it presents the twin challenge of radicalization and separatism. [Pratap Bhanu Mehta writes](#) that New Delhi's "strategy of

containment by force has failed,” and “Kashmir is more in the grip of militancy and radicalization at any point in the last 15 years.”

## FOMENTING PUBLIC UNREST

The whole issue has its moorings in the stone-pelting of Indian soldiers by civilians in the Kashmir Valley and the response of security forces to such unrest. Recent incidents where [a civilian was used as a human shield](#) and the use of [pellet guns](#) have been portrayed as the odious examples of state atrocity and ruthlessness at its peak. In addition, the image of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as Hindutva — an ideology seeking to establish the hegemony of Hindus and the Hindu way of life — hardliners has also blown the unreasonable fears out of proportion and created an atmosphere of suspicion, alienation, disconnect and fear. The jingoistic and hyper-nationalistic media frenzy, the brigade of Hindutva Twitter trolls, the rapaciousness of [cow-protection thugs](#) and the sporadic incidents of violence against Kashmiri students have added fuel to the fire and deepened the sense of alienation.

However, the issue is not as simple as it looks. The way it is being seen, in terms of the binaries of nationalism and anti-nationalism, is a fallacious approach to looking at such a critical development from the policy perspective. The international media have not been able to produce a nuanced analysis of the entire issue. They have downplayed the role of intense Wahhabi radicalization and that of Pakistan in sponsoring the stone-throwers. Recently, [The Times of India](#) brought forward substantial evidence of Pakistan’s envoy playing a crucial role in sponsoring the unrest, with the active involvement of separatist leaders like Shabbir Shah.

There are several layers to this issue. It could be an element of the psy-ops warfare by Pakistan, with its own strategic dividends. Although the policy has been in existence since 2008-09, its utility has increased manifold as of late. After a series of [fedayeen](#) attacks and Indian countermeasures in the form of surgical strikes, there is a possibility that in Pakistani strategic circles the fear of minor or major offensive action — overt or covert — at the behest of India has increased. The direct or indirect sponsoring of terrorist attacks as an option already exhausted its utility after the 2008 Mumbai attacks and the discovery of Osama bin Laden on Pakistani soil in 2011. In the global strategic and popular consciousness, Pakistan emerged as a country providing safe havens to terrorists.

Hence, it could be a new tactic to keep Kashmir restive. First, it is cost-effective and safe as there is no need to execute large-scale infiltration, sabotage activities and terrorist attacks. Second, there is no risk of being caught as with the Mumbai attacks. And as far as the reasons for keeping the [Kashmir issue](#) alive are concerned, a lot of them have to do with the internal dynamics of the Pakistani state, its raison d'être and the civil-military conflict. It might not be easy to engage India through conventional military and insurgency methods, but to psychologically demoralize a democratic state and disprove its credentials in front of the international community, fomenting public unrest can be a highly effective strategy.

As an old adage goes, one should hurt where it pinches the most, so the case of discrediting India and its robust democracy through pictures of schoolchildren throwing stones at security forces could convey a strong message about their faith in the Indian state and their willingness to remain as part of it. For Pakistan, it is easier and more rewarding for [The New York Times](#) to publish an opinion piece lambasting India for its perceived ruthlessness, with footage of civilians injured with pellet guns and humans being used as shields by the army, than organize a fedayeen attack on an Indian army base.

It could also be a blackmailing tool to compel the Indian state to negotiate with the extremist hardliners, thereby giving them more legitimacy, clout and appeal to such proxy popular agent provocateurs. There is an attempt to bring the Indian state to its knees. However, it seems unlikely that Kashmir's political parties, separatists leaders or the Pakistani state (meaning the army) have any genuine interest in finding a [lasting solution to the Kashmir issue](#), as all of them want to keep their utility intact for obvious reasons. Everyone wants a share of the pie that is already rotten.

Further, it leads to hyper-nationalistic sentiments across the nation. Added to this is the media frenzy and biased reporting of the entire issue where the only motive is to garner higher TV ratings by pitting the Kashmiris against India and fomenting such fanatic nationalism across the country. Then, the whole issue gets compounded by the perception of the BJP government as following a Hindutva agenda. The anti-minority bias of the present government could be a reality or a perception of something or both. However, the incidents of [Muslims being killed](#) by thugs of cow-protection vigilantes are definitely giving much-needed fodder to such perceptions and giving rise to fears among minorities.

## **RADICALIZATION**

Another dimension to the entire conflict is the unnoticed fact of [Wahhabi radicalization](#) in Kashmir and the damage being done to its syncretic culture that has historically thrived on the harmonious Sufi traditions. A large number of madrasas and Wahhabi preachers have mushroomed in the hinterlands of Kashmir, and the youth are coming under their influence.

This process is happening very smoothly because of its overlapping with the separatist sentiment. The intense religious radicalization has enabled strong mobilization of the youth around separatist sentiment, but its long-term repercussions are largely being ignored or unnoticed. Ultimately, the religious extremism will discredit the Kashmiri cause and contribute to further worsening of the situation, making the prospects of a political solution within the framework of the Indian constitution even more difficult.

The government's response so far has been ad-hoc, knee-jerk reactionary and emotional. Firstly, there is no strategy that reflects a nuanced understanding on the part of the Indian government of the classic strategic games of the Pakistani establishment. The response seems to be shuttling between a hardline approach and playing soft ball, at random or in response to the media coverage and public outcry. Such instances like the use of pellet guns and human shields are presented out of context, projecting only one side of the story. In turn, they add to the sentiment of separatism and the sense of alienation among Kashmiris. Thus, something that might have begun purely as a strategic move by the unfriendly neighbor starts gaining legitimacy and appeal among the people.

## **PLAYING THE GAME**

The policymakers need to understand these games and craft a well-calibrated strategy in response. The response has to be multi-pronged. First of all, it needs to be recognized that it is a political problem that needs a political solution. The law-and-order mindset can be the most atrocious blunder in such a delicate situation. Unless the government does not come up with fresh ideas for political solutions that are sensitive to the Kashmiri aspirations, the frustration among the youth will not subside. New Delhi needs to show its sincerity and honesty in providing a framework for a political solution. It cannot keep doling out economic packages to mask the real



problem. The government needs to see beyond the coterie of separatist leaders and engage the student leaders, business representatives and civil society working at the ground level.

Further, by not talking to separatist leaders, if New Delhi thinks that it has sidelined them then it's a misconception. By doing this, the government is giving them a free rein to engage Pakistan through hidden and open channels, thus opening the floodgates of sympathy for such provocateurs.

New Delhi needs to come out of these self-imposed mental barriers and engage the separatists not only to show its generosity to accommodate their sentiments, but also for the obvious reasons of statecraft. It does not befit the [world's largest democracy](#) with the ambitions of global leadership to make an amateurish display of its deep-rooted insecurities and rigidities.

However, the term of engagement with separatists is a field where India needs sharp analytical minds that can break the ice, if not make a perfect deal. The people who are assigned to such policymaking must be experts in intelligence, politics, diplomacy, negotiation and military affairs. Entrusting such a crucial task to people with a certain ideological bent may be the worst approach to resolving the Kashmir issue.

The government already has a template.

First, it can begin with [Vajpayee's Kashmir solution](#). The former Indian prime minister had displayed a statesman-like approach when he went an extra mile in 2001 and extended peace proposals based on democracy, humanity and Kashmir's cultural and political aspirations. *Kashmiriyat* and *insaniyat* are as relevant today as they were in 2001.

Second, media coverage of the issue needs to be taken seriously and appropriate corrective measures must be implemented.

Third, social media with its army of Twitter trolls needs to be kept in check if the state wants to prevent the passions from spiraling out of control.

Fourth, economic development, academic fellowships for Kashmiris and relief packages might work wonders in giving a healing touch.

Fifth, the government needs to condemn all cases of human-rights violations like the use of civilians as shields. There has to be a response mechanism outlining the reasonable use of force while dealing with stone-throwers.

Sixth, India also needs to convey its concerns, interests and sincere intentions to achieve a political breakthrough, in clear and precise terms, to the international community. While doing this, India must ensure the support of the world community, and strong diplomatic activity needs to be undertaken to expose the role of Pakistan in fomenting the unrest.

Finally, New Delhi must keep the seriousness of the issue intact. It cannot just let the entire issue acquire a communal color because of activities of the mobs of Hindu extremists and semi-literate media intellectuals. These are serious national security issues that must be kept out of the purview of such petty stakeholders and their narrow political and economic interests.

Kashmir has been through far worse phases. The present situation is not as disheartening as the valley of the 1990s. But if the genie is not tamed now, then it could spin out of control at any moment.

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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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## What's All This Talk About a Gulf-Israel Alliance?

Giorgio Cafiero and Andrea Petrelli

May 22, 2017

*In all probability, Israel's relationship with the Gulf monarchies will remain unofficial and controversial.*

Since Saudi Arabia's King Salman ascended to the throne in January 2015, there has been much discussion about an "unlikely partnership" or "tacit alliance" between Israel and the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members. Earlier this month, the Arab Gulf states [outlined](#) in an unreleased discussion paper an offer to establish better relations with Tel Aviv if Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu commits to reinvigorating the Palestinian peace process.

Under the terms, if Israel would halt the construction of settlements in the West Bank and permit freer trade into the Gaza Strip, the GCC states would establish direct telecommunication links with Israel, allow overflight rights to Israeli aircrafts and lift certain trade restrictions. Although Netanyahu's office declined to comment on the paper, the initiative underscores the vastly improved ties between Israel and the Arab Gulf states, which have no official diplomatic relations with Tel Aviv.

## **TACIT ALLIANCE**

In light of US President Donald Trump's decision to make Saudi Arabia and Israel the first two countries of his first official international trip this month, and his administration's stepped up anti-Iranian posturing and rhetoric, the idea of a more official GCC-Israel alliance would receive extensive support from the White House, as well as from American lawmakers on both sides of the aisle.

To be sure, there is an undeniable partnership between the Israelis and Arab Gulf states based on a common threat perception of Iran. Since 2016, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has participated in [joint military exercises](#) that included Israel. The most recent one, held in March, was aimed at "strengthening ties among the participating countries, maintain[ing] joint readiness and interoperability." In 2009, Tel Aviv lent its support to Abu Dhabi's bid to headquarter the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), now an Abu Dhabi-based international agency that assists countries with renewable-energy usage. In November 2015, Israel opened its [first diplomatic mission](#) in the UAE to represent itself as IRENA.

The story of [Mati Kochavi](#), an Israeli entrepreneur whose high-tech security companies built monitoring systems at New York's airports and undertook a major project in the UAE, is telling. Kochavi was a part-time resident of the US, with companies based in several countries. He offered one of his firm's services to the UAE's leaders. He was transparent about his company's technology and its employees being mainly Israeli. The Emirati officials maintained that, as long as none of the contractors were permanently based in Israel, there was no problem.

Kochavi's company, AGT International, based in Zurich, installed surveillance gear (cameras, sensors, license-plate readers, etc.) throughout the UAE's capital and along the country's border with Saudi Arabia. AGT International's operation in the UAE,

which lasted from 2007 to 2015, was “the most comprehensive integrated security system in the world at the time,” according to [Bloomberg](#). Kochavi managed it out of the US and Switzerland, but Logic Industries, another Kochavi company based in Israel, provided the brainpower for the project.

In addition to the UAE, Israel has cooperated with other Arab Gulf states. For decades, Israel and Saudi Arabia have maintained backchannel communications. Recently, since the Syrian crisis erupted, Saudi and Israeli officials have held meetings in Jordan to discuss Riyadh and Tel Aviv’s common concerns over the ongoing conflict. Israeli defense officials have engaged in covert dialogue with their Saudi counterparts on the Iran file too. Between the end of 2013 and June 2015, [Saudi and Israeli officials](#) secretly held five bilateral meetings in India, Italy and the Czech Republic to discuss what both governments perceive as a grave threat posed by Iran to the Middle East.

[Eran Etzion](#), a former head of policy planning at the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, noted that by 2009 there was security cooperation between Israel and the GCC members. This limited cooperation, nevertheless, set a precedent for enhanced collaboration in the months between the announcement of the Geneva interim agreement or Joint Plan of Action (JPOA) in November 2013 and the actual agreement, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), later in July 2015. During this period, Etzion claimed that Israeli and GCC officials were collaborating in their lobbying in the Beltway against Iran.

## **DOHA DEBATES**

There is also a history of significant interaction between Israel and Qatar. After the Israelis and Palestinians signed interim peace accords in 1993, Doha and other Arab governments lifted an economic ban on Israel. In 1996, Israel opened a [commercial office in Qatar](#) during a trip that then-[Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Shimon Peres](#) took to Doha. Over a decade later, Peres returned for the “Doha Debates” and answered 300 Arab students’ questions. Qatari-Israeli relations took a downturn in 2009, however, when Qatar [shut down](#) the commercial office in response to Operation Cast Lead.

Twice in 2010, Doha offered to [restore commercial ties](#) in exchange for Israel’s permission to provide Gaza with building materials and financial aid. Citing “security

reasons,” Israeli officials rejected both offers. However, since the devastation resulting from Operation Protective Edge, Israeli officials have cooperated with Qatar’s rebuilding of 1,000 homes in Gaza with the importation of materials into the strip all under Israel’s eyes. In 2013, an [Israeli delegation](#) visited Doha to discuss Qatari investment in Israel’s hi-tech sector. A year ago, [Netanyahu hinted](#) at returning to better relations between Israel and Qatar, when he expressed his hopes to receive an invitation to the Arab Gulf emirate during an online conversation with an Al Jazeera anchor.

Part of Israel’s interest in pursuing better ties with the GCC relates to Hamas and the Palestinian group’s relationship with Iran. The Israelis would prefer to see Hamas shift toward the GCC states’ sphere of influence while away from Iran’s. The logic is straightforward: Hamas receives arms from Iran while Qatar provides the group with humanitarian assistance, and given that Doha, unlike Tehran, is a close ally of Washington, the Qataris are not expected to provide resistance factions in Gaza with weapons. Thus, with Hamas within the orbit of the US’ “moderate” Sunni Arab Gulf instead of Iran’s, the Israelis believe the group will pose less of a threat. Given that Hamas’ ties with Tehran caused substantial friction between the [Palestinian group and Saudi Arabia](#) under King Abdullah’s rule (2005-2015), Riyadh and other GCC capitals would also prefer to see Hamas completely sever ties with Iran.

## **PERCEPTION OF THREAT**

The key question is the following: Can the threat perception of the Islamic Republic lead to more formalized relations between Israel and the GCC? This seems quite unrealistic given the positions embraced by Israel’s current government on the Palestinian question. Odds are good that the GCC states will not follow Egypt and Jordan in establishing formal diplomatic relations with Tel Aviv, unless Israel agrees to the Arab-Peace Initiative or some agreed-upon peaceful resolution to the Palestine-Israel conflict that gives Palestinians a sovereign and independent state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The GCC states are under pressure to keep a low profile when it comes to any cooperation with the Israelis. Although the Arab Gulf governments are keen to work pragmatically with those actors that share their interests, in the GCC countries public opinion is firmly on the side of the Palestinians in their conflict with Israel, even if the plight of Palestinians is not as much a central issue across the greater Arab world as it



once was decades ago. Arab Gulf rulers have to take stock of this reality. Their own countries' public opinion has pressured them to interact with Israel either discreetly or through a third party, such as Washington. Similarly, as underscored by both Qatar and Oman's closing of Israeli trade missions in their countries following violence against Palestinians in [2009](#) and [2000](#), respectively, the GCC governments cannot afford to be seen as too close to Tel Aviv when Palestinians are suffering under Israel's occupation and apartheid system.

Discussions about an Israel-GCC alliance will likely continue to intrigue many. Undoubtedly, Israel sees Iran's regime, much more so than any Sunni Arab one, as a threatening force. The Arab Gulf states, in turn, do not perceive Israel as a direct threat to their security, yet Saudi Arabia and some other council members view the Islamic Republic as an existential threat. Given that Israel and the GCC maintain close alliances with the US, there is certainly much more potential for deeper cooperation in the pursuit of countering Iran. Yet in all probability, Tel Aviv's relationship with the Arabian Peninsula's six monarchies will remain unofficial and controversial.

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## The Cambridge of Spies

Polina Popova

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*A Russian academic finds herself caught up in an unlikely spy scandal.*

Between Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson's push for the £100-million [Royal Yacht Britannia](#), the current government's "[trading nation](#)" narrative and Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn's plan to put the economy on a nationalized train [back to the 1970s](#), nostalgia seems to be writing the script of British political life. Unfortunately, Britain's trend of going back to the future does not stop at the gates of Westminster. As one unfortunate Cambridge historian has found out, the unsettling paranoia that Russians in the West are all spies among us has made an unsettling comeback.

The historian in question is Svetlana Lokhova, whose story is a disturbing exemplar of how tensions between Russia and the West are impacting the lives of average Russians living and working in the United Kingdom, Europe or the United States.

Because of brief interactions with former White House [National Security Adviser Michael Flynn](#) within the context of her work as an academic, Lokhova has been caught up in the scandal surrounding President Donald Trump's entourage and the extent of its involvement with Kremlin machinations. Ironically, it was her expertise in Russian spy rings that cast her into the path of the disgraced American general. She is accused of somehow using [historic documents](#) that date back to Joseph Stalin in 1912 to recruit him at a dinner following a talk at the Cambridge Intelligence Seminar, perhaps the world's premier academic forum on the Western spy world.

Accused of being a Russian operative, Lokhova has seen her world turned upside down. There is of course no proof of her involvement in any sort of Russian espionage, but she's already been forced to move home in an attempt to shake off media attention. Some of the most sensationalist coverage, fed by conspiratorial thinking among certain anti-Trump segments of the blogosphere, has even portrayed her as a "honeytrap" — presumably because there is no other reason for a Russian woman to be at the University of Cambridge.

Lokhova is understandably scathing in how she reacts to this portrayal of the encounter unfolded. As she [told the BBC](#): "If I did recruit Flynn that would have been one of the greatest — if not the greatest — Russian coup of all times. So it is utterly ridiculous, totally unbelievable. But, for some reason, the world today is such that people buy it."

The general atmosphere of fear and suspicion has turned Lokhova into collateral damage, but she is not the only Russian caught up in America's growing scandal through no apparent fault of their own. In comparison with Lokhova, though, some of the other victims have considerably more resources at their disposal when it comes to defending themselves. One prominent example is Oleg Deripaska, aluminum magnate and owner of UC Rusal.

Two months ago, the Associated Press alleged [Deripaska had contracted lobbyist and one-time Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort](#) to work on behalf of Russian government interests. The businessman has not taken these accusations lying down.

On May 15, he officially [filed a libel suit](#) against the AP in US courts. In weeks prior, he placed [full-page ads](#) in *The Washington Post* and *The Wall Street Journal* to refute what he described as a campaign of character assassination and demand the news organization provide evidence of the work it claims Manafort performed (which, for the record, it has not). To reinforce just how serious he was being, Deripaska offered to testify before the US Congress to clear his reputation.

If the aluminium tycoon does make the trip to Washington, he may not be alone. Eugene Kaspersky, founder of global cybersecurity firm Kaspersky Labs, has also had to refute allegations as the FBI investigates whether his firm “maintains any troubling relationships with the Russian government.” [US intelligence leaders](#) said on May 11 they would not be comfortable having Kaspersky software installed on their computers. Kaspersky hit back with his own offer to testify, although not without taking the opportunity to generate some free publicity. Responding in the middle of a [Reddit Q&A session](#), he wrote: “I’m very sorry these gentlemen can’t use the best software on the market because of political reasons.”

Of course, Deripaska and Kaspersky both live in Russia. As a British citizen living in the UK, Likhovaya is a more representative example of what exactly Russian expats can find themselves facing in the current climate. The irony is that many of them do not necessarily support President Vladimir Putin. Many of the [800,000 Russian speakers](#) in the US voted for Trump in the hope of preventing “socialist values that made them flee the Soviet republics.” Evgeny Finkel, a political science professor at the Columbia College of Arts and Sciences, argues that while his politics may be different, Putin’s regime still carries the taint of Soviet ideology.

This is the catch-22 that any Russian who maintains ties to the old country needs to fear. Whether they left to escape Russian domestic politics or simply prefer the way they are able to live their lives elsewhere, simply being Russian is now seen as worthy of suspicion. Whatever really happened between Donald Trump’s campaign and the Russian government in 2016 will likely take years to establish for certain, but as speculation swirls, innocent people are almost certainly getting caught up in the crossfire.

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