

Make Sense

of 2015



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ABOUT FAIR OBSERVER

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

We have a crowd sourced journalism model that combines a wide funnel with a strong filter. This means that while anyone can write for us, every article we publish has to meet our editorial guidelines. Already, we have more than 1,500 contributors from over 40 countries, including former prime ministers and Nobel laureates, leading academics and eminent professionals, journalists and students.

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For further information, please visit www.fairobsERVER.com or contact us at submissions@fairobsERVER.com.

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EDITORIAL

Make Sense of the World

Atul Singh

December 31, 2015

To commemorate a breakthrough year, we publish our first e-book that showcases the quality and diversity of our contributors who make sense of 2015 for you.

From the day it began, Fair Observer has set out to make sense of the world. For millennia, the world has been a kaleidoscopic place with a dazzling array of landscapes, species and peoples. To make sense of this kaleidoscopic world is a profoundly human instinct. It is the reason people observe, analyze, dream, tell stories by firesides and record human experiences for future generations.

A year inevitably packs an eventful 12 months. As we look back at 2015, we are filled with pride as to what we achieved through the course of the year. Like any young organization, Fair Observer has gone through ups and downs. For us, 2015 has been a breakthrough year. We have decided to commemorate it by publishing our first e-book.

In this e-book, you will be reading the top five articles from each of our subject and region areas for 2015. Our selection, like all selections, is subjective and imperfect. We have agonized over our decisions and there are other articles we would have dearly liked to include. Yet we have to adhere by our structure. As in *The World This Week*, five is our magic number and some articles have inevitably slipped through the cracks.

This e-book is still rich in content. It showcases the quality and diversity of our contributors. You can see that we live up to our ideal of bringing together a plurality of perspectives that cut across borders, backgrounds and beliefs. This e-book is a valuable resource for students, academics, diplomats, business professionals and global citizens. It has been a labor of love. We intend this to be the first among many and request feedback.

Now, it is time to wish you a happy new year. Another year has flown by, 2015 is history and 2016 looms ahead. May 2016 be a great year for you. Even as you grapple with new year resolutions, you might want to cast an eye on the year past. You might also want to share your perspective with others. Most of all, you just might want to make sense of 2015.

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



AFRICA

Nigerian Elections Set the Stage for Jonathan vs Buhari

Hugo Norton

March 23, 2015

Nigeria faces an uphill battle as it wades through challenges that could derail its presidential elections.

Seen as a fast growing economy and a strong democratic force in the region, Nigeria is at a crossroads in its journey as a rising African power. Marred by the emergence of Boko Haram, the calcification of the north-south split and falling oil prices, Nigeria's future lies in the hands of its contentious and highly anticipated presidential elections.

Nigeria is Africa's most populous nation and largest economy, which is projected to become the world's 13th largest by 2050. Unfortunately, the country faces strong centrifugal forces as it is roughly divided along ethno religious lines between a generally poor Muslim north and a more economically advanced Christian south, with a middle belt acting as a buffer. The unequal level of development has led to tenuous relations between the two regions and has exacerbated the struggle for political power.

On March 28, Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian from the south and leader of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), will run for a second full-term against General Muhammadu Buhari, leader of the All Progressives Congress (APC) and a former military dictator of Nigeria. As a perennial also-ran, having already participated and lost in the past three elections, Buhari has managed to build a strong base of followers in the predominantly Muslim north, and he has made significant inroads in the south.

ELECTORAL PROCESS

Nominally, Nigeria possesses a presidential system, with American-style checks and balances through an independent judicial system and a two-chambered congress. However, in a bid to ease tension between Muslims and Christians, Nigeria instituted a

de facto semi-confessionalist system, with the intent to rotate the presidency back and forth between a Muslim and Christian every eight years. As a result, votes are usually cast along religious lines, a factor that increases the disconnect between the two regions of the country.

From a technical standpoint, the previous presidential elections of 2011 were judged as relatively efficient and open, with Human Rights Watch even deeming them the “freest” in Nigeria’s history. However, opposition leaders, and in particular General Buhari, alleged that the vote had been rigged, galvanizing their supporters, which unleashed a sectarian three-day civil bloodbath that left over 800 people dead. Mobs attacked and ransacked hundreds of Christian settlements and places of worship, displacing some 65,000 Nigerians.

Hoping to dispel such concerns this time round, the Independent National Election Commission (INEC) in Nigeria has rethought the system from the ground up. By using biometric systems and issuing Personal Voting Cards (PVCs) to all Nigerians, the INEC is hoping to eradicate fraud and ballot stuffing. However, the ineffective rollout of the program was one of the reasons behind the contentious postponement of the elections, which were initially scheduled for February 14. At the end of February, a full third of Nigerians had still not received their PVCs, and there are fears that the APC will subsequently use this setback to contest electoral results.

SECURITY CHALLENGES

Boko Haram is a dangerous and tangible security threat, especially in northeastern Nigeria, a region representing approximately a sixth of the voting population. In 2014 alone, Boko Haram killed 10,000 citizens.

The terrorist group sparked a political crisis in Abuja, as it played second fiddle in the INEC’s decision to postpone the elections. The opposition heavily criticized President Jonathan, arguing that the administration is seeking to stall for time and unfairly revitalize its flagging voter base. However, it must be remembered that the northeast is an overwhelmingly Muslim area; making sure that citizens can safely vote in the region does not play to Jonathan’s advantage, but it guarantees that all Nigerians have access to the ballot.

THE CANDIDATES

While there are 14 candidates standing for election, only two are considered to be serious contenders: Jonathan and Buhari.

Even if during the previous election General Buhari gained nearly 97% of his support from the north, he has successfully been able to attract southerners to his camp, thanks to his powerful rhetoric on fighting corruption and promising to crack down on Boko Haram.

Buhari is not a newcomer to Nigeria's political arena. He seized power in 1983, becoming president after leading a military coup against democratically elected President Shehu Shagari. Buhari's disastrous reign did not last two years and was characterized by censorship and brutal repression of human rights.

In the past, supporters aligned with Buhari and the APC have failed to peacefully accept electoral defeats, leading to the bloody 2011 elections. The former military ruler has also made some dubious comments about spreading sharia law and Islamic courts throughout Nigeria, including the Christian provinces of the south, and has sparked fears that once elected, he may pursue a radical Islamist agenda.

For his part, President Jonathan has focused on a platform of "Justice, Unity and Progress." He often points to the developments and economic successes already achieved in Nigeria, including the 8% yearly gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate he has presided over. He also champions other causes such as increasing access to potable water, expansion of irrigated farmland and development of major housing projects. After several setbacks in the fight against Boko Haram, Jonathan has been successful in forging a four-nation coalition to fight the insurgency; Nigerian forces recently took 36 cities from the clutches of the terrorist group.

It is clear that Nigeria faces an uphill battle as it wades through the many challenges that could derail its presidential elections and endanger its economic progress. Whichever way the vote swings come March 28, all candidates must commit to patience, peace and accept the outcome of the poll. The Nigerian population must make sure their leader commits to democratic rules, and moves Nigeria further down its path to becoming Africa's most powerful nation.

Hugo Norton is an Africa Policy Analyst and Advisor at an economic consultancy firm in Brussels.



Somalia is Tired of Conflict and Destruction

Yusuf Hassan

June 5, 2015

A brighter future for Somalia requires a narrative of peace that restores social trust, reinforces government institutions and instills hope.

In 2015, Somalia entered its 25th consecutive year of instability, fragmentation and economic decline. The world has witnessed the impact of Somalia's instability for years—with piracy disrupting maritime trade, and al-Shabab insurgents staging heinous cross-border attacks, most recently at Kenya's Garissa University College, resulting in the death of 147 people. Since 1992, successive international interventions have tried to "solve" the evolving Somali crises through a range of military and political initiatives.

The Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) is a by-product of multilateral interventionism. The FGS was established during the 2002-04 Somali peace process in Kenya, hosted by the East Africa-based Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD). IGAD members contribute the majority of troops to the United Nations-mandated African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). The 22,000-strong peacekeeping force bolsters a weak FGS besieged in Mogadishu by political enemies, and it defends the government's fickle claim to Somali sovereignty in the face of fragmentation, violent insurgency and economic ruin.

During the Cold War, East and West competed for power and influence over Somalia's then-military dictatorship. Despite the collapse of the Somali state in 1991, the country retains its strategic geopolitical value today. Famine and security emergencies have

led to concerted aid efforts, but many governments involved with Somalia pursue competing foreign policy priorities dictated by their own strategic objectives and economic interests.

The inescapable fact is that Somalia needs the world, and the world needs a peaceful Somalia. In January, a study warned that 3 million Somalis will require humanitarian assistance in 2015, including 731,000 facing emergency levels of acute food insecurity. In December 2014, the UN's Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) requested \$863 million to fund Somali humanitarian aid programs in 2015, but donor willingness and funding is wearing thin. Further, while the AMISOM force is currently funded to the tune of \$50 million per month, experts warn that "international donors are beginning to tire of the burden."

In addition to foreign aid, Somalis depend on remittances from abroad. However, the Somali money-transfer industry, *hawala*, has been under growing scrutiny by security agencies and financial regulators in the United States and other Western countries, due to alleged abuse by criminals who launder money and fund insurgents. Banks continue to abandon relations with *hawala* firms over regulatory pressure, and some warn of the devastating impact on the country's economy. Remittances account for 35% of Somalia's gross domestic product (GDP), more than total aid spending. Although it is vital to end funding for criminal networks through robust regulatory frameworks, cutting off Somalia's economic lifeline threatens livelihoods and may lead to further instability.

International intervention has failed because it is no substitute for a Somali-led nation-building process that prioritizes community reconciliation, encourages fair political representation and enhances socioeconomic revitalization. In Somalia, competing political narratives continue to fuel disunity, dissent and disorder. Since 2012, federal leaders have exploited sociopolitical tensions and pursued counterproductive strategies that have led to political infighting within government institutions, renewed armed hostilities in several regions and brought about allegations of power abuse and corruption. Somali politicians must instead return to a narrative of peace that nurtures unity, rule of law, social justice and political cohesion.

Somalia's peaceful political narrative was lost in the violent power struggle among rival factions that erupted following the central government's collapse in 1991. Multilateral interventions with narrow objectives have since exacerbated local tensions. In the context of pervasive violence and distrust of centralized authority, Somalia's clans—

which form the foundation of the nation's social structure—have emerged as powerful, aggressive and self-interested political agents engaged in an aggressive competition for control of contested sovereignties.

Somalia adopted a federal system in 2004, but some analysts have wrongly associated Somali federalism with the ongoing competition among “political clans” fighting for power, land and resources, which emerged after 1991 when Mogadishu imploded and the central state collapsed.

The Federal Government's claim of sovereignty enjoys some international credibility, but local power structures based on political clans exercise de facto authority in most regions of Somalia. Mogadishu's exclusivist politics, exacerbated by government corruption, alienates certain regions of the country and contributes to instability.

MOVING FORWARD

To progress as a nation, Somalia must address its history of violence and end the era of impunity. In order to begin a process of national healing, a peace and justice commission composed of prominent Somalis should be established to transparently address war crimes, human rights abuses and other injustices. The commission's work would complement the government's mandate and local efforts to advance peace, unity and justice, providing powerful counterweights to the destructive forces of disunity and conflict.

Hope and forward-thinking must replace the present sense of despair and resignation in Somalia. With 70% of the population under 30, Somalia is a young country with massive development needs. With peace, Somalia would be able to mobilize its human capital and benefit from natural resources and commercial opportunities. Encouragingly, many nations have restored their diplomatic ties, nominated new ambassadors and reopened their embassies in Mogadishu.

There are other signs of hope. Besides traditional Western donors, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and others have increased aid projects in Somalia. Peace dividends empower local authorities, provide opportunities to neglected communities and encourage alternative livelihoods.

The momentum for change is growing as Somalis tire of destructive conflict. Political leaders are under increasing pressure to make peace, build regional states and complete federalization, reform public institutions and revitalize economic initiatives. A

brighter future for Somalia requires a new narrative of peace that restores healing and social trust, reinforces government institutions and fair practices, and instills hope. Only a Somalia that is good for its people can be good for the world.

Yusuf Hassan, a Somali-American journalist, is a political and media analyst on Somalia and Horn of Africa affairs.



Africa Must Improve Its Welfare Services

Akunyili Tochukwu

July 20, 2015

African governments must provide a better level of social protection for their citizens.

The African welfare state and how it distributes resources is an interesting point of analysis. While some people see an all-inclusive welfare state structure, others see a system that overwhelmingly favors economic elite. I belong to this latter group.

Most African countries lack a coherent welfare state structure, and only a privileged minority benefit from the provisions of a welfare state in those countries where one actually exists. The high exclusion of everyday Africans from state benefits is a common practice.

The lack of a welfare state regime in the lives of many Africans can be seen in *Welcome to Lagos*. This documentary chronicles the challenging experiences of artisanal workers—in this case, dump dwellers—in Olusosun Lagos, Nigeria.

Seeing this documentary offered me the opportunity to ponder over the elasticity and completeness of the African welfare state through an auxiliary inspiration provided by the medium of art. Watching the redoubt and bravado with which the young characters

confronted life, I wondered whether these citizens had felt a positive impact of the Nigerian welfare state in their lives.

Deprived of the mental uplifts that stem from cerebral nurturing and application; uninsured against the macro forces that make life in a more open world increasingly uncertain; and abandoned by a political elite deficient in patriotic interest, these artisans must juggle and negotiate the vicissitudes of existence with only the supreme defiance of their muscled wills.

If we are looking at the lowest end of the spectrum with dump dwellers in Lagos, how many Africans aged 60 and over have a government-sponsored plan for pensions or allowances? How many of these senior citizens have the insurance and/or assurance of spending their latter years in dignity?

In my village of Nkitaku Agulu, I know that for every one senior citizen who receives a government-backed pension, there are 12-15 others who go without.

Certain factors determine the character of a welfare state: its mode of taxation, whether this is progressive or redistributive; and its rate of spending on education, health and social welfare and services like pensions, unemployment benefits and work accident insurance, among others.

The nature and organization of these policies go a long way to inform and shape intergenerational and intragenerational social mobility. With a number of African countries structuring any existent social policies they have on the American model—not the European one—the African welfare state hurts the most neglected citizens.

On a similar front, how many Africans are protected against the forces of the market and exploitation by the capitalist employer—be it through sick pay or unemployment benefits?

Allow me to stress that the preceding question of state protection applies only for that group of Africans who are well-off. For these people, if they do not receive such benefits today, then future generations will through sheer “privilege.” In comparison with a lot of Africans, this group is the economic elite.

It is the brawn of the African that saves him—a fact attested to by the latest edition of the World Bank’s Nigerian Economic Report. As the study states, most Nigerians, as

with other developing countries, cannot afford to be completely unemployed. Those who have no productive employment typically engage in various low productivity and low paying tasks for survival. To put this in perspective, 54% of the 1.1 million jobs created in Nigeria in 2013 emerged from the informal economy.

Working at the basic level of survival is not what Africans need. Africans need to live; to take vacations; to travel; and to develop their interests in the arts and sciences. Survival is no longer sufficient. For Africans to realize a level of existence that is consistent with life in the 21st century, African governments must offer a better level of social protection and better-coordinated social policies for their citizens.

Akunyili Tochukwu is a Nigerian political analyst specializing in African current affairs.



Obama's Kenyan Homecoming: Dreams from His Father's Land

Samuel Ollunga

July 23, 2015

Obama's visit to Kenya comes off the most important month of his presidency.

History is upon us as an acclaimed umbilical homecoming beckons. Kenya will play host to the most significant “foreign” visitor to ever grace the country's shores. US President Barack Obama will be visiting the nation of his father's birth on July 24. The three-day tour to the land that swept the backdrop of his seminal book, *Dreams from My Father*, will be his first as US president—and potentially his last as leader of the free world.

Excitement in Kenya is at a fever pitch. A friend who used to work at the US Embassy in Nairobi sent over an amusing article showing how those Kenyans drunk with jubilation in the historical moment have been heard to make atypical proclamations,

some bordering on the bizarre. But with such an unprecedented visit, who is to say what type of excitement in these circumstances is normal?

Upon his historical election in 2008, many expected Obama to extend his celebrations of that momentous victory into Kenya by favoring the country with his first foreign visit or at least his first sojourn on the continent. However, to do so would have been to lend a barn of fodder to those within the ranks of his opponents, eager to make the case that he was not American enough, or just simply not American at all.

What is to be said of his visit now, then? The timing is perfect. Obama is coming off the most important month of his presidency. His polls are at their highest in the last two years. The list of his vaunted recent successes include the Supreme Court's affirmatory ruling in favor of Obamacare—his signature health care program—and same-sex marriage, Congress' assent to his trade initiative and his conclusion of the Iran nuclear deal.

As he sweeps into the homestretch, Obama's legacy is beginning to take shape. A definitive identity to his presidency is emerging. Many believe the substance of his tenure has begun to touch the periphery of the transformational leadership column where the likes of Ronald Reagan, Lyndon Johnson, Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the great Abraham Lincoln reside.

Further, with respect to the two nations, US-Kenya relations have been at their best since the Kenyatta regime took office in 2013. The thawing in the frosty ties can be traced to the fact that the case against President Uhuru Kenyatta before the International Criminal Court (ICC) has collapsed, and the one against his deputy, William Ruto, appears to be on quicksand.

Until now, many Kenyans were not happy with what they felt was a double-standard on the part of the US. They were miffed on grounds that the United States had, in their opinion, the temerity to pollute the moral high ground by demanding that Kenya go through with the cases before the ICC, yet the US had itself refused to ratify the Rome Statute.

However, the Obama administration's position was judgmental. On the one hand, the optics of proximity were not kind, considering it would not augur well for the US—both domestically and internationally—to be seen as closely associated with a government believed to be led by or shielding potential perpetrators of crimes against humanity. On

the other, Kenya itself triggered the intercession of the ICC, and the US argued that it was merely urging the country to fulfill its treaty obligations in line with customary international law and relations.

GLOBAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP SUMMIT

Obama will visit two African countries on his trip: Kenya and Ethiopia. He will tour the latter last, becoming the first US president to set foot on Ethiopian soil. This is very pivotal, and accordingly, it ought to overshadow his Kenyan stay, which will be ushered in by the fetching Global Entrepreneurship Summit.

The importance of the convention—the first Global Entrepreneurship Summit to be held in Sub-Saharan Africa—cannot be gainsaid. But the subtext, especially from the perspective of Kenyans, is unassailable.

No, Obama's visit is not most compelling because he is the first black US president. That is of course profound and memorable. However, Kenya has played host to many presidents with insignia of firsts draped across their diplomatic lapels. It is also not merely estimable because of a connection to Kenya that may now be viewed as being only academic—after all, isn't everyone essentially from the African continent? Obama has Irish heritage, and although he had the warmest of welcomes when he visited the Emerald Isle a few years ago, Kenyans customarily view his standing differently, in a very nuanced way that is difficult to explain and discern.

In essence, the arresting cultural root connection is palpably viewed as being so deep as to subsume furnished modern constructs. Thus, cretinous birthers might take offense and try to find ammunition in the statement: Barack Obama is a son of Kenya. Yet verily I tell you, he was not born in the land of his father. It is just that culturally in Kenya, and more particularly among his father's Luo people, the notion of where one is from has little, if anything, to do with where one is born—a Western immigration law modernism—and more to do with the underlying legacy of one's heritage.

Hence, for example, upon the demise of a forlorn and worldly abandoned fellow Luo—however obscure that person's life and achievements, and regardless of how tenuous his links to the community may have been—the community would sooner find a charter to the moon to bring the prodigal back home to rest in peace with his forefathers and ancestors. Indeed, in spite of the opinion or beliefs to the contrary of the person in question or even of the prevailing members of the community, such is the depth of the

root of the bond at play that the precept cannot be broken willy-nilly; even by those who forsake the community. It is a kindred ancestral edict that transcends the individual and the people compelled to bring home their stranded own.

In essence, Obama might be the most powerful man in the world, and there is much he can summon by the shrug of his shoulders. But the warm embrace of his father's country will never be his to call.

So is Obama really American? Absolutely, in all senses of the word. Yet if the US and every region of the world were to reject him, paraphrasing the poet Rupert Brooke in *The Soldier*, "there is a corner" of his father's people's land that shall forever be his. And it has little to do with choice. That is why when he visits Kenya, Obama will be greeted with warm wide-open arms and welcomed home.

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Development and Human Rights at Odds in Ethiopia

Gus Fincus

December 23, 2015

In Ethiopia, authoritarian "development" overlooks human rights and responds to dissent with violence.

In Addis Ababa, Ethiopians should be feeling excited. The city has proudly and successfully debuted the first metropolitan rail line in Sub-Saharan Africa. At the same time, the nearly 800 kilometer train from Ethiopia's capital city to the port of Djibouti

has just begun, which should expand global market integration and trade throughout Ethiopia.

Nevertheless, there is no peace. As many as 100 people have been killed by police and military forces across the country since November. Protests against the “master plan” to expand the city of Addis into the surrounding Oromo region have been met with violent retaliation by government forces.

The latest recent round of unrest began over three weeks ago when students in Ginci staged demonstrations in response to the clearing of a stadium and a nearby forest for development by foreign investors. According to reports on social media, Ethiopian authorities responded with disproportionate force, which then triggered mass demonstrations and more police killings across the country.

In April 2014, between nine and 47 students were killed at the nearby Ambo University after participating in similar demonstrations sparked by a plan to incorporate the surrounding Oromo area into the rapidly growing capital city.

The government claims that it only wants to expand the provision of services, but protesters say that this will lead to displacement of farmers in the name of “development.” The precedent the Ethiopian state has established, however, is far closer to the fears of the Oromo than to the claims of the government. At the same time, both can be correct: If this new metro line happens to expand through your farmland, you have gained a service, but also lost your traditional means of sustenance.

The Oromos, by far the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia, have long been oppressed by a predominately ethnic Tigre-led government. Oromo civil society and political organizations are banned by the government, which equates Oromo nationalism with terrorism.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Emperor Menelik II is praised by many Ethiopians for successfully fighting off the Italians and playing a pivotal role in ensuring that Ethiopia became the only country to successfully resist the European “scramble for Africa” at the end of the 19th century. The Oromos view Menelik II less kindly, however, as he simultaneously expanded his kingdom to incorporate the territory of the southern ethnic groups and strategically moved the capital city to the middle of this newly conquered territory.

Today, residents of Addis Ababa still speak Amharic, an entirely different language than in the Oromo communities just outside the city in every direction. It is an imposed language, and the Oromo people still insist on calling the city by its original Oromo language name, Finfine.

Dominance of ethnic minorities by northern rulers continued under the reign of King Haile Selassie and later under the communist military junta of Mengistu Haile Mariam. Under Mengistu's regime, known as the Derg, political dissidents were commonly murdered in the streets. The memory of such horrors persists in the consciousness of the Ethiopian people.

The militias of the major ethnic groups in Ethiopia united in opposition to the Derg, which eventually led to the current single-party "democracy" and the establishment of Meles Zenawi as the head of state. The ethnic militias united against the Derg with the impression that they would each have their own state upon the downfall of the regime.

The reality, however, is that these promises were broken and other ethnic political organizations that helped to overthrow the Derg were banned by the Zenawi government. The newly established Ethiopian People's Republic Democratic Front (EPRDF) was, in fact, just a new name for the Tigrayan People Liberation Front (TPLF).

MELES ZENAWI AND EPRDF

The EPRDF saw capitalist development "for the good of the people" as the only way forward for a country long marred by a history of famine. This has meant the construction of largescale dams and effectively giving away large swaths of land to agricultural investors, displacing traditional peoples who used these lands for grazing and who depended on seasonal flooding to grow staples.

The initial cause for the recent demonstrations is effectively the same, where "development" comes into conflict with human rights and the preservation of traditional ways of living. Meles illustrated his policy by responding to claims of human rights implications of the Gibe III dam by saying: "They don't want to see developed Africa; they want us to remain undeveloped and backward to serve their tourists as a museum."

As in Joseph Stalin's five-year plan, the EPRDF's Growth and Transformation Plan takes a dogmatic approach to "economic development" as defined by foreign investors and creditors. Ethiopian growth is in the double digits, even as El Nino conditions have led to famine across the eastern portion of the country.

NO DISTURBING THE STATUS QUO

The EPRDF argues that disturbances of the status quo are an impediment to the mission of development and, as such, demonstrations can justifiably be met with violence. As one Ethiopian stated, "The government treats riots and peaceful protests the same way and because they are treated the same, they always end the same."

The government is correct in its belief that the worst thing for the people of Ethiopia would be a loss of political stability. It only takes a quick glimpse at the crisis in neighboring South Sudan or across the Red Sea in Yemen to understand what predicaments can result when sectarian tensions align with political instability. As tensions grow between Ethiopia's ethnic states, the risks of catastrophic political crisis are also much greater.

Ethiopia has the right of "free speech" written into the constitution, but as everyone in the country will tell you, there's a big difference between what the government does and what it says it does. The detainment of the Zone 9 political bloggers on terrorism charges serves as a good example of the results of speaking out against the government. Fortunately, these bloggers achieved significant media attention, which eventually put enough pressure on the government to allow them to be released.

Protests throughout the expansive Oromo region have little chance of being documented. We will never know how many people have actually been killed over the last few weeks. To the government's credit, maybe some of these killings were an unfortunate result of an appropriate use of force by police trying to put an end to rioting. Without a free press, however, we will never know and we cannot simply take the government's word at face value.

The EPRDF is wrong to believe that it can use power, force and fear to remain in government forever. Ethiopia's young people are overcoming the fear of political opposition that has long meant certain death or imprisonment under the Derg and, to a lesser extent, under the EPRDF. More and more young people, who account for a huge proportion of the country, are learning to organize via social media, realizing that the "democracy" they live under is a farce.

Young Ethiopians watched as their peers in Egypt gathered in Tahrir Square time and time again to bring about Hosni Mubarak's downfall. While it is now easy to see the Arab Spring as a failure, the aspirations for democracy and justice in the face of oppression have not waned, but strengthened and will continue to spread.

Gus Fincus is a blogger, filmmaker and activist who is currently living in Ethiopia.



China is a Rising Dragon, But With No Blazing Fire

Jarno Lang

July 1, 2015

While careful concern about China's rise is in place, outright panic as often witnessed is exaggerated.

The fast rise of China from a developing country in the 1980s to a resourceful global player with still huge untapped future potential has triggered many critical reactions. While some already fear for the survival of the Western liberal system, others attempt to pour oil on troubled water. There are certainly many variables at play, and exact predictions about future outcomes are very hard to make. However, looking at the mix of measures China has structured its foreign policy on in the 21st century, three specific areas come to mind in which the country's behavior is eye-catching.

The first area concerns finances, the flow of money and investments. Back in the 1990s, the United States was the biggest investor in most Asian countries. With the turn of the millennia or shortly afterward, this changed for many countries, while Chinese replaced American investments as number one. In comparison, the financial commitments of other global players like India, Russia or the European Union are relatively insignificant.

In a second step, in 2013, China announced the creation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) with its main hub in Shanghai, officially due to its frustration with the slow pace of established institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Asian Development Bank. Unofficially, observers argue that it is rather meant as a counterbalance to American financial influence in Asia. Even if the sums handled by this bank are, for now, still relatively small compared to the older institutions, in this regard, China might have succeeded, as the joining of three major European nations—Germany, France and Switzerland—and other close US allies sparked annoyed reactions from the Obama administration.

It is thus clear that China's foreign policy behavior does not fit that of a developing country anymore. Another example for this can be found in the area of diplomacy. Whenever a natural disaster wreaks havoc on countries that China identifies as within its sphere of direct influence, the Chinese government is quick in sending monetary aid. Notable examples are the 2004 tsunami in the Indian Ocean and the recent earthquake in Nepal, both of which hit the respective populations hard.

However, critical voices suggest this aid was not primarily given out of humanitarian concerns, but rather it was politically motivated. Chinese diplomats were certainly fast in denying any race for political goodwill or influence—especially in the case of Nepal—but, if this was indeed the case, China would not be alone in doing so, as India and Pakistan have both showed similar behavior.

Finally, there is the area of regional dominance. In general, Chinese military budgets and activities have been increasing significantly for years. As mentioned above, China attempts to secure its influence in every Asian country that it sees as regionally important. Its change in assertive behavior, however, shows most obviously in the South China Sea.

For the past ten years, in a more and more self-assured manner, China has claimed the Spratley and the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands as part of its sovereign territory, just to name the most prominent territorial disputes with Japan, the Philippines and Vietnam. It is the widespread fear of observers that this situation could lead to a direct clash between China and the US, as the latter could feel pressured to stand by its Asian allies. Satellite images that show how the Chinese military is building an aircraft runway from scratch on one of the disputed islands do not help in calming matters.

CHINA AND THE UNITED STATES

As for China's relations with the United States, can it be described as a "contest for supremacy," as Aaron L. Friedman attested?

Well, yes and no. Yes, because on both sides there are incentives to strengthen one's one position, while simultaneously hoping to weaken the other's, as exemplified by the creation of the AIIB, and rising investment into military budgets on the Chinese side, and the often conducted military maneuvers and exclusive trade agreements with Asian partners on the American side.

On the other hand, both countries have nothing to gain by an outright contest of powers, because although either country is not dependent on each other, their economies and societies are becoming heavily interconnected. Any real clash between the two would lead to both sides losing, with maybe India or Russia as the lucky third—an outcome that both China and the US certainly would like to avoid. The danger of an actual outright conflict between China and the US is not that high.

Surely much more than meets the observer's eye is happening below the official surface as news about Internet-based hacker attacks on both sides in the last two years indicate. It is also safe to assume that both sides have their plans in order, if any of the two should risk anything outside of the usual banter, as declarations of preparedness by the US Pacific Command (PACOM) and the Chinese government show. Nonetheless, instead of hyping the panic as can often be observed in the coverage of Chinese foreign policy, some form of careful concern would be more in place.

Compared to its own history, as well as in relation to other examples all around the globe, never before has the rise of an international superpower been as peaceful as the ascendance of China in the 21st century. This is not to negate criticism concerning aspects like human rights, sustainable development and others in the wake of China's rise. Nevertheless, to use the image with which China has most often been characterized, it is rare to witness a dragon rising without him blazing fire.

To summarize, open conflict between the US and China, as feared by many, cannot be ruled out categorically, but for a global player with that much potential, the mix of measures we have been observing so far—ranging from catastrophe support to increasing its military might—rather resembles a careful probing than an attack on the existing world order. China has as much to lose as any other world power. It will be interesting to see what happens next.

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Thailand: The Land of Smiles and Dictators

Craig Moran

July 15, 2015

What are Thailand's prospects for democracy a year after the country's 19th coup?

As most media outlets have their attention geared toward Iran, Greece and the European Union's asylum seeker crisis, Thailand continues to struggle with the military government that installed itself by a coup d'état in 2014.

In April, former General and self-appointed Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha lifted the country's martial law—which was in effect since the ouster of Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra—and he unveiled a new draft constitution. This document, despite its attempt to massage the authoritarian reputation of the issuing junta, gives leeway to even heavier-handed politics thanks to Article 44, which puts a gag on freedom of opinion and political opposition.

Prayuth's offhand comments about journalists facing execution, and a Human Rights Watch report stating that "one year since the military coup, Thailand is a political dictatorship with all power in the hands of one man," show that this is not the time to overlook Thailand's situation.

Sadly, the country's democratic credentials have ebbed and flowed with regularity, with 19 coups since 1932. But what sets the latest one apart is its desire to reshape Thailand's political framework in ways unseen before.

When Prayuth took over in 2014, he presented a "roadmap" to democracy in his first announcement, along with the promise of "sustainable happiness." This has caused much criticism and ridicule, particularly because Prayuth's many gaffes prove quite the contrary. The ruling National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) defended the new constitution by saying it is only temporary and that it is a stepping stone toward building a better democracy.

There is a stark difference between the government's proclaimed good intentions and the tangible results of its authoritarian rule. According to iLaw, authorities have called in 712 people for "attitude adjustments," 159 others for "political offense" and detained hundreds of journalists since the coup. With this in mind, one can imagine why Prayuth's self-proclamation as a "soldier with a democratic heart" was met with derision.

Thais are eerily familiar with paternalist figures assuming power—the pinnacle of which is their monarch, King Bhumibol Adulyadej, whose "divine" image is enforced with one of the toughest *lèse majesté* laws in the world.

Rulers with fatherly attitudes are not new, as dictators have had similar approaches in the past. However in Thailand, this traditional style often goes hand in hand with the monarchy and, even if reluctantly so, it is still widely accepted. This is why admirers refer to Prayuth as "Uncle Prayuth," a name triggered by his "happiness campaign" that includes a commissioned soap opera and a pro-junta pop song called "Return Happiness to Thailand," which he penned himself. The ease with which Prayuth took power last year also points to a resigned population and a weak political culture where coups are almost accepted as facts of life.

The military junta's draft constitution does its best to prevent opposition and particularly acts to weaken large parties. Siblings Thaksin and Yingluck Shinawatra were deposed on separate occasions (Thaksin by a coup d'état in 2006, and his sister last year) and are now facing political charges and live in self-imposed exile. Thaksin is a telecommunications mogul-turned-politician who is accused of concealing his wealth while in power—a charge greatly used to Prayuth's advantage. Yingluck is indicted for a rice subsidy she offered farmers that didn't pan out as planned.

The conflict between Thailand's traditional elite and the new one was made clear in recent years by the ongoing strife between Thaksin's supporters and opponents in the lead up to the 2014 takeover. This divide is also a marker of Thailand's economic disparity: Shinawatra supporters are usually young Thais from more rural communities, while opponents are almost exclusively older and from the urban middle-class. Neither political side envisions a country where they could both function together; instead, power is seen as a bounty that is exclusive to a single winner.

THE POSTPONEMENT OF DEMOCRACY ?

In mid-May, Prayuth's government announced that elections scheduled for 2015 were being postponed until 2016. This set alarm bells ringing for Human Rights Watch Asia Director Brad Adams, who commented that "backsliding on respect for basic rights and democratic reform seems to have no end in sight." Indeed, prospective elections might be a safety net for anyone believing that the military junta is only as temporary as it claims.

It is perhaps because of this original deadline, as well as an alliance dating back to the Vietnam War, that the European Union (EU) and the United States have been reluctant to act. An EU council condemned the 2014 coup, while US Assistant Secretary of State Daniel Russel openly criticized Thailand's lack of democracy in January. Despite this, neither side has taken any measures against Prayuth. Bilateral trade between Thailand and the EU is worth \$30 billion each year, a relationship that could surely be used to pressure Bangkok on grounds of human rights infringements.

The junta, under its interim constitution, states that its members "shall be absolutely exempted from any wrongdoing, responsibility and liabilities," and in order to uphold this, the new judiciary system is hand-picked by the government from military officials, giving de facto absolute power to the NCPO. Article 44 of the new constitution allows the NCPO's jurisdiction to override anything that it deems to be a "national threat," while the accused have no alternative authority to turn to in cases of mistreatment.

Immediately after seizing power, the military junta took control of satellite TV channels, radio stations and over 200 websites. Acts of defiance, usually performed by students, include singing the French *Marseillaise*, the *Hunger Games*' three fingered salute and public readings of George Orwell's *1984*—perhaps because the junta's title, "National Council for Peace and Order," is almost too coincidental. Such small acts can be punished by up to two years in prison and have provoked a ban on gatherings of more than five people.

Faithful to his politics, Prayuth was reported to have pulled a journalist's ears and thrown a banana peel at a cameraman in 2014, which begs the question he penned in his very own hit single: "To bring back the love, how long will it take?" His government's reaction was to invite 200 local and foreign journalists to a special conference that would teach them not to offend the loose-canon dictator.

It's high time the West took notice of Thailand.

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“Strong Evidence” of Genocide Raises Stakes in Myanmar

Daniel Sullivan

October 30, 2015

Genocide is the most serious charge that can be levied in international law and should not be taken lightly.

The existence of persecution, severe human rights abuses and a high risk of mass atrocities has long been recognized in Myanmar. But now a newly released assessment finds “strong evidence” that genocide may already be underway.

These findings both raise the stakes for Myanmar’s embattled Rohingya minority and beg the question of why a push for protection and an international investigation to ensure accountability have not been launched.

The assessment, carried out by Yale Law School’s Lowenstein Human Rights Clinic, and featured in a new Al Jazeera English documentary, finds that the Burmese government deliberately triggered communal violence, incited anti-Muslim riots and targeted the Rohingya minority. It is based on evidence collected by Al Jazeera English and the Southeast Asia-based advocacy group Fortify Rights. Their investigations include a mix of eye witness and victim testimonies, confessions of former officials and confidential government documents.

The violence and high risk of atrocities in Myanmar have been well-known. Reports by the United Nations (UN), the US State Department and numerous human rights groups have documented rampant hate speech, blocking of aid and restrictions of basic rights. In 2014, United to End Genocide released a report based on fact-finding missions to

western Myanmar, concluding that nowhere in the world were there more known precursors to genocide.

The more than 1 million Rohingya living in western Myanmar have long faced persecution, and 140,000 people have been living in squalid displacement camps with severely restricted rights after their homes and villages were burned to the ground in 2012. In 2014, the government kicked out Nobel Prize-winning group Doctors Without Borders, the main provider of health services to hundreds of thousands of Rohingya, leading to an increased number of deaths. The group has been allowed to return but at a much more restricted level. The conditions are so desperate that over 100,000 Rohingya have taken a perilous journey to flee the country; thousands are believed to have died at sea or in the camps of human traffickers.

What is new are the revelations of official documents and testimony of former officials that link the violence to state policies and organized efforts to target the Rohingya, amounting to much more than random communal violence. Confidential military and government documents reveal language stoking anti-Muslim fears by warning of “nationwide communal riots” and the danger of Myanmar being “devoured” by Muslims. A PowerPoint presentation used for military training demonizes Muslims, using a highly pejorative term, and warns against the “threat” of their growing population. Former officials, speaking anonymously, tell of government planning of riots, including paying instigators.

There is also the independent assessment of the Lowenstein Clinic, which carefully dissects the legal evidence of genocide, including the notoriously difficult to prove requirement of proof of “intent.” The clinic cites hate-speech against Muslims—particularly Rohingya—targeting of Rohingya because of their group identity, birth and marriage restrictions, deprivation of aid and evidence of mass-scale atrocities perpetrated against Rohingya. Though careful to indicate the need for a full and independent investigation to definitively conclude that genocide is occurring, the group finds that “evidence strongly suggests that the Myanmar government has acted with the requisite intent to have committed genocide.”

NOVEMBER ELECTIONS

The timing of the findings are significant, coming just ahead of much lauded elections in November, which are being viewed by the world as a critical test of the country’s democratic transition. But the finding of “strong evidence” of genocide is a reminder

that no matter how well the elections are run, an urgent need for accountability and protection of the Rohingya will remain.

In fact, the elections themselves further validate the report findings of government policies of targeted exclusion. In the run up to the polls, temporary identity cards held by Rohingya and other minorities were invalidated, barring hundreds of thousands who voted in the bi-elections in 2010 from again voting. Sitting members of parliament who are Rohingya have been blocked from running for re-election. A strong movement of extremist nationalist monks is wielding increasing influence and supporting the current military-backed majority party. Its leaders, including firebrand monk Ashin Wirathu, have been very open about their anti-Muslim sentiments, calling Muslims “snakes” and “mad dogs.”

The findings are also significant in terms of their implications for global policies toward Myanmar. Any finding of genocide brings with it an implicit call for action. The United States and European countries have been reluctant to take action against Myanmar as they hope to give space to reformers. But if the “strong evidence” recently found proves true, the stakes are suddenly much higher and the argument to hold back economic and diplomatic pressure is that much weaker.

Genocide is the most serious charge that can be levied in international law and should not be taken lightly. This is all the more reason for an internationally-backed, thorough and independent investigation. As the Yale Law School report recommends, the United Nations Human Rights Council is well-placed to authorize and oversee such an investigation.

The Human Rights Council should launch an investigation, and the international community should push the Burmese government to take measures to protect, not incite violence against, the Rohingya. The government may glaze over criticisms of its democratic transition, but it should not be allowed to glaze over genocide.

Daniel Sullivan is the Director of Policy and Government Relations at United to End Genocide.



Land Mafia Fire Game Lights Up Indonesia

Umi Habibah Mansyur and Muhammad Zulfikar Rakhmat
November 11, 2015

The seriousness of the Indonesian forest fires can no longer be ignored.

As 40 million people gasp for breath and tens of thousands of hectares of forest are on fire in Indonesia, the world continues to revolve like nothing dangerous happens. When more than 500,000 people suffer from acute respiratory infection and wildlife habitat are exposed to damage, people across the globe have barely responded.

For the past two months, the sky of the Borneo and Sumatra islands has been blurred in smoke, just as hazy as the huge capitalism game behind this structured, man-made eco-disaster.

What makes matters worse is that mass media appear to be gradually slipping away even though, as George Monbiot said, it's almost definitely the 21st century's greatest environmental disaster to date.

Despite the fact that approximately 40 million people are breathing in noxious smoke day in, day out, the international community seems to care little, if not at all, about the situation. This is indeed surprising, considering that not only is there unspeakable human travail, with a large number of people ill and significant others dead, but the illicit smoke is also a considerable cost to the country's economy.

LAND MAFIA FIRES

In Indonesia, forests are intentionally inflamed nearly every year during dry season to clear land for commercial plantations, notably palm oil and the pulp industry. Fires are ignited in isolated zones, thus it is frequently hard to pinpoint whose land is burning. So, finding those responsible is a difficult thing to do—sometimes even impossible.

The worst part is that often, the burned area covers flammable peatlands with its ability to snare fire, subsequently festering underground for a long time making it impossible to be quenched.

Though this act of burning land is strictly allowed for up to 2 hectares only, landowners and farmers do not even care. In fact, together with local government and capitalist corporations, they are the ones who make profitable business over this hazardous fire game.

In Indonesia, there is something called “land economic fee.” Meaning, local farmers who sell their land to corporate plantations will get a much higher price if the land is already burned, since it’s considered “ready to be planted.” To put this in perspective, unburned land is worth \$640 per hectare, while burned land is valued at \$820 per hectare.

In fact, the sales fee is like a fresh pie. Landowners, land marketers, the farmers group and workers each get their own piping hot slice. Local governments even reserve a 10% to 13% stake of the fee to compensate their given authorities. In reality, this seemingly eco-disaster is indeed a man-made fire game. Nothing can stop this deadly haze without switching off the source of flame: the land mafia practice.

The public put the blame partly on increasing market demand for palm and wood commodities from these areas, as well as changing climate patterns that have helped in the worsening of fogs. This has been far worsened by the prolonged dry season, which speeds up blazing and makes it more difficult to turn off the fires once they are ignited. This endangers lives and has made this year’s haze the most destructive ever.

The drawback has been an increase in breathing problems not only throughout Indonesia, but also Southeast Asia, with official predictions hitting detrimental levels. Approximately 150,000 people have endured breathing conditions in different parts of the country. Educational institutions in Indonesia and in nations such as Singapore and Malaysia have been closed. It is estimated that the fires will cost Indonesia \$47 billion, and neighboring states will also be affected, thanks to airport and business closures as well as increased health care costs.

JAKARTA’S RESPONSE

The Indonesian government's response has been varied and insufficient. Several provinces have declared a state of emergency. More than 20,000 personnel have been sent to assist, and some amounts of cash have been spent to repel the situation. Although Indonesian President Joko Widodo has ordered the Forestry and Environment Ministry to halt issuance of permits for peatland cultivation and to review all existing permits, his decision to refuse help from Singapore remains questionable.

Not to forget, approximately 200 enterprises and 100 individuals have been under investigation for the fires. But it is important to understand that many of these estates are owned by individuals or entities with strong political links, and it can be said that imposition of law has been desultory at most.

Overall, as Indonesians have argued, the government in Jakarta has been unable to exert strong resolutions over the situation, and many of these efforts have largely been insufficient. As Indonesia-based ecologist Erik Meijaard argues, the main reason behind the government's limited response is that it still has not acknowledged how serious the situation is.

The best way to solve the issue is by eradicating the "land mafia" practice. This can be started by naming and shaming the individuals and companies liable for the fires. However, it is convoluted by the predicament in pinpointing the owner of particular plots of land; registries are not properly stored and are often out-of-date. The government is reported to have set out to relinquish entities allegedly liable for starting the fires. But neighboring countries must also chastise these companies by outlawing their goods and products.

In this case, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) should play a more active role in putting an end to the situation. Unfortunately, it has not been able to help end the worsening situation despite the fact there is an instrument to do so: the Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution, which was signed and ratified by all ASEAN member countries in 2002.

The seriousness of the current situation can no longer be ignored. It must end without delay. It is beyond obvious that many people are in dire need of concrete efforts by both the Indonesian government and the regional community to help alleviate the deteriorating condition.

The most crucial step that needs to be taken is to realize how critical the problem is and the implications it may bring about. Then, it is important to hit liable corporations. Not just by taking them to court, but by banning their products. There is no more point in applying a loose and weak approach to deal with these nature-breaker companies. As the former director of Southeast Asia Greenpeace stated, a “constructive engagement” with those companies is useless as we should take a firm position to fight against them.

In regard to a long-term solution, many scientists have proposed different “safer” methods to clear lands. Both governments and consumers must encourage the use of sustainable methods, especially those that are certified as “green.”

In the end, we can only hope that as the rain season comes and naturally extinguishes the fire, those criminals’ sins will not be washed away and that people will not simply forget about this disaster.

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History is Being Rewritten in East Asia

Sébastien Smith

December 23, 2015

China, South Korea and Japan need to be more honest about their own history if they want peace and stability.

The Nanjing Massacre. “Comfort women.” Did the Chinese communist forces beat imperial Japan or the nationalists? And who really owns the islands known in Japan as Senkaku and in China as Diaoyu?

Yet if there is one thing that China, South Korea and Japan can agree on, it’s that history is a powerful tool that can be used to manipulate their own respective populations.

History is a sensitive subject in East Asia. It is little wonder, then, that Seoul erupted into protest on November 14 over the decision by the government of President Park Guen-hye to make drastic revisions to how history is taught in South Korea’s schools. Tens of thousands of demonstrators marched through the streets of downtown Seoul after the announcement that South Korea’s history textbooks would be replaced with a single officially sanctioned textbook that all high schools will use from 2017.

It is not the first time South Korea has imposed a single state-approved textbook in schools. President Park’s father, Park Chung-hee, issued history manuals in 1974, and these remained in place until 30 years later, when private publishers were finally allowed to print their own history books, ending the state’s monopoly on the teaching of history. Currently, schools can choose from eight different state-approved textbooks.

Of these eight textbooks, conservatives in the government only endorse one as appropriate for teaching purposes. Yet it was criticized for overlooking many episodes of state-sponsored violence in South Korea’s recent history, and for championing the controversial 1961 coup that brought President Park Chung-hee to power. Published in 2013, this book was rejected by schools. Unsatisfied by this shunning, conservatives have decided to ditch the eight-book system and impose a single state-sanctioned textbook.

The aim of this new policy is to correct a “pro-North Korea bias,” with proponents such as Education Minister Hwang Woo-Yea claiming, “We cannot teach our children with biased history textbooks.” Critics of the decision are calling it a whitewashing of history, as it will continue to overlook the atrocities of authoritarian governments of pre-democratic South Korea. In the 2013 book, there is no mention of, for example, the Geochang Massacre of 1951 in which 719 unarmed civilians perished. Photos of the first North-South Korea summit have also been removed, which speaks volumes about the current government’s attitude toward reconciliation with North Korea.

The Park government is also attempting to stifle debate on the legacy of the president's father, who while modernizing South Korea also presided over serious human rights abuses. Awkwardly, while Korean nationalism is based on opposition to Japan, the elder Park was a Korean collaborator with imperial Japan, serving as an officer in the Japanese colonial government of Manchukuo (now present-day Northeast China).

By reverting back to issuing a single textbook, it makes South Korea the latest East Asian country to meddle with its own history for political purposes.

THE HISTORY THAT BENDS...

Japan has long been guilty of ensuring a national amnesia of its history. It is a common complaint outside Japan that the Japanese education system simply does not cover enough of World War II and Japan's attempts at establishing its dominance in Asia during that time. Mariko Oi, a BBC journalist, recalls how the Nanjing Massacre—an atrocity in which between 40,000 to 300,000 Chinese civilians and soldiers were systematically raped, tortured and murdered—was reduced to a footnote in her school history book.

Outside the classroom, an atmosphere of intimidation in Japan is mostly to blame for the muting of open discussion over the country's dark past. To criticize the Sino-Japanese War could prove to be career-threatening and even life-threatening in Japan. In 1990, a gunman almost fatally shot Motoshima Hitoshi, mayor of Nagasaki, for saying that Emperor Hirohito bore some responsibility for World War II.

Perhaps most damaging is the manipulation of history at the top of Japanese society. In August, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's World War II statement was more sympathetic to the soldiers of imperial Japan, casting them as only following orders from their emperor. "Comfort women" were not mentioned in name, but only referenced in a single sentence as "women ... whose honor and dignity were severely injured." There was no mention of the Nanjing Massacre. Little wonder, then, that both China and South Korea regarded this apology as "lacking sincerity" and "not living up to expectations."

At its worse, in his statement, Abe appeared to attempt mitigating or even seeking legitimacy for Japan's past acts of aggression and war crimes. Claiming that "the peace we enjoy today exists only upon such precious sacrifices," he suggested that the

atrocities imposed on East and Southeast Asia by imperial Japan somehow led to peace in the region. It fits in with the Japanese far-right's version of history in flowery rhetoric: Japan as the liberator rather than colonizer, as the victim and not the aggressor.

The issue of Japan's past has always been fresh in the minds of Chinese and Korean leaders since Abe's visit to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine in 2013. Abe visited the site to pay respects despite a chorus of Korean, Chinese and Taiwanese protests that the shrine honors Japanese war criminals as well as Chinese and Korean nationals who were conscripted into the imperial Japanese army against their will.

For Japan and South Korea, preferring to overlook or downplay difficult episodes of their respective histories is a result of their vibrant democracies. South Korean and Japanese leaders often have to pander to far-right views to stay in government and bolster their own authority. In contrast, authoritarian China is effective in stifling debate over its history.

HISTORY WITH CHINESE CHARACTERISTICS

Unsurprisingly, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) also exploits history for its own legitimacy. Like Korea, the Chinese brand of nationalism is based on opposition to Japanese intentions. While there is no right-wing party in Chinese politics, the CCP uses the struggle against Japan to bolster its own party's legitimacy and exploit the nationalism of the Chinese population. "In school, we were taught that the nationalists did not prioritize defending our country," says Fang Jinqing a student of China's prestigious Fudan University.

This historical revisionism was on show during the Victory Day parade held in Beijing last September. China is wholly justified in reminding the world of the forgotten sacrifices it made during World War II. However, the Victory Day celebrations exaggerated the role of the CCP in the war against Japanese aggression and ignored the role of the nationalist government led by Chiang Kai-shek. As Rana Mitter of Oxford University points out, it was the nationalists who endured the worst of the Japanese invasion. Historian Jung Chang goes further, saying that during the war, the Communist Party did not completely cease hostilities toward the nationalists and often sabotaged Chiang's efforts against the invading Japanese armies.

Beijing loves to cast Japan as an aggressive villain of East Asia. China's ambassador to the United Kingdom, Liu Xiaoming, recently compared Abe to Voldemort. While it is true that Japan has not apologized for its war crimes as fully as Germany has done, Japan today is not the aggressive power that is painted in the CCP's narrative. Unlike China, Japan has not fired a shot, let alone engaged in any conflict since 1945. By being dishonest about Japan, China uses this narrative to claim more clout in the region today. Comments over the sovereignty of the Senkaku Islands (known in China as the Diaoyu Islands) are often laced with references to Japan's imperial past.

The CCP's worst offence is the forced national amnesia of the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests, in which hundreds or thousands died (the death toll is unknown). Meanwhile, just across the border in Hong Kong, an enormous candlelight vigil is held every year—the subject remains completely taboo in public, in the media and online 26 years on. On each anniversary, China's censors scour the Internet and remove any online posts that reference the massacre. The result is that those born after 1989 or who were too young at the time to remember have no reference to the protests. "Many young people have no idea about the June 6th incident," says Zhang Bowei, a father of two who works in Beijing.

This is not to say that all history is often used to ill use. China rightly teaches in great detail about the Nanjing Massacre and other Japanese war crimes, which are often forgotten in the West. On any given day of the year, dozens of different schools across China visit the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall. Before Iris Chang's *The Rape of Nanking* was published in 1997, very little was known about the massacre outside of China. Neither Mao Zedong's People's Republic of China, nor Chiang Kai-shek's Republic of China sought wartime reparations from Japan after the war as both leaders were competing for Japanese trade and political recognition. Against the threat of communism, the United States, too, sought close relations with Japan and did not press the issue.

GREAT LEADERS MAKE HISTORY, BAD LEADERS WRITE IT

The outcome of the bending of history is increasingly strained relations between the three biggest powers in East Asia. Today, the biggest point of tension has been over island disputes, despite shabby historical claims. Both China and Japan lay claim to the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. Yet China never controlled these islands. China's claim to Taiwan is also difficult to defend, given that the island was never part of the People's Republic of China. Indeed, the mainland has not administered Taiwan since 1895.

Meanwhile, relations are strained between South Korea and Japan over the Liancourt Rocks, though no conclusive evidence has surfaced as yet on ownership.

The war in East Asia has long been over. But dishonesty over it is threatening peace in the region.

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Modi Must Clarify His Position on Hindu Nationalism

Aparna Pande

February 17, 2015

Modi should publicly clarify his position on Hindu nationalism and not allow others to frame the issue for him.

After nearly nine months in office, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is facing a fearsome enemy: a resurgent militant, chauvinistic and violent Hindu nationalism. The identity of this threat is significant, considering that Modi's political beliefs are deeply rooted in the Hindutva movement, or Hindu Right. His election victory in 2014 was attained with the promise of economic rejuvenation for a rising India. However, foreigners and Indians alike did not expect Hindu nationalist ideologues to derail Modi even before he could launch his economic reform agenda.

HINDUTVA

The origins of Hindutva, or militant and revivalist Hindu chauvinism, can be traced back to early 20th century British rule in India. Hinduism witnessed reform movements of two kinds: the Westernizing one named Brahmo Samaj, founded in 1828 by Raja Rammohan Roy; and the conservative Arya Samaj, launched in April 1875 by Swami Dayanand Saraswati. While Brahmo Samaj and its sympathizers sought to modernize and Westernize Hinduism, Arya Samaj sought to take Hinduism back to a pre-imagined ancient era of its own creation. A conservative backlash within Hinduism began, leading to the creation of various organizations promoting Hindutva ideas—some educational and cultural, and others political.

This backlash needs to be understood in the context of the era's religious demographics. Until 1872, although India was perceived globally as a Hindu-majority region, the statistics did not back this up. The British started the decennial census system in 1872, which included data from India, and the first census was published in

the same year. Throughout India's history, the average person living in a village may have been born to a particular religion; however, local customs were often more important than faith. When the British census began, a large proportion of people selected the religious "other" category because they were unsure which religion they belonged to, or they refused to be categorized.

However, the British Raj differentiated between government officials on the basis of religion. When the first elections were allowed, citizens voted for representatives of their respective religious communities. Religion dictated one's political identity, and it was important for communities of faith (especially the two largest, Hindus and Muslims) to ensure that the Raj felt their influence. In 1909, a pamphlet entitled *Hindus: A Dying Race* made the absurd argument that if Hindus did not have more children, they would soon become a minority and Muslims would overrun India. While clearly false and outrageous, the screed gained prominence among Hindu conservatives and revivalists who already feared this implausible scenario. As recently as December 2014, Praveen Togadia, a senior leader of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council), spoke about the need to raise the percentage of Hindus from 82% to 100% of the population.

Hinduism is unique among most religions, especially the Abrahamic faiths. One may be born a Hindu but cannot convert to the faith via a ceremony. There is also no fundamental creed or common scripture that every Hindu should know or recite. Hinduism increased in popularity and spread across the Indian subcontinent due to its pluralism, its acceptance of individual differences and its catholicity. However, various Hindus began to fear their polytheistic faith lacked the means to compete with the monotheistic faiths, in particular Islam and Christianity.

This feeling of vulnerability led to the popularity of the Arya Samaj and other similar movements. It enabled the group to promote the Vedas, the ancient Hindu texts, as an official religious sacrament. The Arya Samaj also inserted conversion into Hinduism through the *Shuddhi* (purification) ceremony. These developments conversely resulted in the growth in popularity of the Muslim Tabligh and Tanzim movements. A mutual sense of vulnerability and suspicion created a cycle of growth in the two religious communities.

Two main issues widened the rift between Hindus and Muslims in the early 20th century British Raj. The first was language. Until then, Hindustani was the spoken language of the majority in northern India (the official language being English). The need to make themselves unique led Hindus, with British encouragement, to demand that their

language be called Hindi and for it to be written in *Devanagri* (Sanskrit-based script). At the same time, Muslims requested that Urdu be their language and the Arabic script be used. Secondly, despite the fact that many Hindus considered the cow to be sacred while Muslims did not, for centuries the two groups had lived together without this becoming a serious issue. During this period, however, Hindu cow protection leagues were created to defend cows—sometimes with violence. Meanwhile, many Muslims deliberately slaughtered cows near Hindu temples to provoke confrontation.

The end of British rule and the partition of India in 1947 left a bloody and violent legacy. Approximately 1 million people were killed during the partition and another 14 million moved across borders. The deaths and diaspora were religiously motivated—Hindus and Sikhs killed Muslims, and Muslims killed Hindus and Sikhs.

India's founding father, Mahatma Gandhi, was shot dead on January 30, 1948. His assassin, a Hindu revivalist named Nathuram Godse, believed that his target was too sympathetic to Muslims. Gandhi's murder by a Hindu revivalist, combined with the bloody division of India that took place on religious grounds, left an indelible legacy of religious intolerance on Indian nationalism and complicated the issue of citizenship in the Indian constitution.

According to Granville Austin's book, *Working a Democratic Constitution: A History of the Indian Experience*, the Indian Constitution is not simply a set of laws and articles, but a social charter. The constitution guarantees wide-ranging rights to its citizens, which are extended to its large minority populations. The very first words of the Preamble define India as a secular state. The nation is a pluralistic democracy where citizenship is territorial and all minorities, ethnic and religious, are treated as equals.

In contrast, Hindutva calls for an entirely different definition of Indian citizenship. Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, the leading ideologue of Hindutva, wrote a 1923 pamphlet called *Essentials of Hindutva*, which argues that a true citizen must be a male whose faith originates from from the Himalayas or the Indus to the Indian Ocean as his Fatherland and Holy Land. This meant that only followers of Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism and Buddhism could be true citizens, since the holy lands of other religions are located outside of the Indian subcontinent. When Sadhvi Niranjana Jyoti, a member of the Indian parliament for Fatehpur, contrasted the "sons of Ram" with "illegitimates" during a speech in New Delhi on December 2, 2014, she was referring to Savarkar's definition of a true citizen.

Gandhi's legacy as father of the nation, coupled with India's first 17 years as an independent country under Jawaharlal Nehru, left what is referred to as Nehruvian secularism. This ideology has been the foundation of Indian nationalism for the last six decades and has ensured a semblance of stability.

RESURGENCE OF NATIONALISM

This edifice started to crack in the 1990s with the resurgence of Hindutva. The growing Indian economy created a burgeoning middle-class that was more conservative, outwardly religious and demonstrative of its beliefs—which it often sought to impose on others. The rise of Islamist radicalism in other parts of the world, including in South Asia, has only emboldened Hindu revivalists.

Over the years, there has been a rise in the belief that Indian secularism is “pseudo-secularism” because it “pampers” India's minorities (Muslims and Christians) and discriminates against the Hindu majority. “Shout with pride that you are Hindu” is a common chant heard at revivalist protests. There has been a rise in the number of religious riots and communal incidents, with the most violent ones associated with the demolition of a mosque in Ayodhya in December 1992 and the massacre in Gujarat in 2002.

There have been a number of other cases in the last six months, the majority of which were engineered to use religion to shore up the Hindutva voter base. For example, a member of parliament force-fed a Muslim who was fasting for Ramadan. Also, Hindu extremist groups staged the conversion of 57 Muslim families in Agra, Uttar Pradesh, under the guise of “homecoming.”

There are a few possible explanations for the rise of Hindu nationalism.

First, this could be an internal revolt by Hindu revivalists, or the “Saffron Brigade”—a term used in India to refer to the various right-wing Hindu organizations—to pressure Prime Minister Modi to use his electoral mandate to implement their preferred policies. This is the only explanation as to why Modi's cabinet members have pandered to Hindu revivalists, through Niranjana Jyoti's remarks, or External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj's contention that the Bhagavad Gita be made the national book of India. However, it is also known that Modi has privately reprimanded his ministers for such transgressions, which explains why only a few days after voicing her opinion, Swaraj spoke about the need for tolerance and pluralism in India.

The other possibility is that Modi is finally showing his true colors. However, this is unlikely, considering that Modi's election campaign and his speeches after becoming prime minister focused on economic development and not Hindutva. Further, his speech on August 15, 2014, emphasized the need to reduce "communal tensions" and to remove the "poison of casteism, communalism, regionalism, and discrimination on social and economic basis" as they were "obstacles in our way forward." While he seems to have censured his more outspoken ministers and party members in private, Modi has yet to publicly assert his stance on Hindu nationalism.

India's growth, security and future are tied to its identity as a pluralistic, democratic and secular nation that is a pillar of stability in a region and world that is increasingly chaotic. If India is not able to maintain this equilibrium, it will face insurmountable challenges. India is an extremely diverse country that, despite any differences, has managed to not only survive but thrive. Countries even smaller and more homogenous have either collapsed or fragmented. The only reason why India has not is because Gandhi and Nehru's legacy created an Indian nationalism that is inclusive, pluralist and secular. If this identity is tampered with, the state will become vulnerable and unable to face the issues that lie ahead. For the sake of peace, Prime Minister Modi should publicly clarify his position on Hindu nationalism and not allow others to frame the issue for him.

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Sex Education is More Important than We Think

Tanvi Kusum

April 20, 2015

It would be refreshing to see adults talk with frankness about sex.

I am a 19-year-old living in India, where it seems that every debate on sex education has its roots in birth control, safety and battling false information. While these perspectives are doubtlessly important, I have never looked at their pertinence from an emotional point of view.

I always thought we inevitably get the practical information about sex from our peers, much earlier than the high school syllabus even acknowledges it. The only chapter that talks about sex is on reproduction in biology, introduced in 10th grade. It covers all the systems of the human body, from circulatory to the nervous, and there are merely two pages devoted to sexual intercourse. On top of it, the content is in the most technical and distant language imaginable. While the chapter covers the technical aspects of reproduction, it doesn't mention the word "sex" at all. Most prominence is given to how the baby develops inside the uterus, and that can hardly qualify as "sex education."

Teachers, before beginning the chapter, usually warn students against laughing and hooting. It was so boring for us that we were actually surprised as to why the teacher would think we'd hoot in the first place. It seems as though the scandalous image of sex has been passed on from generation to generation.

SHAMEFUL SECRET

One day, I realized I had a completely convoluted and misinformed notion of sex. Even though I was completely fine with the idea of it on the surface, every sexual thought that went through my mind was about being dominated or raped. Sex wasn't a happy activity but a shameful secret to be guarded.

This made me wonder why every thought I had about sex was so violent. I have friends who've had sex, and they are usually very comfortable about sharing their experiences with me. But even though they are adults, they don't seem to find such comfort in discussing relationship issues with their parents. I have been a student of a reputed co-ed private school where I fostered friendships with male students just as easily as female ones, and I am never uncomfortable among friends, or in public, while they converse in innuendos. So why is the topic of sex stored in my brain with such dark matter?

I realized that ever since I was a child, all I was told was that sex is "bad" and "wrong," something no self-respecting human would engage in on their own free-will.

The first time I became aware of sexual relations between a man and woman was through warding off molestation. It was unavoidable for my mother to educate me about this, and even though she didn't mention details, I was told to not let anyone touch certain parts of my body.

Even today, television and the media are filled with gory news of rapes in India, and yet the positive aspect of sex is missing from the agenda. While we grow up seeing our parents having an aloof, businesslike relationship with each other, we have no model to emulate. The problem is not what they tell us about sex, but the complete lack of information on the subject from grown adults.

PURITY LABEL

This “bad” or “wrong” also stems from the fact that young women shouldn't engage in premarital sex or even think about things like kissing—or men in general—because that would endanger their “purity” and label them as “immoral,” resulting in no one wanting to marry them. The biggest, and probably the only, goal that girls are expected to aspire to is marriage.

Society taught us to be scared of our own sexuality by always criticizing our behavior. Freedom is synonymous with promiscuity. For example, berating Western wear, in the name of culture and tradition. Even though women are starting to have as many career choices as men in India, some policies adopted by schools and colleges seem purely misogynistic. Some elite public schools have started to change their uniform from a skirt and shirt to a traditional *salwar kameez*, not providing a choice for girls to wear whatever they like.

The whole drive to cover up the female body strikes me as absurd, since the only person who should be allowed such authority is a girl herself.

Most hostels have discriminatory curfews, with women being called in a lot earlier than men. Authorities deem these decisions to be for a woman's protection. The point escaping everyone's mind is that an *adult* woman has and can exercise her own *free will*. It seems as though women have been reduced to mere sex objects, and all the decisions for them have been made already—keeping in mind “their protection” or more clearly the protection of their virginal value.

The problem with skirts isn't that they're not traditional, but that it shows the skin people are so used to seeing hidden. Women must have freedom of choice, but society is scared that if it was up to women, they'd always choose to embrace their sexuality. This is obvious, since trying to curb sexuality goes against natural instinct.

In Bollywood movies, the bad guys pursue the heroine in order to malign her virtue—this being the only scene in Indian cinema where the euphemism of sex is evident—while the hero saves her as they dance to peppy songs. The hero gives her flowers and respect, and the heroine, as a rule, always says no to any physical advancements as she shrugs and runs away, saying “someone will see.”

In television shows, the protagonist always manages to get pregnant somehow, which becomes the source of joy for the whole family. And yet the act that made it all possible was eliminated from the story.

PECULIAR INDIFFERENCE

There hasn't been any positive depiction of sex in my life, even though I am educated and open-minded; I still don't know how to embrace this side of myself. Where are the strong heroines who have sex with men and then realize they aren't made for commitment? Or a couple who love each other and have sex like normal people would, without the end mission of producing a progeny?

Not knowing anything about sex leads us to have weird thoughts and desires that we are too ashamed to share with anyone, resulting in a peculiar indifference in marital bonds.

While society expects me to get married and become pregnant one day, I fail to see how this would take shape as a “happy event” for me. With the negatives of the ritual embedded in my mind (and of a lot of women like me), how does society expect us to suddenly metamorphose into wives when it has built a whole castle of hate on one of the most fundamental aspects of marriage? Society has taught us to save our bodies, to hide our bodies, be ashamed of our bodies, but it also expects us to become absolutely comfortable when it decides the time is right.

Consider this for example: From a very early age, you condition your children to believe that partying at night is a bad habit; they start agreeing and thinking the same. While they're in high school, they see that everyone is partying and they want go

through the same rite of passage. Since they already know you're against this, they sneak out of the house at night. That puts them in an unsafe position. But if you had been open to the idea of at least listening to your child, maybe you could guide him or her on the precautions they should take at parties.

It is the same with sex. Even though the young generation is engaging in sexual intercourse, we see many women labeled as sluts by their peers due to the negative conditioning. They still have sex, but they also think of it as something negative, making them resent their partner.

Sex education is important in India. It would be refreshing to see adults talk with frankness about this part of their life, making it seem normal. It is essential for teenagers to understand that while it's not suggested they jump in bed with someone this very moment, it wouldn't be wrong if they choose to have sex as consenting adults.

Tanvi Kusum is an Indian student battling with career choices.



Stop Child Labor in Nepal

Suman Giri and Rashesh Shrestha

June 12, 2015

Nepalese policymakers must examine economic factors when drafting solutions to combat child labor.

Imagine somewhere in Kathmandu that a child is dancing to the songs of his blind father for money. Such a heartwarming sight, no doubt. Given how cheap emotional pity is, you might consider dropping a few bucks to help sustain this narrative—that of familial bonds.

But is there more than meets the eye? Perhaps some context could help.

The child in question is one of many helping out on family farms, selling petty items, scavenging for recyclables, begging, weaving carpets, working as conductors in rickshaws, laboring in brick kilns and stone quarries. Dancing, which in most circumstances would evoke a positive emotion, is instead a throwback to an old and often overlooked question in Nepal: How do we provide for children who happen to be born in unfortunate circumstances?

This boy, who is no older than 8 or 9 years old, should be in a school playing with friends of his own age. Instead, he is helping his father earn a living for the family.

Woven within this image is the painful context that child labor is wrong, but at the same time, it is part of who we are as people. The context isn't poverty or plight. Perhaps the most fundamental context here is that we have somehow become apathetic to children working in the street. And that says a lot about how our social consciousness has evolved.

Child labor has been front and center of the public discourse before. Recently, there was an outcry over children working in brick kilns in Nepal, with *The Guardian* featuring a story in its modern-day Slavery in Focus segment. In the mid-1990s, when Nepalese carpets faced bans in Western markets due to instances of child labor, Nepal's government made it illegal for children under 16 to work in carpet factories. However, no policy changes were implemented to provide an alternative source of income for families of such kids, which inevitably resulted in them shifting to similar industries for their economic needs.

This encapsulates Nepal's policymaking. It is akin to proposing battery-powered inverters as a solution to the load shedding problem. But that doesn't address the real issue, and it causes more supplementary problems.

The Nepal Living Standards Survey (NLSS) of 1996, 2004 and 2010 reveal that the percentage of children between 10-14 years old working to provide for their families increased from 35% to 61%. Around three out of five kids of school age are currently working in some shape or form.

TWO APPROACHES

But this is not a novel problem, nor is it specific to Nepal. Other developing countries have recognized similar issues and implemented institutional policies to address them.

Two broad approaches have been introduced with some success. The first is to make education compulsory under new laws like Indonesia. The second involves cash incentives to encourage parents to send their children to school, known as Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs)—Mexico's PROGRESA program is one of the oldest and most well-known models of CCT.

Both of these approaches have their pros and cons. Compulsory education laws are relatively inexpensive to implement, but this would require the government to ensure that adequate education is supplied. For such a policy to be successful, the government needs to provide infrastructure for alternative avenues of income for poor families. CCTs would appeal to those who prefer to use carrots instead of sticks; although the expenses associated with the program mean that the government would have to rely on foreign donors.

International outrage could motivate the Nepalese government to cut institutionalized child labor by banning it outright. However, such policies do not address children working within their own homes or even as live-in servants in other people's houses.

Making education mandatory is another complementary policy step that could mitigate some effects of child labor, but this would only half-solve the issue. The policy will inevitably fail if the government cannot provide enough resources and incentives to sustain the educational infrastructure.

In this regard, perhaps there are lessons to be learned from neighboring countries. India, for instance, has defined education as a fundamental right in its Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, and state governments like that of Maharashtra have allocated a 25% reservation in all private schools for economically and socially disadvantaged children.

This kind of public-private partnership, where profitable sectors are mandated to bear part of the cost of social responsibility, appears to be a practical solution. As an extreme example for this, Indonesian law requires private school operators to be nonprofit organizations. Incentives like free lunches, subsidized accessories and stationery have also proved to be effective for Nepal in the past, and they need to be institutionalized on a larger scale.

Any policy that Nepal implements, however, must take into account the harsh realities of Nepalese livelihood strategies, at least in the short-term. Approximately 75% of

Nepal's population depend on agriculture for their livelihood, and it is fair to assume that child labor is a significant contributor to family income in these cases. Roughly 25% of the total population lives below the poverty line, and poor families need their children to be working to make ends meet.

For such families, a policy that mandates school attendance must be complemented by some form of CCT. These initiatives provide households with cash to send children to school, thus offsetting the loss of income from child labor. Payments increase with age and the educational level of a child, recognizing that older students have a higher chance of dropping out of school and seeking employment.

Such a policy targets the economic calculus of parents with working children. Economic theory suggests three primary determinants of decision with education: financial cost of education; opportunity cost of forgone labor income; and returns of education. Policies such as free education address financial cost, but opportunity cost can only be reduced by compensating the lost income through transfers.

Policymakers must think broadly and include such critical factors when deciding on solutions to combat child labor. For years, Nepal's political discourse has been dominated by inter- and intra-party disputes over the characteristics of political structure, with scant attention being paid to social policies. While important, the political system is not an end in itself, but rather a means to achieve social progress. Political discourse should emphasize solutions to the social problems Nepal faces today. This, and not the layout of the political institution, will determine the country's legacy.

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Hamid Gul and Pakistan's Schizophrenia

David Karl

September 2, 2015

The example of Gul illustrates what is a basic frustration for India: Any rapprochement with Pakistan can only come about via a military establishment that swings between paranoia and pragmatism.

The recent passing of Hamid Gul, a Pakistani general who served as head of the powerful Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency in the late 1980s, elicited a good deal of media commentary about the instrumental role he played on several fronts: the collapse of the Soviet Union; the jihadization of Afghanistan and Pakistan; and the destabilization of the Punjab and Kashmir regions in India.

But Gul also exemplified the oscillations within the Pakistani military establishment between anti-India paranoia and the desire to stabilize relations with Delhi. Consider, for example, the tale once related to this author by the man who was the CIA station chief in Pakistan when the C-130 Hercules aircraft carrying Pakistani strongman Mohammed Zia-ul-Haq exploded in mid-air and crashed under mysterious circumstances in August 1988. The crash killed Zia and a group of senior Pakistani army leaders, as well as the US ambassador to Pakistan and the chief of the US military mission there.

Zia did not lack for enemies, both in and outside of the country, and his sudden, violent death launched a grab bag of colorful conspiracy theories. John Gunther Dean, then serving as the US ambassador to India, came to believe that Israel was possibly behind Zia's demise, an allegation that quickly led to his ouster from the Foreign Service. The incident even prompted a satirical novel that won a Commonwealth Book Prize.

Zia was Gul's patron, and the latter had no trouble in believing the crash was the result of Indian skullduggery. As the story was told to this author, Gul rushed up to the CIA station chief when the latter arrived at the crash site in eastern Pakistan and loudly announced that he had determined the Indians were behind it. The station chief pressed him to detail the evidence for his claim. Gul finally admitted that there was no

concrete evidence, but then he rationalized that since the Indians were so skilled at covering their tracks, the lack of evidence could only be taken as certain proof of their involvement.

PARANOIA AND PRAGMATISM

The mindset Gul displayed that day explains why Pakistan is sometimes referred to by its detractors as “Paranoidistan.” It lies behind such crazy notions like blaming India for the massive floods that ravaged Pakistan in mid-2010; the December 2014 massacre of some 130 school children in Peshawar; or the heatwave three months ago that killed some 1,000 people in Sindh province. (Of course, the Indian side occasionally slips into the same mindset, such as when it detains pigeons as part of a suspected Pakistani spy operation.)

But Gul also had another side. As head of Pakistani army intelligence in the mid-1980s, he counseled restraint during the so-called “Brasstacks” crisis, when a massive Indian military exercise near the border raised serious concerns about a possible offensive into Pakistan. This caution reportedly helped bring about the de-escalation of a situation many feared would spiral into outright war and perhaps even nuclear conflict.

Later, when he moved into the ISI post, Gul was the principal representative in secret discussions with the Indians over the de-militarization of the Siachen Glacier, an uninhabitable stretch of the Himalayas north of Kashmir that is contested by Indian and Pakistani military forces at great cost to both sides. A.K. Verma, who then headed India’s foreign intelligence agency and served as Gul’s interlocutor, has acknowledged that the talks were near fruition when they were derailed by Zia’s death. Then-Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi confirmed this when he told foreign correspondents a month before his assassination in 1991 that he had “almost signed a treaty on Siachen with Zia. The only reason it was not signed was that he died.”

A similar development occurred two decades later following the acute military crisis ignited by the brazen attack on the Indian parliament by Pakistan-based jihadists in December 2001. In the wake of the crisis, the two countries undertook an intensive back-channel peace process in 2004-07 that was on the verge of stabilizing the Kashmir dispute. Then-Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh acknowledged that “an important breakthrough was in sight” until domestic political troubles led to the downfall of Pakistani military leader Pervez Musharraf.

Satinder Lambah, Singh's special envoy to the talks, sketched out the provisions of the tentative agreement, which included freezing the territorial status-quo in Kashmir, as well as both sides granting substantive autonomy to the parts of Kashmir they control and allowing freer movement of goods and people across the inter-Kashmir divide. Moreover, C. Raja Mohan, a distinguished Indian journalist, notes the diplomatic momentum was so great during this period that accords on the disputes over Siachen and Sir Creek—a patch of marshland dividing the Indian state of Gujarat and the Pakistani province of Sindh—similarly appeared within reach.

The example of Hamid Gul and his successors illustrates what is a basic frustration for Indian leaders: Any rapprochement with Pakistan can only come about via a military establishment that swings between paranoia and pragmatism. The anti-India fixation receives much focus these days. But officials in New Delhi would also do well not to lose sight of the desire to find equilibrium in relations.

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Tango Time for the US and India

Atul Singh

September 27, 2015

After decades of frostiness, the world's two biggest democracies are drawing closer because of geopolitics, economics and culture.

The United States and India are the world's two biggest democracies. Both of them are diverse and multicultural nations. Both are also deeply divided and cacophony rules during raucous elections. Both of them have what Joseph Nye calls "soft power" along with economic heft and military might.

The countries have many interests in common. Yet they have not been the best of friends and only now are relations starting to warm up. As Indian Prime Minister

Narendra Modi pays his second visit to the US, relations are better than at any time in the past, but a long road lies ahead for both nations.

COLD WAR AND ICY RELATIONS

US-India relations have a tortured past. During World War II, Indian leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Maulana Azad were grateful to the US for supporting India's independence. Azad was the president of the Indian National Congress from 1940 to 1945. He met Americans regularly when he was not in jail, and most Indian leaders looked to America as a moderating influence on British imperialism.

Soon after independence, the US-India bonhomie evaporated. Both sides made multiple mistakes. The US supported apartheid in South Africa and got rid of Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh through a dirty coup. These actions rattled a newly independent India that was opposed to racism and imperialism.

Indian foreign policy was also unwise. Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru came under the influence of V.K. Krishna Menon, an abrasive man distrusted by Gandhi and Azad, who did lasting damage to Indo-US ties.

As the Cold War intensified, Pakistan became a key ally for the US. Just as in Latin America, the US threw its weight behind Pakistan's military dictators. Multicultural India, a thriving democracy, was treated with active hostility.

Relations reached their nadir in 1971 when President Richard Nixon sent the US seventh fleet to the Indian Ocean on the advice of his rather famous national security adviser, Henry Kissinger. The US supported "the killers and tormentors of a generation of Bangladeshis" because of blind allegiance to a Cold War ally. As a result, an entire generation of Indians grew up distrusting the US and detesting its alliance with Pakistan.

When the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, the US armed and trained the *mujahedeen* in Afghanistan through Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). The ISI diverted much of US aid to promote insurgency in India. For President Ronald Reagan, General Zia-ul-Haq was a "front line" ally in the fight against communism and tacitly supported Zia's "bleed India through a thousand cuts" policy. Terrorism was a feature of daily life in India, but the US chose to disregard Indian concerns repeatedly and callously.

WARMING RELATIONS IN CHANGING TIMES

Two developments changed US relations with India. The first was the collapse of the Soviet Union. This led to the opening of the Indian economy in 1991. Now, India presented a potentially vast market for American companies and Uncle Sam found Indian consumers too seductive to resist.

The second was the September 11 attacks in 2001. This happened not too long after radical Islamists hijacked an Indian plane to Kandahar, Afghanistan. The Taliban regime aided, abetted and sheltered the hijackers. The Indian government shamefully acceded to the demands of the hijackers, who went on to play unleash incredible violence later. More importantly, the hijacking emboldened belief in al-Qaeda that it could pull off more spectacular acts.

At this time, Pakistan was backing the Taliban, which in turn was supporting al-Qaeda. For the first time since 1947, the US realized that it had created a Frankenstein's monster. Even longstanding Pakistan lovers in Washington had to accept that "the land of the pure" had moved toward a toxic form of Islam and was using terror as an instrument of its foreign policy. From now on, the US had no choice but to embrace India.

Under President George W. Bush, the Indo-US nuclear deal marked the high watermark of a new relationship. Since then, the relationship lost momentum because the US was bogged down in Iraq and Afghanistan, while India was ruled by an ineffectual prime minister who was merely a proxy for Congress Party leader Sonia Gandhi.

The US did not help itself by treating incumbent Prime Minister Narendra Modi like a leper because of his supposed involvement in the 2002 Gujarat riots. This meant the most pro-market reformist Indian leader was systematically excluded from any conversation and US companies missed out to Japanese, European and even Chinese firms in setting up shop in Gujarat. The State Department misread the situation right until the historic elections of 2014, when Modi came to power. To his credit US President Barack Obama moved swiftly when Modi won and invited him to Washington. The bonhomie between Obama and Modi seemed to inspire a new chapter in US-India relations.

THREE REASONS TO BE FRIENDS

Obama became the first president of the US to visit India twice while in office. He also became the first to be the chief guest on India's Republic Day. *Prima facie*, it would seem that US-India relations are now remarkably closer.

This is not entirely true because the US is a superpower with numerous interests and many demands on its attention. Yet what is certainly true is that Modi's energetic diplomacy and Obama's receptiveness have made a difference. Even more important have been three key reasons that are bringing the US and India closer.

The first is geopolitics or, to put it bluntly, China. The Middle Kingdom has now become the biggest trading partner of many major countries such as Brazil and Australia. More importantly, China holds an estimated \$3.5 trillion as foreign exchange reserves. This means it can potentially threaten the dollar's status as world currency.

China's assertiveness in its near neighborhood is worrying US allies such as Japan and Korea. Earlier this year, Japan announced a record \$42 billion defense budget. Similarly, India is worried about China's growing strength on its borders, as well as its presence in neighbors like Sri Lanka and Myanmar. Indians still remember their 1962 war with China. It resulted ended in defeat and disgrace. Unsurprisingly, the US and India are trying to reach out to each other.

The second is economics. The US is seeking markets where it can export goods and invest capital. With cheap energy, it is making a strong comeback in a range of industries from chemicals to automobiles. Boeing is still the leading manufacturer of planes, and the US defense industry is probably stronger than ever.

With the slashing of the Pentagon budget, foreign markets have become more important. India is opening its defense sector and the US does not want to lose out to the Russians or French, who have been key players in the Indian market. Similarly, the US wants its nuclear power companies like GE and Westinghouse to have a slice of the Indian market, as India seeks to slake the thirst of its billion-plus population for power.

Indo-US trade has grown from about \$5 billion in 1991 to an estimated \$65 billion for 2014. US investment in India has increased dramatically, and now Indian companies have begun investing in America as well.

Modi faces great expectations, and his primary task is to generate employment in a country of 1.2 billion with over 65% of its population under 35. He has no choice but to phase out the Nehruvian socialist model that imposed anemic Hindu rates of growth on India. The Soviet-inspired Planning Commission has gone. Although Modi has failed to make substantive reforms, he has been tireless in wooing foreign investment. There is natural alignment of key economic interests for both countries. It is for this reason that both are paying each other more attention than ever.

The third trend that is often forgotten is culture. As diverse and fractious democracies, India and the US are beginning to understand how to deal with each other. Increasingly, the Indian elite send their children to study and the best Indian minds continue to flock to the US. Raghuram Rajan, Arvind Subramanian and Jayant Sinha, three key men deciding the future of India's economy, have worked extensively in the US after studying in its top schools.

Ties between Silicon Valley and Bengaluru, Hollywood and Bollywood, MIT and IIT run deep. The Indian Diaspora in the US is becoming more influential, and one of them is the assistant secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs in the US State Department.

In India, most people watch American cinema, love American brands and love to work for American companies. In the US, many are turning to India as well. The growing popularity of yoga, meditation and Buddhism in places like New York and California is creating a new familiarity with India.

After many decades of frostiness, the US and India are starting to tango.

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EUROPE

The Paris Paradox

Landon Shroder

January 12, 2015

Are we conditioned to view the situation differently when Muslims are involved?

The events surrounding the massacre at the *Charlie Hebdo* offices in Paris on January 7 are reprehensible, but not necessarily shocking. At least not for the reasons we might think. Violence must be condemned, yet the inevitable politicization of this event, on both sides of the Atlantic, will soon start to configure around simplistic and digestible narratives.

We should be wary of these simplifications for a variety of reasons. Amongst them, the ability of politicians and media to diminish the complexity of relations between East and West, poor and affluent, secular and religious, or the obsessive fetish surrounding the very concept of freedom of speech. Each of these had some part to play in the Paris attacks.

We have already begun hearing the usual sound bites relating to “freedom” and “assaults on democracy,” and while it is easy to revert to such a facile assessment of the situation, the public should be justifiably skeptical. Such baseless tropes remain the foundation for countless policies, which have spun a never ending cycle of violence—look no further than the continued War on Terror.

MORAL SUPERIORITY

Our reflections about the *Charlie Hebdo* shootings should not start with a projection of moral superiority about Western values, but a quiet internalization on what freedom of speech really means. About how we contextualize it, in the hyper connected world we now live in. And, more importantly, how this has become fetishized as an unassailable component of modern democracy and how we continually fail to grasp the very real implications that it has on public wellbeing. Especially when our ability to think critically is often challenged by the overwhelming abundance of often conflicting information.

This certainly is not meant to apologize away the behaviors, or violence, of any one person or group of people. We must concern ourselves with the deeply profound issues, which manifest from certain interpretations of Islam, much in the same way we must acknowledge the failures unique to liberal democracy. What these shootings reflect, and what we must continue to acknowledge, is that we have reached a critical junction of where culture, media and self-awareness have intersected with national identity and policy, both foreign and domestic.

Nowhere is this more perfectly embodied than in France, where Muslims remain marginalized, totaling roughly 5-6 million, or 8% of the population. Within this demographic there is drastic underemployment, diminished opportunity connected to race and religion, postcolonial tensions and deep-rooted cultural barriers that remain in national opposition, such as the belief in state assimilation vs faith-based self-expression—like wearing the *hijab* (headscarf). Therefore, generating content that is inherently provocative against a disenfranchised class of people only stresses these societal challenges and, unsurprisingly, has brought some of them to a point of political violence. To any objective observer, this should come as no surprise.

These are not value judgments—they only reinforce observations about why someone or some groups can justify violence to themselves, when living in a society that espouses liberal principles. Maintaining the ability to reason along these lines is important, if we are ever to fully understand the acceptable balance between freedom of speech and cultural acceptability.

CYCLE OF VIOLENCE

Another way of understanding the basis of this tragedy is through the interminable War on Terror, a perpetual theme now ingrained in the lives of most Americans and Europeans since 9/11. We have been conditioned to believe that, at all times, a terrorist attack is imminent and our way of life permanently disrupted. Disrupted by whom? By Muslims. A ridiculous notion given the actual statistics on terror attacks—even more so for Americans who contend with upward of 30,000 gun deaths each year.

Nonetheless, this has given rise to an entire industry that supports a certain kind of characterization of 1.6 billion people spread throughout 49 Muslim-majority countries. One that continually remains omnipresent in politics, media and movies. CNN's Don

Lemon recently asked renowned human rights lawyer Arsalan Iftikhar if he supports the Islamic State , on the sole pretense that he happens to be Muslim.

The cartoons of *Charlie Hebdo* are indeed racist, offensive and completely objectionable and, at times, absolutely hilarious. But they are only funny to those of us who have not been marginalized, who have nothing to lose and everything to gain by laughing at satire that was generated to be purposefully offensive. The argument that the magazine's burlesque targeting of religious and political groups was universal only holds up in the minds of those who believe there is some kind of equilibrium to the world's power structure. Meanwhile, this is set against continued "war-fighting" in the Muslim world, illegal detentions, torture and drone strikes which, according to some sources, have killed upward of 4,000 people in the last decade.

So it is not just about cartoons or satire; it is about an entire mentality, which is advanced by governments and media to reinforce a cycle of violence against people from a religion we might never actually come into contact with. This is followed by the inevitable expansion of national security infrastructure, dilutions of personal privacy and an undermining of civil liberties. How ironic is it that we will allow these restrictions to permeate our thinking, our way of life, but unite over political mockery that is tasteless and offensive? This is a highly unpopular opinion because it forces us to acknowledge a certain level of prejudice and malfeasance that we have all been complicit in.

Unfortunately, there are no simple ways to rationalize what happened in Paris to the staff of *Charlie Hebdo*. Violence of any kind, especially in countries committed to secular liberal values, is unacceptable. We are, however, living in an age that has not yet fully come to terms with what it means to be truly interdependent, truly connected, to cultures and communities far different from our own. Nor do we completely understand what it means to be perpetually at war with an enemy and ideology that is as temperamental as it is unpredictable. Despite this, we must be reasonable in our approach to freedom of speech and balance it against the public interest.

There are a million ways to make clever points and further the cultural discourse, without having to show unadulterated support for satire and parody that is of questionable merit. This is the epitome of fetishizing freedom of speech. Should the situation be slightly different and the cartoonists be notoriously provocative against blacks, Jews or any other minority, would we be as outraged as we are now?

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Can Ukraine Turn From Pawn to Kingmaker?

Polina Popova

April 8, 2015

Ukraine should use its unique position to become a bridge between Russia and the West.

“Ukraine should make use of its geopolitical advantages and become a bridge between Russia and the West,” quipped an ambitious Viktor Yanukovich, following his victory in the 2010 Ukrainian presidential election. Despite this emphasis on Ukraine’s strong European identity, the president changed course under pressure from Russia and rejected the European Union Association Agreement in November 2013. The Maidan protests followed, leading to Yanukovich’s ousting and Russia’s subsequent annexation of Crimea.

After a year of violent fighting between Kiev and pro-Russian separatists in the east, Ukraine’s economy is now on the verge of collapse, and the displaced population has reached over 1.7 million. But with fighting coming to a rickety standstill under the Minsk II agreement, do Yanukovich’s words still carry weight? Five years on, can Ukraine fulfill her position as a vital bridge between East and West?

A SOVEREIGN UKRAINE

While Kiev and Moscow have been committed to fulfilling the military obligations and heavy weapons pullback as stipulated under the Minsk II agreement, there is still much to be done before Ukraine reemerges as a sovereign nation. Currently, implementation

of the political components of the Minsk deal appears to have hit a roadblock, and Kiev has yet to grant the separatist regions autonomy, open dialogue over their future elections or unfreeze the economic blockade put in place on the two “people’s republics.” Moreover, on April 6, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko denounced calls for “federalization” of the country, likening such calls to “bacteria trying to infect Ukraine and destroy our unity.”

The deadlock has largely come about as a result of the loopholes present in the Minsk II agreement. In a typical catch-22, the Kiev government argues that the rebels cannot govern themselves until elections are held, while the rebels insist the government must first grant the separatist regions autonomy before holding a legitimate vote.

However, Poroshenko has previously expressed his readiness “to grant Donbass special economic zone status with its own regime governing relations with the EU and Russia.” Such a scenario would be a feasible compromise that will stop short of federalization, and one that would ensure Ukraine’s sovereignty over its borders while awarding Donbass the power to become a strong economic force in the country. But would this be enough?

A REFORMED UKRAINE

The recent approval by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to inject \$10 billion into Ukraine’s economy over the next year as part of its larger \$40 billion bailout has led many to hope for what Christine Lagarde has called “immediate economic stabilization.” These funds will be coupled with an extra \$7.5 billion from international organizations, and \$15.4 billion in debt relief that Ukraine aims to negotiate with bondholders.

Dmitry Firtash, a Ukrainian businessman, is behind an ample recovery plan to help Ukraine overcome the damage caused by its devastating civil war. During an investment forum called “Ukraine Tomorrow” in Vienna on March 3 — attended by bigwigs such as former UK European Commissioner Lord Mandelson, German Finance Minister Peer Steinbrück and Austrian Foreign Minister Sebastian Kurz among others—Firtash advocated for Ukraine’s closer integration with the West and announced the establishment of the Agency for Modernization of Ukraine (AMU). Meant to attract \$300 billion in investment in order to reform and stabilize the country’s economy, the agency “will be structured in a number of directions focused on particular policy areas and led by experienced European politicians or business leaders.”

Firtash, who is currently residing in Austria, is facing US extradition charges at the request of the FBI, which alleges he was involved in bribing officials in India. However, his controversial reputation is unlikely to have any profound effect on the realization of the AMU initiative. Vienna's Higher Regional Court has already concluded in his favor, claiming the US does not have sufficient evidence to prove Firtash's involvement in corrupt practices in India.

While Firtash is a strong proponent for Ukraine's collaboration with the West and is already in talks with potential investors for the implementation of the program, he has insisted that in order to address the difficult challenges ahead, the three key powers, "Europe, Ukraine, and Russia should sit down together and talk things through."

ALIENATING UKRAINE IS COUNTERPRODUCTIVE

Indeed, Russia too has a vital role to play in its neighbor's economy. Prior to the crisis, 6.8% of Ukraine's foreign direct investment (FDI) came from Russia, although the real figure is likely to be much higher. Furthermore, Russian and Ukrainian banking and energy sectors are extremely intertwined, and despite the crisis, the two countries are maintaining their long-term industry and trade relationship.

Given that Ukraine's economy needs Russia, and vice versa, Moscow cannot afford postponing a constructive dialogue with the European Union (EU) and Ukraine for much longer. Against the backdrop of falling oil prices and the weight of international sanctions, Russia's economy is set to contract this year by 3% and by 1% in 2016. Russia could help its own economy by collaborating with Ukraine, not least in the form of a new gas deal and return of FDI, but also by cooling tensions with Kiev, which could result in the removal of sanctions and open Russia back up to international financing.

Easing the burden on Ukraine's economy by offering a much needed gas discount will prove to be a sign of good faith and will effectively signal Russia's acknowledgement that alienating Ukraine would be counterproductive. Following the European Commission's letter to the Russian government, requesting it to consider giving Ukraine a discount on gas exports, Moscow sent a formal demand for Gazprom to lower its Ukraine prices, indicating that there may indeed be room for compromise in bilateral relations.

TOWARD A NEW UKRAINE

There are many lessons to be learnt from the past as we look toward a new Ukraine. While Russian aggression in Ukraine should by no means go unpunished, it was the lack of consideration toward Russian interests in the discussions prefacing the European Union Association Agreement that led to Moscow's hostility and to Yanukovich's rejection of the EU proposal. It was only in summer 2013 that the text of the agreement was finally published in finer detail, which "clearly showed to [the Russians] that with such an agreement Ukraine would no longer be able to maintain the same level of relations" with Russia. Despite Russian hostility toward the agreement, the EU continued with the process without consultation, and it pushed forward with the deal.

Had the EU embarked on meaningful trilateral dialogue at the first signs of Russia's discontent, there is a high chance the whole crisis could have been averted or minimized through a diplomatic solution agreed to by all sides.

We must remember that Ukraine does not belong to the East or the West. While the country has to develop a strong relationship with Europe, it has historical and economic ties to Russia as well. With this in mind, Kiev is excellently placed to become a mediator between the two power blocs in the medium-term. No other country can claim the same mixed heritage and the same tightly knit relationship with Russia while still maintaining ample European aspirations.

But to achieve this, Ukraine has to get its house in order first. The government in Kiev could start by upholding its end of the deal under the Minsk II agreement by granting the separatist republics autonomy and amnesty, while organizing elections in the region that will abide by Ukrainian law. These should be the first steps to ensure dialogue between all sides continues and that the truce does not fall through due to lack of trust among the signing parties.

As noted by a now disgraced Yanukovich, Ukraine is "a nation of great things, but we will accomplish none of them if we continue to bicker among ourselves ... Developing a good relationship with the West and bridging the gap to Russia will help Ukraine."

It's time for Kiev to stop being a pawn and become a kingmaker on the European continent.



Corbyn Fever Brings Winds of Change to Britain

Tahir Abbas

August 5, 2015

The Jeremy Corbyn bandwagon rolls on in Britain, but will there will be problems ahead?

There is a wind of change blowing in British politics. It is sweeping along with it a body of the population that has become bitterly disappointed with today's politics and social realities. A few weeks ago, no one could have imagined that Member of Parliament (MP) Jeremy Corbyn would be the foremost candidate for Labour Party leader and opposition spokesman in the British Parliament. At his 42nd hustings in Birmingham on August 2, this author had the opportunity to listen to the man, appreciate his politics and observe the effects he had on an audience that was brimming to the rafters. The Corbyn momentum was very much in full flow.

Corbyn wants to create a "different and better world," where "democratic representation" remains alive and well. He wants to fight against a dominant hegemonic discourse and against the acquiescence to the austerity measures that the current Labour Party adheres to unchallenged. He regards the current neoliberal paradigm as one that has "brutalized society" with its "economic orthodoxy."

The raft of welfare reform currently in development is a throwback to the Thatcher era, but arguably far more severe and ideological than any grocer's daughter could have achieved. The language of immigration and differences in relation to ethnic and religious minorities is far more extreme and, therefore, more disingenuous than ever before. The Conservatives of today have retained the neoliberal, deregulation and

privatization agendas that were at the heart of monetarism during the 1980s. In contrast, Corbyn wants to stand with “social progress and human rights.”

Corbyn’s words are carrying along both disaffected Labour party voters of yesteryear and those who switched to the Greens because they felt the Labour Party was incapable of addressing their aspirations. Corbyn wants to engage in real politics with a collective aspiration. He wants to focus on communities and interdependence among the masses, rather than the self-interested politics of Westminster “political obsessives” whose *modus operandi* is inward-looking and self-aggrandizing. Corbyn wants to preserve the National Health Service (NHS) as free at the point of delivery. He also wants to protect the heart of the welfare system introduced by Labour after the Second World War, with its focus on welfare, social security, housing and employment. Corbyn hopes to create an economic development framework that encourages investment in technology and manufacturing that is relevant for the 21st century. Germany has managed to invest in its manufacturing sector to resounding success, while Britain has left its own to languish behind the rest of the world as neoliberal policies have supported the service sector economy and the financial services.

For Corbyn, it is individuals who come up from below that make real change. Real change is rarely delivered top-down.

Corbyn’s policy measures will change the distribution of wealth in Britain to make it more equal and fair. He seeks to raise corporation tax by 0.05% in order to eliminate the need for university tuition fees. He will also tackle the housing shortage by focusing on reducing the artificially high rents demanded by the private sector and subsidized by the state.

CHANGE ON THE HORIZON?

The people of Britain are “fed up.” They want change and they want it “now, not in 2020.” The current politics of the United Kingdom lack any sense of society or community. It is a one-upmanship driven by competition and individualism.

There is an illusion toward the kind of socialism that has not been heard of in Britain since the late 1970s. It is based on an analysis of society that sees social conflict as the dominant motif, which means keeping big business and excessive profits in check.

The current reality is an exploitation of resources and talents, which creates alienation and marginalization that is too costly for societies. Poverty is avoidable misery and a waste of capacity. Solidarity is beneficial not just for the individual, the neighborhood and the city, but also for society as a whole. The funds tipped for the new Trident program would be saved. NATO, Corbyn argued, should have been disbanded in 1989 after the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Berlin Wall.

In his questions and answers, Corbyn talked about the huge travesty of the Iraq War. He discussed the unrest in the Middle East that was caused in the conflict's aftermath, along with its implications for Islamophobia and vilification in society today. It has led to cynicism, apathy and indifference. Corbyn's model wants to enforce social justice and peace-building in the international context.

The Corbyn struggle is a collectivist one. It focuses on the needs of societies as a whole rather than that of individuals *per se*. For many, Corbyn is seen as a Marxist, communist, socialist and an extreme leftist, but for others, he is a self-effacing champion of the people. In this respect, he is a breath of fresh air compared to the slick PR-trained but inexperienced technocrats of Westminster.

Corbyn is at the forefront of a tremendous shift in mood. This is most noticeable among a segment of the population that seeks to retrieve significant lost ground at the behest of political parties that have moved to the right over the last few decades.

There is also a deep sense of disillusionment with the Labour Party, which has lost its credentials politically, ideologically and culturally.

On September 12, the results of the leadership election will be announced. If Corbyn becomes leader, which seems likely at present, he will face tremendous battles at many different levels, not least from within his own party. Some argue that a Corbyn victory is a defeat for the Labour Party and a win for the Conservatives for the foreseeable future.

Whether or not he makes it as Labour leader, the groundswell of left opinion—arguably curtailed and dissuaded by majority politics—has created a momentum. Politicians always talk about the changes they wish to realize. But the question with Corbyn is whether things will move beyond the loud applause in hustings to one of real political change. It is what many are waiting for.



Immigrants in Germany Present Five Challenges and Six Opportunities

Rolf Dienst

September 12, 2015

Aging Germany is likely to overcome the challenges and benefit greatly from the influx of immigrants, given its experience and economic strength.

Many of my non-German friends ask me how are we handling the huge numbers of immigrants coming to Germany and how will we continue to do so in the future. A large amount of immigrants are asylum seekers from Syria and Iraq, but many are economic migrants from the Balkan states and Africa. African immigrants, such as those from Libya, end up reaching Germany via Italy after an often hazardous voyage across the Mediterranean Sea.

PEOPLE ARE FLOCKING TO GERMANY

In 2015, Germany expects to take in 800,000 refugees. On first impression, this seems impossible. The stress on German society and politics might prove to be unbearable. However, after reading a fair bit and interacting with a number of people, I have come to a different view. We will be able to handle the situation better than most expect. Germany will benefit from the influx of immigrants despite all the risks they bring.

Six years ago, the Federal Statistics Office published a study that predicted the German population would decrease from 82 million to 65 million by 2060. The study predicted that increasing life expectancy would lead to an aging society with a rising number of dependents for every working person. Japan is already facing the social and

economic problems brought about by aging. There is a strong fear that Germany could face Japan's fate.

The 2008-10 global financial crisis affected Germany less than other European nations. Countries like Spain, Italy, Portugal and Greece have over 25% unemployment. Therefore, many well-educated youth from these nations have come to Germany to find jobs. In 2014, Germany experienced a net influx of 400,000 people. This stabilized the German population last year.

A CENTURY OF IMMIGRATION

We have a long history of immigrants who came to the country to work in our industrialized society. In the early 20th century, German coal mines attracted Polish workers. Italians arrived in the 1950s as *gastarbeiter*, the German word for guest workers. They were followed by other people from the Mediterranean such as those from Yugoslavia. Eventually, more than 3.5 million Turks arrived to settle in cities like Berlin, Munich and Duisberg. Germany has become a more diverse country as a result, and there is much more choice when it comes to food or restaurants in most cities.

On June 20, German President Joachim Gauck gave a major speech in which he talked at length about immigration. He spoke about Germany's history of integrating refugees and remembered how "a poor and ruined Germany managed to integrate millions of refugees" after World War II. Most post-war refugees were Germans from East Prussia and Silesia who spoke the same language and share a similar culture to the rest of the population. Without these hungry immigrants, the country would not have had its *wirtschaftswunder*, the German word for economic miracle. Germany needed immigration because it had lost millions of soldiers and civilians during the war.

The German population is decreasing by 450,000 every year. Without immigration, this number is bound to go up. This will slow down the German economy considerably. Hence, many CEOs of large German companies are welcoming the new immigrants. Opinion polls such as those conducted by ARD-Deutschland reveal that more than two-thirds of Germans support the current immigration policy. Support is particularly strong when migrants come from hopeless countries like Syria and are refugees. Those who come from places like the Balkan states are deemed economic migrants and tensions rise when they claim generous German benefits.

REALITIES AND CHALLENGES

A few days ago, I went to the Munich central railway station as the refugees streamed in. I took cash and clothing to distribute to those who were arriving. There were so many of them in such dire straits that trying to help was nearly impossible. I feel proud of my people, of the police, of the hundreds of volunteers who handled more than 10,000 Syrian refugees in a single day. They had taken the Balkan route and arrived via Turkey, Greece, Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary and Austria. Along the way, these refugees had faced a lot of trouble, particularly in Hungary.

Once they arrived, the police registered the refugees and distributed them across Bavaria and Germany. Volunteers worked closely with authorities to make this possible. Mobile hospitals and food centers opened up. Donations in cash and in kind continue to pour in because these refugees possess little and are starting life from scratch. People have sent clothing, especially for winter, and food in greater quantities than can be currently handled. I guess many in the older generation still remember refugees who fled the Nazis. The entire exercise to provide for the refugees is incredibly impressive and inspiring.

In our affluent little city of Icking, 30 kilometers south of Munich, the first eight Nigerian refugees are living in an empty home of a Catholic priest. They are being helped by 40 volunteers. Our immigrant quota has been revised upward by an additional 80 refugees for 2015. This is not insignificant in a town of 3,500. It is already leading to some tension. The conservative members of the city council blocked the purchase of an empty house for €1.9 million. Hence, from September 30, the sports hall of our high school will be converted into a refugee home. We hope to find refugees a better place to stay soon.

Meanwhile, students will have to exercise in the woods and fields as long as the refugees stay in their sports hall. This simple situation demonstrates that numerous challenges lie ahead both for refugees and local inhabitants.

CHALLENGES TO ADDRESS

The major challenges that Germany must address are as follows.

First, housing was in short supply even before the flow of new immigrants. We have to relax our building codes and find innovative ways of accommodating the newcomers without making housing scarce for the existing population.

Second, we need to conclude agreements with our European neighbors. This might be a big headache, especially when it comes to some eastern countries. The migrant crisis might also damage the stability of the European Union (EU). Yet we have to persist as Europeans and find a way to relieve the pressure on countries like Italy, Greece and Germany.

Third, we have to keep groups belonging to the extreme right under control. So far, we have done very well overall to keep these groups to the fringes of society. However, they remain a high risk for Germany. We can see how eastern parts of the country suffering high unemployment are susceptible to the charms of these groups. We will have to remain vigilant and work constantly to keep these groups under control.

Fourth, normal politicians might resort to populism and rabble rousing to win cheap support. The situation is delicate. Tensions will grow. Resentments will rise. Stirring discontent will be easy. So, the people have to keep politicians under check and demand long-term solutions instead of inflammatory rhetoric and identity based politics. As a people, we will have to develop the maturity to ignore nasty events, which will invariably occur.

Fifth, education will be a great challenge in the days to come. The newcomers will need to learn the German language. Their children will have to go to school. They themselves need training in new skills. They will need apprenticeships and on the job training as well. The German education system will have move nimbly to meet the requirements of new arrivals to the country.

PLENTY OF REASONS FOR CHEER

Despite the challenges, I am positive about the events and their implications for the future.

First, I believe the majority of the refugees will try to adapt as fast as possible. They are hungry and driven. Like immigrants before them, they will try their best to qualify for good jobs and provide Germany with much needed labor. My wife, my children and I travel a lot. We have lived in many countries, including Arab ones. There are cultural

differences for sure, but they already exist within Germany itself. Refugees will largely adapt well to Germany.

Second, the refugees arriving in Germany are hungry with nothing left to lose. There is no way to stop them from entering our country. Germany can try to distribute refugees across Europe, but the primary responsibility will fall on us—at least as long as the Balkan route is the preferred way of travel. The fact that Britain has agreed to accept 20,000 Syrians by 2020 is a joke. This is a number that arrives in Munich over a weekend. There are currently over 4 million registered Syrian refugees in Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan and Egypt. Only Germany would be willing to accept large numbers of them.

Third, we have successfully integrated over 15 million immigrants over the past 70 years. Some of them came from as far as from Kazakhstan with remote German ties and knowledge of the German language. These immigrants are an organic part of German life and stimulate our economy.

Fourth, we can afford to take care of refugees and have the expertise to do so. We rebuilt Germany after World War II. We integrated East Germany 25 years ago at a great expense. This integration was partly financed by the *Solidaritätszuschlag*, a 5.5% tax on the income tax due affectionately called Soli. We will survive the Greece debacle too. The inflow of immigrants will certainly be expensive, but we can pay for it. In the first half of 2015, the federal budget of Germany had an unexpected budget surplus of €26 billion. This year, the City of Munich will have a surplus again and will continue to repay public debt. Some of this money at federal, state and city levels can easily go to refugees.

Fifth, the unemployment rate in Germany is currently approximately 6%. Between Munich and Ingolstadt, the headquarters of BMW and Audi respectively, the unemployment rate is below 1%. The employment office records more than 500,000 unfilled jobs, and companies are setting up recruitment centers in some Mediterranean countries. Refugees could fulfil the German economy's demand for labor.

Sixth, not all of the 800,000 refugees expected in 2015 will stay for good. Some will not gain asylum, while others might be transferred to other EU states. The numbers that will permanently stay in Germany is a wild guess, but somewhere between 500,000 and 600,000 for 2015 seems to be a reasonable figure. This number fortuitously

compensates for the average annual decrease of our population quite well. Perhaps, we might be in a position to admit refugees around this figure in the years to come.

In summary, I believe the glass is half full rather than half empty. The opportunities outweigh the risks. The influx of immigrants presents great challenges to our politicians, our society and indeed every single German. However, we can overcome these challenges if we pull together.

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The Paris Tragedy and the End of Strategic Thinking

Peter Isackson

November 17, 2015

Everything indicates that the West has given up on strategic thinking.

The horrendous and carefully synchronized attacks in Paris on November 13 have provided a new occasion to fill the airwaves and pages of the press with the familiar themes, memes and sentiments our skilled rhetoricians in politics and the media are so good at trotting out. The database of scripts to read from is there for all to exploit. Listening in the immediate aftermath to French President François Hollande, who was clearly wondering how best to recycle his ten-month-old “*Je suis Charlie*” speeches, I couldn’t help hearing the echo of George W. Bush in late 2001. Reuters succinctly summed up the surreal comedy of it in a single sentence. “Faced with war, the country must take appropriate action,” he said, without saying what that meant.

Appropriate action? Hell, we don’t even know what “war” means these days: conflicts between nations or military mobilization against criminal bands? So how are we to judge what the appropriate decisions might be? (Hollande’s exact words in his native

French were “*décisions appropriées*”—decisions, not action). Then again, why should leaders explain what they mean since terrorism calls for “appropriate” action, which of course requires no explanation since our leaders have all latitude to define what is appropriate? In a climate of fear, we want results, not words.

Hollande does provide a justification for these undefined actions that will result from his appropriate decisions. He tells us the assault was conducted against France, and more significantly, “against the values we defend everywhere in the world.” I hear this as roughly the equivalent of Bush’s “they hate us for our freedoms.” It also implies that because our values are, by definition, right and can be applied “everywhere,” we are justified in “defending” them by any “appropriate” means, which may include invading or unilaterally attacking those nations that fail to respect or apply them to our satisfaction. As any lawyer will tell you, the best defense is attack.

President Hollande continues by describing France as “a free country that speaks to the whole planet.” Most countries speak to their own populations, but French exceptionalism is a tradition older and in some ways more revered even than American exceptionalism. The French megaphone is intended to echo at least to the outer reaches of Francophonie but also, thanks to translation into English, to the entire world. French freedom is believed by the French to be a model for humanity that deserves to be enforced through the logic of war.

This kind of reasoning, based on the idea of universal political values (the vaunted “*valeurs républicaines*” or French republican values) actually takes us beyond the Bush doctrine of preemptive war. Especially coming from a former European colonial power, we should recognize it as an enduring vestige of the explicit “civilizing” mission that led European countries for more than four centuries to export their values to the rest of humanity through political, economic and military domination.

WAR OF REVENGE

Two days after the Paris massacre and three days after the unmentioned and largely neglected Beirut massacre, the entire population of France is left wondering what Hollande’s promise to be “*impitoyable*” (merciless) may mean in their daily lives. Will we see soldiers at every street corner to reassure us, whose sight paradoxically at the same time helps to instill a climate of permanent fear? Will France join US President Barack Obama in an eventual new war against both the Islamic State (IS) and Russia,

concretizing the long-standing agreement between the two governments on the priority of dislodging Syrian President Bashar al-Assad?

In his public discourse Hollande is, at least for the moment, playing on the classic motif of a war of revenge against the soulless and diabolical barbarians capable of slaughtering hundreds of innocents in France's otherwise peaceful capital. Within two days of the attacks in Paris, France's merciless response has been to conduct a series of massive airstrikes coordinated with the United States. This was clearly intended to show the nation's defiance, resolution and strength, providing immediate proof of the formidable capacity of the two most deeply engaged Western powers to continue inflicting damage on their enemies.

Although it's far too early to tell where this might lead, it would seem to indicate an orientation toward increased alignment with US policy, whatever that happens to be. More a stance than an actual strategy, its immediate aim is to reassure the public by demonstrating France's ability to respond with force to even the most hateful provocations.

But most observers are aware that bombing raids, however damaging to their targets and however spectacular to report in the daily news feeds, have been singularly ineffective in "degrading" the Islamic State, to use Obama's preferred formulation of Western objectives. Every conflict since Vietnam should have taught both the French and the US that the sheer weight and power of bombs, the speed and accuracy of their aircraft and weapons and continual campaigns of expanding material destruction have no serious long-term strategic value when the stakes are no longer simple national regimes and standing armies. The focus on regime change—repeated in recent years in Iraq, Libya, Syria and Egypt—is a strategic holdover of post-Westphalian Europe that has consistently led to disaster in today's world.

Because he insists on France's engagement in a war—much as Bush did in 2001—at some point, Hollande will theoretically be expected to outline a strategy of war. But is any strategy credible? Is any strategy possible?

THE ABSENCE OF STRATEGY

Many serious commentators have noticed that since 2001, the most active Western governments in the War on Terror and their public media have stopped bothering with the subtleties of strategy, replacing it with two approaches to their staging of the public

drama, both borrowed from Hollywood: First, what I call the casting or the shifting game of alliances between traditional nations who agree to be complicit in war devoid of strategy. And second, the reframing of the conflict as a simple moral tale, a struggle between good and evil.

Announce the stars and frame the drama.

The First Gulf War provided the last historical opportunity to devise and employ well-delineated military strategy in a conflict. CNN rose to fame by explaining and demonstrating to the public on a daily basis the strategies of two governments with traditional armies in an officially declared war played out on well-defined territories. The toppling of Saddam Hussein at the end of the Second Gulf War and the inability of the conquering powers to constitute an effective territorial government that can run an operational military has turned the whole idea of military strategy into a tragic farce.

The result is a vacuum now occupied by IS, which is neither a true political entity nor a local culture, and therefore, it defies any effort at understanding what it is or how it works. Thus, the focus of strategic thinking has turned away from the conduct of war—the steps toward confrontation and eventual victory—to embrace a much more abstract notion of shared mission by likeminded political partners in a moral drama based on spreading or defending their values. The overriding pragmatic question has become, who will ally with whom to defeat evil? How this will be accomplished is not only unknown; it is eliminated from consideration.

In a moral combat, the will of the heroes and divine grace are seen as the essential ingredients. The details of strategy are forgotten and increasingly hidden from view. The focus of the public drama shifts away from the impenetrable fog of local rivalries to something easier for the public to understand: the casting or team-building process, a game of construction of collaborative forces. It gives us our vaunted “coalitions of the willing,” if not out-and-out military alliances. Who will join the struggle? Who will lead the team? How will the roles be distributed?

Such coalitions are united by their perception of a common moral cause, defeating evil. Thus, the type of reporting that CNN deftly placed in the spotlight during the first Gulf War, dedicating hours to describing the traditional chess game of military strategies, has disappeared in favor of a purely moral combat that pits the enlightened, technologically advanced nations of the West who represent *good* against the shadowy forces of *evil*, seen as oozing from a culture in the East that perpetuates the barbarity of

the Dark Ages. Bush famously spoke of the axis of evil. President Obama called the Paris massacre an “attack on the civilized world,” implying, perhaps inadvertently, that there is an uncivilized world that needs to be opposed and conquered. Thus, any nation that considers itself civilized will be expected to join the combat against the forces that threaten civilization.

When recruiting allies and designating evil sum up the government’s and the public’s view of the struggle, there is no longer a need for elaborating and discussing strategy. The fact is that even the strategists no longer have a strategy. Or rather they are left to struggle with shifting, poorly perceived notions of tactical alliances on the ground—not strategic ones between nations—that they will then run like amateur science experiments, mixing chemicals they desperately hope will produce the desired effect. Nowhere is this more evident than in Syria itself, with its micro-alliances aimed at destabilizing and dethroning Assad. But it has been obvious for some time on a macro scale in Iraq due to the Shia-Iranian connection that has been following a decade of neutralization of Sunnis.

The drama of the war we now have focuses on two military virtues: technical, industrial and scientific superiority (civilization), coupled with the hero’s will to conquer the barbarians (good vs evil). The US has had a hard time fabricating the heroes, of which only a few names remain in public memory: Chris Kyle (*American Sniper*), Jessica Lynch and Pat Tillman. Unfortunately, two of those three—Lynch and Tillman—turned out to be tragic victims of not only the war, but also the Pentagon’s PR effort. And the third, equally ambiguous, needed the fame and talent of Clint Eastwood to emerge as a possible role model for avid spectators of the war. This obviously wasn’t the kind of war that produces popular heroes. Instead, the perception of heroism and human valor has been channeled into the hyper-realism of video games, where every youngster can act out the dream of defending our values and humiliating and destroying the evil enemy.

In the First Gulf War, all the elements of traditional political strategy were available to be exploited by our enterprising media: a dictator with a solidly implanted government and army; and territorial ambition (the occupation of Kuwait) with, as an added feature, the complex rivalries of nations on both sides of the Persian Gulf. How things have changed! In the way of strategy or heroism, our Western leaders have nothing left to offer the media apart from their own resolution to be merciless and carry out a commonly agreed but strategically undefined mission. The actual effects of the tactics employed reveal the tragic consequences of the absence of strategy.

The New York Times reported the following on the French airstrikes two days after the Paris massacre: “Warplanes continued to hover over the city close to midnight, according to residents and activist groups. Residents have seen the city bombed by Syrian, American and Russian warplanes. They have been terrorized by public executions by the Islamic State. Now they are wary of yet another power arriving to pummel the city.”

OSAMA BIN LADEN’S THINKING

The nature of the permanent war located in and around the Middle East, and now felt to be spreading to “civilization,” seems to be telling us that the era of national strategies is over. As Republican presidential candidates rage on about how, in their eyes, the underfunded US military must be reinforced and deployed in a suitably aggressive way so that neither the Islamic State nor Vladimir Putin, nor China can carry on with their shenanigans in the Middle East, Ukraine and the South China Sea, most commentators have noticed that behind the rhetoric, there isn’t a shred of strategy. Which is only logical, because those who actually do have the responsibility of strategy in government and the military no longer have the means of defining one.

Some rare commentators noticed long ago that Osama Bin Laden actually had a strategy that was, to our uncomprehending minds, unrelated to the goal of military victory. The spectacular provocation of 9/11 was designed to set the US on a course of self-destruction and potential collapse. Although few in the media are willing to admit it, the political and social atmosphere today is dominated by a sense of vulnerability, the fear of the collapse of a once proud civilization. That is why it has become urgent for some to call for the deporting of all immigrants and refusal to admit any new ones. That is why they insist we must beef up the military and, after an eight-year pause, put a pair of *cojones* in the White House. And that is also why, from a contrasting point of view, we are told that we urgently need to reduce inequality. Everyone has a solution because everyone is acutely aware of the problem.

Thomas Mann claimed in the early 1950s that Adolf Hitler had won the war—that the rational state-controlled military-industrial system that Hitler had put in place had migrated across the Atlantic along with a number of its top engineers, administrators and managers. That obviously wasn’t Hitler’s strategy or ambition. He desperately wanted to do it from home. But victors always take the spoils and, in this case, victory over Germany provided the opportunity for those in the know to import at bargain

basement prices the technology, organizational skill and scientific brains that had built Germany's powerful industrial state.

In a similar way, it might also be claimed today that Bin Laden won the War on Terror—although there will be no victory day since there is no way of knowing when that war may be declared over, by either side. Bin Laden's aim wasn't to take over the United States or impose Islamic law, as some would like to believe, but to weaken and unsettle the mighty American military and economic empire and its extension in the Middle East (in particular, Saudi Arabia and Israel). That's why he symbolically attacked Wall Street (finance) and the Pentagon (military) and possibly targeted Congress or the White House with the fourth plane. He effectively created, first of all, panic and doubt on a massive scale and then provoked a series of political decisions whose accumulated long-term effect included undermining the economy, creating a permanent climate of fear, alienating a significant portion of the world's population and weakening the protections of the Constitution for US citizens.

It could be said that the economy succumbed in 2008 and that the slow deterioration of the social fabric due to that collapse has been well under way ever since. The nature of political debate itself highlights this trend as candidates outdo each other to prove that they hold the keys to keeping America safe. The question of "which America?" remains in the background as political discourse has become increasingly polarized.

"END OF HISTORY"

Has anyone in politics and the mainstream media acknowledged, even as a mere possibility, this strategic orientation of the terrorists we are making such an effort to degrade and destroy? Have any of them even suggested that our enemies might just have a strategy, in particular a long-term strategy associated with a war of attrition? Would it be possible in politics or the media to entertain the idea that rather than seeing them as a barbarian horde attempting to conquer civilization through sheer brutality, they are executing a plan to undermine it from within, and not by subversion but by confusion and misappropriation of resources?

Everything indicates that the West has given up on strategic thinking. One of the problems is that it doesn't sell, at least not as well as the old brands of political action. What is now called strategy is nothing more than conditioned reflex, repeating what we believe to be the successful strategic attitudes of the past. The rest is political PR and posturing. As in chess, authentic strategy is based on the mastery of combinatorial

logic, a good dose of psychology (understanding your opponent) and the ability to anticipate and adapt to a long series of tactical moves. But as in contemporary corporate culture where we assess value only in terms of quarterly results and where investors' perception of value is increasingly speculative rather than founded on a careful analysis of resources and contexts, long-term strategy in politics and the military exists only as an artifact of history—the tale we tell of the way wars and revolutions were once fought and executed. For Western powers, the long-term exists only in the past. But for others, including our barbaric enemies, that may not yet be the case.

If that's true, we desperately need to civilize them quickly so these barbaric but wily enemies will end up seeing the advantages of thinking the same way as we think, focused on short-term and individual goals rather than long-term collective ones. Thus, will we get them to lower their guard, lose their strategic focus and allow us to declare “check mate” as they politely lay their king face down on the board? If we can do that, we will have not only defeated terrorism, but also achieved Francis Fukuyama's “end of history.”

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



LATIN AMERICA

Who's marching in Argentina?

Rodrigo Llauro

February 22, 2015

With the president under investigation for corruption, the year ahead will be an interesting moment for Argentina.

Argentine politics have never been straightforward. A tangled string of opinions, views, emotions and realities have shaped the official and unofficial histories of a country that still fights to understand its identity.

During the reign of the Kirchner family, Argentina's diversity of opinion has become polarized. The multiplicity of thought that led the country to countless versions of Peronism has now led this outspoken society to face an "us vs. them" scenario. Some believe they are living under a corrupt demagogue government, while others argue that the rest of society serves the interests of imperialist neo-capitalist regimes. In other words, you are either in favor of the populist Kirchnerist project or you are anti-patriotic.

This divide is clear in every facet of Argentine politics and "The Silent March" was no exception. The protest held on February 18 was organized to honor the death of prosecutor Alberto Nisman, who died under mysterious circumstances on January 18, hours before presenting his findings over an alleged terrorism cover up that was orchestrated by President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's cabinet and the Iranian government in exchange for oil privileges.

The march was impressive, to say the least. The Buenos Aires City Metropolitan Police registered 400,000 demonstrators marching in the pouring rain from Congress, past Nisman's former office and onward to the presidential palace, which was sectioned off after the multitude stood on every square meter available at the park.

Organized by a group of prosecutors and led by members Nisman's family, the protest was coined "The Silent March," as it asked people to walk quietly to keep it from becoming politicized. The aim was to request transparency in the investigation of the

prosecutor's death, as well as to demand independence of the judicial branch, which is often accused of working under Kirchner's influence.

However, the march could not have been more politicized. Every major event in Argentina is a chance for finger-pointing by the media and deepening the divide between parties. The protest was organized by the opposition, attended by representatives from opposition parties and even renamed "The March of the Opposition" by government-sponsored media, who claimed its sole purpose was to destabilize the current administration.

Yet no matter how many times the government accuses any opposing view from being part of a coup d'état conspiracy, Kirchner's party may find it difficult to hold credibility: Vice President Amado Boudou faces charges of bribery, while the president herself and members of the cabinet are under investigation for corruption, illicit profit and conspiracy. Under this setting, 2015 will undoubtedly be an interesting election year for Argentina.

Rodrigo Llauro is a documentary photographer and an expert on culture and society.



Cuba's Coming out Party at the Americas Summit

Medea Benjamin

April 13, 2015

For over 50 years, Cuba has fended off US attempts to overthrow its leaders.

For Cuba, the VII Summit of the Americas, which was held in Panama between April 10-11, marked a "coming out" party. Banned from past gatherings since they began in 1994, Cuba was not only invited to participate in this year's summit, but it was also the

belle of the ball—albeit the belle was a shaky, 83-year-old Raul Castro who lacks his brother Fidel’s charisma.

Cuba’s presence was heralded in the speeches of every nation’s leader. And the handshake between US President Barack Obama and Raul Castro was a Kodak moment.

In Castro’s long 49-minute speech, he gave a history lesson of past US attacks on Cuba—from the Platt Amendment and supporting the dictator Fulgencio Batista, to the Bay of Pigs invasion and the opening of Guantanamo Bay. But Castro was gracious to President Obama, saying he was not to blame for this legacy, and calling him an “honest man” of humble origins.

Obama certainly won praise throughout the summit for turning this page in the Cold War. Some leaders insisted on clarifying, however, that Cuba was not at the event because of Obama’s nice gesture. Cuba was there because the leaders of Latin America insisted there would not be another summit without the Cubans. Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos recalled his position at the last summit, when he stated that Cuba must be invited to the next one. Bolivia, Nicaragua, Venezuela and others had threatened to boycott any new gathering without Cuba.

Argentina’s Cristina Kirchner de Fernandez went a step further in taking credit away from Obama. She said Cuba was at the table because it had fought valiantly and defiantly for over 50 years while suffering under the US blockade. Ecuador’s Rafael Correa said Obama’s opening was good, but not good enough. He insisted it was time to end the “inhumane and illegal blockade” that had damaged the Cuban people, and to return the “occupied territory” of Guantanamo. Bolivia’s Evo Morales dismissed any notion of the US as a benevolent force now coming to aid poor Cuba. Instead, he argued, the US should compensate Cuba for over 50 years of damages to its economy.

There were expectations that President Obama would use the summit to announce that Cuba would be taken off the US list of state sponsors of terrorism, a critical step in the normalization of relations. Unfortunately, that didn’t happen.

It’s hard for many Americans to understand the oversized significance Cuba has in the hemisphere. Colombia’s Santos thanked Cuba for its mediation of peace talks between his government and FARC rebels. Other governments thanked Cuba for sending

doctors to their countries, treating patients in poor areas where their own doctors refused to go, or for setting up medical schools or training their nationals in Cuban schools. There was praise for Cuba's role in sharing its successful literacy program.

PRIDE IN LATIN AMERICA

But what most Americans fail to understand is the pride felt by so many people in Latin America—even people who don't like Cuba's policies—that for over 50 years, the tiny island has managed to fend off attempts by the American Goliath to overthrow it.

From the very beginnings of the revolution, the US government used every means it could conjure up to overthrow Fidel Castro—from poison cigars and funding saboteurs to diplomatic isolation. History is littered with CIA- and exile-sponsored dirty tricks, including the October 1976 attack on a Cuban jetliner that killed all 73 people aboard. Even in Panama, where the summit took place, there was a plot in November 2000 to kill Fidel Castro by blowing up an auditorium where he was scheduled to speak.

So the fact that Cuba has managed to thumb its nose at the United States for all these years is seen by many as nothing short of a miracle.

"I was in Cuba on vacation," Gabriela Gomez, a teacher from Panama, told me. "I found its economy in tatters, with buildings literally falling apart. I don't like the restrictions on free speech and free assembly. But I love the fact that Cuba has managed to survive as a communist nation in the face of so much outside aggression."

But is the US government really accepting Cuba as a sovereign nation that has chosen a different path? Or is it simply trying to overthrow the Cuban government by different means?

Reverend Raul Suarez, who runs the Martin Luther King Center in Havana and in Panama for the Civil Society Forum, sees the same old intrigue, interference and manipulations. "Just look at what has happened at the Civil Society Forum," he said. "The Americans paid for Cuban dissidents who have no following in Cuba to come to Panama and participate as Cuban representatives of civil society. Meanwhile, many of the representatives of Cuba's mass-based organizations were not allowed in."

"Half our delegation got here only to find that they couldn't get the credentials they were promised, and were shut out of the meetings," said Gretchen Gomez Gonzalez of

the Cuban Federation of University Students, “while dissident Cubans who don’t represent anyone but themselves were given credentials to represent Cuban civil society.”

Pro-government Cubans confronted the dissidents in the streets and at the meetings, calling them mercenaries for taking US money and carrying photos showing some of them embracing convicted terrorist Jose Posada Carriles. They also said that former CIA operative Felix Rodriguez, blamed for killing revolutionary hero Che Guevara, was at the summit working with the dissidents. The dissidents insist they were attacked by pro-government mobs simply for promoting free speech and free assembly. The US State Department condemned what it called “harassment” and “use of violence” against participants.

The cordial meeting between Obama and Castro showed the positive face of the opening, while the clashes on the streets of Panama City represent the rocky road ahead for US-Cuba relations. But at least the path forward is a new one, with fresh momentum emanating from the Panama Summit.

Obama said the US opening could lead to more Americans visitors, more commerce, more investment and more resources for Cubans. If the US government could do that while leaving it to the Cuban people themselves to push for greater individual freedoms, that would be—to take a page from the Castro brothers—truly revolutionary.

Medea Benjamin is a co-founder of both CODEPINK and the international human rights organization Global Exchange.



El Salvador’s Draconian Abortion Laws: A Miscarriage of Justice

Michael Avender and Medea Benjamin

August 3, 2015

As Latin American women continue to struggle for autonomy over their bodies, freeing the “Las 17” is critical.

“We are here to speak for them, to call for their release. When there is an injustice, silence is complicity,” said Father Roy Bourgeois, founder of School of the Americas Watch and a decades-long advocate for human rights in Latin America. He was referring to the 17 women, known as Las 17, who are currently serving 30-year sentences in prison for having miscarriages in El Salvador.

Father Bourgeois is one of the six human rights activists who staged a sit-in at the Salvadoran Embassy in Washington DC on April 24, calling for the release of the women. Four of the protesters were arrested by the Secret Service.

“It was an honor to go to the embassy and be arrested in solidarity with the women in El Salvador,” said Father Bourgeois. “Our greatest enemy in the United States is ignorance, so our job is to tell the stories.”

An overwhelming number of women in El Salvador—particularly those who are poor, unmarried and uneducated—face outrageous human rights violations as they are denied autonomy over their bodies. El Salvador has one of the strictest and most archaic anti-abortion laws in the world; it has a total ban on abortion, even in cases of rape, incest and medical emergencies. Women who have miscarriages or stillborn births are confronted with suspicion from authorities. The legal system has a built-in “presumption of guilt,” making it virtually impossible for women to prove their innocence. Instead, these women are charged with manslaughter and imprisoned. All too often, Salvadoran women are forced to live a life of overwhelming stigmatization and marginalization.

In March, Father Bourgeois led a delegation of human rights activists to El Salvador, where he met with Salvadoran President Sánchez Cerén, human rights leaders and five of the women in prison. Father Bourgeois discovered a common theme among the women’s stories—they are all lower-class, poorly educated, single women who work domestic jobs for wealthier families.

What led to the miscarriages? A lack of access to healthy food frequently leads to malnourishment among the impoverished in El Salvador. Tragically, that could have caused the miscarriages. As the women recounted their stories, they painted a grim

picture: fainting as a result of blood loss, waking up in a hospital handcuffed to a bed and ultimately being transferred to prison.

For the first year of their sentence, the women were forced to sleep on the floor of their cell-like sardines, pressed next to each other. They were given only a gallon of water every two days for both drinking and bathing—water that is not drinkable by US standards.

Father Bourgeois was haunted by the stories of the women he met. When he returned to the United States, he couldn't sleep. "I have never been more affected by a group of people than I was by this group of women," he said.

Amnesty International put out a petition calling for the release of Las 17, and it has received an incredible 700,000 signatures and counting. Erika Guevara-Rosas, Amnesty International's Americas director, stated: "For almost two decades women in El Salvador have suffered the consequences of this outdated, draconian law and ... now voices from the global community join their struggle to stop the injustice. This is now a deafening chorus of concern that cannot be ignored. President Cerén must heed this call."

The Salvadoran administration, a progressive government that emerged from the guerrilla struggle in 1998, is feeling the heat. The government, however, does not have the power to overturn the ruling of the conservative court, nor does it have the power to combat the powerful conservative lobby in the country's congress. Members of El Salvador's leftist government fear easing the anti-abortion law, as it could affect the party negatively by alienating its voters and the church. A change in the law, therefore, seems unlikely in face of omnipresent Catholic values throughout the country.

For decades, Latin American women have been fighting repressive anti-choice laws—laws that lead, every year, to the death of over 1,000 women and the hospitalization of over 1 million due to complications resulting from backstreet abortions, according to the World Health Organization.

In El Salvador, one of the most prominent pro-choice organizations is La Agrupación Ciudadana por la Despenalización del Aborto (The Salvadoran Citizens' Coalition for the Decriminalization of Abortion), which has been combating the abortion ban for years while exploring legal avenues to achieve the release of Las 17.

Activist Sara Garcia stated: “We live in a misogynist, machista society ... with prejudices about how a woman should behave and the punishment she should receive for not fulfilling those expectations.”

As the women of Latin America continue to struggle for autonomy over their bodies, freeing the Salvadoran 17 is a critical step in addressing this gross miscarriage of justice.

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Colombia Leads by Example in the Americas

Jonathan Bissell

August 10, 2015

The leadership of President Juan Santos has become a model for other nations in the Americas to follow.

Despite criticism of appeasement from pundits, Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos has pragmatically led his country through a difficult era and currently has it poised to reach lasting internal peace.

International relations scholar Joseph Nye describes power distribution in the contemporary era as extremely complicated due to the effects of globalization. In this new world, it is often difficult to separate domestic and international issues, thus creating the so-called “inter-mestic” issues. Leaders continue to play their traditional game of “political chess,” albeit they must now do so in a three-dimensional manner, playing vertically and horizontally on three planes concurrently.

It is difficult to find a Western Hemispheric leader who has had more accomplishments than President Santos. His policies are based on three benchmarks: the improvement in the measurements of the Fund for Peace's Fragile States Index (FSI); the decreasing levels of coca growth and exports; and Colombia's economic development. Colombia has made significant progress in recent years with its Plan Colombia. Recent history demonstrates what happened before the current drug policy was put in place.

MOVING FORWARD

In late 1989, presidential candidate Luis Carlos Galán was murdered near Bogotá, allegedly by gunmen working for drug cartel king Pablo Escobar. This led to a national effort to rid Colombia of its scourge of international drug trafficking. Colombia established greater cooperation with the United States in combating the growing, cultivating and trafficking of cocaine. Over the last 25 years, Colombia has worked hard to strengthen its democracy, grow its economy and end the 50-year cycle of violence.

Arguably, the first Colombian leader to launch a holistic attempt for broad reform was President Andrés Pastrana Arango in 1998. He developed Plan Colombia to end "armed conflict, eliminate drug trafficking, and promote development." Pastrana was followed into office by Álvaro Uribe in 2002. President Uribe fought narco-traffickers ferociously and appointed Santos as his minister of defense during those decisive years.

The Colombian drug policy is based on a comprehensive strategy, flexible policy and diffused information model. It recognizes that as Colombian economic growth continues, increased incomes will create higher drug consumption domestically. The country recently began to benefit from the plan. It shows a remarkable improvement in the FSI published annually by the Fund for Peace. More than 150 indicators form the framework of the methodology for the index. These measurements are stitched together by 12 social, economic and political primary indices. The results are exhibited in the advancement Colombia has made, moving from 41 to 61 over the last six years.

The United States' International Narcotics Control Strategy Report shows that illicit drug-related activity in Colombia continues to drop. This has contributed to a rise in street prices of cocaine in the US, and a drop in usage from 3% to 2.2%. The Colombian cocaine yield decreased from nearly 600 metric tons (MT) in 2001 to 175 MT in 2012. The cultivation in 2013 was projected to be down another 6%. Data from

the United Nations (UN) also mirrors these trends closely. The UN estimates that Colombian cocaine production has been reduced by 50% since 2007 and continues to fall. This is down considerably from an estimated 600 MT in 2000.

Nevertheless, critics persist, centering their arguments on the “balloon effect,” which shifts illicit drug cultivation to the nearby Andean states of Peru and Bolivia. Detractors point to the negative effects of aerial fumigation on rural residents. The Colombian government confronts these issues directly—coordinating with locals prior to fumigation and using alternative crop development programs. These development initiatives assisted nearly 500,000 people by 2010. Colombia also assists other Latin American countries in their fight against the illicit traffickers.

FARC

President Santos uses the security gains Colombia makes against illicit traffickers to strengthen his democratic institutions. As the Colombian military retakes the areas previously claimed by the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC), the national police replaces it to maintain peace, supported by aid agencies and the increasing professionalism of federal agencies. Colombia’s economic growth improved significantly under Santos—from 1.7% in 2009 to 6.6% in 2011—and remained strong at 4.7% in 2013. The country is becoming more economically viable as it eradicates illegal activities. Colombian Finance Minister Mauricio Cárdenas recently speculated that a peace deal with FARC could boost economic growth by another 1%.

The re-election of Santos in 2014 reflects the appreciation Colombians have for his policies. Able to wield a “stick and carrot” simultaneously, he is using his credibility as a former defense minister to negotiate a peace agreement with FARC. The president recently agreed to a bilateral ceasefire, but not before skillfully negotiating a deal to drive an ideological wedge between simple drug traffickers—*las Bandas Criminales Emergentes* (BACRIM)—and the radical FARC dissidents who are open to a political settlement. Santos appeals to both sides of his domestic constituency, as well as international allies as diverse as the US and Venezuela.

Santos recently angered domestic pacifists by supporting the firing of Bogotá’s leftist mayor for corruption, while annoying conservatives who desire a strictly military solution against FARC. He stayed ahead of the argument against the War on Drugs, treating domestic consumption as a health issue. In 2011, Santos, along with other Latin American presidents, called for a new global drug strategy, accentuating the current policy’s failures.

This criticism seems to have affected the verbiage of the United States' 2013 National Southwest Border Counter Narcotics Strategy, especially regarding the illegal trafficking of firearms and bulk cash. It now appears visionary, as the US currently grapples with its own drug policy, as Maryland, Colorado, California and Washington DC have recently legalized or decriminalized some drugs, making America appear incoherent in its own federal and foreign drug interdiction policies. It seems that Santos has taken former US President Bill Clinton's famous political skill of "triangulation" to a transnational level, all the while remaining true to Pastrana's three original goals.

There is an old adage that states: When life hands you lemons you make lemonade. Santos has done so with his effective drug policy in Colombia, impacting the entire world. He has stayed flexible, continuously adapted his strategy, divided his enemies and built effective coalitions. Under Santos' leadership, Colombia has improved its economic growth, decreased the amount of drugs trafficked illegally, built on its FSI standings and is in the process of negotiating a peace agreement with FARC. Concurrently, Santos constructively criticized US drug policies and improved diplomatic relations with Colombia's counterparts throughout Latin America. In such a multifaceted and complex world, President Santos has been the epitome of a successful "inter-mestic" leader.

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What Happened to Brazil?

John Feffer

September 26, 2015

Latin America's largest country once looked ascendant. Now it's been laid low by widespread violence, structural racism, endemic corruption and external economic shocks.

In the 2014 FIFA World Cup, Germany not only ousted Brazil from the semifinals. It gave the legendary team a drubbing—7 goals to 1. For most of the match, Brazil faced a shutout. Only in the last minute did Brazilian striker Oscar manage to put the ball in the net.

The staggering loss was all the more painful because it took place in Brazil, which was hosting the World Cup. Brazil's national football team hadn't lost at home in 62 matches going back to 1975. It was a very public humiliation that took place before heads of state and millions of people watching the televised match.

The World Cup was supposed to be a crowning achievement, the proof that Brazil had made it to the club of advanced nations. It was an opportunity for the world to acknowledge all that Brazil had achieved in the previous 15 years.

Not only had the Brazilian economy grown at a rapid pace in the first decade of the 21st century—averaging between 4-5%—but it had dramatically reduced its inequality. The policies of President Lula da Silva, the charismatic leader and former trade unionist, had pulled 26 million Brazilians out of poverty. The *Bolsa Familia*—the family allowance of direct cash payments to the poor—helped to swell the middle-class from 45 million to 105 million in just ten years, a truly remarkable development in a country of 200 million people.

The Brazilian model didn't just offer hope for other countries facing underdevelopment and economic inequality.

Along with the other BRICS—Russia, India, China and South Africa—Brazil was leading the “rise of the rest” that would dethrone the United States and usher in a truly multipolar world. Lula, the left-winger turned powerbroker, epitomized this new post-post-Cold War world, negotiating deals with both George W. Bush *and* Hugo Chavez, Germany *and* China, the mandarins of the international financial system *and* the poorest inhabitants of the urban slums. He had turned a country best known for carnival, samba and beaches into a serious global competitor.

Lula's successor, Dilma Rousseff, took over in 2011. Going into 2014, the Brazilian economy wasn't performing at quite the same levels as in the Lula years, but it was still registering modest growth. Rousseff had reasonably high approval ratings in her first term and polled a still-respectable 40% at the end of 2014.

All of that has changed. Today, Rousseff's approval rating has nearly bottomed out at 8%, and the Brazilian economy is set to shrink by nearly 3% this year. Anti-government demonstrations brought several hundred thousand protesters into the streets of more than 200 cities in March and August to demand that Rousseff step down. In the economic equivalent of the 2014 World Cup loss, Standard & Poor's recently downgraded Brazil's bonds from investment-grade to "junk."

Critics have taken aim at the Rousseff administration for its corruption and mismanagement. Analysts blame the collapse of the commodities market and the slowdown in Chinese imports. Still others identify Brazil's persistent poverty and inequality as the culprits.

Brazil was heading into the semifinals of world development as an odds-on favorite. How did the country go from world-class performer to global embarrassment in what seems like the blink of an eye?

THERE WILL BE BLOOD

The most violent cities in the world are not in the war zones of the Middle East. Nor are they, by and large, in the poorest parts of Africa.

In the most recent United Nations report on global homicide figures, Africa was overtaken by a surprise entrant: Latin America. One-third of the world's homicides take place in a region that contains only 8% of the global population. And of the top 50 most dangerous cities, in terms of homicide, an astounding 19 of them are located in Brazil.

In the US, Detroit has the worst murder rate: 44.9 murders per 100,000 people. For the Brazilian city of Ananindeua, it's nearly triple that: 125.7. The murder rate overall in Brazil is 29, making it even more dangerous than Mexico. Suketu Mehta writes in *The New York Review of Books*: "Four Brazilian cities had a murder rate of over 100 per 100,000 residents. Between 5 percent and 8 percent of Brazilian homicides are solved — as compared to 65 percent of U.S. murders and 90 percent of British murders. Most of the victims are male and poor, between fifteen and just shy of thirty. The homicide rate has shaved seven years off the life expectancy in the Rio favelas (slums)."

Prior to the 1980s, Brazil was not an especially dangerous country. But the rise of the drug trade, the involvement of organized crime and the spread of gangs all contributed

to the spiraling violence. It's also been increasingly dangerous to write about Brazil's dangers. As John Otis of the Committee to Protect Journalists has written, "at least seven Brazilian journalist were killed in direct relation to their work between January 2011 and November 2012, making the nation one of the world's deadliest for the press."

Brazilians might take some comfort from the fact that, as a whole, their country comes out pretty well in the Global Peace Index. In 2015, Brazil ranked 103 out of 162—not great, but better than Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador. It's also a far cry from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, the worst performers on the list. Brazil isn't that far off from the US, ranked 94, either.

On second thought, these ratings are only good news in the sense that Brazil is better off than countries at war and states on the verge of failing altogether.

After all, these relative rankings don't really convey the atmosphere of pervasive violence in the country, even during the Lula years, when the economy was expanding and the poorer population was getting more of a share of the pie. During Lula's first term, for instance, rural violence actually increased as disputes over land spiraled up 83%. Despite his commitment to greater income equality, Lula failed to address the enormous concentration of land in the hands of large farmers and landowners. He did try to reduce the deforestation that was eating away at the Amazon and other parts of the country, but that trend reversed after 2012.

Meanwhile, police brutality has reached epidemic proportions. In 2013, police in the US killed about 768 people (and 1,100 in 2014). In Brazil, with two-thirds the population, the police killed over 2,000 people in 2013. Extra-judicial killings escalated during the lead-up to the World Cup, as the military police and affiliated death squads tried to "clean up" the slums surrounding the stadiums.

As in the US, people of African descent face a much greater chance of dying in Brazil—at the hands of police or in homicides—than white people. This summer, a version of the Black Lives Matter movement, called React or Die, began to gather steam in Brazil. It was about time. For a country that was the last in the Americas to give up slavery, that imported ten times more slaves from Africa than the US did, and where Afro-Brazilians make up more than half the population, Brazil has long been in denial about its structural racism.

THERE WILL BE CORRUPTION

It's a safe bet that where there's oil, there's corruption. Even in Norway, which generally gets reasonably high marks from Transparency International, the country's oil company Statoil has been embroiled in a corruption scandal around its dealings in Angola.

Brazil's government-controlled energy company, Petrobras, is involved in a set of scandals of much greater magnitude and impact. The company, beginning in 2004, orchestrated a series of kickbacks in which contractors colluded in overcharging for services and then shared the proceeds in the form of, essentially, bribes. A handful of Petrobras employees enjoyed huge windfalls, as did a cadre of officials from the ruling Workers' Party.

The estimated size of the corruption: \$3 billion. In comparison, the much more widely publicized corruption in FIFA, the international football federation, has reached only around \$150 million.

Petrobras' self-inflicted wound coincides with a significant drop in world oil prices. Since the company represents an astonishing 10% of Brazil's gross domestic product (GDP), the fact that it lost half its value in the last year has had a disproportionate effect on the country's economy.

Unlike many oil-exporting countries, Brazil isn't dependent entirely on the market for crude. It has a rather diverse portfolio of goods that it sells to other countries—from soybeans to iron ore. But it did develop a dependence on one *country* to buy those goods: China. Between 2000 and 2013, Brazilian exports to China rose from \$2 billion to \$83 billion, and more than half of all exports began to flow to that country. A drop in commodity prices in the spring followed by Beijing's devaluation of the *yuan*—which made Brazil's exports more expensive—was a devastating one-two punch.

Widespread violence, structural racism, endemic corruption and a set of external economic shocks have all contributed to Brazil's fall from grace. Can the country recover from such a public embarrassment?

LULA'S LEGACY

When asked about Brazil's current travails, former President Lula remarked that "the poor helped save Brazil. And today I say that to take care of the poor is the solution."

The *Bolsa Familia* will likely continue, since it enjoys broad political support. It's not just a handout. Payments to mothers are contingent on children going to school, getting proper meals and receiving adequate health care. It's an early-intervention program that works.

But the larger legacy of Lula remains at risk: For instance, the nature of the state's involvement in the economy. Ideally, the state can play an important role in stimulating the economy, putting resources into such sectors as sustainable energy, and providing a measure of stability to counteract market volatility. But that assumes a "clean" state. The *Bolsa Familia* has been a critically important program, but what's the point of redistributing wealth to the poor while at the same time redistributing wealth to the wealthy through corrupt practices?

And what's the Brazilian state currently planning to do to pull the country out of recession? The Rousseff administration would like to reintroduce the financial transactions tax that was rescinded in 2007, but that proposal faces stiff resistance in the legislature. So instead, the government is looking into legalized gambling, a recipe for more corruption and impoverishment of the populace.

Even an uncorrupt state invested in oil and gas is likely to make policy decisions slanted toward Big Energy. If the state has a vested interest in fossil fuel companies, like Petrobras, it may be less willing to forgo profits by putting more investment in renewable energy sources. Indeed, despite an impressive record of expanding electricity use without acquiring the carbon footprint of comparable countries its size, Brazil has also witnessed a decline in the proportion of renewables in its energy portfolio. Oil and natural gas are powerful drugs, and the Brazilian state is hooked on them.

Finally, the BRICS model, including a new BRICS bank, sounds like something new and different. But in reality, the BRICS basically just want to change the nameplates on the existing international financial system. This isn't South-South cooperation as imagined in the New International Economic Order of the 1970s—an envisioned restructuring of the global economy for the benefit of the South as a whole rather than just a few leading players. When push came to shove, Brazil under Lula engaged in

the same ruthless scramble for resources in Africa that the US, China and other powers have engaged in for years.

It's not too late, of course, for Brazil to make a major, mid-course correction. The Petrobras scandal is already prompting a major anti-corruption drive. China's economic slowdown is pushing the country to seek a more diverse set of trading partners. And in response to the omnipresent violence in society, various civic initiatives are addressing the nexus of police, gangs, and poverty. Still unknown is whether Brazil can pull this altogether as a credible development alternative, which can then perhaps influence the trajectory of the BRICS.

A poor performance in front of a global audience can have long-term psychological impact. But fortunately, in life as in sports, countries get second chances. Brazil has all the right ingredients to be a world-class performer. It just has to clean house first and come up with a different strategy.

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Does the Islamic State Pose a Threat to Morocco and Jordan?

Nicholas Heras and Amanda Claypool

January 19, 2015

The continued existence and potential expansion of the Islamic State undermines the legitimacy of the Middle East's constitutional monarchies.

The Middle East and North Africa's constitutional monarchies are surviving the upheaval of the Arab Spring. Morocco and Jordan, two key US allies in the region, are popularly billed as constitutional monarchies. The two kingdoms are generally regarded as "islands of stability" in an imploding region that offer consistent support for US objectives in the Arab world, particularly in the realm of regional security.

Although these two kingdoms are separated by over 2,500 miles on opposite ends of the greater Middle East, they are frequently billed as being the same type of regime following a similar strategy of coopting challenges to their ruling system. States like Morocco and Jordan are key because, until now, they have managed to retain a qualitative advantage in the institutional capacity of their respective states, crystallizing the regime's rule while preserving a sense of legitimacy. It is this model of the state, where the ruling regime is buttressed by legitimacy created from strong state institutions, that will lead to long-term stability in the Middle East.

Morocco and Jordan are held in high regard as examples of monarchies that will "fade" into a republican, democratic government over time through a commitment to a phased transitional process. These constitutional monarchies are believed to have the ability to slowly transition their societies into a more participatory form of governance, in an effort to co-opt instability and rebellion before it devolves into violence. This slow and methodical process of democratization is stated to be a safeguard for the security of these nations while undergirding the social contract between the monarch and the will of the people.

Accordingly, these two countries should represent the type of regime that can prevent the bloodshed and Islamist radicalization that is associated with the popular revolutions and counterrevolutions that have occurred in the Middle East since December 2010.

The popular legitimacy of the monarchies in Morocco and Jordan has traditionally been based upon a historical and cultural mechanism of deference to a ruler with a very specific type of sociopolitical credential. This is based upon the position of the monarch as a strong and rightly guided commander of their faithful Muslim subjects with ancestry from the Prophet Muhammad through the Alaouite Dynasty, in the case of Morocco, or from the prestige of holding direct descent from the bloodline and tribal lineage of al-Sharif — descendants of the venerated Quraysh tribe, which the prophet was a member of — in the case of Jordan.

Morocco's King Mohammed VI, according to this metric, is the *Emir al-Mu'mineen* (Leader of the Faithful) presiding over a strong state that has existed since the 17th century and which enjoys significant international backing and security assistance. Moroccans are believed to view the current king as being more tolerant of open political discussion than his father, enjoying wider popular support while still exerting dominant power over his country. Jordan's King Abdullah II claims descent from the Prophet Muhammad through the Hashemite clan, a subgroup of the Quraysh tribe, whose rule extended from Jordan to Iraq and Saudi Arabia prior to the founding of the modern Jordanian state.

A fundamental element of Jordanian nationalism asserts the symbolic potency of the history of the Hashemite monarchy's important and esteemed tribal lineage as the sociopolitical foundation of its kingdom. Despite the mounting internal economic and demographic and external political pressures that have been caused by the Syrian Civil War, the rapid growth of Amman as a regional center of commerce—and as the country of refuge for hundreds of thousands of people fleeing conflict in neighboring Iraq and Syria—Jordan has thus far remained stable, indicating the potential for a long-term and enduring monarchical regime presided over by the Hashemite dynasty. Although Jordan operates an efficient and active internal security service, the economic and demographic pressure of high youth unemployment, widespread economic inequality and the growing antipathy of the monarchy's traditional Arab tribal constituency toward it place increasing stress on Jordanian sociopolitics.

Emphasizing the importance of stability in Morocco and Jordan, in 2014, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) voted to expand its membership to include these two

constitutional monarchies. The promise of much needed financial aid from the GCC could be enough of an incentive for both Jordan and Morocco to seriously consider joining. Most important to the GCC countries is that Morocco and Jordan are considered to have excellent security services, with long track records of aggressively confronting domestic Islamist and Salafist challenges to their rule. Both countries are also enthusiastic participants in the ongoing US-led coalition air campaign against the Islamic State (IS).

THE ISLAMIC STATE AS A LEGITIMACY CHALLENGE

The maturation of IS into a quasi-state, however, challenges the legitimacy of these two constitutional monarchical regimes. The leader of IS, the self-declared “Caliph Ibrahim”—aka Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi al-Husseini al-Quarayshi—claims to have similar tribal lineage to the Prophet Muhammad and has self-styled himself as the Leader of the Faithful of the *umma* (global Muslim community). Baghdadi’s assertion is that his rule is an inevitably successful, divinely guided world mission that is authentic to the cultural and sociopolitical traditions of the Arab people. The cultural mechanisms of legitimacy that are cultivated by the Moroccan and Jordanian monarchies may not be a powerful enough argument against the appeal of the Islamic revolution led by IS’ caliph.

As a self-declared Hashemite with descent from the Prophet Muhammad, a religious scholar and a successful military commander, Baghdadi offers an alternative leadership role model for frustrated, politically active Islamists and Salafists in Morocco and Jordan. Baghdadi’s “Islamic State” continues to expand by building state-like institutions in eastern Syria, despite battlefield losses in Iraq that have for the time being curbed its growth there. IS’ setbacks on the battlefield in Iraq are more accurately described as operational, not strategic.

The militant Salafist group is slowly, but surely, accepting the allegiance of like-minded organizations throughout the trans-Saharan region, including Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis in the Sinai, the Shura Council for Islamic Youth in Derna and the “Fezzan Province” militia in Libya. In time, IS’ ability to access the trans-Saharan network of smuggling and jihadist activity from Mauritania to the Sinai will give it another line of access to Morocco’s population.

For these reasons, Jordan and Morocco will continue to be important front lines to contain IS. Jordan is at an important location at the crossroads of the Levant and the

Arabian Peninsula, and it is positioned as Saudi Arabia's northern flank against the expansion of IS. Morocco's relationship to Europe in terms of its close economic ties to the European Union and diaspora communities in France and Spain represents the southern flank of Europe. Rabat and Amman are active security partners in transnational security agreements impacting their wider regions of the Middle East. A successful containment strategy will necessitate bulwarks, like Morocco and Jordan, in order to limit the penetration of IS into Europe or Saudi Arabia, respectively.

A strong indicator that the foundations of these monarchical systems are less secure than they had appeared is the flow of jihadists from Morocco and Jordan into Syria to fight under Baghdadi's command. Morocco and Jordan are some of the highest exporters of foreign fighters to Syria, with the former contributing 1,500 jihadists and the latter more than 2,000. There are a number of reasons why rural and urban Moroccans and Jordanians join IS, particularly disenfranchised youth. These include scarcity in economic opportunity at home, severe political discontent with their monarchical regimes, the search for adventure and a pan-Islamic desire to fight against what they view as the murderous Syrian government. A common theme in the foreign fighter phenomenon spanning multiple continents, however, is the growing potency of militant Salafism.

In Morocco and Jordan, where tough counterterrorism initiatives have landed scores of Salafists in prison, momentum generated from the Arab Spring and the success of IS-led military offenses have infused a new breath of life in Islamist political aspirations. In Morocco, prison has become a staging point for enhanced radicalization, enabling Salafist leaders to build deep networks that have since become epicenters of jihadi recruitment. In Jordan, existing Salafist hubs like Ma'an and Zarqa — two of Jordan's most economically vulnerable areas that consequentially lie along historic routes of transit and commerce — continue to advocate for the overthrow of the Jordanian monarchy. Jordan's geographic proximity to IS' frontlines and the challenge of accommodating Syrian refugees are additional sources of tension on the Hashemite Kingdom that can be used as recruiting tools for the militant group.

Jordan, for example, has already begun to experience domestic backlash, after an April 2014 amendment to its Anti-Terrorism Law quickly drew criticism that it could be used to silence political opposition in the media. Regardless, continuing to send jihadists to prison will not eliminate the problem and will only continue the cycle of radicalization and jihad. Jordan's large youth population is also a likely target for IS propaganda efforts, undermining the monarchy's legitimacy and using the promise of

generous salaries as enticement to join the militant Salafist organization. Emigration of large quantities of foreign fighters to join IS and similar armed groups—like al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra and Jund al-Aqsa in Syria—and the rejuvenation of large Salafist networks seem to suggest that bases of legitimacy are shifting from the old monarchical system to the new IS-branded Islamic caliphate.

THE POTENTIAL FOR DESTABILIZATION

The most pressing challenge facing these regimes, however, is not the threat of jihadists returning home and setting up shop; rather, it is how these regimes will respond when they do. While Morocco and Jordan can increase security precautions and strengthen counterterrorism measures, doing so could inadvertently alienate seculars by undermining civil liberties and increase the call for domestic reforms. The increasing prevalence of security forces on the streets of cities such as Rabat, Casablanca and Marrakech in Morocco, and Amman, Zarqa, and Ma'an in Jordan, also can send another pernicious message: the monarchical regime is starting to lose control, and the caliphate's power is ascending.

The potential for the destabilization of the monarchical regimes in Morocco or Jordan, or both countries, as a result of the long-term efforts of IS and its sophisticated propaganda efforts, presents a strategic dilemma for the United States and its allies in the greater Middle East. Cultural mechanisms of legitimacy that are cultivated by the Moroccan and Jordanian monarchies may not be a powerful enough argument against the appeal of the Islamic revolution led by IS' caliph. Sooner rather than later, Baghdadi's arguments will threaten the ideological, cultural underpinning of regimes throughout the region, including those of Morocco and Jordan.

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Oman Could Hold the Key in Yemen

Fernando Carvajal

April 2, 2015

Oman could serve as a crucial mediator for the conflict in Yemen, where dialogue presents the only way forward.

As the conflict in Yemen has taken a turn for the worse, observers believe Saudi Arabia's military response to calls for assistance by Yemeni President Abdo Rabbo Mansour Hadi has eliminated all options for a peaceful solution.

The drums of war beat in unison from Riyadh to Rabat, Khartoum to Amman and the streets of Yemeni cities like Aden and Taiz. All those involved in the Saudi-led alliance are not only aiming to degrade the military and political power of the Zaydi-Shia Houthi rebels, but also to halt Iran's expanding sphere of influence. Analysts have largely focused on Saudi statements regarding the mission to reestablish order on its southern flank, an attempt to restore a degree of certainty at a time of unprecedented lack of predictability.

Yemenis themselves remain divided over Operation Decisive Storm, undertaken by a coalition of ten countries led by neighboring Saudi Arabia. They are divided between protesting violations to their country's sovereignty and opposition to unrestrained Houthi aggression, which saw the group consolidate its grip on power from the capital city, Sanaa, to southern provinces like Lahj and the port city of Aden. Military operations by regional powers, threatening a ground offensive, have not only exacerbated Yemen's downward spiral into disintegration, it has now also nurtured discord among the Yemeni population.

The failure of mediated talks between Yemeni political actors led by UN Special Advisor Jamal Benomar in Sanaa lies at the center of the military option. According to the Saudi ambassador to the United States, Adel al-Jubeir, Operation Decisive Storm aims to create a situation where Houthis see no option but to reengage in dialogue, inside or outside Yemen, a move to prevent a descent into civil war.

But Yemenis believe the destruction of military infrastructure will exacerbate the security vacuum and create new spaces for Islamist militants to establish safe havens

and expand their own operations targeting Houthis and their army allies, as well as providing them with the ability to plan and possibly execute operations against Western interests.

By targeting airport runways, radar posts, munitions depots, missile sites and fighter jets on the ground, the Saudi coalition may degrade the Houthis' military capabilities, but it cannot force the militia and its military allies to capitulate and withdraw from cities and lay down their weapons.

The Houthi rebel group, an Iranian client allied with deposed Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh, is supposed to fall in line and join a new round of talks according to Saudi calculations. The dialogue, outside Yemen, would aim to strengthen the legitimacy of Interim-President Hadi, currently in Riyadh, and his government, which resigned in mid-January after Houthis took control of the capital. Yemeni Prime Minister Khaled Bahah also resigned at the time and was released from house arrest on March 16, subsequently having left Yemen to join his family.

EARLY WARNINGS

Observers warned as early as March 2013 of impending failures in the transition process as a result of a faulty transition plan adopted as part of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) initiative and the absence of a "Plan B." The Office of the UN Special Advisor (OSA) on Yemen lacked the capacity to manage the transition after the 2011 protests, and staff were overwhelmed by political maneuvering outside the confines of the nine-month-long National Dialogue Conference (NDC). Talks held in Sanaa under the auspices of Special Envoy Benomar aimed at reconciliation among rival political parties and the drafting of a new constitution.

The United Nations lost all credibility as result, and it became the target of an extensive and well-coordinated demonizing media campaign by allies of Saleh and the Houthi rebels. The UN Security Council's failure to follow through on threats of sanctions against those obstructing the transition process since 2013 also contributed to a loss of credibility among the Yemeni population. Furthermore, the failures to safeguard the transition and Hadi's legitimacy naturally led to former President Saleh's resilience as a center of power and the rise to prominence of Houthi rebels under the leadership of Abdul-Malek al-Houthi.

After the start of the air campaign, all UN staff were evacuated from Yemen to neighboring Djibouti and Ethiopia. Some observers see this as a crippling sign against delivery of much needed humanitarian aid and the possibility of a solution to the conflict via dialogue. However, the option of continued talks under the auspices of the UN was nearing its own demise even before the start of the campaign, as parties had already boycotted the latest round of talks led by Benomar before he departed to present his latest report to the UN Security Council at its meeting on March 22.

While the current military campaign primarily aims to create a balance among Yemeni factions, it risks exacerbating the conflict and divisions among the population. No political faction has been able to beat the Houthis on the battlefield. Salafist and tribal elements were defeated in late 2013 in northern provinces, and military and tribal forces loyal to the Muslim Brotherhood affiliate, the Islah party, suffered a devastating blow at the hands of UN- and US-sanctioned Houthi field commander Abdullah “Abu Ali” Yahya al-Hakim between July and September 2014. The last of the tribal elements loyal to Islah are currently pinned down in the oil-rich eastern province of Mareb.

The strongest resistance to the Houthis in recent months came from Sunni tribes in al-Baydha, where they receive support from Ansar al-Sharia militants, an affiliate of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), and from tribes supporting the southern Secessionist Movement (al-Hirak) in other provinces. Civilian opposition to the Houthis also increased in Sanaa as a result of a Houthi crackdown on youth activists and journalists, a scenario that is now repeating itself in the central province of Taiz. Further opposition is growing in Aden, where Hirak elements have taken up arms against Houthi cells within various state security institutions like the Military Police and Special Security Forces (SSF). The main fight in Aden continues over control of the airport, one of two remaining ports of entry/exit in the country after the coalition disabled airports in Sanaa, Taiz and Hodeida on the Red Sea coast.

On March 27, former President Saleh announced a new initiative to deescalate the conflict and restart talks. His four-point proposal includes a call for talks in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) or a UN facility outside Yemen.

Soon after the announcement on television and social media, Saleh came under attack from his opponents as he had previously refused offers from Saudi Arabia and Qatar to host a new round of talks, which are also supported by President Hadi. Saleh has now lost all credibility among a large segment of the population and regional powers, which may endanger the future of his political party, the General People’s Congress (GPC).

President Hadi dealt Saleh a new blow in his attempts to remain relevant as a new presidential decree removed the former president's son, Ahmed Ali Abdullah Saleh, from his ambassadorial position in the UAE on March 29.

DIALOGUE AS THE ONLY WAY FORWARD

The end game in Yemen has only one route: dialogue. The military campaign, already opposed in Morocco and Pakistan, two of the ten countries taking part in Operation Decisive Storm, can only lead to a protracted armed conflict that could threaten Yemen's territorial integrity. Saudi Arabia has failed to provide a concrete timeline and fixed goals for the campaign, alarming the US administration, which is concerned over an open-ended armed conflict in a highly volatile territory. The longer the Yemen conflict continues, the faster the security vacuum will expand and create new opportunities for armed militants like AQAP and new affiliates of the Islamic State (IS). The two groups are not only a menace to Saudi Arabia and Western interests, but they also have made attacks against the "apostate" Houthi rebels a priority.

The Saudi-led coalition has yet to declare a mission to pursue Islamist militants like AQAP in Yemen. The US has withdrawn all its diplomats and military personnel from Yemeni territory, in effect suspending counterterrorism operations, even though the State Department claims to maintain relations with Yemeni authorities for intelligence gathering purposes. AQAP and IS, which have so far remained silent since the start of the air campaign on March 25, may find opportunities to target Houthis, similar to the assassination of Abdul-Karem al-Khaiwani, which was carried out by AQAP, or the attacks on two mosques in Sanaa on March 20, claimed by IS.

This will embolden Houthi elements to retain their military capabilities and perhaps expand relations with regional allies to gain financial support and armament. Saudi Arabia may then find it difficult to explain their pursuit of the Houthis if the latter are fighting terrorists previously targeted by the United States. In addition, prospects for peace talks would diminish, as Houthis will find no incentive for engaging talks, inside or outside Yemen.

There is no doubt that the Houthis had no intent to return to the negotiation table prior to the start of Operation Decisive Storm. It is further evident that the Houthis will continue to reject talks in Riyadh, Doha or at the United Nations due to their opposition to UN Envoy Benomar's role. Saudi Arabia listed the Houthis as a terrorist group in March 2014, and the Houthis see Qatar as still very close to the Muslim Brotherhood,

which complicates relations further due to the Houthis' opposition to the Islah party in Yemen. The Houthis still have leverage they can use, while Saleh may soon run out of his own leverage to keep himself relevant in talks. Other parties like Islah, trying to find its own way out of this conflict, remain open to dialogue as it appears to be the only road to recover any meaningful role in Yemen's future.

Notably, Oman's Sultan Qaboos bin Said, who recently returned to Muscat after a several months-long health check-up in Germany, opted against joining the military coalition. Yemen's eastern neighbor is the only Gulf state to maintain cordial relations with Iran, and it often acts as a mediator for members of the GCC. The sultanate has also remained on the sidelines as a passive observer during the transition period in Yemen. Omani diplomats assisted American and British personnel to evacuate from Sanaa in mid-February, and the country is the only GCC state to keep its embassy in Sanaa, while all other five member states opted to suspend services and join President Hadi in Aden in late February. Saudi diplomats were subsequently evacuated from Aden on March 28.

Efforts to end the ongoing devastation across Yemen will require the United States to exert pressure on Saudi Arabia amid tense relations over nuclear talks with Iran. The US would also have to play a role in positioning the Sultanate of Oman as a viable option. The US may be able to convince the GCC to allow Oman to offer its good offices and territory to host a new round of talks between Yemeni actors, and perhaps later between Houthis and Saudi Arabia.

Some actors have already reached out to Oman as the military operation begins to take a toll on the general population. A week into Operation Decisive Storm, coalition strikes have moved beyond high value targets to soft targets, already claiming a high number of civilian casualties. Hopes for dialogue in the coming days seem increasingly likely, as reluctance to place troops on the ground among Saudi Arabia's allies begins to surface. Houthis continue to advance on the city of Aden as militia numbers remain unaffected, presenting high risks for foreign troops that could be entangled in a protracted ground conflict.

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Learning Lessons from the Iranian Nuclear Problem

Peter Jenkins

July 27, 2015

The Iran deal presents an opportunity to celebrate the contribution of the NPT to international peace and security, says former British Ambassador Peter Jenkins.

The journey to a comprehensive agreement offering the US and its European allies an opportunity to feel more confident about the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program has been a long one. It began in the summer of 2003, following Iran's admission of secret contacts with the A.Q. Khan nuclear supply network, and of covert development of dual-use (civil and military) nuclear technology: uranium enrichment.

Can one make unashamed use of hindsight to identify lessons that may come in useful if the West is ever again confronted with a non-nuclear-weapon state party to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) hiding nuclear activities?

The question is worth asking because in the Iranian case, the US and Europe have ended up taking a diplomatic sledgehammer to crack a nut. The deal that emerged in Vienna on July 14 is remarkably similar in its essentials to the deal that Britain, France and Germany could have negotiated with Iran in 2005, if they had been ready to concede Iran's right under the NPT to enrich uranium for use as reactor fuel.

ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT INTENTION

In 2003, the United States and the European Union (EU) saw only one explanation for the "policy of concealment" that Iran had pursued for 18 years: Iranian decision-makers wanted nuclear weapons. This judgment determined the West's policy in those early years of the journey: Iran must be persuaded or coerced into surrendering its dual-use enrichment equipment—as well as abandoning construction of a reactor that had potential to be a good source of weapon-grade plutonium.

When Iranian diplomats explained that they had been driven to a policy of concealment by Western nuclear supply restrictions, the thought occurred to their Western counterparts that the Iranians were taking them for simpletons.

It was true, of course, that the Nuclear Supplier Group, which was created in the mid-1970s, had agreed guidelines that made its members very reluctant to supply dual-use equipment to any member of the Non-Aligned Movement, especially to revolutionary regimes (which is how the Islamic Republic was perceived in the 1980s and into the 1990s).

But given those supply restrictions, why were the Iranians so determined to acquire an enrichment capability, and why were they so determined to retain it now that their policy of concealment had landed them in deep trouble in the boardroom of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)? Surely there could only be one reason: they wanted the bomb.

It was only very slowly that the West acquired a better understanding of the influence of nationalism on Iranian thinking. Mastering difficult technologies satisfies an Iranian need to reassert Iran's identity as a major Asian civilization and a regional power. In the case of enrichment, it also guarantees against Iran feeling the humiliation it experienced in the early 1980s, when nuclear cooperation with and nuclear supply from the West were cut off.

OVERESTIMATION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SANCTIONS

In August 2005, after the collapse of Europe's attempt to persuade Iran to give up enrichment, the West switched to a policy of coercion. It turned to the United Nations (UN) and bilateral sanctions to induce Iran to reengage and negotiate the cessation of enrichment.

To this day, the US government appears to believe that this policy has been successful. In public statements, American politicians ascribe to sanctions Iranian engagement—a diplomatic process that resulted, eventually, in the July 14 Vienna Plan of Action.

What this interpretation of events overlooks is that early in 2012, the US and the EU stopped insisting on Iranian suspension of enrichment as a precondition for talking, and that in 2011, there had been muffled indications that the first Obama

administration might have been ready to accept Iran retaining a limited enrichment capability.

Of course, sanctions have supplied Iran with a motive to negotiate and the West with negotiating chips to trade off against Iranian negotiating concessions. Sanctions have been useful (albeit costly for some and painful for others). But it would be a mistake to believe that without sanctions a deal could never have been achieved—not least because of the similarities between the deal offered to the three Europeans in 2005, well before any sanctions and the Vienna Plan of Action.

INAPPROPRIATE PRECEDENTS

In 1991, after Saddam Hussein's troops had been driven out of Kuwait, the US and its allies pushed through the UN Security Council a resolution that demanded an end to almost all nuclear activity in Iraq, where the development of enrichment for military purposes was underway. The resolution also required Iraq to allow UN inspectors to roam at will throughout the country—often referred to as “anytime, anywhere access”—and to interview whom they chose.

The memory of this achievement, which was later found to have eliminated Iraq's nuclear weapon program, has lingered on in Washington. US politicians and policymakers have hankered after meting out to Iran the treatment inflicted on Iraq. They seem to have had difficulty grasping that the circumstances of Iraq in 1991 bore no resemblance to the position in which Iran found itself in 2003 and beyond.

Iraq had violated a fundamental international norm by invading another state. This was accepted by UN Security Council members as justification for depriving Iraq of certain sovereign rights. Iran's offence was of a much lesser order: withholding information from the IAEA. Although the US and its European allies somehow persuaded the Security Council to accept that Iran's infringements represented a threat to international peace and security, they could never have got the council to treat Iran as it had treated Iraq in 1991.

OUTSIDE INTERFERENCE

The American and European approach to the Iranian case has suffered greatly from Israel's political influence in Washington and European capitals, and from Israel's security relationship with the US.

Israel is a regional rival of Iran. It resents Iran's refusal to recognize Israel as a Jewish state. It suffers from Iranian support for organizations that refuse to tolerate the way Israel treats Palestinians. For more than 20 years, some Israeli politicians have seen political advantage in propagating belief in an Iranian nuclear threat to Israel.

These and other factors ought to have made Israeli motives suspect as far as Iran is concerned. Intelligence emanating from Israeli sources ought to have been marked "interesting if true." Policy prescriptions from that quarter ought to have been disregarded. Attempts to countervail the Israeli influence on Congress and pro-Israel campaign contributors ought to have started in early 2012, when US President Barack Obama decided to recommit to a diplomatic solution to the problem.

None of that happened. Instead, to this day, Israeli influence continues to bedevil rational problem-solving. The US administration and European governments have at last emancipated themselves, made wise by the deranged nature of Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's opposition to a deal with Iran. But far too many members of Congress remain in thrall.

IN THE END

All this begs the question of whether there will be any further cases of non-compliance with nuclear non-proliferation obligations.

In the NPT nuclear-weapon states (the US, Britain, France, Russia and China), there is a tendency to imagine that the non-nuclear-weapon states are itching to get their hands on a few nukes. That may come from overestimating the value of their own nuclear arsenals and underestimating the security and political benefits that non-nuclear weapon states experience from collective compliance with this non-proliferation norm.

Since the NPT entered into force in 1970, there has been proof of only two non-nuclear-weapon states (Iraq and North Korea) having decided to go all the way to weapon acquisition. A larger number of states have renounced acquisition plans and adhered to the NPT or reverted to compliance. At this point, there is no hint abroad that any non-nuclear-weapon state is secretly seeking nuclear weapons, and all but five states—of whom four are already nuclear-armed and the fifth is a recent creation—are NPT parties.

None of this will deter so-called counter-proliferation experts in the nuclear-weapon states from lying awake and trying to devise ways of eroding what few rights the non-nuclear-weapon states possess. But for the rest of us, the peaceful resolution of the Iranian nuclear problem presents an opportunity to celebrate the contribution of the NPT to international peace and security.

Peter Jenkins is a former British diplomat who worked on the Iranian nuclear issue when he was the ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency.



A Picture Can Save a Thousand Lives

Chaker Khazaal

September 21, 2015

The graphic nature of published images showing a dead Syrian child is a “game changer,” says Chaker Khazaal.

As viewed by most of the world, a Turkish police officer carries the lifeless body of a Syrian child, washed ashore on one of Turkey’s prime tourist resorts. The toddler, later identified as 3-year-old Alan Kurdi, was found face down in the sand. Observers on the beach captured images of this heartbreaking moment, and the photographs and videos dominated social media and international news outlets.

Alan was one of a dozen Syrian refugees who drowned in a failed attempt to cross the Mediterranean to reach the Greek island of Kos. The boy’s mother and 5-year-old brother were found further along the beach—both had drowned.

Circulation of these images multiplied at an alarming rate, sparking online controversy over the ethics of showcasing photographs of a deceased child.

Several news outlets eventually opted to publish the pictures. In Britain, newspapers across the political spectrum united in a decision to feature them on the front page of

their publications. Many, such as *The Independent*, incorporated editor's notes explaining their choice to publish the photos.

"*The Independent* has taken the decision to publish these images because, among the often glib words about the 'ongoing migrant crisis,' it is all too easy to forget the reality of the desperate situation facing many refugees," the note read. "If these extraordinarily powerful images of a dead Syrian child washed up on a beach don't change Europe's attitude to refugees, what will?"

FLEEING THE MIDDLE EAST

The graphic nature of these published images is a "game changer," giving the world a rare insight into the dire circumstances of the displacement crisis in the Middle East.

Millions of refugees have managed to escape either the violence gripping their homeland, or the harsh conditions of the majority of refugee camps in neighboring countries. Finding a new home is not easy, especially as some of the region's more lucrative countries have refused to take in these displaced people. Many others make it difficult for refugees to relocate with full legal status, rendering them unable to secure aid and employment.

Some news outlets chose not to run the images. *Vox Media* cited concern that the pictures had become "less about compassion than about voyeurism."

I completely understand the desire not to share, or even glance at the photos of this young child. There is no question these images are extremely distressing. But to those of us who have been following the displacement crisis, the fate of Alan's family—while certainly tragic—comes as no surprise.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported that more than 2,700 people have died this year trying to navigate the Mediterranean into Europe, making it the most deadly migrant crossing point in the world. This is just one of the many dangerous routes taken by desperate refugees who often have no place to go except overcrowded camps in neighboring countries such as Jordan, Turkey or Lebanon.

In a study released this year by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), it was reported that two-thirds of the Syrian refugees in Jordan were living below the international poverty line. With less than \$40 a month per person to sustain

themselves, refugee households often have to do without the very basic life necessities such as heating, electricity and basic plumbing.

Due to this appalling situation, many refugees rely on assistance from outside sources such as the United Nations World Food Programme. However, the organization said earlier this year that it was running out of money to feed refugees. It was reported in early July that the UN agency had already cut its food assistance for 1.6 million.

One image of the young refugee Alan puts a face to a tragedy impossible to grasp with mere words. His family became one of several thousand who have lost their lives in search of a more humane existence. So while it's natural not to feel "good" about sharing images of such a tragedy, we must understand the importance of documenting such catastrophic consequences.

Although thousands of migrants have already perished crossing the Mediterranean in 2015, the image of one drowned child has altered the way entire countries are viewing this catastrophe. Up to this point, the international community has struggled to find a permanent solution to the Middle East's ongoing refugee crisis. Spanning over 65 years, this situation can be traced back to the displacement of millions of Palestinians as a result of the Arab-Israeli conflict of 1948.

Before Alan's family embarked on their final trip together, his aunt Tima Kurdi had been trying to secure their official Canadian refugee status.

"I was trying to sponsor them, and I have my friends and neighbors who helped me with the bank deposits," Kurdi told the *Ottawa Star*. "But we couldn't get them out, and that is why they went in the boat."

As is the case with thousands of Syrian Kurdish refugees in Turkey, Alan's family was denied refugee status by the United Nations, as well as exit visas by the Turkish government. Without either of these, Citizenship and Immigration Canada was more than likely to reject the family's request for Canadian refugee status—leaving them no choice but to get on that boat.

Chris Alexander, Canada's minister of citizenship and immigration, announced he would be pausing his re-election campaign so he could travel to Ottawa and look further into why the family had been unable to achieve refugee status.

There is no doubt these images were going to encourage people to take a stand—an action from a reaction. It has become extremely difficult for the world’s leaders to ignore the plight of millions of refugees hoping for a better life.

Kim Murphy of *The Los Angeles Times* stressed how important it is for people to continue to share pictures that provoke emotion and raise awareness of the ongoing displacement crisis.

“The image is not offensive, it is not gory, it is not tasteless—it is merely heartbreaking, and stark testimony of the unfolding human tragedy that is playing out in Syria, Turkey, and Europe, often unwitnessed,” Murphy said. “We have written stories about hundreds of migrants found dead in capsized boats, sweltering trucks, and lonely rail lines, but it took a tiny boy on a beach to really bring it home to those readers who may not have yet grasped the magnitude of the migrant crisis.”

THE RESPONSE

The powerful worldwide reaction generated by these images focuses on additional awareness to countries such as the United States and Britain, who haven’t quite pulled their weight to help alleviate displacement in the Middle East. The International Rescue Committee reports that the US has resettled only 1,541 of the over 4 million Syrian refugees since the civil war began five years ago. By contrast, Germany is expected to resettle an estimated 800,000 over the next year.

A map tweeted by Luay al-Khatteeb, nonresident fellow at the Brookings Institution, illustrates the disparity of refugee aid between Gulf Arab states and countries such as Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey.

Thanks to the voices that have been inspired by these graphic images, there will no doubt be more pressure than ever for these countries to open their borders to refugees in need.

Such was the case when British Prime Minister David Cameron had earlier this year referred to people fleeing Syria and Afghanistan as a “swarm.” The images of Alan stirred such public outcry that the United Kingdom reacted to the crisis by announcing it would accept up to 20,000 refugees by 2020.

“The whole country has been deeply moved by the heartbreaking images we have seen over the past few days,” Cameron said. “It is absolutely right that Britain should

fulfill its moral responsibility to help those refugees just as we have done so proudly throughout our history.”

Confrontational visuals remain a crucial element of engaging the population and prominent public figures in addressing a solution with meaningful outcomes.

If a picture is worth a thousand words, could it also save a thousand lives?

Chaker Khazaal is a writer, reporter and public speaker.



A Glimmer of Hope for the Syrian Crisis... But Only

Gary Grappo

November 2, 2015

The talks in Vienna offer the first faint hope for a solution to the civil war that has wracked Syria. But intractable issues could yet frustrate this hopeful beginning.

At first blush, the auspicious beginning of the latest peace initiative on Syria that concluded in Vienna on October 30 offers much by which to be encouraged.

The 17 participating nations, plus the European Union and the United Nations—the Syrian government did not participate—issued a joint communiqué that called for, inter alia: protection of the rights of all Syrian people; the defeat of the Islamic State (IS); and an invitation to the United Nations (UN) to convene representatives of Syria’s government and the Syrian opposition in order to seek a political process leading to credible, inclusive, non-sectarian governance, followed by a UN-supervised process to establish a new constitution and hold free elections. Moreover, the parties committed to maintain Syria’s territorial integrity and state institutions.

A number of factors make this newest peace-brokering initiative different from the two Geneva collectives that preceded it.

First, Iran was present, a derivative of the Iran-P5+1 nuclear accord that served to bring the Islamic Republic closer to the doorstep of acceptability in the international community. Iran has much invested in Syria, bankrolling Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to the tune of billions annually and deploying hundreds of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps troops there to protect his regime and lead the fight against opposition forces, including the Islamic State, but also many moderate opponents.

Second, the scale of the Syrian tragedy has become too big for anyone to ignore. Casualties now exceed 250,000 by some estimates. One-half of the Syrian population of 23 million has been forced from their homes—4.5 million as refugees and the rest as IDPs, or internally displaced persons. Many of the former are besieging Europe's borders, creating something of a crisis for European states still struggling to address high unemployment and lackluster economic growth since the 2008 global economic crisis.

Third, there is a new player on the ground in Syria, Russia, which weeks ago deployed two dozen warplanes to the country's western coast, ostensibly to help carry the fight to IS, but more apparently to shore up Assad's flagging forces in the western part of the country. Russia has created new "facts on the ground" in Syria, complicating matters for the US and Arab Gulf states.

Finally, efforts to halt the forces of IS, including those of the US-led 40-nation coalition, have done little to staunch the terrorist group's advances in Syria and Iraq. The reality of the need for a global effort to defeat and eliminate the region's most diabolically ruthless and efficient terrorist group now appears obvious to all.

Issuing pleasant sounding and even sensible joint communiqués, however, may be the easiest part; although media reporting suggest that even the discussions leading to it became heated. But if these governments can reach such a lofty goal statement, and even win the endorsement of Syria's government, what's preventing them from ending this tragedy?

The answer is actually pretty simple: The conflicting parochial interests of the countries participating, especially Iran, Russia, Saudi Arabia (and its Gulf partners) and the US.

INTERESTS AT PLAY

Iran seeks to preserve quasi-Shia Alawite rule in Sunni-majority Syria and protect its Lebanese Shia client, Hezbollah. Any solution that effectively isolates Hezbollah from its indispensable Iranian benefactor would be a non-starter in Tehran. Iran would prefer to see Assad remain, however, it might be prepared to tolerate his exit after an interim period, but only if the Hezbollah nexus is not threatened—in other words, some semblance of the current regime would have to remain.

Russia wants to keep its bases, particularly the naval facility near Latakia, and undermine America's traditional dominant influence in the Middle East. The latter is associated with Russian President Vladimir Putin's effort to move Russia back onto the global stage of international politics. Furthermore, Russia views almost any effort to bring popular rule to the region as nothing more than a veiled American pursuit of instability and consequent regional dominance. Therefore, keeping Assad in place until a suitable Russia-sympathetic replacement can be found is essential.

Saudi Arabia and its Gulf partners want to remove the Alawite grip on Syria, replace it with a Sunni government and reduce, if not eliminate Iran's presence and influence. The Saudis fear that Iran is on a hegemonic quest in the Middle East with outsized actions in Iraq, Yemen, Lebanon and Syria. Halting the Iranians in Syria would go a long way to curbing the Islamic Republic's perceived ambitions. The removal of President Assad is a *sine qua non* for Saudi Arabia.

America's interests are less obvious but no less important. Bringing democracy to Syria—and, equally vital, eradicating Islamic State-like extremism in the country—would bring much needed stability to the region, reduce pressure on neighboring countries like Lebanon and Iraq that are also struggling with nascent democracies, and preserve Israel's security. Obviously, leaving Assad in charge would frustrate any genuine democratic process. However, Washington has moved off its prior "Assad must go" perch and would probably be able to tolerate his remaining if only briefly.

The Gordian knot in all of this is the future of President Assad. While the positions of the parties to the Vienna talks are known, Syrians have yet to be able to voice their wishes. The 2014 elections, in which he incredulously won over 90% of the vote, have been virtually discredited. After all that has transpired in this near-five year conflict, however, it is hard to believe that anything more than a fraction of Syrian voters would accept his continuing as president in any kind of new government—democratic or

otherwise. Therefore, his exit regardless of how it happens is inevitable; only its timing remains to be negotiated.

Even so, the aforementioned conflicting interests of these major parties—most of which directly conflict—create substantial obstacles to a resolution, even if they may genuinely accept the pledges of the joint communiqué. Moreover, communiqué pledges must also translate to actions on the ground, many involving millions of people and violent extremist groups.

Nevertheless, the imperative of staunching the national hemorrhage that is Syria and returning peace and stability to the country's suffering population must prevail. And it must do so quickly in view of the mounting toll of victims and destruction of their nation.

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.



NORTH AMERICA

A Love Letter to Young American Muslims

Maria Khwaja Bazi

February 14, 2015

In a letter to American Muslims, Maria Khwaja Bazi reflects on rising Islamophobia and the murders of Deah, Yusor and Razan in Chapel Hill.

Dear MSA kids,

I was 17 on September 11, 2001. It was fall of my senior year of high school, and I was worried about a US History exam. I wore a scarf and performed the afternoon prayer in our school's library.

They wheeled a TV with a live news broadcast into our room. I looked at the person next to me, a handsome Greek junior, for reassurance, but his eyes were on the screen, watching the Twin Towers fall over and over again. All I remember is Ms. Thompson, our history teacher, repeating, "Things will never be the same."

They never were. The next day, in a local sandwich shop with my two (white) best friends, a lady threw a glass at me and screamed, "Go home, we don't want you here!" *I am home*, I wanted to tell her, *I am home*.

We can speculate beautifully about whether we will ever be considered "Americans" or not. We can attempt to assimilate: play sports, make friends with our neighbors, read Harper Lee and hold ourselves up as poster children for Muslims worldwide. We can be active in our Muslim Students' Associations (MSA) to provide services and support to our communities. But when we see the goodness, the *normalcy*, of Deah, Yusor and Razan, we must accept that perhaps, it is never enough.

I understand. I remember all the Muslim students after September 11 who came to school with American flag T-shirts and bandanas. I remember the tall, dark Iranian guy,

who I had a major crush on but never spoke to, defend someone from slurs. I remember the support of, mostly white, faculty and students at the school.

I came home that night and buried myself under the duvets, shorn—in my own estimation—from my community. The once familiar Midwestern school, blonde cheerleaders and maple trees were alien and terrifying. I was alienated.

Although I went on to become an MSA president in university and a token Muslim on many fliers, I never shook that feeling.

I still answer “America” if you ask me where I’m from, but I’ve moved halfway across the world to a place where I can hear prayer calls and eat all of the food.

I have gotten so used to searching for *halal* options that I still order the tuna at Subway. Some things I can’t shake. Some things I don’t want to.

The American Islamic spirit I learned in adolescence carried me through struggles with my well-meaning immigrant parents, falling in love with boys, understanding my own identity. I was, and am, an unwavering Muslim before anything else—attempting to emulate the courageous, kind example of people before me.

And through the years that have followed, despite travel and the Taliban and a Master’s degree in a foreign country, I carry that indefatigable spirit, that hope I learned in America, with me.

I know you, MSA kids. I know you come together in quiet classrooms after school to organize awareness events and design banners. I know how, on university campuses, you’re still worrying about how to separate the cultural expectations of your parents from the democratic nature of your Islam. I know about your love of Hamza Yusuf and Suhaib Webb.

I even know you haven’t quite figured out how to talk to the opposite sex and that *hijabi* fashion is still a thing. I may have been around before hashtags, but I know who you are.

And I love you. I love you because you will sleep on each other’s furniture at random times and you will find each other at conferences. You will help each other through struggles about wearing scarves and broken hearts and you will dance at each other’s

weddings. I love you because you will pray together, shoulder-to-shoulder, and you will insist on women's spaces in mosques.

I love you most of all because you will continue to serve and fight for your communities even when people on all sides are against you. I love you because you represent the best of us.

I know we all weep for Deah, Yusor, Razan and their families because they were also of us. I know your grief and fear. Although I am sitting a thousand miles away, I've had so many conversations with young mothers who are afraid to take their children outside. Men I knew as gangly 18-year-olds feel they need to purchase guns for the safety of their families.

But you are at the forefront. It is you who have to negotiate your identities in a space that is no longer safe. I am so sorry that this falls to you but, as many African American families have told their children, you will have to work harder to overcome it.

It is not fair. I am sorry for you, but you must accept that.

Please take it from an older hand: don't be alienated. Don't shut down, like I did. Don't refuse to engage with your communities no matter how much it frightens or angers you. Stay safe, stay together, but don't self-segregate.

Please continue to demonstrate to the American public who don't believe that you are the best of the best. Stand with others who are also marginalized in solidarity.

I know all of us are the turning tide—the millennial generation that has defined Islam differently from our parents. I know we have assimilated to various degrees, but we have also kept what we feel is valuable and right. I'm not sure if everyone else realizes how far we have come from the extremism of the “Islamic State”—our latest bogeyman—but I do.

At some point, I am confident the American public will also realize, despite what Fox News and Bobby Jindal tell them, that you are not a threat. You are, in fact, their greatest defense against extremism. Nobody needs a summit to figure that out.

Reach out to those of us who are older—there are many of us, former MSA presidents and VPs and treasurers, generally working in hospitals and private practices. We know

how you feel and we will support you. We love you, I hope you know that, and we understand your identity better than anyone else. We consider ourselves American, too.

With love,

A former MSA president

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



Baltimore, the City of Lost Souls

Landon Shroder

May 13, 2015

What were the deep-rooted causes behind the uprising in Baltimore?

“Baltimore is a troubled city, a city of lost souls.” Naisha Smith is only 25 years old, but she has an awareness that would escape even the most experienced of social observers. “The problems come when the citizens feel threatened ... had they not rioted, the way they did, they would not have been heard. This is a build up from generations of constant anger.”

Her aunt, Renée Washington, a woman of sharp intelligence and inescapable warmth, who was sitting next to me in their Baltimore home, interrupted: “I agree with what the young people did, because these kids got tired of being another black statistic.”

She continued, “But if you never do anything, guess what? The next generation will be fighting the same fight we are fighting now, and it is time for it to stop.”

The candor in which they spoke about police violence was deeply unsettling. Attempting to justify my naiveté, I explained that I had just spent the past 11 years overseas. For me, the idea that in 2015 people still lived with this kind of fear was shocking. These are the same types of stories I grew accustomed to hearing in Iraq and Angola – not in the United States.

Only a few days earlier, I had met Renée at the headquarters of the People’s Power Assembly in West Baltimore—a community activist group organizing protests throughout the city. During our brief encounter, she displayed a distinct skepticism toward the charges just leveled against the six officers who killed Freddie Gray. In a lively office full of volunteers, some of whom traveled from all over the US, she plainly told me, “Baltimore never gave any justice to the folks police killed. This is just an attempt to quiet people down, pure and simple.”

Renée’s finance was also killed by the Baltimore police in 2000, in a well-publicized case.

The real story of what happened in Baltimore is with people like Renée, and how their perceptions have been shaped by years of mistreatment at the hands of the police. These are the feelings that truly fueled the unrest in Baltimore. And what soon became apparent was that the upheaval, far from being an opportunistic outburst of anger, was actually a carefully choreographed response. One that had been building over time, by young people looking to challenge a system that has consistently failed them.

TIRED OF BEING ANOTHER BLACK STATISTIC

I saw this frustration vividly on the steps of the Baltimore War Memorial Building on May 1, only minutes after District Attorney, Marilyn Mosby, read the charges against the six officers. Community activist Jay Morrison, from the Young Minds Can Community Coalition, holding a megaphone, addressed the crowd: “This is not about civil rights, this is about human rights, how the police officers ignored that man’s [Freddie Gray] basic human rights ... we treat terrorists better than we treat black people.”

Analyzing conflict in any country that is prone to violence would reveal unique similarities to Baltimore: a lack of access to jobs, education, opportunity, soaring income inequality, as well as state-sanctioned violence, tends to end in overt hostility—think the Arab Spring. And, given that the city of Baltimore has been involved in 317

lawsuits involving the police since 2011, resulting in \$5.7 million worth of payouts, this is not a far-fetched assessment.

Furthermore, of at least 109 people have been killed by the police in Baltimore between 2010-14, 69% were black. And of the total number killed, black people were five times more likely to die from an encounter with the police. Half of these, almost 45%, were not armed with a weapon of any kind.

Given these facts, the shock from politicians, pundits and commentators that followed the riots is not only misplaced, but highly cynical.

ABANDONED BUILDINGS AND VACANT LOTS

After the protests and demonstrations were over, I traveled back to Baltimore to spend some time with Renée in an attempt to better understand the perspective of local residents. Her fiancé, Joey Wilbon, was killed after someone reported that he was stealing cars from the auto repair shop he owned. No police officers were ever charged with his murder.

She showed me the press clippings about her fiancé, as well as a book of old photos. “The police thought he was homeless, and of course they did not go to the people who called them—then they killed him.” There were clear discrepancies in the story told by the Baltimore police about what happened. A police spokesman said there was no sign of trauma, but when relatives eventually viewed the body, days later, there were bruises and swelling on his face. This follows a similar pattern, which exists to this day: One which portrays the victim as being unruly, before being processed on a fabricated charge and, in some instances, dying while in police custody.

A short time later, Renée took me around to some of the neighborhoods where the police had killed local residents, including Joey. Accompanying us was a woman named Sharon Black, who runs the People’s Power Assembly. A retired nurse, Sharon is every bit the committed community activist, having spent years on the front line of equality struggles in Baltimore.

Before we toured some of these neighborhoods, I asked Sharon where Baltimore was going to go from here, after the cameras leave and the media loses interest. Like a battlefield commander, she laid out a plan for what is going to happen next: “The phase we are in right now is demanding amnesty for the youth. There is very close to 500 people arrested during the past two weeks. So immediately coming to the defense

of those arrested, and making sure there is a conviction and the police serve jail time are our short time priorities.”

“In the long-term, we are going to implement a ‘know your rights, cop watch’ campaign to train people in how to use cameras and patrol their own neighborhoods. We are also looking into the possibility of a charter amendment for the election of the police commissioner.”

Our first stop in East Baltimore was near Montford Avenue and Biddle Street. In 2012, a now-redundant special unit of the Baltimore police, called the Violent Crime Impact Section, also known as “knockers” by local residents, killed a man named Anthony Anderson in a vacant lot. The police claimed he was dealing drugs and died from swallowing a bag of heroin, but the medical examiner’s report listed the cause of death as “blunt force trauma,” which included eight broken ribs, lung bruises and spleen lacerations. His death was ruled a homicide, but no charges were ever filed against the police.

Only a sad memorial remains as tribute to Anthony Anderson. A stuffed bear, held up by some old wood, which we found lying on its side.

This area is notoriously impoverished with derelict houses lining narrow streets, which are in various states of collapse. Some estimates have indicated that there are upward of 16,000 abandoned buildings and 14,000 vacant lots in Baltimore, the same kind that Anthony Anderson was walking through when accosted by police in 2012. Young men occupy every corner, some selling drugs, some just milling about with little else to do. Unemployment for young men in this part of the city is at a staggering 37%.

The spot where Renée’s fiancé was murdered is little more than a small parking lot on the corner of Homewood and Bartlett, also in East Baltimore. This was the first time she had been back, since visiting it with Joey’s mother in 2005. She carried herself with a quiet resolve, but I could tell being back was upsetting for her. “It took months for his family to get the police report, months, because they couldn’t figure out what should be in it.” When I asked about the outcome, about justice for her or his family, she just shook her head. “There was nothing.” There is no monument for Joseph in this place.

As two young men walked by, Renée stopped them and asked what they thought about the Freddie Gray case. Both responded in great detail about how the legal

proceedings were handled, including how the charges and potential prosecution could work. Impressed, I nodded my head in agreement, until I realized that this was probably due to first-hand experience of being arrested and maneuvering through the courts.

Around 92% of all marijuana arrests in Baltimore come from lower income communities, which is almost six times higher than white communities, even though drug use is comparable in both.

During our conversation, one of the young men conducted a drug deal in front of us.

IN ORDER TO STOP THIS FIGHTING, WE HAVE TO STIR UP THE PEACE

A few days before my tour of the city with Renée and Sharon, during the May 1 demonstrations, on the corner of Penn North, next to the CVS, which was ransacked during the riots, a young student named Tee Latrice told me, “In order to stop this fighting, we have to stir up the peace.”

Not long after, a local member from the Crips gang, handing out slices of pizza (pizza diplomacy never fails) also on the corner of Penn North, told me, “We ain’t got much, so sometimes, you got to cause some devastation to get your point across.” When I pressed him on what this meant, he simply said, “People care about shit getting burned down, why? This man’s dead.”

Once I heard this, I started hearing it everywhere: The idea that rioting and property destruction was somehow the story—not their lives that had been brutalized by an out-of-control police force. This theme soon started to connect a local narrative that was almost entirely overlooked for the more sensational aspects of media consumption. For the protesters, these two things were entirely linked, the destruction of property and the death of Freddie Gray. That was the entire point, not the consequence. To separate these things only reinforces the impression that the conditions which led to the upheaval in Baltimore were somehow irrelevant.

The one time I asked someone on the street about the looting, I was met with a look of complete incredulity, which seemed to say, “Is that your takeaway from this, the looting of a CVS?”

This concept is quite hard to understand, let alone relate to, especially for people who have been fortunate enough to never have been truly disenfranchised — not just in their own country, but also in their own communities. Reducing the enormity of this to mere abstractions like “rioting” and “looting” will only guarantee that episodes like this will continue to happen with increasing frequency.

For some commentators, the demonstrations and celebrations in Baltimore have been indicative of a certain perception—one which attempts to portray low income communities as uniquely subversive or antagonistic toward police.

This is an easy trap to fall into, more so as income inequality and partisan politics drives communities further apart and challenges our ability to empathize with one another. The reality, however, is much more simple. Lower income communities have finally found some small degree of accountability, after years of police abuse. The same kind of accountability that is demanded by medium income communities throughout the US.

As the sun was going down, we walked over to a demonstration being conducted by a local church. Walking around the neighborhood in the shadow of a dilapidated school, which was vacant and crumbling, the pastor blessed the community and asked for the strength to rebuild. But not before blessing the city officials, the mayor and finally the police.

Renée just looked at me and said, “Maybe they should pray for those people who are killing our children.”

Landon Shroder is a security consultant who specializes in threat assessment for high risk and complex environments.



Experience Trumps All

Patrick Mellody

October 19, 2015

Is the GOP front-runner a public servant or just another man with servants?

Billionaire Donald Trump is telling the political establishment, “You’re fired.” Trump is delivering the message like only he can: bold, brash, gold-plated and rich. He believes he is the disruptor-in-chief. His poll numbers and growing list of disciples show idolatry plays well. His screed, entertaining as it is, is not new.

There have been “anti-establishment” candidates before. And while there’s no debating Trump breaks the conventional political mold, he’s no Arnold Schwarzenegger, Jesse Ventura or H. Ross Perot.

Trump has Perot’s wealth and the star power of former Governors Ventura and Schwarzenegger. But these most recent well-known “disruptors” served others before they ran for public office. Perot, a data tycoon and a billionaire, went to the Naval Academy and served his country. Ventura was a Navy Seal. Even Schwarzenegger served as the co-chair of the President’s Council on Physical Fitness before he was California’s governor.

Trump, who is often compared to one of these candidates, simply lacks their commitment to others.

He has money, notoriety and an endless amusing array of one-liners. Sounds like keys to success right out of a Trump University class. It isn’t.

As impressive as Trump seems to himself and his supporters, he is missing a fundamental element of the presidency.

His lack of service and utter disregard for relevant presidential experience will be his undoing. In fact, every successful nominee has had a record of public service, either through the public sector, the military or previously elected office. Trump has none.

Trump is known for real estate deals, casinos, bankrupting his businesses four times, accusing President Barack Obama of being foreign-born, insulting women, denigrating immigrants and being a reality show ringmaster.

It may come as a surprise to many, including Trump himself, but Americans value service in their leaders. When an NBC News poll asked about specific presidential candidate traits, no prior political experience (public service) gave respondents

reservations and made them uncomfortable the most. Having military experience and being a governor made voters enthusiastic.

Is no military or public service in Trump's background enough to make him step back from his own reflection and realize he may not have what it takes to be the leader of the free world? No, not even close.

DOES MONEY MATTER MORE?

As Trump demonstrates on a daily basis, money matters most in our electoral system. Most candidates don't make it because they lack cash. And as Trump brags, he has "lots of it."

The other reason candidates lose or drop out is an embarrassing past or offensive gaffe. Relentless scrutiny and humiliation the press and social media reserve for a shaming worthy of *Game of Thrones* usually kills a healthy ego's designs on the presidency.

Trump eats attention.

The year 2016 will be unlike any presidential campaign Americans have witnessed, and Trump is a very different type of candidate. Like a tabloid celebrity, any press is good press to him, and his ego is not only unscathed by embarrassment or doubt, but in an odd way strengthened by it.

On the campaign, the thrice-married billionaire has finally found his perfect match. His money coupled with an infatuation for attention is a relationship he loves. Don't count on a game changing oops or a ghost from the past, haunting him away from the White House. This is the biggest stage Trump has ever had, and he is going to strut on it like a dancing peacock in a monsoon.

SERVICE IS AN HONOR

The only service in Trump's record is to himself. When the press questions his non-existent political or military service experience, Trump responds with a story about his boarding school, and if that doesn't work he resorts to an insult or personal attack.

Americans who have served their country and worked for their communities need to start highlighting Trump's real reasons for running: himself. Other candidates in the Republican primary and the Democrats, too, can no longer afford to wait for The Donald to fall on his sword, the media to filet him or pray for an intervention from the "force." People who have served their country and communities need to contrast their record of service with Trump's empty file. The time to shine the light on the "huge" experience hole in his candidacy is now.

This will not be easy for Republicans, a party, which has spent the better part of the last three decades publicly shredding the merits of government and policymaking. Like it or not, service is the starkest contrast the rest of the field has to the current front-runner: Donald Trump.

Jeb Bush, who comes from a family of public servants, was by several accounts a good governor in one of the largest, more politically complicated states in the union, Florida. Why was he good? We know nothing about his actual record, but are well-versed in the facts or lack of in Trump's incomprehensible immigration plan.

It is a disservice to the public to discount elected public service experience as a qualification for the most powerful elected position in America.

At the heart of this presidential campaign, as it has been with every election since the founding of our democracy, is a very basic issue: What does it take to be the leader of the nation?

The great presidents of the United States of America were elected to serve. It may seem quaint and antiquated in our modern times of selfies and social media memes. Regardless of where they came from, each of our presidents had a sense of duty and honor before they took office. Regardless of their popularity or poll numbers, they all made long-term policy decisions—not short-term, easy money, quick fixes.

This is a country where the Founding Fathers mutually pledged their lives to each other, their fortunes and their sacred honor. Let's see Trump make that pledge.

**THE FOUNDING FATHERS, LINCOLN, THE ROOSEVELTS,
EISENHOWER, KENNEDY...**

Donald Trump. President Donald Trump. The record just got scratched. Trump does not measure up to the values enshrined in America's DNA. Trump is a lifelong opportunist who inherited his father's business. He is not a self-made businessman. His decisions have been driven by dollars and fame.

Are voters willing to give up on the criteria that gave us Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, the Roosevelts, Kennedy and, more recently, George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton in favor of a man whose favorite saying is, "You're Fired," which he tried to trademark for himself.

Stranger things have happened in American politics. Just ask Speaker John Boehner and Representative Kevin McCarthy.

If the other 12 GOP candidates who have served and made actual effective policy do not bring up Trump's "huge" experience deficit, it is possible an ego, a suitcase full of cash and a gold brand will become the GOP's nominee and the next commander in chief of the world's most powerful military.

Trump cannot buy or take a class, even at Trump University, to earn the experience every president and all of our great leaders sought and fought for before they asked for our support. The other 12 Republican candidates and the entire GOP have to recognize history—their own as policymakers and public servants. The primary and the 2016 election should not be based on who gets the most attention, but rather which candidate has the best record of service.

Donald Trump cannot escape his lack of service. The responsibility to make service a clear qualification to be president lies with every candidate. It is now their time to disrupt The Donald's own reality.

Patrick Mellody is a strategic consultant and writer.



Clinton, Sanders, Trump? Just Ask a Casting Director

Amy Cook

November 21, 2015

By looking at casting directors and Hollywood, Amy Cook examines who will stand in the 2016 US presidential election.

If you want to know who won the last debate or who will win the next one, you shouldn't ask a political pundit—you should ask a casting director.

We Americans would like to believe that we are choosing a candidate for president based on who makes the best arguments or advances the best policies, but it is more honest to admit that we are looking for a leading man or woman to play a theatrical role.

While it is a cliché that we vote for candidates as if for an actor playing a role, recent insights from both researchers of stereotyping and insights from actual casting directors show it is true. I am a theater director and scholar who integrates cognitive science into my study of Shakespeare, performance and audience response, and this primary season feels like a casting call where there is really only one choice for the role.

Voters make decisions in much the same way that a Hollywood or theatrical casting director makes choices about actors for roles; which actor auditioning “feels right” as a head of state? The winning candidate best fits the way we wish to imagine the “movie” of the next four years of our collective lives.

Drew Weston, a psychologist at Emory University, reported in 2006 on fMRI studies that while watching video of potentially damaging political information about preferred political candidates, the part of the brain associated with reasoning was calm and the parts associated with emotions were active. This, he concluded, is evidence that our emotions play a central role in candidate selection.

In the 1970s, Eleanor Rosch, a psychologist at the University of California, Berkeley, showed that categories are defined by prototypes, not a list of rules or qualifications.

This means our category of “chair” may be defined by a dining room chair, but can be expanded to include a barstool or beanbag. Based on years of studying color recognition in speakers of the Dani tribe in New Guinea, Rosch and her colleagues showed that although the Dani speakers did not have words for certain colors, they could see them and have a conceptual category for them; their language did not wholly determine their conceptual system. Thus, she argued, “human categorization should not be considered the arbitrary product of historical accident or of whimsy but rather the result of psychological principles of categorization, which are subject to investigation.”

Our category of “president” is not based on a set of conditions to be met for inclusion—intelligence, experience, policy insight, leadership. It is based on similarity to prototypes. The prototypical American president may look like Michael Douglas or Ronald Reagan, but that doesn’t mean someone like FDR or Hillary Clinton might not fit.

Categories do not expand easily, however, as people assume they are based on an objectively-assessed set of shared properties. In which case, changing what or who belongs in the category of “chair” or “president” cannot happen easily.

It’s reasonable to assume that there’s a sizable portion of the public who could not and do not see candidate, and now president, Barack Obama as president. They will continue to perceive him as being fundamentally miscast because, for them, being a white male feels like one of the requirements of an American head of state, and since they see categories as fixed, they are inexperienced with category expansion or change. This reaction, while still more than one might expect from policy disagreement, is better understood as category confusion than simple racism.

ACTING THE ROLE

Casting directors know that you can, with care, bring audience members to expand their categories. Judi Dench became James Bond’s M in 1995 and spectators recognized her authority, intelligence and experience as close enough to the prototypical M that her gender was uncontroversial. When Dennis Haysbert was cast as presidential-candidate David Palmer, spectators understood that 24 took place in the near future.

What casting directors saw in Judi Dench, Dennis Haysbert, Glenn Close or Martin Sheen was what the American people are looking for in the candidates: someone who can “hold” and maintain authority. In Hollywood talk, the actor will have to be able to “carry the film.” In fact, Martin Sheen did that so well in the first couple of episodes of *The West Wing* that his role went from being a cameo to a lead; President Bartlett was not meant as one of the main characters, but Sheen’s president was incredibly popular with viewers.

In much the same way as candidates point to their experience as a CEO or governor, actors’ previous roles are part of the audition reel. Close’s VP in *Air Force One* (1997) gained authority as much from the actor’s roles in *Fatal Attraction* (1987) and *Dangerous Liaisons* (1988) as from the lines written by the screenwriter. In fact, given the insights of casting directors, actors/candidates need not be afraid of having personal baggage, even scandals or addictions, as this can make for good drama.

While the scope of what we can forgive evolves with time, Americans have always loved redemptions. Some of our favorite actors have been warmly received coming back from personal debacles. Robert Downey Jr’s history of arrests and drug addiction (and recovery) made him the super power to turn *Iron Man* into the highest grossing film of 2013 (\$1.2 billion). Hugh Grant’s public arrest off Sunset Strip only added to his awkward charm in *Notting Hill* (1999). And audiences love movies about coming back from a low point. According to a 2004 BBC poll, *It’s A Wonderful Life* (1946) was voted the second best movie never to win an Oscar; *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994) was the first.

If actors/candidates are properly repentant about their mistakes, and are willing to be redeemed, Americans will identify with them, voting with their wallets or ballots. While President Bill Clinton’s refusal to be repentant over his affair with Monica Lewinsky made the scandal go on and on, candidate George W. Bush’s acknowledgement of over-drinking and his expressed regret boosted his approval ratings.

THE LEAD ACTOR IS...

Jeb Bush would seem to have everything—and no past scandals to be sorry for. He is tall, white, comes from a political dynasty, has played the role of leader in Florida, has a strong political record and policy positions and he has raised lots of money. But Jeb Bush can’t escape being cast as the number two, the dad walking the dog next door.

The fact NPR reported that he had the least air time during the second Republican debate is not at all surprising: he is always upstaged.

People are excited by the outliers like Bernie Sanders, Ben Carson and Donald Trump, but their popularity will not translate to votes. Casting directors would love to cast them as the eccentric neighbor or outspoken co-worker in the break room, but they would never cast them as the lead. The American people have a fascination with the idea of these candidates—in the same way that we loved Kramer on *Seinfeld*—but we don't see them at the helm of their own show.

Based on the insights of casting directors, I'm willing to bet that the nominees will be Hillary Clinton on the left and Marco Rubio on the right, and Rubio will lose because Clinton best fits the category of leader. Indeed the Benghazi hearings, understood in this light, ended up giving Secretary Clinton what Hollywood calls a reel: hours and hours of the actor/candidate demonstrating her ability to play the part that she is up for.

The instincts we have may not make for the smartest democracy, but we can correct for the distortions in our perception only once we are aware of them.

Amy Cook is an associate professor in the Theatre Arts and English departments at Stony Brook University.



Reframing and Preventing American Gun Violence

Veena Trehan

November 23, 2015

Right-wing groups say that having good guys own and carry guns protects them from bad people. That is false.

On an average day, 85 Americans die and more than 200 are rushed to the emergency room due to gun violence. An average week brings one shooting at a school and one shooting by a toddler. The implicit or explicit threat of gun violence has intimidated African American students at the University of Missouri, legislators, active citizens, mothers, black churchgoers and Muslim community members.

Similar countries' rate of homicides using firearms is about 20 times lower than in the United States. Household firearms in just five weeks kill 3,400 Americans, the same number who have died from terrorist activity since 2001. Since 1968, 1.4 million Americans have died from gun violence. Since 1776, 1.4 million were killed in all wars (both recent tweets by astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson.)

After the Umpqua Community College shooting in October, President Barack Obama bemoaned the “routine” coverage of mass shootings. Yet Americans are reinvigorated for this critical, winnable fight: gun violence prevention groups are growing in reach and power, celebs are speaking up, and even Jon Oliver showed how Australia took steps to end mass shootings in just three months.

Still, the issue remains neither accurately framed by the media, nor discussed in terms of effective, multi-faceted solutions.

Right-wing groups say that having good guys own and carry guns protects them from bad people, suggesting that adding to the 300 million guns in America would curtail violence. This false, routinely cited narrative stymies progress on preventing gun violence. We need to focus on the following five uncomfortable, pertinent realities:

THE COVERAGE OF GUN VIOLENCE

When gun violence was perceived as an inner city problem, it supposedly reflected gang violence, gun trafficking, widespread access to guns, a depraved culture and music, poor parenting and a criminal mentality.

Now, white males are behind most high profile crimes, including right-wing terrorism—which is responsible for more deaths than Muslim extremist actions—and school shootings. In fact, Malcolm Gladwell recently wrote the school shooters follow easy-to-emulate cultural scripts. Yet gun violence today is often framed as acts of “lone wolves” who are “mentally ill,” despite just 5% of homicides (albeit 90% of suicides) involving serious mental illness. Culture and community remains key.

GUN PERPETRATORS AND GENDER

Gun perpetrators have a gender. The vast majority of suicides by gun, which comprise six in ten of all gun deaths, are by men. In fact, suicide was recently identified as a major cause for the jump in deaths among white, middle-aged men.

Additionally, about 90% of homicides are committed by men, with 99% of mass shooters being male. The majority have a “catalyst for the shooting ... that threatened the man’s identity as a man.”

Yet little gun violence coverage is devoted to masculinity.

GUNS AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

One in three teenagers has experienced some form of dating abuse, with one in ten teens being physically hurt by a partner. A quarter of women experience domestic violence.

A gun’s presence poses a risk for all. It makes it five times more likely an abused woman will be murdered, and in 10% of incidents by shooters in populated areas (active shooter incidents), a current or former partner is targeted.

VIOLENT CULTURAL ENTERTAINMENT

Many kids (and adults) spend many hours each week enjoying realistic depictions of war zones and crime scenes—places with easy access to guns, rampant violence and brutal gore. Yet the pain and sorrow associated with real world gun violence is often missing.

This likely leads to desensitization and less empathy, with brain changes that are linked to aggression and psychopathy. So the trade-in of *The Brady Bunch*, *Pac-Man* and *Playboy* for *The Walking Dead* and *Homeland*, *Call of Duty* and violent porn is hugely problematic.

In fact, were the nationalities or other characteristics of actors in entertainment changed, we might recognize much of it as promoting terrorist ideologies. Yet these

crime-based videos and games are heavily marketed to children, with many parents having limited knowledge of their content and effects.

THE UBIQUITY OF GUNS, MENTAL HEALTH AND FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Our society has radically changed gun laws. Now, just a handful of states explicitly bar “open carry,” which is no more effective than other protective action and may increase the risks to one’s self, others and the police. It has also become easier to carry a concealed gun with the proliferation of “shall pass” laws that make it harder for officials to deny a permit, even when there is a reason to do so. Additionally, a number of states now allow guns in bars, schools and/or parks.

Ironically, this is happening in a population that struggles with their mental health. One in five American adults is on a psychiatric medication. One-quarter binge drank in the last month. And one in three college students felt depressed in the last three months (one in 11 contemplated suicide in the past year).

Guns amp up risks. We know the presence of a gun increases the chance of suicide. It can also lead two individuals to be more aggressive in an exchange.

Conversely, so-called Second Amendment rights often trample those granted by the First Amendment. Guns, even by their mere presence, can intimidate those disagreeing with a gun owner on racial, gender or political issues. This can result in many choosing not to express themselves or protest out of fear of being shot, even when they are not explicitly threatened with death. Yet right-wing gun groups rarely condemn such intimidation.

SO WHAT?

Few, if any, peaceful nations have omnipresent guns, with many not registered to the owner. Conversely, individuals in nations in civil turmoil flaunt untraced weapons. The US must draw from solutions that have worked here and abroad.

Action to prevent gun violence has popular support. Americans are more concerned about gun violence than terrorism, and they support mental health restrictions, background checks and a federal tracking database. Here are ten solutions worthy of discussion:

- 1)** Universal background checks, passed in Washington and Oregon, should be passed to track the other 40% of gun sales, and no sale should proceed until a check is complete (closing the “Charleston loophole”).
- 2)** Action must be taken to address the processes of the small minority of gun dealers linked to most crime guns.
- 3)** Funding must be provided so government inspections of gun shops can happen in a timely manner; 58% of federally firearm licensed dealers had not been inspected in the past five years, according to a government report.
- 4)** We should consider moving toward regulation required for cars, which can also harm others—to include training, tests, health requirements, liability insurance and inspections—rather than away from it.
- 5)** So too must we discuss severely limiting concealed and open carry to protect both the police and citizenry. Is the new warning to children, “Don’t take candy from a stranger ... but ignore the man with the lethal weapon two feet from you”?
- 6)** We must find ways to remove all guns from those who have committed interpersonal violence and those who are mentally ill, and to keep them from purchasing more.
- 7)** Mental health services must be expanded.
- 8)** The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which have been affected by a congressional ban on research, must be allowed to investigate what US Surgeon General Vivek Murthy calls a public health problem. Unbiased research from colleges and think tanks would be helpful as well.
- 9)** We must change culture: educating all about oppression of women and ethnic minorities who are frequent targets; defining and reinforcing a healthy masculinity; and telling kids (and adults) about risks associated with guns, like through the “Ask Campaign” and suicide proofing one’s home.
- 10)** We must work broadly to educate and inform parents about violent gun play and other cultural violence, while presenting alternatives to encourage values of empathy, discussion and cooperation.

These efforts should be a medical, educational, familial, community, legislative and societal priority.

Gun crimes shatter lives. But we can build a society that values respect and dialogue over pretend and real gun violence. Indeed, we must.

Veena Trehan is a writer and journalist who focuses on policy and the responsibilities of politicians and institutions.



THE INTERVIEW

Estonia is One of the Most Advanced E-Societies in the World

Kourosh Ziabari and Keit Pentus-Rosimannus

March 5, 2015

In this edition of The Interview, Fair Observer talks to Estonian Foreign Minister Keit Pentus-Rosimannus.

The standoff between the European Union (EU) and Russia over eastern Ukraine has not left Estonia unaffected. Sharing a 294-kilometer border with Russia, Estonia has felt threatened since Moscow increased its military presence in the region. The country is now looking for US and NATO backing to preclude the menace of a possible Russian aggression. Estonia's airspace was violated by a Russian jet in December 2014, a charge that Russian officials vehemently denied. US President Barack Obama pledged in a speech in Tallinn that Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia will not lose their independence again.

Pioneering a globally-reputed program of e-government and e-citizenship, Estonia is a dynamic and flourishing economy of the EU, despite being the bloc's eight smallest country. It joined the EU in 2004 and immediately adopted the euro as its currency. *The Atlantic* calls Estonia the world's "most tech-savvy government."

Estonian Foreign Minister Keit Pentus-Rosimannus talks to *Fair Observer* in an exclusive interview about a range of issues, including the country's e-citizenship plans, its border disputes with Russia and its ties with Asian countries.

Pentus-Rosimannus has been Estonia's top diplomat since November 2014. She is the vice-chairwoman of the biggest political party in the country. Prior to assuming the post of foreign minister in the government of Prime Minister Taavi Rõivas, she served for three years as the minister of environment.

Kourosh Ziabari: It has been a few months since you started work as Estonian foreign minister. What are your most important priorities? Which region do you

intend to cooperate and interact with more during your tenure? Estonia's foreign policy has been traditionally pivoted on the development of relations with western European nations, the United States and NATO member states. Do you also have plans for boosting Estonia's ties with other countries, including Middle Eastern ones and Asian powers such as Japan, India and South Korea?

Keit Pentus-Rosimannus: My past three months in office have been mostly influenced by the changed security situation in the close neighborhood of the European Union. Russian aggression in Ukraine that breached several key documents of European security, such as the OSCE Helsinki Final Act, has seriously compromised the overall security situation in Europe. It is clear that Russia bears major responsibility in that conflict by supplying arms, troops and equipment into the conflict zone.

Many governments, including those further away from the actual conflict, have made strong statements reflecting their serious concern about these events. It is a pity that the UN Security Council has been unable to take a clear stance with regard to the ongoing atrocities, such as the recent killings of civilians in Mariupol by Russian-backed separatists.

As seen from the European Union's perspective, on the one hand, it is important to make constant efforts along the political track in the coming months; and on the other hand, to continue restrictive measures such as individual and economic sanctions against Russia. I firmly believe such a double-track approach is most appropriate, given the situation at hand.

In addition to the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the alarming situation in the wider southern neighborhood of Europe has been constantly on my agenda. The rise of the terrorist group ISIL [Islamic State] in Iraq and Syria, their inhumane aims and means need a clear response from the international community. Estonia has joined the global coalition to counter ISIL and has provided assistance to the refugees in the region. Some developments in Africa have raised serious concerns, such as the ongoing instability in the Sahel region, as well as the situation in Libya.

Over the years, we have developed friendly and fruitful ties with many countries outside the Euro-Atlantic area. Asia has always been on our mind, and we have already had diplomatic representations in several Asian capitals for many years. Recently, we opened embassies in New Delhi and are doing so in Canberra. For some years we have had embassies in the Middle East and the bilateral exchanges are very

active. Our ambassador in Cairo is accredited to the League of Arab States and the African Union. Last year, we opened our embassy in Brasilia, which is our first embassy in South America. In Asia, South America and Africa, we have expanded our network of honorary consuls and involved business delegations in visits whenever possible. In the economic realm, we are also working on developing various bilateral agreements, for example, to prevent double taxation.

Ziabari: The e-government program has been a successful initiative of Estonia, and it has helped several developing and even developed nations across the world find ways to transform the processes of providing public services to citizens and eliminating the complexities of administrative bureaucracy. Why do you think it is important to promote e-governance and reduce the amount of paperwork that is done in different government offices? Why has Estonia taken up such a plan, and why is it trying to assist other nations in implementing e-governance solutions?

Pentus-Rosimannus: Indeed, Estonia is one of the most advanced e-societies in the world. Our success story grew out of the partnership between a forward-thinking government, a proactive ICT sector and a tech-savvy population. Estonians and the Estonian state enjoy a wide range of e-solutions: e-elections, e-taxes, e-police, e-healthcare, e-banking and e-school, etc. Our e-solutions have increased government efficiency and improved democratic processes. Services in the private sector such as Internet banking and digital signatures have cut costs and sped up trade like never before. In Estonia, we are seeing 35 million digital signatures per year. This makes up a week's worth of time per person in just a year.

In terms of development cooperation, our country went through a transformation phase ten years ago, when we transformed from being a recipient country to a donor country. Our experience from that transition period is that a scarcity of funds often forces one to be more innovative and effective in problem solving and finding sustainable solutions. That is how the government e-services systems have developed in Estonia.

In order to give non-residents the opportunity to use our secure e-services that have been accessible to Estonians for years already, we have recently launched e-residency. It is a state-issued secure digital identity for non-residents that allows digital authentication and the digital signing of documents.

Thanks to our own positive experience with e-governance solutions, we are now delighted to share our best practices with our development partner countries and other

partners. Just to name some examples, Estonia is proud to be the facilitator of the E-Governance Center of Moldova; in Ukraine we supported the development of e-services in the local government of Ivano-Frankiewski together with Sweden; and we are currently committed to supporting the government of Ukraine in developing its broader e-governance system. We are also supporting the reform of public financial management and the State Treasury of Kyrgyzstan.

In addition to sharing our positive practices with development partners, we support creating the EU Digital Single Market. In order to do that and to develop a pan-European network of e-solutions, it is crucial for countries to take a similar technical and organizational environment such as our X-Road into use, which enables secure Internet-based data exchange between information systems.

Ziabari: You served for three years as the Estonian minister of environment. Is the European Union doing enough to tackle the crisis of global warming and address concerns emanating from climate change? EU leaders agreed to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 40% before 2030. With Europe's growing energy demands in mind, is it realistic to expect that the goal for 40% will be met by the 2030 deadline?

Pentus-Rosimannus: The EU has shown leadership in being the first of the major economies to come out with an ambitious target. This shows our commitment to achieving an ambitious deal in Paris. The 2030 package is the most ambitious on the table from any major economy in the world. It is unique, as it sets out an economy-wide reduction target of at least 40% domestic reductions in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 compared to 1990—to be implemented through subsequent EU legislation. So you can be certain we will achieve it. This is in line with a cost-effective pathway to 80% domestic reduction on 1990 levels in 2050—recommended by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, as necessary to achieve a likely chance of staying below 2 degrees. It is fully consistent with the latest findings in science. The EU has already cut our per capita CO₂ emissions from 9 tons in 1990 to 7.5 tons today. Our 2030 package will cut our per capita CO₂ emissions to less than 6 tons, putting us well on the way toward our goal of achieving 2 tons per capita by 2050. It will require a lot of effort, not least because we have already taken significant steps to become the most energy efficient economy in the world.

Our 2030 target will improve the greenhouse gas intensity of the EU economy by another 50% in the next two decades. It will require the EU to increase its share of

electricity produced from renewable energy from around 22% today to over 45% by 2030. By 2030, it will reduce emissions in the electricity sector by more than 50% compared to 1990, while increasing production by more than 20%. It will require significant investment: The additional impact of the proposed 2030 framework on top of the existing policies was estimated at €38 billion per year for the period 2011-2030.

Ziabari: In his September 2014 visit to Tallinn, US President Barack Obama said before a large crowd of Estonians gathered at the Nordea Concert Hall that Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania had lost their independence once before, but with NATO, they will never lose it again. Was Obama implicitly talking about a possible threat from Russia? He pledged a great deal of financial assistance to fund the expansion of the infrastructure and mission of the Ämari Air Base. Do you consider the air base to be a necessity for countering the perceived Russian threat?

Pentus-Rosimannus: Estonia as a small and open nation highly values the unwavering commitment of the international community to the multilateral cooperation frameworks and the primacy of international law. Our security is primarily based on the collective defense commitment of NATO allies. The United States is an important ally indeed, both bilaterally and within NATO. The continued US presence in Europe is welcome and necessary. Given the recent developments in our neighborhood, it is only natural that for Estonia, the presence and visibility of our allies in the Baltic region is of key importance, and we see President Obama's statement as part of this commitment.

We will continue to work together with US authorities in creating an Air Force Training Center in Ämari, which will open new opportunities for training and enhancing the region's air forces. Ämari Air Base is an ideal place for becoming a regional US-Nordic-Baltic interoperability hub for enduring, long-term cooperation between the US, other NATO countries and the regional partners' air forces.

Ziabari: Let's talk about Estonia's relations with Russia in more depth. There have been a number of events and incidents in recent years that embroiled Estonia in disputes and tension with Russia, most notably the abduction of a security officer, Eston Kohver; the reported violation of Estonia's airspace by a Russian Air Force combat plane, which Russian officials strongly denied; and the nearly-failed border talks. First, would you please tell us why Russia has refused to ratify the 2005 state border and sea boundaries treaty with Estonia, which was negotiated in Moscow itself? And second, why do you think Estonia's

relations with Russia have become so problematic, despite the Russians being among the first to recognize Estonia's independence?

Pentus-Rosimannus: The advancement of the ratification of the border treaties and their enforcement is in the interests of both Estonia and Russia. But so far, the Russian side has not taken any steps in starting the ratification process of the border treaties. The ratification bill has not been submitted to the State Duma yet. The Estonian parliament has completed the first reading of the ratification bill. We are looking forward to real steps on Russia's part.

Relations between Estonia and Russia and the EU and Russia have deteriorated as a consequence of Russian aggression in Ukraine. Since the start of the Ukraine-Russian conflict and in response to Russian actions, the EU has applied a restricted relations policy toward Russia and imposed various sanctions. European Union foreign ministers held an extraordinary meeting in Brussels on January 29. We focused on the serious escalation of the situation in eastern Ukraine after the attack by Russian-controlled separatists in Mariupol on January 24, which claimed the lives of 30 people.

Russia's continued aggressive behavior and failure to comply with its obligations must have consequences. The EU will continue its restricted policies toward Russia as long as necessary, and the sanctions policy must be continued in close coordination with transatlantic partners. Russia must fully implement its commitments under the Minsk Protocol and Memorandum and with full respect to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Bilateral contact between Estonia and Russia have been rather limited since the start of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Diplomatic contact has continued, as well as contact on expert levels in some areas, for instance environmental cooperation.

We have noted an increase in activity near our borders. We have witnessed both air and sea border violations. Those kinds of incidents definitely do not build trust in our relations.

We remain very concerned about the abduction of Estonian police officer Mr. Eston Kohver on September 5, 2014. This act was carried out by the Russian security services on Estonian territory. The continued illegal detention of Mr. Kohver in Russia constitutes a clear and grave violation of international law. Despite repeated calls, this matter has not been resolved, and we continue our efforts to achieve his rapid release

and return to Estonia. We continue to work to achieve his release and are grateful for wide international support.

Ziabari: The Ukrainian parliament recently voted for the annulment of a law that upheld the country's non-participation in military alliances. This is considered a provocative decision by Russia. Are you in favor of Ukraine joining NATO, even though a NATO spokesman has said that accession talks may last several years? Won't it contribute to the further exacerbation of tension between Russia and the European Union?

Pentus-Rosimannus: According to the principles of European security, every nation has the inalienable right to be part of political or military alliances. Every country has the right to freely choose its allies. Ukraine's leadership has, in the past, expressed its wish to become closer to the Euro-Atlantic community. NATO, on its part, has maintained a longstanding open-door policy that is still in effect. The request for membership can only be made by Ukraine itself and acknowledged by the Ukrainian government, which represents the interests of the people and has taken the direction of further integration with Europe. No third country has the right to influence Ukraine on this matter.

The alliance has unanimously supported Ukraine's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. NATO has strongly condemned Russia's actions in eastern Ukraine and the illegal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, which NATO will never recognize.

Ziabari: Do you think that countries such as Turkey, Albania, Serbia, Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina meet the criteria to be considered for EU membership? Are you generally in favor of the EU's enlargement, especially eastwards? I noted that during your trip to Georgia, you termed the country to be an important EU partner and said it has implemented significant reforms on its road toward the European Union and NATO. Do such countries, which many people at the EU do not consider "adequately European," have any chances of joining the union?

Pentus-Rosimannus: We support the continuation of the European Union's open-door policy so nations that share common values and principles with our member states can be included in the union. EU enlargement must happen on the basis of firm but fair conditionality and the principle of countries proceeding on their own merits.

The Riga Summit, to be held this spring, should give Eastern Partnership countries that have done their homework a clear message of the European perspective. Hopefully during that same summit, a decision can also be made concerning visa-free travel between Georgia and the European Union.

Estonia's support of the accession of the western Balkan countries remains firm. We hope that Croatia's accession to the European Union is a positive sign to the entire western Balkan region.

We are continuing with training programs for the eastern partners, and [we] have established an Eastern Partnership training center in Tallinn to share our transition experiences with other countries to provide effective aid to countries in growing closer to the European Union and in developing democracy and building up the rule of law.

Ziabari: During the OSCE ministerial meeting in Basel in early December, you referred to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as one of the concerns undermining the security and stability of Europe. Nagorno-Karabakh, in terms of its ethnic composition, is mostly populated by Armenians, who make up 95% of the enclave's population. However, the United Nations consider Nagorno-Karabakh as part of the Republic of Azerbaijan's territory. The conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia continues to this day and no viable solution has been presented on how to put an end to hostilities. What do you think is the best resolution to this longstanding conflict? Do you agree with foreign intervention in favor of a certain party?

Pentus-Rosimannus: We are indeed deeply concerned about the possible escalation of the situation and what effects it will have on cooperation between the EU and the region. We expect the counterparts of the conflict to be more willing to find a solution and to avoid any provocations and aggressive rhetoric. The solution to the conflict must be found by the counterparts themselves. We cannot offer any solutions and neither do we support intervening in favor of one side.

We recognize Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. In our view, the only way to solve the problem is to do it peacefully—we do not consider any military action acceptable. We believe that the format of the OSCE Minsk Group gives both sides the possibility to communicate with each other. Even if a solution is not found immediately, dialogue must continue. We are glad that bilateral talks and communication between Armenia and Azerbaijan have recovered since 2013. It is important for the counterparts to take

action in building and recovering mutual trust, and to support confidence-building measures and engagement policy.

We support the close contacts and mediation activities carried out by the EU's special representative in the southern Caucasus region and by the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group with the conflict counterparts. We also support the European Union and OSCE's coordinated cooperation effort to avoid escalation of the conflict. It would be a positive step forward if the mediators could have continuous legal access to Nagorno-Karabakh and other disputable areas around it. The only thing in our power is to encourage dialogue and avoid an escalation of the conflict.

Kourosch Ziabari is an award-winning Iranian journalist, author and media correspondent.

Keit Pentus-Rosimannus is the Estonian foreign minister.



Islamophobia is a Lucrative Industry

Kourosch Ziabari and Nathan Lean

March 19, 2015

In this edition of The Interview, Fair Observer talks to award-winning author Nathan Lean.

The US-based Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life predicts that over the next two decades, Muslims will make up 26.4% of the world's population of 8.3 billion people. This means that the worldwide Muslim population will have grown by 25% at the end of 2030.

However, while the population of Muslims in the West is growing, a fear of Islam as an ideology is increasing. This has sometimes resulted in aggressive and discriminatory measures against Muslims, which compels some scholars and thinkers to warn against

the rise of “Islamophobia.” The belittling and mocking of Islamic beliefs, the Quran and the Prophet Muhammad—often in popular culture and the media—indicate that Muslims face a serious challenge: How to continue living in Western societies peacefully, while being on the receiving end of hate crimes, the denigration of their faith and the restriction of social freedoms.

Nathan Lean is an American scholar and writer, who has investigated Islamophobia extensively. He is the author of an award-winning book, *The Islamophobia Industry: How the Right Manufactures Fear of Muslims*. He has published tens of articles about religious intolerance and discrimination against Muslims in the West for various media outlets, including *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Washington Post* and *The Huffington Post*.

Lean believes that Islamophobia is a lucrative “industry” that wins skyrocketing salaries for those who promote and contribute to it.

In this edition of the Interview, *Fair Observer* talks to Nathan Lean about why Islamophobia is rising in the West and how the fear of Muslims is being magnified by corporate media.

Kourosch Ziabari: Islamophobia has been on the rise in the United States and Europe over recent decades. However, it appears that the tragic 9/11 attacks and the US government’s reaction to them intensified the anti-Islamic sentiments among many people in the West. Do you agree with the premise that the War on Terror eventually turned into a War on Muslims?

Nathan Lean: An unfortunate consequence of the War on Terror was that it operated on the premise of a “foreign enemy, domestic threat.” While the Bush and Obama administrations went to great rhetorical lengths to avoid conflating the actions of extremists with the peaceful majority, the policies they put in place reinforced the notion that the religion of Islam, and by extension all Muslims, deserved special scrutiny.

Thus, we see a plethora of examples of religious discrimination in the name of national security: The NYPD collaborated with the CIA to spy on Muslim communities in New York, in some cases designating entire mosques as “terrorist organizations”; the FBI paid informants to infiltrate mosques and entrap Muslim worshippers—in one California case, the informant was instructed to sleep with Muslim women; the State Department, in concert with federal immigration offices, delayed or denied visa, passport and

citizenship applications based on nothing more than the applicant's name or country of origin; Congress held a series of McCarthy-esque hearings on "radicalization" of American Muslim communities that produced no evidence such a thing was occurring; and more recently, the White House announced its "Countering Violent Extremism" program, which unlike its broad name, has a narrow focus on the Muslim American community.

These initiatives, and others like them, reinforce the narrative that Muslims—by simple virtue of being Muslims — are a security threat and must be monitored. This fortifies the claim that terrorism is uniquely a religious problem and that Islam is particularly to blame. I'm hesitant to call this a "War on Muslims," because that buys into the civilizational rhetoric of the terrorists. But what else buys into the terrorists' apocalyptic worldview of "Islam vs. the West"? All of the disgraceful policies I've just mentioned.

Ziabari: People like Geert Wilders or Pastor Terry Jones, who openly denigrated the Quran by "indicting" and burning it, and magazines such as *Jyllands-Posten* and *Charlie Hebdo*, which ridiculed Prophet Muhammad through their cartoons, conveniently used the pretext of free speech. Is it really fair to permit irreverence toward some 1.6 billion Muslims and what they consider to be sacred under the guise of freedom of speech?

Lean: *Charlie Hebdo* and *Jyllands-Posten* had the "right" to publish their cartoons. But having that right does not mean that what they did was right. In Western societies, free speech is fast becoming a weapon. We don't fight *for* it as much as we fight *with* it. Bludgeoning minority groups in the United States and Europe with the revered values of liberal democracy is not helpful. Is France better off because a cartoon of Muhammad angered two men who killed 12 people? Has French society gained something from that? Nearly a decade later, has Denmark realized an increasingly freer and more equal society because of its cartoon controversy? In the United States, have the anti-Muslim bus advertisements championed by the ridiculous hate group leader Pamela Geller advanced liberty for ordinary Americans?

No. None of these things have contributed to healthier societies. All of these exercises in "free speech" communicate messages of prejudice. They target a marginalized and alienated group of people, and suggest that in order to be fully European or American, they must accept the defamation of their holy figures in public and cheer on the values that allow for such caricatures and representations to be shoved down their throats in the first place.

Of course, there is a dirty bit of hypocrisy here, too: In France, anti-Semitic language — equally as inexcusable as Islamophobia—will likely land you in jail, as will any speech that the government selectively deems offensive. In 2008, actress Bridget Bardot was charged for the *fifth time* with speech that “incited racial hatred” toward Muslims. Three years later, fashion mogul John Galliano was convicted of uttering anti-Semitic comments in a café. In the wake of the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, 54 people have been arrested for the ambiguous crime of “apology for terrorism.”

Free speech is about as sacred to most people as are their religious values: When it works for them, they embrace it. When it doesn't, they reject it.

Ziabari: The number of Muslims in Europe and the United States is growing rapidly. Many of these Muslims are immigrants who move from developing or underdeveloped countries to the West in search of more prosperous, peaceful lives. However, they are often finding their daily lives more challenging as their civil liberties and social freedoms are being restricted. Are Western governments not responsible for the wellbeing and security of their Muslim minorities?

Lean: European and American governments have an obligation to support the rights of everyone who calls those places home. Ultimately, though, government is a flimsy and often-pathetic institution. Its leaders campaign on value issues, but govern on special interests. A congressman from the deep American South would have little incentive to support policies that facilitate mosque construction or alleviate religious discrimination toward Muslims in the workplace. The same is true for various locales in Europe: An Austrian or Belgian politician caters to the desires of the group that elects them.

This domestic political malaise is also tightly woven to the banner of foreign events—flashpoints of violence like ISIS [Islamic State] beheadings—that sow angst at home by fortifying nationalism and common identity. In Europe as in the United States, this may mean a coalescence of racial and religious groups whereby the interests of the majority (non-Muslims) prevail over the minority, Muslims.

Ziabari: Statistics show that of all terrorist attacks that take place in Europe and the United States, only a small portion are carried out by Muslims. For instance, a Europol report showed that in 2010, of the 249 terrorist attacks on European soil, only three were perpetrated by Muslims. This is while a large number of politicians, law enforcement officials and media are inclined to repeatedly talk

about the threat of Islamic fundamentalism and Islamist terrorism. What's your take on that?

Lean: It is true that the number of terrorist attacks carried out by Muslims in Europe is quite small, compared to other groups. In the United States, that is also the case. The University of North Carolina and the Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security released a research report in 2014, indicating that since the attacks of 9/11, Muslim-linked terrorism has killed only 37 people in the United States. Nearly 200,000 people have been killed by gun violence in that same period of time.

The problem, however, is that for most Europeans and Americans, Islam and Muslims are foreign. They exist "over there," beyond "our" borders. As a result, it's not the instances of domestic terrorism that we focus on as much as it is the instances of foreign terrorism: groups like ISIS, Boko Haram, the Taliban, al-Qaeda and others. These groups do kill lots of people. Those images, which circulate on mainstream news media, are not balanced by depictions of non-violent Muslims. This results in a warped view of reality, and the real danger posed by these terrorist outfits is countered, in part, with domestic programs that are premised on the faulty notion that Muslim-led domestic terrorism is the biggest threat.

Ziabari: **Yes, as you say, the rise of the terrorist group ISIS has significantly contributed to the growth of anti-Islamic attitudes across the world, making those who believe the Islamic State is representative of Muslims more doubtful about the peaceful nature of Islam. How is it possible to make these skeptics believe that ISIS doesn't have anything to do with Islam, and that all major Muslim scholars, both Sunni and Shia, have denounced its atrocities and shameful killings of children, women and innocent men?**

Lean: What will cause people to understand that ISIS has nothing to do with the normative Islam practiced by the vast majority of the world's 1.6 billion Muslims? In a word: time.

These types of prejudgments are not easily rectifiable. Fortunately, however, Muslims today have more tools at their disposal to push back against prejudice and persistent misinformation. While the Internet is a breeding ground for Islamophobia, it's also fast-becoming an outlet for viral memes and other expressions that offer nuanced views. Popular culture, too, is playing a major role. Wildly popular comedians and actors—most of them non-Muslims—are using their platforms to speak out against

misinformation that targets Muslims. And as Muslim voices become more centrally featured in the world of popular culture and news—film, television, radio, etc—Americans and Europeans will become more comfortable with the idea that groups like ISIS are aberrations.

Ziabari: In your internationally-acclaimed book, you called Islamophobia an industry. Do you think Islamophobia is really being promoted as an industry? Are there systematic efforts at work to propagate an illusory fear of Muslims, to make them the bogeyman and enemy who is responsible for all the evil that happens today?

Lean: The Islamophobia “industry” is not like the automobile industry: There are no large companies, conglomerations, CEOs or assembly lines. But it is an industry in a more organic sense. A network exists — one that connects dozens of individuals and groups on several different continents. Major foundations with tens of millions of dollars (Donor’s Capital Fund, Scaife Foundation, Bradley Foundation, etc) donate money to think-tanks and pseudo-scholarly organizations and projects (Clarion Project, Middle East Forum, Horowitz Freedom Center, Center for Security Policy, etc) that reflect the donors’ ideological bent.

These organizations and projects rely on a handful of self-proclaimed experts on Islam, the Middle East, terrorism, national security and related fields, [including] Daniel Pipes, Robert Spencer, Zuhdi Jasser, Steven Emerson, Frank Gaffney, etc. These individuals manufacture narratives about Muslims and Islam—threat of sharia law in the United States, supposed influence of the Muslim Brotherhood, etc—that are disseminated to bloggers and activists such as Pamela Geller, Brigitte Gabriel [and] Walid Shoebat, who are paid hefty salaries to propagate them.

These groups, which thrive on conservative politics and hard-line support for Israel, form part of an online echo chamber (Jihad Watch, Atlas Shrugs, BareNaked Islam, Gates of Vienna, Blazing Cat Fur, etc). Additionally, through their best-selling books, speaking tours, consulting fees and public events, the individuals in this “industry” draw incomes well into the hundreds of thousands of dollars each year.

Ziabari: What role have corporate media companies played in stoking Islamophobia? Media organizations in the West normally take pride in their honesty, transparency and independence. Do they take orders from

governments, or simply run their campaign of fear-mongering against Muslims on the basis of their editorial policies?

Lean: The media plays a central role in stoking Islamophobia. While they don't take cues from the government, they do advance stories that speak to the preferences of their respective audiences. The media's problem on this issue is threefold.

First, Muslim voices are largely absent. Most often, it's non-Muslims talking *about* Muslims, rather than talking *with* them or featuring them as anchors, reporters, producers or others who can insert nuance, complexity and nurture a more sensitive conversation.

Second, news media is a corporate venture, and money comes from advertisements, which come from high ratings. The way to keep raking in money is to keep raking in viewers. The way to keep raking in viewers is to keep them glued to the story.

So, how do you keep viewers glued to a story when there is little information to report, for instance, after an explosion somewhere in the world? By asking leading questions that keep the story going. Rather than telling audiences to come back when more information is available, reporters often ask questions that suppose, infer, suggest, hypothesize, insinuate, wonder, imagine, conjecture, etc. They do things other than report the simple facts. An anchor might ask: "Do we have any information that this attack in Kansas was carried out by Islamic terrorists?" Another might wonder: "Could it be that al-Qaeda or ISIS affiliates in Europe were behind this slaughter?" Still, we might hear: "There are no indications at this early point that Muslim extremists were involved." Suddenly, the possibility of Islam and Muslims being implicated exists, which perpetuates the idea that they are the usual suspects. And this sensational storyline—whether it is true or not—usually keeps people glued to their television sets.

Lastly, in some cases, journalists breach objective protocol altogether and intentionally inflame. Fox News is the archetype, with figures like Sean Hannity and Bill O'Reilly bloviating on air about "jihad" this, or "sharia" that. A 2011 study by ThinkProgress showed that Fox disproportionately deploys terms that reflect negative views of Muslims, inserting phrases like "radical Islam" into broadcasts significantly more than their competitors. It is also well-documented that Fox's chief, Roger Ailes, drives news stories that confirm his paranoid worldview—one that is so teeming with violent Muslims [that] he once put an entire building on lockdown upon seeing a janitor who was wearing "Muslim garb."

Ziabari: And as the final question, let me refer to one of your previous statements. In a September 2012 interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly*, you said that Islamophobes and right-wing extremists in the United States make thousands of dollars each year through arousing controversies and spreading hatred against Muslims. How is this possible? Have you really come to the conclusion that Islamophobia is a lucrative industry for right-wingers and neoconservatives?

Lean: Islamophobia is a lucrative industry. It's a well-paying career for several people, who devote their life's work to promoting narratives that sustain it.

Take the boorish blogger Pamela Geller, for instance. Tax filings show that she draws an annual salary from her hate group, the American Freedom Defense Initiative, of well over \$200,000. She also draws income from book royalties, donations to her website and public speeches. Robert Spencer, a New Hampshire-based Catholic deacon who operates the online diary JihadWatch, receives nearly that amount each year from David Horowitz's Freedom Center.

Frank Gaffney, whose DC think tank was behind the unfounded claim that the Muslim Brotherhood have infiltrated the American government, drew a salary of just under \$300,000 in 2011, while David Yerushalmi, who serves as an attorney for Geller and Spencer and who drafted the anti-sharia legislation, raked in more than \$150,000, with much of it coming from consulting fees charged to Gaffney and legal fees paid by "lawfare" cases he filed on behalf of his clients.

The Clarion Fund, which produced the anti-Muslim film *Obsession*, has received more than \$18 million, while Daniel Pipes' Middle East Forum has reported close to \$6 million in income over the years. The Council on American Islamic Relations reports that between 2008 and 2011, 37 different groups earned a combined \$120 million in total revenue.

Kourosh Ziabari is an award-winning Iranian journalist, author and media correspondent.

Nathan Lean is an award-winning author and scholar.



The Foreign Policy Bazaar with Ian McCredie

Landon Shroder and Ian McCredie

May 22, 2015

In this edition of The Interview, Fair Observer talks to Ian McCredie, a former senior British foreign service official.

Any conversation with Ian McCredie reveals that he has been at the epicenter of world events, many of which continue to captivate our collective imagination. Whether it was developing sources in Zambia at the height of the Cold War, acting as a Swedish diplomat in Iran after the Islamic Revolution or working to undermine the Soviet Union in various places, McCredie was there.

This makes speaking to him something a revelatory experience, reducing you to the role of an enthusiastic student, eager to understand the intersection of secret diplomacy and foreign policy—exposing a world that, for most, only exists in books and films.

As one of the most senior British officials in Washington DC on September 11, 2001 — and, later, as the UK/US intelligence coordinator for the invasion of Iraq in 2003— McCredie is privy to information that few people will have, let alone get to hear.

Fair Observer traveled to Washington DC to hear what Ian McCredie had to say about world affairs. In such uncertain, unpredictable and interesting times, this edition of The Interview covers a lot of ground.

Landon Shroder: You have been in the political risk business for the better part of your life, specifically as a senior intelligence coordinator for the British government and then as the vice president for corporate security at Shell International. How has the world changed during this time, and what are the most glaring shifts that mere mortals might not be aware of?

Ian McCredie: It depends on what you mean by mere mortal. If you live in one of those areas where events are happening, you are certainly aware of them. The biggest

change in my lifetime has been the fall of the Soviet Union. The threat of nuclear destruction and a global war was a very real fear for many years until the collapse of the Warsaw Pact. The first time I came to America in the 1970s, I remember seeing the nuclear fallout shelters scattered all over New York. These visible signs indicated that the threat was real. With the declassification of war plans in Europe, you can now see the extensive preparations for nuclear war, both in the US and Britain—all conducted in greatest secrecy to ensure the continuity of government and civil order.

This threat was existential on both sides, and the evaporation of the Soviet Union and the construction of the European Union has certainly been the most dramatic political and economic shift in my life. As a result, more people live in peace and security and are wealthier than was ever the case up until the fall of the Soviet Union.

Shroder: That is quite frightening. How did governments on either side of the Cold War plan for this pending nuclear war?

McCredie: One example is the construction of the Moscow Metro—its depth is because the stations are designed to be nuclear bunkers. There were very extensive civil defense organizations, both in US and UK, which were set up so [the] government could survive a first nuclear strike. Networks of underground bunkers for the continuation of government after a first strike were also developed. They were extensive and still exist, although they have since been scaled down. Then there was what to do the day after. This was all part of the war planning. Twice in my professional life, the West and the USSR [Soviet Union] came close to using nuclear weapons. This was a very real threat.

Shroder: September 11, for some, was the single, most defining moment in recent history. Since living overseas for most of my adult life, I am conscious, however, that this is almost exclusively an American narrative that reduces all other global events to the back page. Does the modern world expand outward from the events of September 11?

McCredie: No, it doesn't, but that depends on your point of view. I had a good vantage point being a senior member of the British Embassy in Washington DC on 9/11. One thing I remember was that apart from the actual events of the day, it was hard to convince the UK government that there would be a significant shift in American perception of the world.

For the US, this was a watershed, but not for the rest of the world. From the point of view of London and other capitals, this was a very bad terrorist event, but there had been many terrorist events and indeed other awful atrocities—think of Srebrenica—around the world and this was one of many. I think many, including the Chinese and Russians, still wonder why Americans are so focused on this event.

Yet because of America's size and policies adopted after the attack, it has impacted events, especially in the Middle East, out of proportion to the initial crime. Most of the terrorism and instability that has taken place since 9/11 has been partly of the consequence of the American reaction, and many of the things that have happened since might not have occurred, if not for the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. Americans had the whole world behind them on September 11, and they wasted that advantage.

Shroder: At what point do you think that advantage was squandered?

McCredie: George Bush's pronouncement that you are either "on our side, or against us" was the pivotal moment. Many countries' governments were equivocal about what exactly that meant and became automatic enemies or at least suspects. And the relentless pursuit of individuals, illegal prisons, renditions and the vilification of governments who spoke about human rights and the rule of law really soured the view of the Bush administration in many eyes. I believe you fight terrorism with the rule of law and don't adopt the methods of those you are fighting. America crossed the line and, to be fair, many thoughtful Americans now bitterly regret doing so.

Shroder: In 2003, as the UK intelligence coordinator in Washington DC, you were part of the group helping to plan Britain's involvement in the 2003 invasion of Iraq. What were your impressions at the time?

McCredie: A big question was: Would the UK join the US coalition for the invasion of Iraq? The UK government of the day had many considerations to take into account, but one influential factor was that they very much wanted to honor their alliance with America, which they saw as a fundamental part of British foreign policy—and so right or wrong they would be at America's side.

Another strong impression of the invasion was that, despite popular memory, it had nothing to do with 9/11. The policy of regime change in Iraq pre-dated 9/11, but 9/11

gave it great impetus, driven partly by a view of the Middle East, which had a significant influence on American foreign policy at that time.

Shroder: What was that view?

McCredie: The view was that Iraq represented the last Arab nation opposed to peace with Israel. By removing Saddam Hussein, you would remove the last vestige of support for the continuation of the Arab-Israeli conflict, which would also remove the last vestige of Arab support for Palestinian resistance, who would in turn agree to a peace treaty.

And if you replaced Saddam with a democratically elected government, then peace would reign, both politically and economically. Free trade throughout the entire Middle East would flourish and that would be a permanent solution to the Arab-Israel problem. There was still Iran, but that was another matter.

Shroder: In the build-up to the Iraq War, was there an understanding of the kinds of challenges that would be present in participating in this kind of military adventure? Clearly, the British experience must have been informed by generations of colonial nation-building.

McCredie: I think we should tackle the myth that the British know how to do these things due to experience in colonial administration. If you look at the way Britain withdrew from [the] empire, most of the parts they abandoned were left in chaos and destruction. The independence of India was followed by the slaughter of millions on both sides—Hindus and Muslims. The pullout from Africa resulted in all sorts of internal conflicts and corrupt regimes, and our behavior in the Middle East—arbitrary borders and spheres of influence — has led to interminable wars. So I don't think we have any claim to wisdom. Experience, yes, we used to have some, but the generation that had it are nearly all dead.

The people now running the Foreign Office and Ministry of Defence are prone to the same kinds of misconceptions that their American allies are—and none of them have firsthand experience of running a foreign country, and few even speak local languages or are immersed in local cultures.

But were the consequences of the Iraq invasion discussed at the time? Yes, they were. There was a sharp difference of opinion between the British and American side on

what would happen after the invasion. The Americans were convinced—at least the Pentagon was convinced—that just decapitating the regime would lead to a repeat of the same kinds of revolutions we saw in eastern Europe after the fall of communism. People would naturally become social democrats and rebuild their country into a flourishing civil society, and all those liberal institutions that were previously suppressed would somehow reemerge.

Shroder: But was there an awareness of the cultural disposition of Iraq, or an understanding of the factional and sectarian challenges that predated Saddam Hussein?

McCredie: I think some policymakers understood that, but at least on the American side, there was a belief that Saddam and the Baath Party was the problem, much like the Nazi Party or Communist Party. If you remove those, the rest of society would flourish.

Of course, that was a grave miscalculation. The British side did not believe society would automatically stabilize and were pushing very strongly for a large reconstruction plan to rebuild civil society. The Americans did not see it like that; they thought they could administer the country for a little bit by occupation and then pull out. But some aspects of the occupation was not thought through. For example, the governor of the Central Bank—immediately after the invasion—was not an Iraqi, but an American, which is outrageous if you are from Iraq. This was later corrected by the appointment of Sinan al-Shabibi in September 2003.

The de-Baathification of the Iraqi administration was also done swiftly and comprehensively and was a disaster for the Iraqi military. The tools left to any civil administration to maintain order were removed almost instantaneously, which made them entirely dependent on American troops for civil order and created a great deal of resentment. They might not have liked Saddam, but they certainly did not like a foreign occupying army.

Shroder: What are your impressions after all these years? America withdrew, now America is back. From an intelligence standpoint, what do you think?

McCredie: We are in a period of great chaos—a descent into the rule of warlords—and this is likely to continue for many years, as Iraq fractures into separate regions for Kurds, Sunni and Shia. On top of a weak central government, many outside countries

are continuing to interfere. The frustrating thing from the American point of view is that they cannot control events. For a while they did, but [they] no longer can, and no one knows where these events will eventually lead.

Shroder: Why do you think that is? Our politics tends to fixate on America leading from behind or not doing all it can, which typically means military solutions.

McCredie: Leadership in terms of what? What is there to do? Well, one thing there is to do is push [the] Islamic State (IS) back and do some capacity-building to support civil government. America is doing that, as are other governments, but that is only one small part of a very complicated problem. The natural reaction amongst laypersons is to say, “OK, we need to get a grip of the situation.” Well, getting a grip of the situation means occupying the country and telling everyone else to “shut the fuck up and do what you are told.” Well, America tried that, and it did not work out so well and no one wants to do that again—not a chance.

Shroder: Can we continue to talk about the Middle East? I have been referring to the region as the “modern” Middle East, because the colonial borders that were imposed after the two World Wars seem to be failing. It is almost like the region is resetting to zero. Where is all of this instability coming from?

McCredie: The current instability in the Middle East began after the fall of the Soviet Union. This is when the spheres of influence belonging to the British, French, Russian and American became fluidized. Previously there was some stability—the client regimes maintained order at home with the support of the external powers backing them up. And the external powers restrained them from going to war with each other. This ensured not just political, but also military and financial stability, access to markets and so on. After the fall of the USSR, almost everyone declared a peace dividend and reduced their foreign commitments and withdrew support from their clients. So what was left was that many countries were without any outside support or popular support from their internal populations. So, they were inherently weak. This has led to both instability internally and adventurism externally.

This started with the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, which I do not think would have happened during the Cold War. But Saddam did not think anyone was paying any attention, and who cared about the Kuwaitis? Apart from Saudi Arabia, none of the other Arab countries were particularly rattled by the invasion. In fact, the invasion of

Kuwait was quite popular in the Arab world because they all thought that the Kuwaitis deserved it. However, in the Western world, alarm bells started ringing when they realized that they had neglected the stability of the region. And there was panic at the thought that Saddam could soon occupy the oil fields of Saudi Arabia. The Saudis were alarmed because not only did they risk losing their oil fields, but they found that Saddam's ally, King Hussein of Jordan, had started styling himself [as] "Sharif Hussein," which meant he had fallen for Saddam's promises of restoring the Hashemites to the Emirate of the Hejaz and custodianship of Mecca and Medina.

Shroder: How much of the current instability in the region is linked to the US invasion of Iraq in 2003?

McCredie: The invasion of Iraq was the decapitation of a regime, but there was little nation-building or replacement of that regime with a government that had any legitimacy. There was an attempt to do that, but as we know it was a very poor attempt and it failed. The last attempt was with Nouri al-Maliki, the former Iraqi prime minister, who did not achieve legitimacy at all. In fact, the reverse, which has led us to where we are at now.

Shroder: Much of the US media focuses on things like sectarianism and factionalism, but how much of the ongoing conflicts can be traced to more traditional metrics like politics and economy?

McCredie: The traditional metrics still apply: politics and economy, and access to resources, jobs, stability.

Shroder: And this still underpins everything?

McCredie: One hundred percent, but grievance needs a language, and in the past that has been the language of anti-aristocratic revolution, or communism, nationalism, trade unionism or freedom (e.g. in the US case from British taxes or slavery).

One language of grievance today is the version of Islam used by groups such as IS. This, however, provides a similar kind of refrain: communal living, support for the poor, reversion to some utopian ideal and resistance to totalitarian rulers. Of course, Islam has the benefit of not being written by Marx and Engels, but actually dictated by God himself, and this adds legitimacy to the language. And it is the language or its embedded ideology, which is the focus as opposed to the underlying grievance. If you

focused on rectifying the underlying grievance, a lot of these issues would go away: enough food and shelter, schools, hospitals, stability, representative government, health, security, rule of law and so on.

Shroder: To make a gross oversimplification, the region is split between influence, which fluctuates between Iran and Saudi Arabia. From one perspective, Iran has been the great nemesis of the US, but the projection of its foreign policy has been contained to some form of rational self-interest. From another perspective, Saudi Arabia has been something of an ally, but its ideology has fueled groups such as IS. How do we reconcile these two things?

McCredie: Well, you are right, that is a gross oversimplification. Iran has only recently had a sphere of influence, which has been the Shia parts of Iraq and Lebanon, both of which see Iran as a spiritual leader and a source of financial and military support. Outside of that, Iran does not have much influence; a bit in Bahrain, a bit in Shia Saudi Arabia, but not much elsewhere. And even in Iraq, it has its limits, since they are Arab Shia, not Persian Shia. From the Iranian point of view, they still feel surrounded and isolated, rather than having a sphere for influence. They were a regional power in the brief period of the British pullout in the Gulf in 1971 and the collapse of the Shah's regime in 1979. They have aspirations to get back to that, but of course the Gulf States don't want to see that happen. This has nothing to do with the current regime in Iran. It is just the way that Arabs and Persians view each other.

Saudi Arabia's influence is similar—not great. They have got, or had, Yemen and the lands they have occupied and incorporated, but the House of Saud are seen as rivals by the ruling families of Jordan and most of the Gulf States. They have banded together, of course, out of common desire for preservation, but there is no natural Saudi influence.

Shroder: Since Saudi Arabia has the financial resources, I suppose, if there is a ground force invasion in Yemen, it will be outsourced to allied or affiliated countries?

McCredie: That remains to be seen. Inserting mercenary forces into the conflict will lead to great resentment even if they are Egyptian or Pakistani forces, which are the two countries most likely to support Saudi Arabia in this endeavor—and both of whom are greatly in Saudi Arabia's debt. Egypt got a bloody nose in Yemen once before, and Pakistan is also well-aware that deploying its Sunni troops in a sectarian fight will

inflare, not calm, the situation. These would not be peacekeeping troops acting under a UN mandate, but a mercenary army—and I would not be surprised at fierce opposition from many sections of Yemeni society, not just the Houthis.

Shroder: IS, in no small part, came about due to the US invasion of Iraq. Is there a moral or ethical obligation to intervene in Iraq because of this? Or do we just leave them to their fate?

McCredie: Well, we don't leave them to their fate. We support civil society and reconstruction, and we can supply them with arms, intelligence and air support, but this is very much an Iraqi fight. IS is a brutal, horrible regime, but I am not sure IS is any worse than some of the others that have come before it—the Nazi Party, for example. Similarly, the methods they have used — for instance, the Jordanian pilot being burned alive—are particularly horrible, but the only thing new is that you can now watch it on the Internet and on social media.

Some of the things that IS does are given legitimacy by harking back to the campaigns of the Muslims in the early years of Islam — executions and waging war are part of jihad. Some in the region do not see this as unusually brutal. It is just the continuation of history, but it is the publicity which is shocking to our eyes. The Nazis did far worse, but mostly in secret.

Shroder: How viable is the actual threat from IS beyond the Middle East? Its ideology is compelling individual acts of terrorism globally — Paris, Tunis, Copenhagen, Sydney.

McCredie: I think you said it there: These are individual acts of terrorism. They are pinpricks on the elephant. None of these will be existential threats to France, Australia, Britain or America. But there will be some horrible events, more terrorism, more beheadings, more bombs going off—this is very likely. IS does not threaten America or any western European country in terms of their existence. They are not going to occupy any Western country; all they have done so far is occupied ungoverned space.

Shroder: You worked in Iran during the years right after the revolution. What do you think of the nuclear deal? Can the Iranians be trusted as partners?

McCredie: Trust is the wrong word. The Iranians are more like unknown business partners. They are brilliant negotiators—look at the way they have extracted

concessions from the P5+1 from a position of great weakness. They enticed the West into negotiations and concessions, right up until the deadline and beyond. For example, I think there was a key moment of Western weakness when the talks hit the March 31 deadline and John Kerry did not get up and leave the table. This was a mistake. The Iranians knew they had him on the run and extracted a few more concessions, a few more centrifuges.

So yes, the Iranians can be dealt with and we have dealt with them, but we cut a less than optimal deal, but it is a deal, nonetheless. It is a deal we can live with; although they did better out of this than they should have done. Can they be trusted? Trust is still the wrong word, but can they be verified and held to account? Yes they can.

Shroder: Is having this kind of deal better than having no deal at all?

McCredie: Yes. Iran is ready for engagement. They are going through a generational change. One of the key issues, ignored in the press, is that [Ayatollah Ali] Khamenei is going to die. He is the lynchpin holding the regime together. He is one of the last remaining members of the revolutionary group that came to power in 1979, and when he dies, he won't be replaced. He will be the last supreme leader.

Iran as a whole is going through this generational and demographic shift—50% are under 30 and only 15% are over 50—and because of this, politics will change quite significantly. Once Iran opens up and there is freedom of travel, freedom of movement and normal trading relations, it will immensely strengthen the hand of the young and those Iranian politicians, and there are many who preach engagement and moderation.

Shroder: Do you think the US is still the indispensable nation in complex times such as these? It seems like more and more countries are now willing to make policies that advance their own interests at the expense of the US.

McCredie: America has not been an indispensable nation for very long. It saved Europe from Nazism, but only late in the day. Since World War II, it has replaced Britain as the global Western military power, and that produced a certain amount of stability. And there is this view of America as the indispensable policeman because if America is not there, who is? And if America shows weakness, the space will be filled by someone else or would leave chaos in its wake — I think there is some truth in that. I think America is not indispensable, but in the absence of anything else, it is a force for

some stability because the alternative is [a] vacuum, and we know what happens when there is a vacuum of power.

Shroder: Let me ask you a question no one ever asks: Removing all emotive issues surrounding this, what does the US get out of constant and unwavering support of Israel? Clearly this will be one of the more pressing foreign policy positions debated in the forthcoming US election.

McCredie: What they get is a whole host of problems. The US does not get any strategic advantage because Israel cannot be used as a launching pad for any kind of military intervention in the Middle East. They get some intelligence support in exchange for their billions in military aid, but that is not the point.

One consequence of World War II—broadly speaking—was that European Jewry either perished in the gas chambers or escaped to America. World Jewry is mainly concentrated in America and Israel, and it is only natural that American Jewry takes a particular interest, an emotional and religious interest, in seeing Israel succeed. And that, as we all know, has a great influence on American politics.

However, looking forward, 50 years from now, the living memory of World War II will be gone; it will not be a memory, but a history. Those who can give a firsthand account of the Holocaust will all be dead, and the absence of their testimony will impact Jewish leverage on US foreign policy. But for now, yes, Jewish influence on US politics and in return the willingness of the American people to support Israel is the reality, and although it creates loads of problems for America, it remains part of the body politic, which will not likely change in my lifetime.

Shroder: Do you think the idea of Israeli resilience, being this tenacious country in the middle of a desert that also has a terrorism problem, impacts the American perception of Israel?

McCredie: Israel has always shoved out a fair share of propaganda: the plucky survivors who made the desert bloom. Israel has been very successful in representing a specific viewpoint on Arabs and Muslims, and Arabs and Muslims have been very unsuccessful in representing their own interests. For instance, the most active Muslim group currently manipulating the media is IS, and that is not a very attractive position.

Why should the US continue to support Israel? I think the answer is very clear: About 75% of the Jewish Diaspora lives in America and helps elect the US government. Do Jews have too much political influence? Maybe they do, but that is not America's fault; that is a sign of Jewish ability to organize their community to make an impact. If you don't like it, then get off your ass and organize, make an impact of your own, quit complaining.

Shroder: This has been a great interview. Is there anything we should leave our readers with? Anything on the horizon that people should prepare for: pestilence, locusts, biblical flooding?

McCredie: Yes. Climate change will force a reallocation of the world's resources. The tens of millions who now live in areas about to be flooded, or covered in desert, or deprived of water for drinking and irrigation, will attempt to migrate to countries that are better resourced. The fight for those resources has just begun.

Landon Shroder is a security consultant who specializes in threat assessment for high risk and complex environments.

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BBC and India's Problematic Romance

Nilanjana Sen and Mark Tully

June 24, 2015

In this edition of The Interview, Fair Observer talks to former Bureau Chief of BBC New Delhi Sir Mark Tully.

The relationship between the Indian public and the government has often been fraught with tension. During such times, foreign broadcasters like the BBC have found it easier to make inroads in a new cultural setting and communicated effectively with the Indian audience.

However, in the history of independent India, the relationship between the government and foreign media has not always been stable. On June 25, 1975, then-Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared a state of emergency—known as the “Emergency”—during which the BBC office in India was shut down. More recently, the Indian government made an attempt at stopping the British broadcaster from airing *India’s Daughter*, a documentary on sexual violence in the country.

Sir Mark Tully, an author and the former bureau chief of BBC New Delhi, started his career in India with the transistor radio in the 1960s. He has witnessed the evolving relationship between the Indian government and the media, both domestic and foreign. From the time of the Emergency to present-day claims that the media are gagged under the current government, Tully argues that Indian media have never been afraid to take on the powerful.

In this edition of *The Interview*, *Fair Observer* traveled to New Delhi to speak with Sir Mark Tully on his love for India, the evolution of Indian media and the future of the country.

Nilanjana Sen: What is it about India that makes you stay? What do you find so alluring about the country?

Sir Mark Tully: Well, it’s a difficult story to explain. People often say that I love India—of course I like India, otherwise I would not be here—but it is not as simple as that. As a matter of fact, I am a great believer in fate.

My family has connections with India going back to 1857. But even before 1857, the first War of Independence, we have a diary written by my great-great-grandmother about what happened during that time. Her father was established in India during the time of the mutiny. He was an opium agent actually, in eastern Uttar Pradesh.

My mother was born in [present-day] Bangladesh, and I was born in Calcutta. When I left India, we were six of us children and we were all very sad. We all went to English

boarding schools but none of us liked it, and we were all naughty children at school. We all had happy memories of Darjeeling, which was a lovely free place.

Then, 20 years later when I joined the BBC, I had a very boring job and I did not like working in London. Out of the blue I got a chance of working in India, and I thought it must be my fate that made me come back here. And ever since then whenever I left India, something has happened to bring me back here.

I left India after four years when I came here in 1965 as part of the BBC. The man who succeeded me got into a mess and was expelled from the country—not his fault though. Then, the BBC back in London thought that we must send someone who is experienced and can deal with this Indian government, which can be tricky. I held up my hand and said I was experienced. But during the Emergency, I was also expelled. And when the Emergency was over, I told the BBC to send me back, otherwise it would look as though I had done something very bad. After that, the BBC gave up trying to get me out of India.

And when I left the BBC, I thought to myself for few moments that shall I go back to England now? But then I thought that India has made me and it would be very ungracious of me to just leave India because I was no longer part of the BBC. And that was 20 years ago and I am still here. And I have no plans of going. But I would have to say that it is ultimately in the hands of God and we will have to go one day anyway. Whether I leave a little of myself here or not is still very much in the hands of God.

Sen: In your book, *The Heart of India*, you mention that you started your career with the transistor radio, which was replaced by television. What impact did this have on the Indian audience, especially those in rural India? Do you continue to believe that the radio enables a more intimate relationship with the audience than television?

Tully: Yes, absolutely. The radio does help connect better with the audience. My career has basically been in radio. It is still my favorite medium. If someone said to me that you can either do radio or television, I would not for a moment think. [I would] go for radio.

During the 60s, 70s and 80s, the transistor radio had come in by then. The transistor radio was very cheap. It operated on batteries, so you did not need electrification and it did not require a lot of money. This dramatically increased the spread of radio because

it was easily accessible by people in villages, and the Indian government was giving away transistors for family planning. So there was a big radio audience. And during those roughly 30 years, the only radio that people could hear in villages was All India Radio and that was what they would call sarkari radio. But they knew that the sarkar was not to be trusted, so they turned to foreign broadcasts.

Luckily, the BBC was the first choice and, to be absolutely honest, the only choice then. We were broadcasting in English, Hindi, Bengali, Tamil, Urdu and Nepali. So, we had a huge audience and this made us have a huge impact. But very often, this also made us the target of anger of the government. We were sometimes accused of being a foreign hand, sometimes accused of trying to destabilize India—we were accused of all sorts of things. But my argument always was that if we were distorting the news or we were doing something which was blatantly untrue or wrong, then people would not listen to us. So the government and [the BBC] had a difficult relationship, but except during the Emergency, we had to live with each other.

Since the 1990s, television has come along. It has been free and it is allowed to broadcast news and current affairs. And the written press has expanded spectacularly, especially the vernacular press. So, the BBC is no longer as important as it was, but I had the good fortune to be broadcasting during the times when the BBC was quite important. That is why I became well-known, not because I was a genius or anything like that.

Sen: Some people used to call you “Munshi Tully”? What’s the story behind that?

Tully: Actually, what happened was that when I was writing *Heart of India*, I was in Varanasi near Premchand’s village, and I said to someone that not many people write stories about rural India—it’s only about the Indian middle-class. So, I said I am trying to do a Munshi Premchand. But I said I can never be anywhere as good as he was. So, some people began to call me “Munshi Tully.” But they also called me all sorts of other things—some not very polite, others polite.

Sen: As you have reported extensively on rural India, what are your views on mainstream media’s depiction of what Mahatma Gandhi referred to as “real” India? Do you think mainstream media gives enough importance to rural India?

Tully: No, I don't think they do. Certainly, there are notable exceptions like P. Sainath, Shekhar Trivedi [and] Srinivas Jain, but basically they don't give enough attention to rural India. But rural India is still very important because obviously the majority of the population lives in rural India.

Sen: You have often stated that Indian media is disconnected from common citizens and is elitist in its orientation. Why is this?

Tully: I think the Indian media is basically an urban media. I think all of us in the media have a problem that we are, on the whole, looking for bad news and, therefore, that does misrepresent things, because if you are giving only bad news—I mean if the bias is towards bad news—then the bad news becomes in people's mind what is happening all the time.

You get some very obvious examples in this. I am the last person to deny that rape is highly objectionable and that women should be protected. Nevertheless, because of the coverage of rape now in the Indian media, everybody has the impression that no woman can walk out of the door in India without being afraid of [getting] raped. Nobody knows how many young women are in journalism, in IT and in all sorts of things—who are going in the streets of Delhi doing their jobs and living normal lives.

So this is one of the problems [and] corruption is another. Much is said about corruption and there is a lot of corruption, but there are a lot of honest people in the police. And even as journalists because of paid news—there are lot of people who think that every journalist is taking money. So that is one reason for the disconnect.

Sen: How do you compare Indian media to British media—or, for that matter, American media? What are the strengths and weaknesses of Indian media?

Tully: I would say that I don't know why the division. I think, to an extent, the Indian media are less divided on political lines than the media tends to be in Britain. I do not know much about the American media because I have hardly ever been to America and I do not read much of the American media. But as far as the British media are concerned, there is a fairly strong ideological and political divide. You know which side *The Daily Mail* is going to be—on the right—and *The Guardian*, for instance, is going to be left of center. You don't have it to the same extent in India, but you do have individual journalists who are identified with one ideology or another. I think that's one difference.

I think Indian journals, on the whole, publish more academic type of articles and perhaps less journalistic, though not all of them. I think they are less sensational. Indian newspapers are much more investigative than they were, but they are less investigative than British ones are.

As for television: When I was in Britain, I [didn't] see all these discussion programs which go on endlessly and in which people shout at each other. I think these programs are very uninformative. I don't think you have that sort of thing very much in Britain. You have hard-hitting interviews, but they are usually one on one. You don't have four people speaking all at once. So that would be another difference.

There is one more very important difference. In Britain, radio is a very powerful current affairs and news medium. And the one program that today the politicians like to get onto is not a television program, but it is breakfast show on Radio 4 called *Today Program*. In India, by contrast, radio for news and current affairs is virtually dead because no one is allowed to broadcast, except All India Radio.

Another thing which we have not talked about is social media. I don't really know very much about social media, and that is a very big gap in my knowledge.

Sen: Corruption in Indian media has been a hot button topic. You have commented before that much of India's governing apparatus is really the relic of the British Raj. Do you think some of this colonial, top-down mentality permeates Indian media today? Do you think Indian media enjoys independence, or are they timid when it comes to holding the powerful to account? If so, why?

Tully: I don't think the media are that scared to take on the powerful. I think the one time during the Emergency they were, but we have known some journalists who took on the government. Take for instance Kuldeep Nayar, who was arrested during the Emergency. I do not think journalists are unduly afraid of the government, and if you watch the television every night, you will see that people come and say rude things, aggressive things, and they criticize the government.

But people are suggesting that because [Narendra] Modi is a strong prime minister, the media are feeling gagged, [but] I don't think so. I find a lot of criticism of Modi and of the government. Remember all that rumpus about his suit?

Sen: What is your view on the controversy regarding the film, *India's Daughter*? Do you think the media covered the issue satisfactorily?

Tully: I think it was the government in this case. It is always, or rather usually, an unwise thing to make a fuss about something you don't like, because you just draw attention to it and more and more people end up watching it.

There was no way the Indian government was going to stop the BBC from broadcasting it around the world. I know the BBC's attitude: We do not allow foreign governments to tell us what to broadcast. So when Rajnath Singh said he was going to stop this from being broadcast anywhere, he was not going to be able to do that. All he did was attract international attention to it. So I think it was unwise of the government to make a fuss about it. But I do understand they felt political pressure on them. They must have thought if they did not make a fuss about it, people would think they were not taking the problem seriously.

About the film itself: I didn't see it. To be honest, I did not very much want to see it; perhaps I should have. But I have read various views on it, and obviously there are different views.

Sen: Please shed some light on the role the BBC played in the restricted political environment of the Emergency in the mid-1970s.

Tully: During the Emergency, I was thrown out [of India] and the BBC office was closed down. It was a very difficult time, but what we tried to do was use other sources and information in order to provide a reasonably reliable service for people. And certainly, we were very widely listened to, but Mrs. [Indira] Gandhi hated us and the government [did] too, since we were defying them. They thought that by closing the office and throwing me out, they would close the BBC down, but they didn't—the BBC continued. There were lots and lots of people who were very grateful to the BBC, and we had not damaged our credibility.

Sen: What motivated you to write your first book on India, *Amritsar: Mrs. Gandhi's Last Battle*?

Tully: What motivated me to write this book was that I felt the Punjab crisis was an example of something which was very dangerous anywhere and particularly in India, which was doing religious politics. I believe the Congress had created Bhindrawale and

he had gotten out of control. We were happily working on this book when, suddenly, Indira Gandhi's assassination took place, and that gave the book a new slant.

Although there have been lots of other books on Blue Star and the assassination of Indira Gandhi, ours was the first and, if I can say so, without being arrogant, [it] has reasonably stood the test of time. But as I said, there are lots of other books, and there is more information available than in our book because ours was the first.

Sen: In India's *Unending Journey*, you mentioned that Christianity can learn from the Hindu tradition of acknowledging that there are many different ways to God. You mentioned that it might help people question their belief that denies the validity of other faiths. Do you think the semitization of Hinduism is currently taking place?

Tully: I don't believe the majority of Hindu people are intolerant. There is a streak of intolerance, but even those in the Hindutva wing will always say that we are not intolerant and that we do accept that there are many different ways to God. They do say it, but quite often their actions and the things they say thereafter seem to suggest otherwise. But we Christians believe that Jesus is the only way to God. In that sense, we can learn from Hindu tradition.

Sen: Where do think India is headed, given its potential?

Tully: I have always said that India has enormous potential, and that is why she is recognized around the world. But India will not realize her potential until the administrative system is reformed, [and] the judiciary and the police. In order to realize her potential, India needs a government that functions more efficiently. You cannot function with a judiciary that does not deliver justice on time; you can't go on with having as many as 70% of people in prisons under trial and trials that can go on for years.

So, yes there is potential, and yes the potential is shown. Even with this old British Raj-style government, which I think is fundamentally flawed. Take for instance the police, which still [operates] on an act that was introduced by the British in 1861. Well, how can that be right?

I think it is [fine] to have plans like the *Swachh Bharat Abhiyan*, the Make in India Campaign, but these campaigns won't really be successful until we have an administration which functions efficiently.

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Lindsey Graham on US Foreign Policy in the Middle East

Landon Shroder and Lindsey Graham

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In this edition of The Interview, Fair Observer talks to Republican Senator and US presidential candidate Lindsey Graham.

Foreign policy is a long game—a calculus that should always supersede the whimsical proclivities of election year politics or petty score settling. Unfortunately, this has never really been the case. Over the years, Republicans and Democrats alike have polluted the foreign policy lexicon to score cheap political points at the expense of long-term strategies in places like Iraq and Syria.

However, within this vortex of confusing policy conundrums and complex decision-making, there has always been the steady hand of Republican Senator, and now presidential hopeful, Lindsey Graham.

Senator Graham has been described as many things over the years—war hawk, interventionist, realist—but one thing is for certain: He has a detailed plan to address some of the most challenging foreign policy issues of our times, which is more than what most politicians are ever able to claim.

In this edition of The Interview, *Fair Observer* talks to Senator Lindsey Graham about Russia, Iraq, Iran, the Islamic State and what the US can do to regain the initiative in the Middle East.

Landon Shroder: With Russia engaged in an air, land and sea campaign in Syria, along with the intelligence sharing agreement that has just been put into place between Iraq, Syria and Iran, has Moscow completely outmaneuvered the US in the Middle East? Is US foreign policy in danger of collapsing?

Lindsey Graham: Russia has not so much outmaneuvered us, but they came up with a strategy that is beneficial to their interests, and we have a hap-hazard strategy. We talk about degrading and destroying ISIL [Islamic State], but there is no plan to destroy ISIL—bombing ISIL is not going to destroy them. We talk about replacing [President Bashar al] Assad, but we've never taken Assad on because [President Barack] Obama did not want to disrupt the negotiations on the Iranian nuclear deal. He knew if he pushed hard against Assad, Iran and Russia would be mad.

We're captured by this official Iran deal, and we have a president that just gives lip service to the things that you need to do. You got a Russian president who wants to prop up Assad, who is a proxy of Russia, a puppet of Iran, and he is willing to commit ground forces, airpower and he has created a regional alliance between the Iranians, Hezbollah, [the] Syrian army and some Russian troops.

They are going after the people threatening Assad—and winning. We are sitting on the sidelines watching the region become more influenced by Russia and Iran. President Obama's foreign policy is a complete, abject [and] miserable failure.

Shroder: So where does US foreign policy go from here? How do we regain the initiative in Iraq and Syria given this new axis that has formed against our policies?

Graham: Here's the good news for the United States. The region as a whole has aligned with us. The outliers are Syria and Iran. Every Arab capital wants the same two things we want: The destruction of ISIL, because they are a threat to their government and their people, and they want Assad gone because he is a proxy of Iran and the Russians.

With the right American leadership, you can form a regional alliance that has a lot more capabilities than Russia and Iran, and [then] really isolate them. A regional alliance between Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Jordan and Egypt (all have air forces, all have armies) and we would form a regional alliance—90% the region, 10% US [and] we go in on the ground. We can't find indigenous forces in Syria to train to destroy ISIL and really fight

Assad. A regional alliance to counter the Russian and Iranian alliance and would destroy ISIL.

Shroder: How would we bring these nations together, especially Arab countries that have competing interests in a place like Syria?

Graham: It all starts with pushing out Assad. They are backing some of the extremist groups, trying to create a bulwark against Assad. So it all falls into place with American leadership. Without American leadership it will never happen.

Shroder: With Russia now engaging inside of Syria, is there ever going to be scope for the US to cooperate with Russia with regard to a joint strategy in fighting the Islamic State?

Graham: No, because the goal is not to destroy ISIL—they [Russians] could care less about what happens in the eastern part of Syria. Their goal is to prop up Assad. They'll launch some airstrikes against ISIL, but their real goal is to destroy opposition to Assad.

Shroder: Is there going to be an opportunity for Russia to transition Assad out of power? Would that be an acceptable policy that the US could back—if the Russians could institute regime change, but not necessarily dismantle the government?

Graham: Russia wants to keep Assad in power, which they are using force of arms to accomplish, or replace him with another puppet. What I want is for the Syrian people to decide who leads their country. If Russia has a presence in Syria post-Assad, it will be up to the Syrians if they want to find a place for the Russians in Syria—that's fine with me, as long as the Syrian people make that choice.

Shroder: In terms of fighting the Islamic State, you spoke of the need for US boots on the ground, which I am assuming would stage from Iraq. How would that look given the fact that the Shia militias have eclipsed the Iraqi security forces and would not accept such a deployment?

Graham: One, it would change the balance of power inside of Iraq. More American boots on the ground, if accepted by the Iraqi coalition government, which I think it would be, would neutralize the advantage the Shia militias have. It makes it more likely

that the Sunni Arabs could pull away from ISIL in Anbar Province, [and] makes it more likely that the Kurds will help us in Mosul. It makes everything more likely and is a big blow to Iran.

Shroder: Is it a wise strategy to arm disparate factions inside Iraq? For instance, is arming the Sunni tribesmen or arming the Kurdish Peshmerga independent of the central government a policy worth exploring?

Graham: Yes. We have been training these Sunni Arabs. That is what led to the success of the surge and the Sons of Iraq; we are going to have to do it all over again. Eventually, we are going to have to have a coalition government. You are not going to be able to partition Iraq. Bottom line is the Sunni Arabs are not going to break or rely on the Shia militias for their security. The Sunni Arabs were aligned with the coalition we were a part of, and it worked before. But they are not going to break from ISIL and pin their hopes and dreams on a Shia-dominated, sectarian-dominated government in Baghdad.

Everyone went back to their sectarian corners after the withdrawal of the US forces—as the security deteriorated, people went back to their sectarian corners. You are going to have to do the surge all over again, this time with less American help.

Shroder: But by arming the different groups outside of the central government, doesn't that undermine the credibility of the central government in Baghdad?

Graham: Right now, Baghdad in terms of arming the Kurds is mixed, and Iran has more influence today than they ever had before. There is no scenario where you take back Anbar Province without arming the tribes, period. Now, you are not arming them to the extent that they can take over Baghdad, but you are allowing them to more effectively fight ISIL and dislodge them from Anbar Province. Giving more military capacity to the Kurds helps us with ISIL in other problem areas, but we are not arming these people to the extent that we are going to have an invasion of Kurds in Baghdad. But you are going to have to bolster the alliances that we need.

The alliance in Anbar Province is the Sunni tribes with Iraqi security forces—not pin it on the Shia militias. In Mosul, the Kurds [and] Iraqi security forces working with us could dislodge ISIL from Mosul. This is going to be a very complicated endeavor, but those are the alliances. And when you throw the Shia militias in, you break apart the entire structure.

Shroder: I get that. I also spent seven years in Iraq, so I am quite invested in the country.

Graham: It is sad to see the progress just wasted, because it did work—the surge did work. They were working on the hydrocarbon law, the de-Baathification law, politics were moving forward in Baghdad. The security environment had transformed, and when we pulled out, that security vacuum was filled by al-Qaeda in Iraq, which eventually turned into ISIL and [the] political progress stopped.

That was the warning everybody gave Obama: If you leave too soon everything falls apart. And it did, and it has to be rebuilt.

But the good news is that it can be rebuilt. The region is now looking for American leadership more than ever. There are opportunities for new alliances we did not have in 2009-2010.

Shroder: I was in Basra Province when the US pulled out, and we just woke up one morning and everyone was gone. You could sense the vacuum forming pretty much overnight.

Graham: Yeah, that is when JAM [Jaysh al-Mahdi] and all these guys moved in and became a sectarian militia-run area. Iraqi security forces are too Shia. That's what [Nouri al] Maliki did—he basically destroyed the national army. The Kurds, the Sunnis and the Shia are going to have a loose confederation. You are not going to have a partitioned Iraq. The Sunni Arab nations are not going to allow anyone to give southern Iraq to Iran and that's what happens with partition—the oil fields go to Iran, and I don't agree with that.

Shroder: Do you think the US has enough legitimacy in the Middle East to still effectively shape regional events?

Graham: Not under Obama. I don't think anyone is going to follow Obama, because he's been seen basically doing a deal with Iran that does not help Middle Eastern turmoil. His willingness to withdraw all troops, drawing a red line with Assad and besides crossing it, he still stands—he's [Obama] made us weak in the eyes of the region. I think his credibility as a leader in the world is almost zero.

Shroder: How do your policy positions on Iraq, Syria and the Islamic State differ right now from the rest of your Republican rivals? You seem to actually have a plan in place that is quite pragmatic.

Graham: I think the difference is knowledge and a plan versus talk, platitudes versus proposals. Understanding that more American ground components are needed in Iraq. There is not an indigenous force left to train that can destroy ISIL and push Assad out. I am willing to work at that with a regional approach to isolate Russia and Iran. That regional approach will have a military component, but be diplomatic too.

Just understanding the players and having spent time in Ramadi and Fallujah and understanding the tribes, having met with the tribal leaders—they all know me. Having been to Mosul several times, there is a level of understanding. I know all the Arab leaders. I know they would gladly align themselves with an American president they can rely upon, because Iran and ISIL [are] a threat.

So what I've got is a way forward that will lead to victory, and my goal is to destroy ISIL and change the Middle East for the better. The big difference in this race is the level of understanding.

Landon Shroder is a security consultant who specializes in threat assessment for high risk and complex environments.

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In the Midst of a Revolution, The X Factor Meets The Apprentice

Abul-Hasanat Siddique and Asim Haneef

February 11, 2015

How do you tackle social and environmental problems and make money at the same time?

Tired of reality TV shows focusing on Kim Kardashian or some other pointless celebrity? Ever think reality TV could be a little deeper? Thankfully, you're not alone. A groundbreaking, new "edutainment," reality TV show that launched in late 2013 in Egypt has skillfully harnessed the power of mainstream media to ask some bigger questions of its audience, such as: How do you tackle social and environmental problems and make money at the same time?

Combining some of the best aspects of *The X Factor*, *The Apprentice* and Ashoka's Changemakers, *El Mashrou3* (The Project, in Arabic) is the first-ever reality TV show about business and social entrepreneurs in the Middle East.

Produced by Bamyam Media, a social enterprise that specializes in creating impact-oriented television shows for social change in the developing world, *El Mashrou3* is an innovative and original formatted reality TV show that brings together 14 young contestants from different walks of life as they live together and work to find solutions to social and environmental problems that can also be sustainable, profitable businesses. With the concept of the show drawn up in the wake of the January 25 Revolution, *El Mashrou3* seeks to highlight the renewed passion for social change among Egyptian youth.

Sponsored by heavyweight tech partners Samsung and Google, the reality TV show racked up tens of millions of viewers in Egypt following a successful first season. It created a large action-led social media community—over 1 million—as part of its on-the-ground outreach effort to connect viewers with ways to practically start their own social enterprises and businesses. *El Mashrou3* is now set for a second season in

Egypt, as well as being adapted and localized for several other regions, including India, Jordan, Philippines and Bangladesh.

In this interview, author and journalist Abul-Hasanat Siddique speaks to Asim Haneef, Bamyar Media's global director of development and the executive producer of *El Mashrou3*. Haneef is a former Al Jazeera English producer and journalist specializing in long-form, sociopolitical documentaries on activism, technology and sustainability. Currently based in Cairo, he is also a fellow of the Aspen Institute, the pan-Asian think tank Asia House, a TEDx speaker, part of the under-30s "young leaders" network Sandbox and on the advisory board of tech entrepreneurship quarterly *Erly Stage*.

Abul-Hasanat Siddique: Thank you for taking the time to speak to us. First, please tell us a bit about your background and how you got to where you are today.

Asim Haneef: I was born in London and grew up in a town called Croydon. I don't have many memories from my childhood, but I remember I was a pretty empathetic child and wanted to help others, especially those I saw being victimized and oppressed through no fault of their own—basically being born with a different set of results from me in this insane geographical lottery of life.

I remember witnessing a lot of that injustice around me, and I guess the way I channeled that into my work in the media was by recognizing at about 15 years old that this all-conquering entity—the "media"—had largely replaced the role of religion in dominating our imagination, culture and consciousness, and that I could probably trace back about 70% of whatever people were talking to me about on any given day to some form of media output, whether that be a newspaper, TV report, radio or other.

I began to think there must be ways to harness this medium to educate, inspire and inform others, through storytelling and truth-telling with a flashlight of some kind. I wasn't yet sure if that was through news, books, investigative documentaries, reports or other mediums, but I felt it was a fairly good field for me to try my hand at and one that naturally fit with my hunger and curiosity about other people and the planet we exist on.

So I started off writing hundreds of letters to TV production companies, asking if I could have a five-minute coffee with them. I wrote about 500 letters and received around 495 negative replies, which I used as motivational wallpaper for my room. But I got a couple of encouraging messages that said, why don't you just come in for a quick

coffee? So I pounced at the chance and soon started working as a tea boy/runner at a production company, then an intern at Bloomberg, then a researcher on some BBC projects. I then really just jumped across lots of different TV production and news companies and did whatever I could to get closer to a role that I felt enabled me to use media in a more meaningful way to build a better world.

Siddique: And then you moved to Al Jazeera English, right?

Haneef: Yes, I became a researcher and producer at Al Jazeera English with a focus on global sociopolitical documentaries. Whilst there I pitched and helped develop a series called *Activate*, which was about young, change-making social activists across the world. That idea came about in 2011, just as the Arab Uprisings (sometimes oddly referred to as the Arab Spring) started to emerge, and I wondered: Why can't we find a way to tell stories about social activists around the world who are doing something brave and inspiring—but in a positive light—and also tell their stories as flawed human beings with the exact same vulnerabilities as you and I, not making them out to be superheroes, but just incredibly driven and courageous people? So, I identified and developed stories in Pakistan, Sudan, India and China, and we made six, 30-minute documentaries that were successfully aired on Al Jazeera English, going out to millions of people globally.

Even though the series was a success and got re-commissioned for a second season, I was frustrated and remember clearly thinking: I wish these stories and the crucial themes of socioeconomic injustice, bravery and technological innovation could reach broader audiences. I wondered: Am I simply making news and documentaries that just reach niche, already-educated viewers — people who know the issues? Do these films only get seen by a handful of people that understand the issues already? Am I just preaching to the choir? Is this just a comfortable media job that enables me to keep making films without having to really think hard about the audience, whether they are having any impact or contributing to any real change on the ground?

I began to wonder how to explore some of these complex themes with broader audiences — such as, how do you reach the young and old mainstream audiences that don't give a s**t about politics and the news? Those who find the whole universe too serious and inaccessible. That seemed like an interesting challenge.

After doing some basic research, I found that the majority of those people were either glued to long-running soaps/dramas/serials or some form of reality TV. So I began to

consider how to use the popular medium of reality TV shows to communicate basic business information or to inspire, educate and empower, perhaps focusing on some of the individuals in our world who I felt really needed to be highlighted—not just social activists, but the upcoming new generation of creative social entrepreneurs, people using business to affect large-scale social change. I really loved this concept of the social entrepreneur and realized that most people still had no idea what it was, making it a great subject to communicate to a mass audience.

Siddique: Why was that? Why do many people not know about social entrepreneurship?

Haneef: Well, people might not be familiar with the term “social entrepreneurship,” which is still pretty new across the globe, but many are familiar with the concept of an ethical business created to make a financial return *and* be good for the community. This is what regular business used to be before the era of unregulated corporate casino capitalism, under which profit was king regardless of social consequences. Social entrepreneurship is at least a label for the revival of this old concept that business can be a force for good and part of the solution to the social transformation required so desperately in society, if we are to have a fairer and more just world for all of us.

Historically, businesses were drivers for social, environmental and economic change—they cared about the communities they served. I believe companies like Cadbury’s was actually started to wean people off alcohol and its negative effects—its remit was one of responsibility to people, not just to shareholders. It’s only in the last 20-30 years that we’ve reached this point where profits are prioritized over anything else. And yet we all know that’s not sustainable, so there needs to be more responsible businesses and entrepreneurs emerging, especially in the next generation of younger people—and they need to be encouraged and highlighted.

A popular reality TV show in a developing country highlighting some of these themes and people seemed like a good idea that could not only inspire and encourage millions of young people, but also become a platform for connecting those that wanted to start their own businesses with the resources, tools, mentors and networks they needed to take that first all-important step.

I wrote up a proposal for the show, pitched it around and found some success from funders. However, at the same time, I was also put in touch with someone called Anna Elliot, who had done something similar in Afghanistan but on a microscopic scale. I

was supposed to have a ten-minute Skype call with Anna that turned into a four-hour conversation about the power of “edutainment.” We talked about Sesame Street, the psychology of brands and marketing, how to reach a mass audience and why edutainment had mostly failed across the world. We agreed to work together on the show in Egypt, a country suffering from some of the highest youth unemployment and gender inequality rates in the Middle East and North Africa, and also in the grip of monumental economic and political change.

Siddique: So we’re talking about the uprising in 2011?

Haneef: Yes, the youth were leading the charge for change politically on the streets, but we also wanted to develop this TV show to focus on the wider economic question—because even back then, some observers were rightly pointing out that you needed an economic revolution alongside a political one for real long-lasting and systematic change on an institutional level.

We held a three-day co-creation action lab bringing together the key stakeholders within the entrepreneurial ecosystem, the educational system, youth, business leaders, activists and NGOs [nongovernmental organizations] to ask: How do we collaboratively create an educational TV show that’s going to have an inspiring, positive impact on the country and, hopefully, lead to a nationwide movement triggering more young people to believe in themselves and their own ability to create and own a business project, and go from the ideas stage to execution with the help and assistance of the growing startup ecosystem around them?

Sorry to backtrack, but just to answer your initial question about how I got into all of this: I’m trying to create a different kind of approach using media, because I worked in news and documentaries for a long time and became tired of them — tired of the same press release “copy and paste” editorial line over whether a story gets traction or not. Usually, you have a bunch of white, middle-class editors who decide what’s going to be a global news story and that then somehow goes out to millions of people. I advise everyone who is interested in working in the media to study the economics of news production, because once you trace it back far enough, you realize that so many editorial decisions are purely related to who has the money, and even news companies owned by businessmen have biased agendas they are constantly pushing on the rest of us.

I decided that rather than continue in news and documentaries, I was going to try appeal to mass audiences, especially in the developing world, who were already having their brains and minds manipulated by TV—only with the lowest common denominator trash of mainstream entertainment and celebrity. For me, the challenge is: Can you really make something that's educational and entertaining at the same time? And that's what led me to where I am today.

Siddique: Moving on: Was Bamyán Media created with the TV show, *El Mashrou3*?

Haneef: The company itself? No, it was registered a few years ago in Afghanistan for the *Dream and Achieve* show; though only in Egypt have we become more aware of what Bamyán Media really is. It's an attempt at a radical kind of media organization that's a significant departure from traditional media, because we don't just create or aggregate content. We have a process of quantifying the impact the media has—working with universities, ratings agencies and specialist M&E [monitor and evaluation] experts and other bodies to measure the effect it has in terms of providing behavioral and real-world social changes.

We go beyond the TV show with our on-the-ground outreach work. Most shows are made to go on TV, people watch them and then end of story. But with Bamyán Media, we create huge, sprawling social media communities around our shows; we stay engaged with millions of people who are watching them; and we help them connect to vital tools and resources on-the-ground, so they can set up their own business projects. For example, if someone watching the TV show about entrepreneurship in Egypt has an idea about an agriculture start-up that they want to do but don't know how or where to start, Bamyán Media helps them to connect to an accelerator or incubator, and the potential funding organizations that will enable them to fulfill and realize the potential of their idea. It's a very different thing to conventional media. It's us saying: We're not just a media organization; we are on the intersection of media and social development — and the TV shows are just one part of the equation.

Siddique: Let's talk about *El Mashrou3*: What is it about, and how has it helped the contestants and Egyptian society?

Haneef: The show, *El Mashrou3*, consists of 13 one-hour episodes. It's a competition-based reality TV show and you have 14 contestants from across Egypt, each with an idea for a sustainable business. We chose them, brought them together and filmed

them over about two months. We set challenges in each episode that related to an entrepreneurial lesson — so it became almost like a boot camp for entrepreneurs. One of the ways I describe the show more broadly is: If *The X Factor* or *American Idol* are about people achieving their dreams through their talent or voice, then *El Mashrou3* is a reality TV show about young people reaching their dreams and fulfilling their potential through their business acumen, brains and a whole lot of hustle.

In every episode, you have two teams that are set a challenge often by one of the three main judges or a mentor — something related to a social problem Egypt faces. To give you an example, one of the biggest problems in the country is trash. So, the judges will say to the contestants: “One of Cairo’s biggest problems is trash. We would like you, in 48 hours, to use the trash and waste to develop a sustainable business model and then go out and sell what you’ve made on the streets.” In this particular episode, the two teams went to Cairo’s biggest trash yard and worked creatively to turn the country’s problem into a solution, by finding a way to create products, have a supply chain and sell the goods to market.

At the end of each episode, the winning team moves on to the next stage and one person within the losing team has to leave the show. There are elements of some other shows like *The Apprentice*, *Dragon’s Den* and *Shark Tank*. But *The Apprentice* is just a job interview from hell—that’s the tagline and it has nothing to do with social entrepreneurship or social innovation, and certainly isn’t about tackling society’s problems!

Siddique: Well, it’s to do with money.

Haneef: Yes, exactly! So we have a totally different angle that’s much more centered around “encouragement” rather than “humiliation” or laughing at people. Our contestants are not waiting to get a job; they are aspiring entrepreneurs from across Egypt learning to be even better leaders. They come from different cities and different backgrounds. One of the most important things on a show like this is to have a really wide cross-section of people that represent the authentic face of a country. So, we spent a long time finding those people through a casting roadshow across Egypt that lasted several months.

In the last three episodes of the show, the format shifts to become much more focused on the final three contestants’ personal projects and businesses, and how to make these social enterprises successful. Everything becomes much more focused on

them—their business plan and how they will raise capital and get their project off the ground. This is our way of taking our main audiences through an entertaining and fun ride into finally the heart of start-up world, where you need to have a business plan, know your numbers and be prepared for anything necessary to build your business.

Siddique: And has the show finished?

Haneef: Yes, the first season of *El Mashrou3* started in late 2013 and finished in April 2014. The ratings were between 3-4 million per episode, making it the fifth most successful show for the TV channel, Al Nahar—and Al Nahar is one of the biggest networks itself in Egypt. In total, we worked out that we had over 30 million views and over 270 million impressions on Facebook, and that it had beaten a lot of other popular reality TV shows like *Dancing With the Stars*—becoming the first business, social entrepreneurship TV show to ever achieve that.

Siddique: It's very innovative, and I like the link to *American Idol*, *Dragon's Den* and *The Apprentice*, but from a social entrepreneurship approach. We don't even see shows like that in Britain, so I think that's absolutely brilliant. What does the winner get?

Haneef: Not sure why there's no equivalent in the UK—maybe we should make one! Regarding the winner, besides the \$350,000 grand cash prize toward building their business, they also get a combination of support from the entrepreneurial ecosystem accelerators, incubators and mentors. A lot of these entrepreneurs desperately want to have advisors to help them get their idea to a point where they are able to scale. We have also helped several of the other contestants go on trips abroad linked to securing funding, and every single contestant also received a range of gifts provided by our sponsors, including phones, laptops, TVs, website development assistance and six-months incubation.

Siddique: And what happens to the other contestants, since one leaves after each episode?

Haneef: We decided that the whole tone of the show was going to be encouraging and positive. It wasn't going to be negative or have insults like “you're fired” or “get lost.” In a way, every contestant that leaves the show is a winner. In fact, our goodbye line from the judges is: “You will continue your dream, but not with us.” So it's even framed in a way to make people feel encouraged and inspired that they joined in the first place.

Every contestant who leaves the show goes off with a package of support from us that I mentioned earlier, making us perhaps the only TV show of its kind to do that.

Siddique: I personally can't stand Alan Sugar, so I'm glad you don't follow his line. But do you track their progress?

Haneef: Yes. We knew it wouldn't be enough for us to just give contestants some money or support on a one-off basis and not follow-up. The contestants became celebrities in their communities and nationally, which we witnessed during the nationwide "entrepreneurship bus tour" we organized, with some of the contestants going around the country post-show with crowds of hundreds coming out in Alexandria, Aswan and Mansoura to hear them speak in a public setting about their experiences on the show and what they will do next. And we are following some of their progress to communicate via social media, so people can know what they are up to as well. This is hard, and it's a struggle to keep up, but it's something we are certainly keen to do and become better at in the months and years ahead.

Siddique: You traveled quite a bit last year. What's the future for the show? Do you see it being sold to other parts of the developing world?

Haneef: Yes, we are currently in various talks and negotiations about bringing the show to several other territories. I recently read that 4 billion people still don't have access to the Internet—and so, television is still one of the primary mediums to reach a wide array of people that aren't online yet. Whether you like it or not, viewers are still sucking content up globally. It's just that they're absorbing content that doesn't really do anything for them, their future and lives—to help them. The type of content they consume doesn't give them a sense of being able to take the future into their own hands, and it doesn't highlight and show examples of successful people that are at the same age as them.

In the West, we might be inspired and influenced by Martin Luther King Jr. But there's a lot of young people in developing countries that don't relate to him at all—they don't see familiar role models around them that look like them, talk like them, understand their society or came up from the same neighborhood as them. I think we are subconsciously looking for a reference point in others or a role model. And one of the benefits of a TV show like *El Mashou3* is it has the potential to reflect some of the best of society back to itself and say: "Hey, this is what someone born down the street from you is doing. It's not going to be easy, but you have the potential to do the same."

We are talking to the main television networks, telecoms companies, banks and ecosystem players in places such as Jordan, India, Bangladesh, the Philippines and Pakistan. The idea has been very well-received in every country we visit. Everyone accepts that it's a fantastic idea, using the power of media in a big way to inspire and educate.

And even though many people have had a similar idea for a reality TV show with a social edge, what separates us is that we've done it successfully now twice. We're one of the first companies that actually went out there, managed to get the money and support from sponsors like Samsung, build the alliance and produce the show for a primetime mainstream audience.

So, to answer your question, yes we are actively exploring how to bring the project to a range of other places, but also making sure that in every country we go to, we listen very carefully with our partners on how to regionalize, localize and adapt the show. We don't want to just copy and paste the show; every culture and country has a different identity and different challenges—that will invariably inform the content and programming itself.

For instance, in Bangladesh, the show may be more geared to resilience around climate change, because in time, the country faces the possibility of being submerged underwater. The biggest environmental and social concerns in Bangladesh are related to the scarcity of water and climate change, and also corruption and pollution. So these are going to be some of the top issues we will try to address and tackle on our show in the country. In Jordan, you have a tremendous amount of new jobs that need to be created within the next five years and huge issues around migrant populations from Iraq, Syria and Palestine. So how can our show encourage social entrepreneurs to start businesses in Jordan that are going to create jobs and contribute to inter-regional unity? These are some of the challenges for those regions.

Siddique: Are there specific countries you would like to state on record that you're looking to pursue for a show?

Haneef: Yes: India, Jordan, Bangladesh and the Philippines. If you think you can help in any of those places, feel free to drop me an email.

Abul-Hasanat Siddique is the managing editor, chief operating officer and co-founder of Fair Observer.

Asim Haneef is a British TV producer, journalist, multimedia consultant and entrepreneur.



Rethinking Retail Development in Morocco

Kaylee Steck

July 24, 2015

In Morocco, the corner grocery store has endured despite supermarket growth.

You have just arrived in a Moroccan city. It's hot and you want to buy a bottle of water. The first place you go is a corner grocery store, called *hanout* in Moroccan Arabic.

Hanouts form an important part of proximity commerce. They are hubs of social and economic activity that build customer networks through locational convenience and trust. They also provide easy access to small quantities of staple foods and household supplies. Shopping at a *hanout* is a quick, customized experience with the benefit of special services like delivery of gas canisters for heating water and cooking.

Hanouts offer their clients several other advantages. They create a sense of neighborhood safety by keeping late hours and accommodating rhythms of daily life, such as prayer and meal times. They also give advice as rental agents and matchmakers.

Finally, *hanouts* provide food security in cash scarce communities by extending credit to their clients. In the absence of formal contracts, credit depends on trust and further reinforces the socially embedded nature of the *hanout*.

The retail sector in Morocco represents over 10% of gross domestic product (GDP) and employs roughly 13% of the labor force. Within the sector, large retailers control less than 15% of the market. Despite the significance of small retailing in Morocco, the dominant narrative of retail development is that supermarkets will replace small shops. Thus, previous development studies focus primarily on modernizing distribution channels without incorporating local knowledge and institutions.

My fieldwork on corner groceries reveals some issues that might inform future development approaches that are more sensitive to small retailers. In May, I attended a meeting at the headquarters of the Professional Association of Grocers in Casablanca. Association members said that certain suppliers do not give invoices with small deliveries. Invoices let grocers track their purchases and they allow suppliers to monitor their sales for tax purposes. In place of an invoice, grocers receive a *bon de livraison* or a delivery slip, which is not as rigorous for accounting purposes. Another common complaint was that suppliers refuse to replace expired products, especially in low-income neighborhoods.

Grocers are afraid of exploitation by companies and banks. A program called Hanouty began in 2007 as a private sector attempt to transform *hanouts* into a recognized chain. Participants received a loan from BMCE Bank to purchase new store appliances and products. Participants said they were overcharged for appliances, and they accused the program of delivering nearly expired products and making false promises. When the program failed and was dismantled in 2012, participants still had to pay back their loans.

In February 2015, a group of small retailers formed a collective to protest in front of parliament in Rabat. Their demands included stopping the fast growth of supermarkets and their concentration in popular neighborhoods; limiting oppressive tax audits; providing basic social protections; developing the trade sector with respect to maintaining a balance between large and small retailers; and opening a serious dialogue for their participation in the process of addressing these demands.

Despite recent trends in local development, small retailers remain marginalized from decision-making processes. Moreover, their experiences are largely absent from literature dealing with retail development.

Hanouts are places for social and economic transactions, for exchanges of money and advice, for drinking tea and making conversation. As much as they are vital hubs of local culture, *hanouts* are considered undeveloped spaces and inefficient businesses

that do not keep up with modern marketing and merchandising. In other words, they do not fit into the neoliberal order of mass retailing and consumption.

However, this regime is not the only force of change in Morocco. Small retailers play an important role in shaping the direction of change too; their resilience in the face of efforts to transform retailing across the country demands more inclusive approaches to development.

Kaylee Steck is a researcher in the Fulbright US Student Program.



Entrepreneurship in India is a Story With Two Endings

Punit Arora

October 5, 2015

India's abundance of young and hungry talent is both a boon and a bane for the country's future.

Those who know India well know that anything that was ever said about the country is as likely to be true as is the exact opposite. It is a country that is constantly in great flux as what was true yesterday may not be true today, and what is true today will likely not be true tomorrow. It is not surprising that the entrepreneurial scene in India is in a similar state of transition.

Some commentators look at billion-dollar startups such as Flipkart and Snapdeal—the “unicorns”—and conclude that the Indian ecosystem is about to burst at its seams. Others look at the desperate street sellers and cheap knock-offs to conclude the opposite. For others, Indian entrepreneurship is all about outsourcing and call centers. Depending on when, where and how you look, all of that has a pinch of truth and, by corollary, a pinch of myth to it.

INDIAN ECOSYSTEM

How do we make sense of this transition? How do we reconcile the fact that India has the largest number of people living in extreme poverty, as well as one of the largest numbers of multimillionaires? (India, incidentally, also boasts the fifth highest number of billionaires in the world.)

India is a tale of two “demographies.” Before elaborating on this further, let’s quickly review the state of entrepreneurship in the country today.

If we consider the Total Early-Stage Entrepreneurial Activity (TEA), a key measure used by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) to compare entrepreneurship levels, India stands at a lowly 9.9%—it was one of the lowest ranked countries in the world in 2013. India also ranked among the bottom three countries in terms of ratio of opportunity entrepreneurship to necessity entrepreneurship. Compared to its development-level peers, the report also found India below average on job growth expectations, innovation and internationalization. In fact, India ranked far below Sub-Saharan Africa in terms of innovative orientation.

Lest we conclude these statistics to be all gloom and doom, let’s remember that GEM reports tend to be heavily influenced by the prevailing sentiments at the time of the survey. As an example, the 2002 GEM study had reported a decline of 25% in the global TEA between 2001 and 2002, but a 50% increase in India (from 11.6% in 2001 to 17.9% in 2002) during the same period. In fact, Thailand and India had ranked at the top that year. Since general business sentiment in and about India has improved over the last year after the change in government at the federal level, the latest TEA results would probably be significantly different.

Some confirmation of this increase in entrepreneurial activity is evident from the increase in the number of startups and their funding, valuation, and mergers and acquisitions activity. The number of startups is reported to have increased from practically nothing just a few years ago to 3,100 in 2014, and it is projected to increase to 11,500 in 2020.

Indian startups received \$13 million in investment in 2010 and surpassed \$2 billion in 2014. Tiger Global Management, a New York-based venture capital firm, alone invested \$422 million in India in 2014. The average valuation of an Indian startup has

reportedly increased to around \$2.3 million, which is about half that of an average startup in America.

Finally, more than 20 Indian startups were acquired by big technology firms from around the world at a total price tag of about \$1 billion. While these numbers pale in comparison to the overall startup ecosystem in the United States, they also denote a tremendous progress in just a few short years.

A TALE OF TWO

This brings us back to the tale of two “demographies.” Let’s call them “necesspreneurs” and “opportuneurs.”

Most of the entrepreneurship scene in India is driven by the sheer necessity to earn a living. As all formal sectors of economy (agriculture, industry and services) languish behind population growth, many people have no choice but to look to self-employment for sustenance. These necesspreneurs may be good at hustling to survive in a hyper-competitive environment, but most of them are not the true drivers of an entrepreneurial economy. In fact, the 2013 GEM report also noted that most of these Indian “startups” were single-person (zero-employee) operations with very little expectation—on an average 1.42 employees in five years—of any growth.

The second group—the opportuneurs—is largely made of successful web companies. These are no longer call centers or outsourced service providers. These markets are already saturated and dominated by a few established players such as TCS, Accenture, Infosys and Wipro. The source of opportunity for new startups is a huge and ever growing domestic market that is combined with the unprecedented potential to raise the efficiency of existing businesses and processes.

These startups are led by people who see the potential of domestic markets and are making big bets on it. “Opportuneurship” in India is fueled by brain synthesis, which refers to development of new ideas from the movement of people. The concerns that the country previously had over “brain drain” have rapidly evaporated and been replaced by direct and indirect benefits of professionals returning home armed with new knowledge and cognizant of new potential. The real benefit from the rise of the outsourcing industry is not the pennies that India makes from it, but from the mobility that it has created for Indian professionals, along with the associated knowledge and confidence to succeed in the new economy.

As a result, the Indian information technology industry is going through some sort of dynamic revolution. It has witnessed the unprecedented rise of unicorns from Flipkart and InMobi to Micromax Informatics and Zomato. Most of these rising stars, however, rely on adaptation of existing business models. Flipkart is essentially an Indian variation of Amazon and Ola of Uber. In fact, GEM estimates nearly 93% of Indian entrepreneurial businesses to be replication of existing businesses. Thus, while entrepreneurship in India is closing the gap with entrepreneurship in the developed world, it is yet to produce exciting radical innovations.

If we rank entrepreneurial stages on a scale of 1 (minimal) to 5 (radical)—with other points along the continuum being 2 (foreign-dependent), 3 (replicative) and 4 (adaptive)—most of Indian opportunism would rank at “replicative,” with some signs of transitioning to “adaptive.” Among these adaptive startups that primarily rely on incremental innovation are firms such as Zipdial, Innoz, Goonj, Novopay, Paytm and InMobi. (Note that even replication and adaptation in a new social milieu, especially with underdeveloped institutions, requires tremendous entrepreneurial risk-taking—so it should not to be belittled or dismissed lightly.)

The biggest hurdles for Indian firms to enter the fifth (radical innovation) stage are not infrastructure, energy, corruption or technology; though all of those are important issues that need to be dealt with. It is also not the near complete absence of research and development (R&D) infrastructure and ecosystem—Indian universities do not rank high on research. By international standards, top Indian schools would primarily be considered “teaching” schools. With both the government and industry being hamstrung with comparative resources shortages, they have not done much (directly or indirectly) to address the lack of R&D. However, this can be remedied rather easily—with the help of brain synthesis—if right systems and incentives are in place.

The population size and growth, which is a fountain for a million entrepreneurial opportunities in India, is the country’s biggest stumbling block. In just 68 years since independence, the Indian population has more than quadrupled. It is not hard to imagine the burden this puts on land and resources, but the damage it causes to institutions and incentives is less recognized.

A government may, for example, recognize the necessity of new technology infusion into supply chains, but how does it gather the courage to actually let that happen when the livelihood of millions of small retailers depends on it? How does a farmer put aside a piece of land for researching new crop varieties when the average landholding is

barely enough to sustain him the next few weeks, if even that? How do you invest in automation when someone would do that job for cents, and how do you, in the absence of those productivity gains, compete with the rest of the world?

BLESSING AND A CURSE ?

We know about the red tape and demand-driven corruption, but what about the supply-side of that equation? In competing for scarce resources and services, how many individuals and firms give in to the temptation to take the easier way out, thus vitiating the atmosphere for everyone else?

The rise of service economy in the past two decades has not just managed to obscure the problem of population, but it has also shrouded the lack of any significant entrepreneurial activity in agriculture and manufacturing sectors. This rapid growth has created an illusion of the Indian population as a human resource, while forgetting that for a resource to be valuable it has to be scarce (relative to other resources).

Automation is already putting tremendous pressure on employment and wages in the US. Robotics and artificial intelligence scare even the likes of Bill Gates, Stephen Hawking and Elon Musk. What happens when India begins to feel this heat? How would Indian startups respond to the challenge posed by these technologies in the face of super-abundance of “human resources”? How would the democratic system in India respond?

Those are the questions that will decide the future of entrepreneurship in India. All will be well if human ingenuity can find solutions to these challenges. Perhaps, this too will pass uneventfully much like Malthus’ predictions in 1798 on world famine and disaster.

I distinctly remember when computers first arrived in India, and my parents were scared of losing their jobs to the machines. None of their worries came true, and in fact computers turned out to be the best thing that could have happened to them and India. Every generation has shared these feelings, and every generation so far has managed to do better than the generation before it. Have we finally gone too far though? I don’t know for all of humanity, but I do worry for India, and I really wish for some Indian startups to prove me wrong.

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Anou Connects Moroccan Weavers to World Market

Anna Boots

October 9, 2015

Changing the way we shop for Moroccan carpets can help ensure that weavers are fairly compensated for their work.

Despite the existence of a global market for Moroccan carpets, the women who weave them often live in poverty and benefit very little economically from their craft. This is due in part to the geographic isolation of many weavers and their dependence on middlemen to link their products to customers, who are usually tourists shopping at a *souq* (market) in large cities like Marrakech and Fes.

There are so many intermediaries in the supply chain between weavers and the buyers of their carpets that in the end, only a small fraction of the final selling price of a carpet makes it into the pocket of its weaver. Middlemen frequently take advantage of illiterate and geographically isolated weavers, because they can count on the fact that the weavers don't know how much their carpets are ultimately being resold for. Oftentimes, rural weavers feel unable to demand a higher price from a middleman, who they fear may be the only potential buyer of their carpets in the foreseeable future.

Weavers utilize various strategies to overcome these barriers to profiting from their craft. Many organize in cooperatives, which allow them to benefit from increased access to resources, including better looms, higher quality yarn and a variety of training opportunities, as well as access to a more consistent market for their products.

Cooperatives usually sell their carpets at exhibitions, in bulk to clients with whom they have relationships and even online, eliminating the need for individual weavers to spend long, hot days sitting at the *souq*, trying to sell their carpets for at least enough to cover the cost of yarn. Some weavers also prefer the community and solidarity they find weaving in a group with other women to weaving alone in their homes.

ANOU

Some weaving cooperatives take advantage of a website called Anou, which describes itself as an online platform for Moroccan artisans to sell their products directly to consumers all over the world, eliminating the need for middlemen and/or fair trade organizations to connect artisans to customers.

Eliminating intermediaries usually increases artisans' profits, and this has certainly been the case for many weaving cooperatives in rural Morocco. Some have had so much success selling on Anou that they use it almost exclusively and have been able to stop relying on less profitable venues for selling their work. Founded by Dan Driscoll, Anou hopes to start connecting with more and more cooperatives in the years to come.

Despite their promise, cooperatives aren't always the rosy solution to weavers' problems that they are sometimes marketed to be. Many cooperatives are led by a few women (or even men) who treat the cooperative as a private enterprise, in which they profit from the work of other weavers, who they pay just enough to keep them coming back to work.

As part of an effort to formalize the work of rural artisans, the Moroccan government strongly encourages artisans to organize in cooperatives, but it places less emphasis on regulating the cooperatives and ensuring that their members are adhering to the standards and principles of the business model.

Under Moroccan law, all cooperatives are required to hold a general assembly once a year, in which they elect their leadership and make decisions about how they share profits among their members. In reality, many cooperatives ignore this requirement. Their leadership makes decisions unilaterally, taking advantage of the desperate situation of other weavers, who have very few options for paid work. Unfortunately, for many weavers, joining a cooperative sometimes merely replaces one form of exploitation with another.

CHANGING THE WAY WE BUY

Given that a market for Moroccan carpets clearly exists—as evidenced, for example, by the success of Anou, and the steep prices many tourists are willing to pay in the *souqs* of Marrakech and Fes—the challenge is not so much in making people want to buy Moroccan carpets, but in changing the way they purchase them.

Women weavers put vast amounts of time, resources and energy into the creation of their carpets, and an unwillingness to compensate them for much beyond the cost of

their yarn speaks loudly about our global community's respect (or lack thereof) for their artistry and the important roles they play as preservers of a revered piece of Moroccan cultural heritage. People love to talk about the importance of preserving traditional handicrafts such as carpet weaving and passing them on to future generations, but how do we expect artisans to continue practicing crafts, on a large scale, that they are hardly compensated for?

For tourists who are interested in purchasing a Moroccan carpet directly from its source, the best way to do so is to travel to a cooperative and buy it from the weavers for the price they are asking, or from a weaver selling her work directly at the *souq*. Some cooperatives are quite remote, but others are located in towns and villages not far from major Moroccan cities. A trip to one of these towns or villages is sure to be a worthwhile travel experience, as well.

Of course, not everyone who wants to purchase a Moroccan carpet is able to travel directly to its source. For those customers, shopping online at Anou or at the *ensembles artisanales* in most major Moroccan cities is a good alternative.

Changing the way we shop for Moroccan carpets can help ensure that weavers are fairly compensated for their work.

Anna Boots is a Fulbright student researcher in Morocco.



What Can the Power of Travel Do?

Abul-Hasanat Siddique

December 19, 2015

A US-based startup seeks to connect like-minded hosts and travelers, and it promises to take the world by storm.

“What can the power of travel do?” asks Yasmine El Baggari, a young Moroccan entrepreneur, at an event in Rabat hosted by US-based startup Voyaj and the World Bank.

As someone who is always hopping across continents, travel is part of my vocabulary. I easily get bored when sat in one city or country for too long. But even I am stumped with that question. I mean, what can the power of travel do? Does travel mean more than going on vacation and taking a few snaps of Big Ben or the Burj Khalifa?

While trying my best to get over writer's block—ironically I am working on my second book—I have set out to understand what travel means.

You see, travel can scare the bejeebers out of you. Think about it: You're in a strange place where you probably don't know the language and you see no familiar faces. After all, it's not like *Cheers* where "everybody knows your name." So, who wouldn't get scared? Well, at least to begin with.

In fact, I remember a friend once sent me a text message that said, "I have no idea how you always travel and live abroad. I was in Morocco for four days, and on the second day I was crying. I much prefer sitting at home in London with a cup of tea."

As I said to her, explore your local surroundings on the first day, venture out on the second day, and once you are past the third day, you'll be fine. In fact, add speaking to strangers whenever you get a chance and you'll feel like Usain Bolt after winning a race. To be honest, I have a habit of speaking to strangers, especially when abroad, and getting into odd situations.

But while travel can be daunting as you step outside of your comfort zone, it can also be something you will never forget. For me, I have so many memories—good and bad—that I have built and that I am still building. Memories that include listening to the stories of Palestinian refugees at Gaza Camp in Jordan, discussing politics on Avenue Habib Bourguiba in post-revolution Tunisia, or even being detained at airports in Lebanon and Morocco.

VOYAJ: CONNECTING PEOPLE

Travel is so much more than just sitting on a beach, visiting a few touristy hotspots and never learning about a different culture. And it's this exact reason that Yasmine El Baggari launched Voyaj: to connect people, both locals and travelers. Think Facebook, Airbnb and Couchsurfing, but without the exchange of money.

I remember saying to Yasmine in 2014 that Voyaj promises to take the world by storm. I still stand by that.

At 22-years-old, she is one of the most driven and motivated people I have had the pleasure of meeting. She is building a company that “connects like-minded hosts and travelers to share authentic cultural experiences, bridging cultures, and opening hearts and minds.”

I love that word, “authentic.” And even “opening hearts and minds.” Because that’s what real travel does: It opens your heart to find new loved ones or loved places abroad, and it opens your mind to cultures and traditions beyond your own.

Having left Morocco to study in the US at the age of 17, Yasmine explains what travel means to her.

“Travel has the ability to transform people’s lives,” she says in her often passionate tone, “through one-on-one personal interactions, and expand people’s horizons and perspectives about different places and cultures and break down stereotypes.”

With a crowdfunding campaign in the works, Voyaj will certainly have some fun rewards lined up. The buzz around the US-based startup has seen it partner with a host of personalities and companies, including the rapper Akon, *Forbes* and Turkish Airlines.

Currently in beta testing, the tech-savvy team at Voyaj is perfecting the backend infrastructure ahead of a global launch. But that doesn’t mean travelers have yet to use the website.

While on a “Voyaj experience” in Morocco, Bear Kittay, a social alchemist at the Burning Man Project, breaks it down for me.

“Travel is a portal for an individual or for a society into seeing the world in a different way,” he says as his eyes close while he searches for the inner words to describe his experience.

“In our age, there is an illusion that we change and transform things through technology alone or through concepts. That’s a fallacy,” he adds. “The reality is that change for an individual and a society happens through experience. And experience is most effective when it’s a journey into the unknown.”

On his first trip to Morocco, but certainly not his first time outside America, the words jump out as Bear sums up what travel can do. “Travel facilitates a type of education, a type of recalibration of an individual,” he says.

Indeed, travel can give a person a lifetime of education beyond simply reading a textbook. In fact, Lucas Ausems set out to explore the countries he studied at university by actually traveling to those nations. He’s already been to Bangladesh, Myanmar and Indonesia and has written about his experience for *Fair Observer*.

For myself, travel has given me friends in more countries than I would have ever imagined. It has given me homes in places I would never had thought of visiting. And it has made me grow into the person I am today.

So, what can the power of travel do? Wow, I’m stumped again! Has writer’s block kicked back in?

Well, I guess I’m still finding out what travel *truly* means to me. But when I do, Yasmine, you’ll be the first to know.

Abul-Hasanat Siddique is the managing editor, chief operating officer and co-founder of Fair Observer.



CULTURE

Excuse Me, Why is Jesus White?

Atul Singh

January 5, 2015

Jesus should look more Palestinian and less European to stop symbolizing the supremacy of the white man.

As a child, I attended Christian schools. These institutions taught students well. Teachers were tough but cared. I remember one Mrs. Lobo constantly trying to get me to study. Both she and my mother were frequently upset because I would bunk class and run off to play. Once I left an exam halfway through because I was bored. Both Mrs. Lobo and my mother were deeply distressed. On one occasion, I caused Mrs. Lobo even more pain.

During the morning assembly in church, we were told Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Back in class, I asked Mrs. Lobo where in the world was Bethlehem. She answered Palestine. In those days, photos of Yasser Arafat, the chief of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), often appeared in Indian newspapers. My father must have pointed out Arafat's photo to me and mentioned where he was from. So, I blurted: "Excuse me ma'am, why is Jesus white? Why doesn't he look like Yasser Arafat?" Suffice to say, Mrs. Lobo couldn't answer the question.

CROSS CARRYING CONQUISTADORS

On the first day of 2015, I couldn't help observe that the highest read article on the website of *The Economist* was "On the Trail of Hernán Cortés." The correspondent had traced Cortés' journey of five centuries ago and written a splendid account of the conquistador. As expected from a publication born at the height of the British Empire, it tells a triumphant tale:

"This is where one of the great military expeditions of history began: Hernán Cortés's march in 1519-20 from the Gulf of Mexico to Tenochtitlán, seat of the Aztec empire. Historians liken it to Julius Caesar's conquest of Gaul. Its protagonist, a cunning 34-year-old with almost no experience of war, led about 500 men and just over a dozen

horses into territories whose bloodthirsty warriors hugely outnumbered his own. He exploited seething tribal rivalries to conquer a civilisation—albeit with the help of gunpowder, smallpox and his wily Indian lover. At times he used mischief; at times cruelty. He had an eye for his place in history—as well as for the ladies. His soldiers did not just subjugate the people they conquered. From the very start they bred with the Indians too, creating a mixed race through mestizaje, with a common language and religion that defines Mexico today.”

Conquest has defined human history, but what is most interesting in *The Economist* article is the story about the episode when Cortés was gifted eight noblewomen as slaves. He was only willing to accept the gift if the fat ruler became Christian first. Genghis Khan plundered, pillaged, raped and slaughtered, but he didn't have the arrogance to save people's souls. He wasn't sanctimonious like the white men from Europe who went out to conquer foreign lands for gold and God.

I was born in Vasco da Gama, a port town named after the Portuguese explorer who sailed to India in 1498. He is glorified as an epic hero in *Os Lusíadas*, the Portuguese classic, and there is a church named after him in Kochi. Conveniently forgotten is the fact that he murdered for pleasure and once burnt 400 Muslim pilgrims on their way to Mecca. Even women were not spared. Their efforts to offer their gold and jewels didn't work. Even when they held up their babies and begged for mercy, good old Vasco wasn't moved. He wanted to find Christians in India and destroy Islam.

The churches in Latin America and Goa were built by the Spaniards and Portuguese. Christianity was imposed through the barrel of the gun, though missionaries played a significant role. Both the Spaniards and the Portuguese set out to persecute not only other religions, but also non-Catholic Christians. Today, the people who were colonized have largely lost their native cultures, myths and identities. Most significantly, in former Spanish and Portuguese dominions, Jesus is almost invariably white.

MUSCULAR CHRISTIANITY, MISSION CIVILISATRICE AND ALL THAT JAZZ

The British and French were not as interested in saving souls as the Spanish and the Portuguese. Yet they saw themselves as civilized Christian nations. Popularized by the barrister T.C. Sandars, “Muscular Christianity” is the idea of tough men of God going out to civilize the natives that held sway in Victorian England. The image of “the Englishman going through the world with rifle in one hand and Bible in the other” was

popularized by J.G. Cotton Minchin. British public schools, which are really private schools for the well-bred, were infused with this ideal. Cotton Minchin wasn't far off when writing: "If asked what our muscular Christianity has done, we point to the British Empire."

The French idea of *mission civilisatrice* was infused with the idea of the superiority of Christianity. Conversion to Christianity wasn't essential as under Spaniards or the Portuguese, but was preferable. Along with European dress and the French language, it was the hallmark of civilization. Needless to say, both the British and the French built churches where Jesus was white.

During my lectures, I often ask Africans from the Anglo-French colonies whether Jesus is white. A devout Nigerian student in Berkeley, whom I taught last year, confessed to be troubled by this fact. He told me: "It is what Jesus stands for that matters; not his color." I quipped: "Then what is the problem in Jesus being black?" Like Mrs. Lobo, he couldn't answer.

YES, JESUS SHOULD LOOK LIKE YASSER ARAFAT

For Christians, Jesus is supposed to be the son of God. If he is white, does that mean God is white? Michelangelo Buonarroti, the greedy gay genius, painted a resplendent old white man creating a dashing young white man on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Any Catholic who sees the image cannot but be influenced by the fact that God and Adam are white men. Needless to say, so is Jesus. To steal the words of Cecil Rhodes, the great robber-turned-philanthropist of the 19th century, white men have won the first prize in life's lottery.

Religion at its best provides a repository of tradition, a locus for community and a crucible for spirituality. Christianity is no exception. There have been countless pious Christians such as Mrs. Lobo who have been outstanding human beings with a profound spirit of service. The New Testament idea of turning the other cheek is certainly a noble one. The historical Jesus was a Galilean Jew born in modern day Palestine. Finally, in 2015, he should start to look Palestinian.

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



Sex: Stone Age Mind in a Modern-Day World?

Anna Pivovarchuk and Barry Kuhle

February 13, 2015

To what extent is our sexual behavior determined by evolutionary psychology?

Everyone is familiar with the feeling of utter exasperation with the opposite sex. How common are phrases like “Women, I just don’t get them” or “It’s just another one of those ‘guy things.’” From our ability to park a car, find directions on a map, deal with a crisis situation or maintain a healthy relationship, we often feel that there is a gap between the sexes. The human race has been involved in building bridges across the tumultuous rapids of sexual differences for time immemorial.

Yet there is science behind these societal myths. Notions like free will, rational choice and basic physical attraction are influenced by the nature of our biology, going back to the earliest time of human development. Are men really more likely to cheat? Why is female sexuality more fluid? Can men and women really be friends?

In this interview, Anna Pivovarchuk talks to Professor Barry Kuhle, an evolutionary psychologist, about the science behind our sexual norms.

Anna Pivovarchuk: Laymen’s wisdom tells us that men and women experience sexuality and relationships very differently: what turns them on; what turns them off; how they relate to their sexual partners; how they react to infidelity. What is the science behind these observations? Are men and women really that different when it comes to their sexuality?

Barry Kuhle: A bit. I mean, they’re similar and different. Men and women are equally likely to experience jealousy. One sex is not necessarily more jealous than the other, but there is a sex difference in what’s more likely to trigger jealousy. So males are more likely than women to experience jealousy because they suspect their partner has been sexually unfaithful, whereas women are more likely than men to experience jealousy if they suspect their partner has fallen in love with or formed an emotional connection with somebody else. That said, there are plenty of women who get sexually

jealous, plenty of men who get emotionally jealous, but there is a robust sex difference there that has been found across cultures, across time and using various methodologies.

Pivovarchuk: Could you elaborate on that?

Kuhle: The original study was done in 1992 and asked men and women to imagine one of two scenarios: that your partner has had passionate sexual intercourse with somebody else, and then to rate how upset that makes you, and also they did some physiological measures. They measured how much sweating occurs, how much brow furrowing, which we tend to do when we're upset, and how much their heart rate increased. Males, when they considered and imagined their partner having passionate sexual intercourse with somebody else, rated that as more upsetting than women, and also had higher heart rates, were more likely to furrow their brows and had greater skin conductance, which is a measure of sweating. When women imagined their partners forming a deep emotional attachment with somebody else, all of their indices went up compared to men.

Pivovarchuk: Why is the emotional element of an affair more important to women?

Kuhle: Well, the rationale is twofold. For males, over evolutionary history, they and only they could have been cuckolded by women – that is, duped into raising a child that wasn't theirs. As the saying goes: it's mama's baby, but it's papa's maybe. As I tell my students, males have paternity uncertainty, women have maternity certainty. For males, they're never certain if the child is actually theirs, because women are fertilized internally and you can't be certain that it was your sperm that got to the egg. Conversely, for women, they can't be cuckolded, they can't be duped into raising a child that's not theirs, but they can lose their partner's protection, resources and care if their partner falls in love with somebody else. So for women, a greater adaptive problem was not being cuckolded but losing their partner's time, attention, resources. Hence the sex difference in what triggers jealousy.

Pivovarchuk: So that all goes back to our very first ancestors and the way we functioned in the Stone Age?

Kuhle: That's the theory behind it. It's an evolutionary psychological hypothesis, and as I mentioned, this pattern of results has been found across cultures, across time and across various methodologies.

Pivovarchuk: Your research focuses on alloparenting to explain that women have evolved to have sexual responses to both sexes regardless of their sexual orientation, because of the specific problem of being abused, abandoned or losing their partner. Could you explain how this works?

Kuhle: So this is a paper I published with a grad student at Ryerson University named Sarah Radtke. And at the moment it's just a hypothesis. We came up with a potential explanation for why women appear to be more sexually fluid than men. Being sexually fluid, as you allude to, does not necessarily imply bisexuality, but over the course of women's lifespan they appear to be more flexible in the gender they're looking for in a potential romantic partner than men. Not at any given time, but women tend to be more likely than men to change their labels. So they might identify as heterosexual at one point, bisexual at another point, lesbian at another point and sometimes unlabeled at all. Whereas males are likely to be either heterosexual or homosexual.

So why are women so sexually fluid? Sarah and I put forward the alloparenting hypothesis, in that it's possible women might be more open than men to, say, other members of the same sex as a means of acquiring alloparenting. Alloparenting, as you know, is when you acquire help for your children aside from genetic relatives, so people who are not related to you. And it's possible, given that men are more likely to defect from relationships by cheating, more likely to die earlier, more likely to pick up other mates, which would dilute the amount of time, energy, investment they have for you, that women might try to essentially get additional parenting help from other women, and it's possible that sexual relationships might facilitate that. We outlined, I believe, 14 separate predictions that could falsify or support that hypothesis.

Pivovarchuk: Like what, for instance?

Kuhle: Well, you'd expect women who are divorced and with children would be more likely than women who are currently married with children to be open to romantic and sexual relationships with other women. We even have one, as you alluded to earlier, predicting that women who were sexually abused early on might be more likely later in life to pursue other women as a means of parenting help.

Pivovarchuk: Women whose husbands divested in them for the sake of other women, women whose husbands deserted them, women who have been raped, women who were abused – those are the five main points. So it all goes back to men letting them down in some way.

Kuhle: That's a good way to put it.

Pivovarchuk: Going back to infidelity, there's Chris Rock's joke that a man is only as faithful as his options. Is that true for both men and women?

Kuhle: Both men and women of course commit infidelity. But our best evidence suggests that men are much more likely to cheat than women. And if you look, for example, at men who have a lot more options, particularly those men who have lots of resources, who have a good deal of status, who are older and more attractive—we see this in Hollywood, of course. We see men who are married to or at least in a relationship with some of the most beautiful women in the world. The classic example was Hugh Grant, from about 10, 15 years ago, when he was with Liz Hurley but decided to step out of that relationship and to have, I believe, oral sex with a sex worker, a prostitute somewhere in Hollywood. And in some respects, this surprised people. In other respects it didn't. Men are much more likely to pursue low-cost sexual opportunities outside of their relationships than women are, and they're less likely to get attached to those women outside of their relationship than women might be.

Pivovarchuk: You cited a classic study in which 75% of men and 0% of women consented to requests for sex from a complete stranger of the opposite sex. Why is there such a drastic difference?

Kuhle: I love that you mention that. We talk about this study in most of my classes. This was done by Russell Clark and Elaine Hatfield in the early 1980s. As you mention, they did a fascinating study where they hired confederates, people who worked for them who were moderately attractive, to approach members of the opposite sex on a college campus. They were of similar age and went up to members of the opposite sex and asked one of three questions: Would you go on a date with me? Would you come back to my apartment? Would you have sex with me?

Men and women were equally likely to commit to a date from a complete stranger they've met for about four seconds who's moderately attractive. That alone surprised me. The sex difference emerged after that. Women were much less likely than men to

consent to go back to the apartment. I believe something like 69% of men but only 6% of women consented to go back to the apartment. When it comes to the “go to bed” question, 75% of men said yes, 0% of women said yes. And that 75% is likely to be an underestimate. Some of those men—and I’ve talked to Elaine about this—asked for rain checks, as in “My girlfriend’s in town, are you free next weekend,” or “My parents are in town.” Some of those men were surely homosexual. So if Clark and Hatfield had solely approached heterosexual, single men, it’s likely that the 75% number would be even higher.

Pivovarchuk: Why is that?

Kuhle: The rationale is over evolutionary history, men—much more so than women—could have increased their reproductive success by increasing the number of sexual partners they had. As I say quite simply to my students, if a female has sex with 100 different guys on 100 different days, she’s still only likely to bear one child. If a male has sex with 100 different women over 100 different days, it’s likely he’s able to have far more children than one. So over evolutionary history, males who pursued these low-cost sexual opportunities, who had an increased desire for sexual variety, would likely have out-reproduced males who didn’t. Whereas for females, additional partners doesn’t buy you much in terms of reproductive currencies. So males have been selected to be much more interested in sexual variety.

And that’s one of the most robust sex differences ever found in the social sciences—a huge effect size. If you ask men and women how many partners would you like to have over various intervals, a month, a year, five years, a lifetime—when you get to a lifetime, males are upwards of 25, 30 in terms of how many partners they report they would like. Women are between five and ten. So women typically don’t want nearly as many sexual partners as men on the average on the whole.

Pivovarchuk: You’ve looped us into the way sexually-experienced women are perceived by men in our society—finding that the ones who have had many sexual partners are suited for short-term gain; I think that’s the term. So they’re okay to date for a little while, but you wouldn’t marry them.

Kuhle: Absolutely, and I think a lot of women know this. So when you start dating someone, if you have sex with them early on, males are more likely to look at you as a short-term sexual partner, as opposed to a long-term mating partner. In large part because if a woman is likely to have sex with you quite easily early on without knowing

much about you, that suggests she might be able to do so with strangers once you are in a relationship. It's a potential harbinger of cuckoldry. So why settle down with her and increase the specter of infidelity and being cuckolded?

I should mention one thing, women who partake in sexual variety – they receive a bit of derogation from others. They're not esteemed nearly as much as males are, of course. So there's tons of terms we use for women who are promiscuous. "Slut," "whore," what have you. There's very few for males; in fact, we oftentimes just throw the word man in front of it, like "man-whore" or "man-slut." So there's a lot more condemnation for women for sexual variety. What isn't grasped as much is that a good deal of that condemnation comes from *women*. It's *other women* who typically slut shame. Males who are looking for short-term mating, they don't slut-shame. They love that! But short-term mating women are a threat to *women* interested in long-term mating. Because if you're interested in a long-term mate, but a woman who's simply flashing some tits and ass is easily able to acquire your mate, even if for the short term, that's a threat to your strategic long-term interests.

And it's not just our society. Most societies that have been studied suggest that women get a lot more heat for being sexually promiscuous than males, and they get it from both sexes, particularly from women. And you can observe this pretty easily. I've seen this in large classrooms. So, before class starts, it's kind of fun to keep an eye on students when they don't think I'm paying attention, and let's say a female will walk in with a bit more of a revealing outfit. And the males will look at that female with interest, and the females will look at the other female with contempt. And they'll even talk to each other: "Who does she think she is?"

Pivovarchuk: What fascinates me is how far back it goes, that those moral codes and behavior patterns have not evolved, even though society's quite different now, thousands of years later.

Kuhle: That's a great point. We talk about that in class as well. We have a Stone Age mind in a modern-day world. So the nature of the mechanisms of our mind haven't changed very much, although the society we're in has changed in part. But it shouldn't be that surprising – our society is so much different now with regard to *food*. We have refined sugar, we have all different types of carbohydrates that we didn't have before, or at least with regard to the output of the carbohydrates, but our preferences are still very similar to what they were for sweet foods, fatty foods, salty foods. Back in the day that would have been beneficial. Now, not so much, because a cheesecake has more than enough calories to feed a family of four for *two weeks* back in the day! And now

we can demolish it in one sitting. But that Stone Age mind perseveres in a modern-day context. It just gets different inputs into the mechanisms now, which sometimes leads to different outputs. But the mechanisms are the same.

Pivovarchuk: Do you think we'll ever evolve past it? If we do, how long do you think it'll take?

Kuhle: I don't know, but none of us are going to be here, so I don't really think about that too much. But my students always like to ask that question. And it's a fascinating question, but it's not one amenable to science. If the adaptive problems changed, then we would expect the adaptive solutions, the adaptations, the mental mechanisms of the mind to change. But we're talking hundreds or thousands of generations. We're also presuming we haven't wiped ourselves out by that time. Some 99% of all species that have ever existed no longer exist, and we're going to be one of them at some point. So I don't know if there's enough time left for humanity for substantive change to occur. But who knows?

Pivovarchuk: An optimistic prognosis! To take us back to the idea of sexually "promiscuous" norms: Are parents more controlling of girls' behavior than boys'? I am talking about "daughter-guarding": Some 40% of parents will tell their daughters to wait for sex until marriage, compared to only 25% for boys. In today's world, it was quite shocking for me to see that, because we're all about gender equality, individual freedom. Do children actually follow those instructions? Because the math doesn't really add up: If 75% of boys are told go out and do whatever they want, who do they do it with?

Kuhle: That's a great question. There are a couple things to unpack what you mentioned. Carin Perilloux, Diana Fleischman and David Buss, a couple of years ago, put forward the daughter-guarding hypothesis, which as you mentioned is the idea that parents have been designed to protect their daughters' sexuality more so than their sons' by encouraging them to wait until marriage, for example, to have sex. And this is something my undergraduate research assistants and I conducted a study on and just published, looking at sex differences in those "birds and bees" talks. So what is it that parents tell their sons and what is it that parents tell their daughters about sex?

And as you alluded to, the evidence suggests that parents are more likely to attempt to restrict their daughters' sexualities more so than their sons'. They're more likely to give daughters curfews, they're more likely to say you can't be home alone with a non-

genetic male in the house, more likely to say “Wait until marriage,” more likely to say “Don’t get a bad reputation.” Whereas men are more likely to hear things like “Have fun! Go out and sow your oats.”

Your question’s a good one, though: How effective are these tactics? Yes, parents appear to be more likely to tell their daughters some things relative to their sons, but we don’t have any evidence so far about how likely children are to follow those rules. And that’s an open question for the future.

We did ask children, “How do you feel about those talks?” We gave them a slew of adjectives, and by far and away the biggest winner was “awkward.” They found those birds and bees talks extraordinarily awkward.

Some, of course, I think erroneously, would argue that having these talks is tantamount to encouraging people to have sex. Which is pretty phenomenal, because people really don’t need encouragement to have sex ... Sex has always existed in every species that is sexually reproducing. If anything, I think the talks could stymie it. But there’s a large fraction of the US, mostly conservative religious fundamentalists, who argue that talking about sex, seeing depictions of it, even getting access to birth control, is giving license to having sex and encouraging it. I think there’s very little theoretical support for that, certainly very questionable empirical support for that.

Pivovarchuk: I agree with you. The more you prohibit something, the more powerful its allure. But going back to the way men and women are different: Are men and women drawn to different things in potential partners? Do they look for different things?

Kuhle: Yes. In fact, the study that really put evolutionary psychology on the map was done by David Buss in the late 1980s, where he looked at 37 different cultures located on six different continents with over 10,000 subjects. And he asked them: “What sorts of things would you look for in a mate?” And he gave them, I believe, 18 different characteristics and had them rate it on a 0-3 scale—0 being irrelevant, 3 being incredibly important. And he found rather robust sex differences.

For example, males are more likely to say that it’s important to them that a female is younger than them. Males are more likely to value physical attractiveness. Women are much more likely to value resources and status and protection and want a guy who’s a bit older. And when he initially conducted this study, he asked prominent sociologists, psychologists and anthropologists of the time, and just about every one of them said:

“You will not find these sex differences to be universal. They’ll be culturally variant.” He of course argued, from an evolutionary perspective, we should find this to be rather a pan-human characteristic. And his data suggests it very much was. There were rather robust sex differences across cultures. These cultures vary in tremendous ways in political systems, in mating systems, etc, and yet the sex differences persist.

Pivovarchuk: What about the whole idea of “opposites attract”? Is that a more common scenario in couples, or which one is more likely to last?

Kuhle: That’s kind of a misnomer. In the overwhelming majority of characteristics it’s similarities that attract each other. We tend to be drawn to people of similar race, of similar religion, of similar values, of similar wealth, of similar attractiveness. There’s only two things we’re drawn to “opposite” people: Heterosexuals are drawn to people of the opposite sex, and most people are drawn to people with a slightly different smell to them, which is indicative of what we call an MHC complex – the Major Histocompatibility Complex. Essentially, it’s a measure of what sorts of things you’re immune to. And it appears that both men and women are drawn to people with a different set of genes, the idea being they’ll be complementary. So your brood of children will have a range of immunities such that any pathogen or parasite wouldn’t wipe out all of your children, some of them would be able to thrive. So the overwhelming majority of things we’re drawn to are similarities, not so much opposites.

Pivovarchuk: There’s a study that looked at how women pick their partners depending on what stage of the menstrual cycle they are in. What was really interesting is that around the time when they’re ovulating they go for the more “manly,” strong types, and then when they stop ovulating they pick the nice, stable guy. I think that’s a very interesting way of looking at the choices that we make, which appear to be conditioned by our physiology and evolutionary history.

Kuhle: These are some tremendous findings. There’s been this ovulation revolution in evolutionary psychology and psychology in general in the last 15 years, showing, as you mention, that women who are not on birth control, who are cycling naturally, their preferences differ as a function of their menstrual cycle phase. The rationale being, women essentially have this duplicitous mating strategy. They’re going to marry this dad-type figure, the type of figure they’re drawn to when they’re not ovulating, who typically have lower testosterone, who are more likely to be investors and protectors. And while they are ovulating they’re drawn to that high-testosterone guy, who’s more

likely to be interested in short-term sexual opportunities, so they can get the good genes from the high-testosterone guy and then dupe the father guy, the husband who's more fatherly, into raising that child. Rather interesting stuff.

Pivovarchuk: That brings us back full circle to the cuckold theory, and the fear: That there's scientific evidence behind that, which is quite remarkable. What about the famous quote from *When Harry Met Sally*, that "Men and women can't be friends because the sex part always gets in the way." Is that true?

Kuhle: There's a lot of evidence to suggest it. April Bleske-Rechek pioneered some of this research back in the day, and she has found that in opposite-sex friendships, males are much more likely to value physical attractiveness in an opposite-sex friend than women, and men are more likely to dissolve a relationship when they find that their partner is not interested in them—particularly when they're interested in somebody else. Males are more likely to look at opposite-sex friends as a potential short-term mating opportunity. Whereas women are more likely to look at an opposite-sex friend as a source of protection. Both men and women do look at OSFs (opposite-sex friendships) as potential long-term mates. Men look at it as more potential for short-term mating than women.

So they can be friends, but the sexuality part does get in the way much more so than people expect. When you ask women this, they tend to say no, but then when you ask women, "Well, does your friend want to have sex with you," they say yes. So what they're saying is, "I'm not interested—the sex isn't getting away for me," yet they still acknowledge that "No, he wants to have sex with me, I just refuse to acknowledge it." And in some respects I wouldn't be surprised if women play into that. That is, they—if not string males along, they at least dangle the opportunity for sex even though they won't actually commit to it—as a way of keeping that relationship going longer.

Pivovarchuk: I guess since we are on the subject of differences again, to round up: Are men really from Mars and women from Venus, or is there hope in all of this?

Kuhle: I mean that's overstating it a bit. In most things men and women are quite similar, in the overwhelming majority of characteristics. But when we get to the human mating realm, we see that there's much more differences than we see in the food realm or the habitat-selection realm. The way I look at it is, men and women largely have similar psychologies, except in human mating realm where we say many large

sex differences. Both men and women pursue short-term mating, both men and women pursue long-term mating. But short-term mating looms larger in men's mating repertoire than it does in women's. And that's a pretty robust finding.

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An American Anxiety

Hannah Rosenberg

November 3, 2015

Anxiety is linked to the insecurity gripping a divided, unequal and conformist United States of America.

I have anxiety. Generalized Anxiety Disorder, officially. It was never really acknowledged or diagnosed until it swelled up into a wave of depression during my second year of college. Looking back now, I can trace the breadcrumbs marking its trail: the odium for sleepaway camp, the times spent fighting off nausea in the locker room before swim meets.

At most times, it flares up unannounced, unwelcomed. It doesn't always make sense. I'm white, in my 20s, grew up in the same house my parents still live in and have graduated college debt-free. I've got a good family with four living grandparents, a brother, cousins and good friends.

To the objective observer it would seem I've got it all. And I kind of do. Maybe I have a genetic predisposition for anxiety and depression; but maybe it's environmental. But maybe there's something more going on. Maybe America has something to do with it.

ANXIOUS AMERICA

For me, anxiety is all about control. My anxiety spikes when outcomes are uncertain or I feel threatened or invalidated. I live in a country where control is systematically hard to come by. America is a nation without universal health care or affordable post-secondary education; a country in which the disparity of wealth between rich and poor has hit an all-time high; a nation run by corporations that ship our jobs overseas; a society filled with intolerance, violence and discrimination—and that’s just a glimpse of our problems.

America doesn’t offer security—emotional, physical or fiscal—to its people. And it’s making us anxious.

A study conducted to look at Britain’s “me culture” connected high levels of depression and anxiety to the country’s individualistic, capitalistic culture. The lead author of the study, Joan Chiao, states: “People from highly individualistic cultures like the United States and Western Europe are more likely to value uniqueness over harmony, expression over agreement, and to define themselves as unique or different from the group.”

In individualistic societies like ours, the prioritization of individual success takes away time and value from community building. When success means being better than the other, the idea of a society with shared resources is hard to nurture. While a few among us might gain individually from a capitalistic, individualistic model, we lose collectively. The larger share of society’s resources we claim for ourselves, the smaller share we deal to someone else.

This ever-present, ever-pressing need to secure enough resources to survive is what makes America a breeding ground for anxiety.

We like to believe we get to be ourselves in America. But what the American “melting pot” really serves to do is to melt away our individual differences and serve us up, neatly poured into duplicate molds.

To be successful as an individual, we *have* to conform. Even from childhood, we need to check off all the right boxes to secure our future. The ideal set-up: fiscally secure; English-speaking home; pre-kindergarten education; good primary schooling; participation in a range of extracurricular activities; development of unique/marketable

skills; good grades; AP classes, high SAT scores; no felony/misdemeanor violations; admittance to a well-regarded university; high GPA; summer internships at notable organizations; professional appearance; interpersonal skills—you could get more specific and more extensive, but the point is clear. Success in America is formulaic and there is no level playing field. Socioeconomic factors like race, sex and income level play an influential role. Any difference, any deviation means an added challenge to overcome.

WHITE, WEALTHY MEN

The proof of endemic American inequality can be seen in the country's legislation. Since 1776, the law of the land has protected the interests of wealthy white men. Women and minorities are still fighting for legislation that reflects and serves their values and needs. The wealthy white men have been guarding their turf and fighting back. This is only to be expected. As Martin Luther King Jr. wrote in *Letter From a Birmingham Jail*: "It is a historical fact that privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily."

Today, the triumph of Ronald Reagan's get rich ideology has resulted in a Citizen's United court ruling unleashing unlimited money into election campaigns. Exemptions from federal environmental standards for drilling companies and the Trans-Pacific Partnership are only two of the too many decisions and deals that cater to corporate interests that monopolize wealth.

The American dream is still rigged in favor of the white, wealthy men who set it up.

Yes, our society has evolved culturally and legislatively since its inception, but we are still governed by a group who looks suspiciously demographically similar to the one that founded this country.

Our current congressional body is 80% white, 80% male and 92% Christian. For a body of representatives, Congress isn't very representative at all. Whites make up only 63% of the total US population. That's nearly a 20% deviation from the racial representation in Congress. The number of women in congressional office doesn't come *close* to covering the 50.8% *majority* that actually exists in the US, nor does the number of Christian congressmen paint an accurate picture of the religious breakdown of Americans. Not only are there few non-Christian congressmen, but there is almost

no representation of the 22.8% of Americans who consider themselves religiously unaffiliated.

If you're non-male, non-white or non-Christian, how can you expect to feel secure with a majority white, majority male and majority Christian representative body? If you're white, male and Christian, why share? Why risk giving up your security?

Both situations are anxiety-inducing, which suggests that perhaps I'm not the only one in America affected. In fact, evidence is everywhere that our country is beset by anxiety and depression—from an individual to a national level.

Clayton R. Cook broke down common characteristics of so-called emotional disorders like depression and anxiety into: all-or-none thinking; discounting the positive; Negative filter; overgeneralization; labeling; fortune telling; emotional reasoning; should and must statements; personalization; and unfair comparisons.

Evidence of these symptoms runs rampant in our politicians. For example, Cook characterizes all-or-none thinking as one which views only extremes without accepting a middle ground. Remember the time Republicans shut down the government to shut out Obamacare?

That is textbook all-or-none thinking.

What about discounting the positive? Barack Obama's use of the n-word in an interview with *WTF with Marc Maron* drew a variety of critical responses and disproportionate attention to the social acceptability of his word choice rather than the reason he dropped the slur.

Fortune-telling or fear-mongering is also big. What else explains the Republican hysteria that any sort of negotiation with Iran would lead directly to Iranian nuclear development? The Republicans have no evidence, and they've been wrong (big time) before. Their open letter directed to Iranian leaders is a classic example.

To return to Cook's criteria, our representatives are using such partisan polemic that compromise is impossible. Tensions run high in Washington DC and throughout much of the United States. The fraught atmosphere of the Republican primary and the popularity of Donald Trump reveal how divided the country has become. With so many self-important, competing agendas, it's no wonder we don't have universal health care

or affordable post-secondary education. On one side, we have people anxious about defending their resources, and on the other, we have people anxious about trying to gain them.

STEPS IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

When I first started to tell people about my experience with anxiety and depression, it was hard and weird. A lot of people didn't understand. They wanted to know what "happened" to me, and I was embarrassed not to have what they'd recognize as a real reason. It was frustrating.

But then there were the people who did understand—who'd experienced the same thing or were at least sympathetic. They validated the way I was feeling, equipped me with tools to manage and made me feel secure no matter the circumstances.

I think if America can take that that step, talk honestly about its weaknesses, insecurities and struggles, then perhaps we can start building communities that are attentive and responsive to the needs of the whole and not just one part.

Hannah Rosenberg is a recent graduate of the University of Maryland with a Bachelor of Arts in Communication Studies.



Saudi Fighter Challenges Stereotypes of Women

Maria Khwaja Bazi

November 6, 2015

In the Middle East, a female jiu-jitsu fighter works to eliminate bias against women in combat sports.

No historian can say for certain whether the Amazons existed. Some say they lived in a matriarchal society, where little girls were raised as warriors and men took care of the babies. Some say they were a figment of the Athenian imagination, a way to frighten the men into cooperating during times of “political stress.”

In 1861, Johann Jakob Bachofen’s *Das Mutterrecht*, or *Mother Right*, presented a theoretical ancient world: polyamorous, communistic and with a religion recognizing a matriarchal rather than a patriarchal line. Some interpreted this to mean that the dark ages of humanity ended with the enlightened advent of patriarchal rule and monogamous marriage. More recently, feminists use the theory to hypothesize about a utopia ruled by women.

To be fair, however, the idea of harmonious women living in villages and engaged in peaceful goddess worship is less threatening than the idea of an Amazon who fights “like a man.” A vicious, skilled, aggressive woman scandalized and titillated the Greeks. Only when the tale expanded to include a macho Heracles defeating and subjugating Hippolyta, the Amazonian queen, could the men relax—the feral woman was under control.

In the modern world, the entrance of women into traditionally male combat sports, including boxing, cage fighting/mixed martial arts (MMA) and Brazilian jiu-jitsu (BJJ), stir the same sense of horrified fascination. Rhonda Rousey is perhaps the most recent example of this: A hugely successful, hugely talented, disciplined fighter still paradoxically criticized both for her “masculine” body and traditional good looks.

Rousey is a mixed martial artist, combining techniques from other disciplines such as boxing, judo, muay thai and Brazilian jiu-jitsu. BJJ, in particular, appears very much the man’s sport, with on-the-ground grappling and twists designed to “submit” the opponent, or get them to tap out. The gripping of clothing, the claustrophobia and the odd intimacy of BJJ make it seem like an odd sport for a woman to take up, especially considering that often both genders “roll,” or compete, with each other.

DEFEATING STEREOTYPES

Enter Farah al-Zahrani, a 21-year-old Saudi university student living in Jordan and now a female BJJ competitor. Zahrani is the first Saudi woman to compete in BJJ and, perhaps more importantly, one of the first Saudi women to compete in sports, full stop. Although the 2012 Olympics in London saw two entries by Saudi Arabia—16-year-old Wojdan Shaherkani in judo and 19-year-old Sarah Attar in track—both of them lost by

significant margins to opponents and brought the lack of facilities and training for Saudi women into the limelight.

Zahrani has the same frustration while visiting relatives in Saudi Arabia. “There are no places to train in Saudi,” she says in an international school accent. “I’ve been here in Saudi for three weeks and I’m going crazy.”

When asked how she began BJJ, she says it was an accident. “I’ve always been involved in sports. I did taekwondo, swimming, gymnastics and started BJJ a year and a half ago. One of my friends was doing a Kickfit class at an MMA place, and it was a combination between a cardio workout and kickboxing. So I did Kickfit to stay fit, and there was Kickfit on one side and BJJ on the other side. I would always watch them and I couldn’t understand what they were doing. I was astonished by how graceful and smooth their movements were but, at the same time, it was weird, too intimate. I was like, I’m never going over there!”

Shaking out her mane of hair, she says ruefully, “I asked, ‘Are there any girls training?’”

Zahrani placed fourth in the World BJJ Championships in Abu Dhabi in her weight and in the open division, where all weight classes compete together. Although she has only trained for a year and a half, she is earnest in her love of jiu-jitsu and her desire to compete.

“One of the concepts of BJJ is the smaller and weaker person can submit the bigger and tougher guy. Size doesn’t really matter—technique matters, how you use the technique to submit your opponent. I’m about 55 kilos and I’m one of the smallest girls. The fact that I can use BJJ to submit larger girls and guys is mind blowing to me,” she says.

Brazilian jiu-jitsu traces its lineage from judo and Japanese jiu-jitsu. The word jiu-jitsu comes from the Japanese “ju jutsu” or “gentle/supple/yielding art.” This is perhaps the essence of jiu-jitsu, which to the untrained eye looks like two people squirming and rolling around with each other. BJJ’s grappling and rolling involves being on top of, beneath, across and behind the opponent—in positions that those who prefer traditional gender roles might find scandalous. Except, of course, during a roll the point is to defeat the other person.

Although the formal combat techniques in a BJJ roll cannot translate directly from gym mat to street fights, BJJ does purposefully work to give the advantage to the smaller, weaker opponent and is considered by some to be a good basis for self-defense. For women, this could mean a moment's advantage and the ability to get away when facing physical street harassment or assault.

Of course, this still doesn't mean that walking into a gym full of men rolling around on the floor is any less intimidating.

"I didn't really understand anything at first or get anything," says Zahrani when asked about her first days doing BJJ. "They said OK, there's this move called the arm bar and I couldn't connect the moves and technique with like, how you do it in a real life match. I thought I would just try. I liked it."

"I train with the guys in class," she continues, "but some of the guys prefer not to train with girls. They might be religious or they just don't like training with girls. You get to choose sometimes—you do what you're comfortable with."

When asked about her coach and his openness toward women in a male-dominated sport, she says, "My coach is Jordanian, but he was born and raised in Brazil. His name is Samy al-Jamal. He's a fourth degree black belt and he's very supportive of what we do. He's very, very supportive of the girls. Our school has a lot of girls, that's what makes it special—we're eleven girls now. None of the schools have that amount of girls."

FACED WITH HARASSMENT

Zahrani then comments on whether living in Jordan is difficult, or if she has faced harassment from others because of her competition in the sports, especially *sans* the hijab worn by both Shaherkani and Attar.

"In Jordan, people are more open-minded than in the Gulf," she responds, sighing. "We have female boxers, and soccer players and basketball players, so sports are something common here. But BJJ is different because they think it's violent, and because they think it's all about breaking other people's hands and legs or something like that. But in general they're more open-minded than people in KSA—they think I just punch people and get hurt."

“My relatives in Saudi, they are supportive, but they don’t know exactly what I’m doing and they don’t really ask. They knew I was competing in Abu Dhabi, so they were like, we saw you on TV, but they have nothing to say about this. Some of the Saudi people are very negative. I [received] very negative criticism when my pictures were online on social media because I was the first Saudi to ever compete in BJJ and people said I was a sinner. Like, ‘She’s going to hell.’”

She pauses for a moment and continues: “On Twitter and Instagram, there’s this page called ‘First Saudi’ and they put pictures up of the first Saudi to do anything, so they had my picture up, and I was reading through the comments—some of them were hurtful. ‘No one wishes her well’ or, like, ‘She has no father. Where is her father?’”

“I was questioning myself: I thought maybe I’m doing something wrong, like I wasn’t raised ‘right.’ But there’s nothing wrong with what I do. There’s this image of Saudi girls that they should be wearing a *niqab* or *hijab*, but I don’t wear that when I’m in Jordan. When my pictures were on social media, there was nothing showing—my body was covered in BJJ clothes but I didn’t have anything on my hair. So they were like, she’s a sinner.”

“My father is very protective of me from people, especially on social media, and he would be annoyed if he saw such comments. I have to keep in mind how to dress and how to post pictures, like I shouldn’t put stuff up that is too weird. I can’t just tweet whatever is on my mind. I have to be careful what I put out there.”

Notably, both Shaherkani and Attar were heavily criticized for participating in the Olympics, with some even calling the teenage Shaherkani a “prostitute for the Olympics.” While this is a distinct reaction from Saudi Arabia, where women only recently began competing, even in the United States, with Title IX sports legislation for women, doing something “like a girl” means doing it weakly. Our global obsession with women being weaker and, if they demonstrate strength, somehow “masculine” recalls an ancient attitude that the modern world has still not shaken.

Zahrani, luckily, has a good head on her shoulders and growing support from a small niche of women, including Muslim women, taking up fighting and combat sports. The Tumblr Muslim Female Fighters posts daily photos of women in combat sports from Turkey to Malaysia and Canada. As for Zahrani, herself, she has bigger dreams for her future.

“Some of my friends don’t really understand; they find it intimidating or ‘not feminine.’ They say, ‘Do you think you’re going to be a world champion? You’re wasting your time.’”

“I keep doing it because I like it. I keep doing it for myself; it affects me mentally and physically in a very tremendous way. I’m usually not a very patient person, but after doing BJJ I became the most patient person ever. I have a very short temper, but when I started doing BJJ I got this negative energy out of me because of punching the bags and training and fighting my teammates. You can’t just train twice a day and then just quit, you know? You have to do the whole thing.”

“In BJJ, I want to be a world champion, to be honest. I want to compete every opportunity there is, every tournament. I just want to go and compete,” she says, running her hands through long, wavy hair. “I want to train all the time. When I get my black belt or my brown belt, I want to open up a school in Saudi for girls to train in martial arts. I’m kind of working on that.”

When asked about her thoughts beyond competition, she shrugs, smiling, and says, “I think more Saudi girls should be involved in sports because they should be able to be healthier, not only their bodies, but their minds should be healthier—they should be able to stand up for themselves. Sports should be in every school in Saudi. Not sports as in training and competing, but just going to the gym and having a workout or keeping healthier, it affects a lot of things. Not only your body, but your mind as well. It plays a big, big role in people’s lives in general.”

“I’m also looking for a sponsor,” she says, grinning again. “I want to keep competing but, you know, BJJ competitions are kind of expensive and I’m still in school. But I want to try; I want to keep trying to compete. I’d love for my for my country to support me, my country’s recognitions and support is more important to me than whatever medals I might get at tournaments. I know I can offer a lot to the female Saudi community.”

FIGHT LIKE AN AMAZON

Zahrani is, perhaps, one of a new generation of young women across the world learning to blend the traditionally “masculine” characteristics of competitiveness and ambition with what it means to be female. “I’m not a tomboy,” she says, “There’s not just one kind of being feminine!”

It is a shame that, even while we have created the spaces for these young women to be celebrated and pushed, we still see in the backlash and comments a fear hearkening all the way back to times when women were considered to be property.

It is a fear of the woman who cannot be controlled, who cannot be subjugated and who cannot be pressed into docile, obedient silence. Women who can punch a man and control the situation if a man attempts to, in BJJ terms, submit her. Fear of the woman who is too feral, too wild and too outside the limits of what we consider to be appropriate, weak feminine behavior. Behaving “like a girl” is perhaps our way of making sure that women remain in the comfortable box, defeated by muscled, macho heroes, appropriately scantily clad and helpless.

Yet if it is up to the Zahranis and Rouseys of the world, we will have to begin rethinking our gendered definitions and our fear of women who might fight not like a man, but like an Amazon.

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



There's More to Chicago Gang Violence than Meets the Eye

Andre Evans

December 15, 2015

Writing off the children growing up in Chicago's ghettos as lost causes will only ensure the continuation of the cycle of violence.

There's a bullet for everyone in my neighborhood. You just have to dodge it or not be around when the gunman puts it in the cartridge, cocks it and aims.

As of June 8, Chicago had seen 1,050 people shot since the beginning of 2015. That's more than the number of people shot in New York and Los Angeles combined. Although some critics, such as Chicago Police Superintendent Garry F. McCarthy, argue that crime rates have dropped in Chicago since the early 1990s, this claim is misleading. The amount of shooting victims has actually spiked, since violence is concentrated in certain areas. Specifically, the Englewood police district clocked in more murders in 2011 than any other district where unemployment was approximately 35%.

This is how we roll in Englewood, one of the many hoods in the south side of Chicago. It's a cold environment in these parts. On every corner, gangs defend their turf like a fort, taking pride in being a part of a group that has filled both the sociological and emotional family factors missing in their lives.

EVERYONE NEEDS TO BELONG

The absence of my biological father was my social ill. Despite constant prayers and love from my mother and grandmother, I joined a gang called the Gangster Disciple Nation (GDN) at the age of 12, searching for a male role model and respect from my peers. As a naval military professional today, people struggle to comprehend why I and many other youths are or were involved in gangs.

The answer is simple: Humans have a fundamental need to belong. Belonging is a distinctly primal urge. Just as we have needs for food and water, we also have needs for positive and lasting relationships.

Joining a gang fills the emotional void of loneliness. You gain respect among others, build camaraderie and find a new family. But let's make one thing clear: Gangs are not bad. The military, fraternities and sororities, and even political parties are gangs. The difference is how they operate. In the same manner that a parent raises a child with love and discipline, society has proved that the most successful people grow up being mentored by someone who is patient with them despite their numerous failures.

The reality is that many youth from under-resourced communities are searching for mentors they can call their own. According to MENTOR, the National Mentoring Partnership, 37% of at-risk youth report that they never had an adult mentor of any kind while growing up. Nationwide, that means 9 million at-risk youths will reach age 19 without ever having a mentor.

So the next time you attempt to judge youth involved in gangs and violence, just remember that someone was patient with you through all the mistakes you made growing up. All human beings need patience and love. Without them, we look elsewhere for something to take their place.

DARE TO DREAM

Like Wal-Mart, a wide supermarket of drugs and guns can be bought and sold in your average Englewood alley or apartment building. What a place. No matter what the season or time, crackheads, gangsters, hobos and hustlers walk the same streets as children on their way to school, educating them on the advanced placement courses of the streets. Kids are shown their future at a young age. They strive to become professionals in various trades: successful hustlers, drug dealers, pimps and killers.

According to the National Center for Victims of Crime, in one study of inner-city 7-year-olds, 75% had heard gunshots, 60% had seen drug deals, 18% had seen a dead body outside and 10% had seen a shooting or stabbing at home. The same study showed that in Chicago alone, approximately 25% of black children reported witnessing a person shot and 29% indicated that they had seen a stabbing.

It's not a surprise that these youths are influenced by what they see. I made it out of the hood because I had a mother, grandmother and godmother who pushed me to dream and prayed for me every day. Many critics judge the youth of Chicago because they have no desire to dream big or envision a life outside the city for themselves. Looking into the eyes of these young children, you can see a thirst to learn from their surroundings: The hood is all they know. These at-risk youth cannot dream what they cannot see. The bullet of the cold streets just took another life.

THE COLOR RED

I came to Chicago from Detroit, Michigan, when I was 3 years old. My parents had divorced and, with no money, my mother, my brothers and I moved in with our grandmother in the Englewood neighborhood—the most violent ghetto of Chicago. The smell of weed, garbage and liquor constantly filled the air. For decades, heroin and marijuana have remained the most prominent drugs trafficked in Chicago's street-level narcotics trade.

A study by the Illinois Consortium on Drug Policy (ICDP) reaffirmed that Chicago remains the city with the most rampant heroin overdose problem in America. In 2010,

Chicago metropolitan hospitals recorded 24,360 heroin related ER admissions. The chemical engineers of Englewood diligently mix every form of leaf, liquid or powder they can get their hands on. They have mastered the scientific method of experimentation to the bone. The chemists of Englewood could give students at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) a run for their money.

We walked down the street to church every Sunday. But that walk wasn't pleasant. In those four short blocks one could learn a life story. Trash was everywhere. On the second house of the first block, a group of guys dressed in black and blue hovered like bees around a cracked gray porch. These were the gangster disciples, a notorious Chicago gang better known in short as GDN.

With no mercy, GDN had a bullet for anyone in Englewood who interfered with their money, turf, drugs or women. They always wore black and blue, their trademark colors of identification. They were all employed full-time just to stand and hang. On the other side of the third block, right in front of the church, stood a large group of 20 to 30 guys dressed in red and black. They were called the Black P. Stone Nation (BPSN), a rival gang. Some refer to BPSN as the Bloods. They were called Bloods for a reason: They loved to shed it.

The BPSN were vultures. Gulping down large bottles of Smirnoff, smoking weed and showing off their various guns to each other, the group of BPSN's comical laughter was interrupted when they saw a kid walking down the street in a red shirt. The kid could not have been older than 12. His life had just begun. He walked down the pavement past the large group of men on the porch, excited about the large red popsicle that completely absorbed his attention. His sweet smile brought hope to the entire block, a direct juxtaposition to the dark, depraved surroundings around him.

Instantly, happiness turned to nightmare. The kid found himself surrounded by 20 men in what appeared to be the black Ku Klux Klan. He was captured by his predators. The circle of life was taking place, closing in like a boa constrictor. When the circle opened up, all that lay there was the dead brown boy and his red popsicle. The kid was handsome with his curly, black hair. The popsicle's juice dripped and ran alongside the curb, fusing with the boy's rich red blood. His life had just ended.

Colors have always fascinated me. Kids grow up excited about the world of coloring and its rich, vibrant tones. A color, pure and fun to the mindset of a child and a concept taught to everyone in school, can cost you your life. Here, color was a bridge to death.

The colors you wore determined whether or not you would see the sunrise the next day.

IT'S NOT THE MUSIC

Drill music is the gospel that exemplifies the gritty daily life in Chicago. The term “drill” originally means to fight or scrap. The city’s youth created drill music—a subgenre of Hip Hop’s trap music—in order to cope with the violence experienced on Chicago’s impoverished south and west sides. The city was stamped with the nickname Drillinois due to the music’s grim, violent and aggressive lyrics, which reflect the gangs and crime that has made Chicago the murder capital of America since 2012.

Many critics argue that the raw message behind drill music condones violence as “cool.” Although some youth do use drill music to glorify violence, there are also many others who use it as an outlet to express the experiences they have endured and the feelings they have felt.

But as a city, we have to stop pointing fingers and blaming drill music for the violence we see in Chicago. Violence and crime was rampant within the city long before drill music was invented.

The issue is not the music; it’s the lack of education. One thing the Naval Academy has taught me is to take responsibility for my actions. If the unit fails, then I fail as a leader. In this same manner, if we give up on the youth of Chicago, then we all fail as leaders and a community. It is our “duty” to serve them.

Instead of focusing so much on music and how many people get shot every day, we must focus on creating and maintaining aggressive mentorship programs that are promoted so hard all the youth in the city know about them. The youth want help. Trust me, I know.

But they can’t reach out for help if they don’t know about the resources and programs available to them. We have to help them leave the hood, give them the mentorship they need and let them grow into the people they can be. Writing off these children as a lost cause only ensures that the cycle will continue.

Andre Evans is a Truman scholar, MIT Lincoln Lab fellow, youth activist, speaker, engineer, military professional and motivator.



Despite Problems, Greece's Economy Has Growth Potential

John Bruton

February 24, 2015

Greece's future needs to be underpinned by a credible plan that focuses on private sector-led growth, argues former Irish Prime Minister John Bruton.

It is important to note that the recession in Greece has been much deeper than expected by those who agreed the original bailout package in 2010—a 25% fall in output against a predicted 7% drop. The budgetary adjustments have been bigger than in other bailout countries.

It must be acknowledged that when Greece was bailed out by European governments and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the ultimate beneficiaries included banks—not only in Europe, but also elsewhere. These banks had been lending to the Greek government long after they should have stopped doing so, and they have forced Greece to confront reality. They assumed that because Greece was in the euro, someone, somewhere would ensure they were repaid.

Yes, some of the banks, who were thus saved from their errors, were indeed German. But many of the banks that were rescued from their embarrassment were British and American—and the British and American taxpayers have avoided a proportionate exposure to the costs, through the Greek bailout, of saving *their* banks. The eurozone is bearing the main burden, while the others offer free advice.

That said, it would have been in nobody's interest for a panic about Greece to have infected banks around the world. Bank credit constitutes 95% of the money we use, and a collapse in confidence over money could have had devastating global consequences. Without confidence in banks, economic activity would have come to a shuddering halt. We would have had a crash, rather than just a crisis. Hindsight critics can ignore that now, but it was a real risk then.

SOME BACKGROUND

The origins of the Greek problem are very deep and longstanding. For years, Greeks had been consuming more than they were producing, retiring on pensions earlier than is normal in other countries, and running an educational system that had few links with the real economy. All these gaps were bridged by borrowing money from foolish investors, who averted their eyes from the profound underlying problems of the Greek economy.

Meanwhile, Greece supported a cumbersome and slow courts system, and an equally inefficient system of public administration and of regulating entry to professions. These systems got in the way of growth, because growth needs a capacity to move human and other resources quickly from less to more profitable activities. Such systems might have been affordable in a very rich country, but Greece never was a rich country.

Greece failed to develop a broad, modern industrial sector. It relied too heavily on tourism and ship-building. Greeks made money selling things to each other Greeks, instead of the rest of the world.

Greek businesses stayed small, not big enough to become exporters. Indeed, the proportion of micro businesses in Greece is very large, and this sort of business frequently under-declares its income for tax purposes. This is part of the reason for poor tax collection in Greece.

But there is growth potential in the Greek economy. A McKinsey study back in 2011 suggested that Greece could develop medical tourism—it has a large population of dentists. I met someone recently who was waiting for ages to have treatment for tonsillitis in Ireland, but instead went to Greece and had the operation done in days.

McKinsey suggested a big scope for aquaculture and food processing in Greece. The country could develop its port infrastructure to provide a regional cargo hub. But none of these initiatives can be financed unless Greek business people have access to a healthy banking system.

The Greek banking system is far from healthy. Its capital is tied up in Greek government bonds. The credibility of these bonds has been called into question by the brinkmanship and loose rhetoric of the new Greek government. The uncertainty over

whether Greece will still be in euro in a few months' time also inhibits investment, while nationalist rhetoric in Germany on that topic has added greatly to that uncertainty.

Greece's future needs to be underpinned by a credible plan that focuses on private sector-led growth—backed by a healthy European banking system—that invests in productive Greek businesses rather than just in Greek government bonds, as it did in the past.

If that is to happen, it is not just Greece that needs to do a lot of homework, but the entire European Union (EU). The EU needs a real banking union that allows banks to lend across borders to good projects wherever they are found in the eurozone. This needs common EU legislation on debt collection, collateral and the like.

The fact that Greek, Irish, Portuguese and Spanish taxpayers have borne large burdens to recapitalize their banks—or have undertaken new debts—as part of a project to sustain the global banking system needs to be recognized by the rest of the world.

This cannot, unfortunately, be done straight away. The problems that gave rise to the crisis must be understood, and fixed, first.

The Greece election result would not lead one to believe that Greeks understand the source of their problems. And the credence that many voters elsewhere give to rhetoric that suggests being “against austerity” constitutes an implementable policy—in a world of free capital movement—indicates that many do not understand what went wrong or what can realistically be done about it. But ultimately, there must be an honest attempt to find a fair settlement of these legacy issues.

A Global Debt Conference, sometime before 2022 when Greece has to make huge repayments, should be considered. It could be sponsored by the IMF and might negotiate debt relief on the basis of the extent to which countries have, in the seven years between 2015 and 2022, implemented growth promoting reforms and achieved primary surpluses on their current budgets, taking into account the demography and the tax raising potential of each nation.

John Bruton is the former Irish prime minister and an international business leader.



Is the Rising US Personal Savings Rate a Bane or Boon?

Daniel Currie

April 21, 2015

The rising personal savings rate may pave the way for strong consumer spending.

The financial crisis that crippled the US economy in 2007 shook the global landscape. The aftershock sent the markets into turmoil resulting in the Great Recession, which saw the US economy's gross domestic product (GDP) shrink by "5.1% from the fourth quarter of 2007 to the second quarter of 2009." The crisis affected most people and it clearly showcased the frailties in the modern economic system.

With a bevy of news reports focusing on financial derivatives to corporate malfeasance, the paltry American personal savings rate was an afterthought. According to economists at Wells Fargo, the savings measure can be thought of as "personal saving as a share of after-tax income."

Kevin Lansing, a macroeconomic researcher from the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco, notes that since 2000, the average personal savings rate was 1.9%, in comparison to 5.2% in the 1990s. Lansing explains that the sharp reversals in the savings rate during the 2000s could have been caused by the burgeoning rise in the stock market, along with housing prices. Consumers mistook the rise in their stocks and housing values as an increase in their savings, which eventually led them to spend and acquire debt.

The debt to personal income rose to a mammoth of 118% in 2005, which stressed household balance sheets. As the recession took hold, many consumers and private sector enterprises had to deleverage their debt, leading to a loss in demand and an increase in savings. The US economy tumbled and "extraordinary measures" were taken by the Federal Reserve to save the economy from collapse.

RECENT SAVINGS RATE

The savings rate has now jumped after the housing bubble rocked consumer finances. According to the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis' Economic Data (FRED), the average personal savings rate in 2007 was 3%. However, in 2008, people started to save more to deleverage and pay off debts, which resulted in an average savings rate of 4.9%. From 2008-15, the average savings rate has been approximately 5.7%, with the highest reading of 10.5% in December 2012.

The latest reading on the personal savings rate in February 2015 came in at 5.8%. This is surprising for analysts, as it is the highest rate in more than two years. Admittedly, there has been a string of disappointing news from the US economy such as poor job growth, along with a stronger dollar, which is hurting exports.

But even with the disruption caused by the Los Angeles port strikes, there has been good news with wage gains and lower oil prices. While the former has seen rather poor increases over the past couple of years, the statistic has increased by 2.1% from a year ago in March. Hence, the question of a rising personal savings rate needs to be answered, and its implications—if any—for the US economy must be analyzed.

REASONS FOR HIGHER PERSONAL SAVINGS RATE

The long and brutal winter that pummeled the American northeast clearly affected consumer buying behavior. Even with personal income rising by 0.4% in February, consumer spending barely budged as it grew by 0.1%. Harsh winters can dampen people's appetite for consumerism and it could lead to a higher savings rate.

As the shortened spring leads to summer, there may be an increase in consumption due to pent up demand; spending that is bound to increase after a period of saving and sluggish buying. The Consumer Confidence Index may reflect this buoyed outlook as it rose by 2.5 points in March. Mark Vitner and Michael Brown, economists at Wells Fargo, see the latest reading as a sign of better spending to come in spring.

The steep fall in Brent and WTI crude oil prices has pushed down gasoline prices. On April 7, 2015, nationwide gas prices were \$2.38 nationwide, which is \$1.20 less than a year ago. According to analysts at GasBuddy, Los Angeles may see gasoline prices "hover between \$2.80 and \$3.10 from May through August." Lower gasoline prices should fuel demand as it is a tax cut for the middle-class. However, as aforementioned, the savings rate has risen as people are pocketing the gains rather than spending cash.

For consumers to start spending more, they will have to believe that gasoline prices will stay low in the long-term. This is almost the same as tax cuts not leading to extra spending because people believe that taxes will rise again in the future. In a recent survey from the Consumer Federation of America, consumers see gasoline prices rising by 50% to \$3.20 in the next two years. Consumers may be saving now in anticipation for higher gasoline prices in the future.

The Great Recession scarred the general populace as many people were left unemployed or stuck with lower wages. Millennials were greatly affected as they suffer from low starting salaries that could lead to lower income gains in the future. Even with a purring economy, recent graduates may find it tedious to switch jobs, considering the realities they faced during the financial crisis. No matter the recovery taking place, people were hurt by the recession, and this could lead to tepid recoveries along with slower spending and higher savings.

Negativity bias could be used to explain some of the risk aversion. This is when the brain is more sensitive to negative news than positive news. Indeed, the Great Recession brought a lot of unpleasantness over a long period of time. Consumers are attuned to the unpredictable future and they are taking the necessary action: saving more. This could explain the higher average savings rate from 2008 onward.

With a lot of debt taken prior to the popping of the housing bubble, private sector companies and individuals had to deleverage. Economist Richard Koo from Nomura Research Institute chalks this to balance sheet recessions. According to Koo, balance sheet recessions lead to “minimizing debt instead of maximizing profits following the bursting of a nation-wide asset price bubble.” Japan was plagued by a balance sheet recession during the 1990s. The main problem stems from the deleveraging that takes place that causes income to be used to pay down debts. Presently, people may even use their incomes to pay down accumulated student loan debts; nonetheless, consumers want to bolster their balance sheet before increasing consumption.

IMPLICATIONS OF HIGHER SAVINGS RATE

Income will be diverted away from consumption as people save their money and pay down their debts. Insightful research by Charles Atkins and Susan Lund showcase that by keeping incomes constant and increasing the personal savings rate by 1%, this will cause a \$100 billion fall in consumer spending. The researchers also mention that an increase in US incomes by 2% a year would allow households to reduce their debt-to-

income ratio by 5% and have a personal savings rate of 2.3%. According to a *New York Times* article, the average US consumer's debt-to-income ratio peaked at 130% right before the recession. With an expectation of increased wages in the future, there will be more income to spend and save in the spring.

As per research from Oxford Economics, higher savings can be channeled into the financial markets for more investment. This could lead to an increase in capital stock and innovation that could fuel economic growth in the future. Oxford Economics contends that “a higher level of household and national—saving enables an increase in investment without a worsening of the US's foreign borrowing position.” Without savings to fund a “healthy” 20-25% of GDP investment rate, there might be an increase in borrowing from foreign investors. Such borrowing could lead to overreliance on finicky foreign investment. Oxford Economics reports that the US personal savings rate needs to be maintained at 5-9% as the investment rate stood at 19% of GDP in 2013.

Even if an increase in personal savings can lead to higher investment, there must be demand for any expectation of investment. Researchers Jamee Moudud and Ajit Zacharias showcase that “saving needed to finance investment comes mainly from retained earnings and not from household saving.” As a result, an increase in demand from consumers can lead to higher profitability for businesses—especially in a recovering economy—that should be the impetus for capital investment. A higher savings rate (or less government spending) may take away from the consumption required to fuel investment.

Finally, an increased personal savings rate to save or pay debts will improve consumers' balance sheets, which might help people weather further economic storms. A sobering note comes from Wells Fargo economists, who mention that “47 percent of the households save nothing out of current income.” This measure fell from almost 48% in 2010, but the high figure is a concern. It is also worrisome that 64% of the working populace has only three months of expense income if there was a problem with their main income.

Nick Bunker from The Washington Center for Equitable Growth concurs because the savings rate differs at each level of the income distribution. It is no surprise that the top 1% was able to save on average 36% from 1986 to 2012. In fact, the bottom 90% averaged a negative savings rate from 1998-2008. This statistic should have increased after the Great Recession, but it showcases a dearth of savings for the most vulnerable.

The US personal savings rate has seen an uptick since the bursting of the housing bubble, but it might start falling in the near future as balance sheets are repaired. An inequality of savings dampens the rosy picture of higher expected consumption in the future. It may not be a problem for US President Barack Obama at the moment, but it is something the next president may need to carefully analyze.

Daniel Currie is the economics editor at Fair Observer.



Lessons Greece Can Learn From Seychelles

Manu Sharma

July 21, 2015

Greece should look to Seychelles for lessons on rejuvenating its ailing economy.

Oxi it is! In early July, the Greek electorate delivered a thumbs-down to sermons from lenders, media, international bodies and diplomats. Greeks chose not to give in when placed under overwhelming pressure from “Team Euro.”

The Greek debate means all sorts of things to people of all hues. Chiefly, the internationalists and regionalists have hijacked an economic debate and turned it into a philosophical one. This debate may decide the future and form of the European Union (EU), the biggest experiment on regional integration in history. While this philosophical battle rages on in the eurozone, the Greek people are on the sidelines awaiting their dreary fate.

Among all the hoopla about a Greek default, “Grexit” and Greek referendum, a routine press release by the World Bank went unnoticed. Seychelles, a tiny Indian Ocean

archipelago, was promoted to a high income category by the World Bank in the first week of July. What is the relevance of Seychelles to the Greek crisis?

In 2008, Seychelles had a debt-to-gross domestic product (GDP) ratio of 177%, and a negative GDP growth rate of -2.14%. Greece was in a slightly better position at the time, as it had a debt-to-GDP ratio of 117% along with a GDP growth rate of -0.4%.

Yet 2015 bears testimony to a healthy Seychellois economy, while the Greek economy is still in the doldrums. The numbers speak for themselves. The present debt-to-GDP ratio in Seychelles stands at 63%, and the country's growth rate is 2.76% for fiscal year (FY) 2014. This is in stark contrast to Greece's gloomy picture as the country has grown 0.8% in FY2014 with a debt-to-GDP ratio of 172%.

The Greek debt crisis shows no sign of abating, despite the implementation of austerity measures. In the midst of this tedious situation, the 26% unemployment rate has the potential to precipitate a political crisis.

The economic problems of Greece are twofold: a lack of monetary and fiscal leverage. Since its entry into the eurozone, Greece has had no monetary leverage to inflate its way to growth. Printing money would have allowed Greece to rein in interest rates and boost export competitiveness. Furthermore, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is seeking to dictate fiscal policy decisions in order to allow for timely debt servicing. This leaves Greece's monetary and fiscal policy autonomies to bureaucrats and academics; both of whom are unable to fathom the complexities of Greece's social fabric while making decisions on the country's economy.

Amid all this, another vital peg of Greek armory is missing. Prior to 2010, Greek credit was extensively subscribed to private banks, which brought forth serious risks of financial contagion from a Greek default. With credit transferred to the rest of the eurozone's balance sheets, a widespread systemic disruption is less likely in case of a Greek default; private banks are not as exposed anymore.

As the immediate threat of a nuclear option default is no longer credible, the focus has shifted to retaining Greece within the EU rather than nourishing it back to strong economic health. Under these circumstances, the Greek government can either participate in negotiations with lenders that lead to iterative attrition of its economy, or it can seek innovative ways out of this crisis.

The Seychellois experience becomes relevant under the latter option. How has a tiny debt-ridden country been able to rejuvenate its economy and continue to maintain a welfare state?

Seychelles is an interesting policy example to learn from and adapt wherever relevant. Despite the obvious political and economic dissimilarities between the two nations, basic philosophical bedrocks can always be understood and replicated to help other countries emerge out of a crisis.

The Seychellois crisis of 2008 is succinctly explained by the IMF:

“Since independence in 1976, Seychelles—an archipelago of about 115 islands in the middle of the Indian Ocean—had built up a successful economy, supported by a growing tourism sector. But a combination of overly expansionary fiscal and monetary policies, a pegged exchange regime, and a complex system of exchange controls, state subsidies and financial sector restrictions culminated in a severe balance of payments and public debt crisis in the second half of 2008.”

Here are some lessons from the Seychellois experience that Greece would do well to learn from.

LESSON 1: OWN YOUR REFORM PROCESS

President James Michel, who was leading a left-leaning party, had a big task of selling the reforms to his constituency. Strategically enough, the government owned and actively aided the reforms process. Instead of packaging the reforms as an imposed necessary evil, Seychelles used the IMF package to rewire its economy with minimal pain. The National Assembly speaker at the time stated that the authorities transitioned from being “proponents of welfarism” to “fervent promoters of entrepreneurship.”

In the case of Seychelles, austerity measures were used to encourage the transfer of employment generation from the public to private sector without cutting employment opportunities. Utilizing the IMF support, Seychelles was able to remove foreign exchange restrictions, float its currency, liberalize interest rates, modernize its monetary framework, and significantly tighten its fiscal stance. Seychelles rejuvenated its fundamentals without the need of bailouts, and this is something that Greece has to take a hard look at.

LESSON 2: PRIORITIZE POLICY GOALS AND IDENTIFY NEW ECONOMIC ENGINES

When it comes to austerity measures, the polity should dwell upon what can and cannot be cut. Seychelles maintained an expansive welfare stance, whereby the government subsidized an entire range of goods and services. Austerity was used as required, but the country remained firm with its welfare mechanisms.

Subsidies on milk were withdrawn as an effort to reduce government expenditure, but public services such as education and health care were available to all Seychellois. The government let go of some subsidies, but it did not dismantle the welfare mechanism meant for social overhead capital.

Paul Krugman and Simon Tilford asserted that Greece has already undertaken significant austerity measures. The real problem for Greece is its tanked economy. Hence, the country must kick-start economic growth in order to survive the crisis. There is an urgent need for Greece to relax its fiscal tightening over certain sectors; otherwise it risks an overall strangulation of growth. At the same time, it has to be wary of dismantling the social welfare mechanisms that are vital for preserving social stability.

The Greeks must use the crisis to identify innovative approaches to re-engineer the country's economic structure. Seychelles adopted a twin approach of moving up the value chain within its traditional sectors of tourism, fisheries and financial services. The country moved toward high margin and high value product lines within its traditional sectors of competence.

The country simultaneously adopted the concept of the blue economy and turned its attention toward one resource that it had in abundance: the ocean. Seychelles' blue economy paradigm allowed the country to leverage its oceanic resources for high-end aquaculture products; bio-prospecting for pharmaceutical compounds; renewable energy; and marine fertilizers.

To top it all, Seychelles is keen on local entrepreneurship to power the sunrise sectors, and its government has announced a slew of measures to allow these sectors to grow.

Greece also needs to quickly identify its potential beyond the conventional bounds of the European industry. A pertinent example is Greece's long coastline. The country sits

in a fairly advantageous position to benefit from international trade. In short, Greece should explore its comparative advantage to achieve a brighter future.

LESSON 3: DEFT POLITICAL ESTABLISHMENT AND DIPLOMACY

Seychelles achieved its political stability through two ways. First, the deft statesman, President Michel, was able to command respect from multiple quarters and was able to muster strong legislative sanction for reforms. This was followed by a strong administrative setup that was able to implement the reforms in its entirety. The Seychellois government implemented radical policies that put the country in uncharted territory. It is one of the smallest economies to rely on a freely floated exchange rate. The Greek polity also needs strong leaders who can deliver. Crisis needs its crisis manager.

Seychelles indulges in an astounding amount of diplomatic outreach given its relative size. As an active member of the Small Island Developing States (SIDS), it has blazed a trail in proposing policy paradigms and focused its attention to the negative externalities caused by developed and emerging economies. Seychelles engages actively with old-world economic powerhouses under the aegis of the Paris Club, the United Nations and the European Union.

Beyond that, Seychelles has built robust and independent relationships with Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS). Seychelles is vulnerable to external shocks from the international economic climate. The country also has a fragile environment to look after. An effective way to countermand its risks is to have a large number of friends that can help spur its local economy after painful economic shocks, which Seychelles is successfully doing. Greece has a very important lesson to learn, and it needs to look beyond the troika (European Commission, European Central Bank and the IMF) and the borders of the EU.

The Seychellois government was smart, adaptive and resilient in facing the crisis. It approached the problem head-on. Clearly, this should serve as a case study on how to approach an economic crisis. Greece may well do a lot better by keeping the debate limited between the government and its electorate rather than making it an international *cause célèbre*.

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Why Are Interest Rates So Low?

Jeevan Parameswaran

July 22, 2015

A lack of consensus on a policy prescription keeps interest rates lower for longer.

The global economic environment of recent memory has been unusual to say the least. Persistently low and even negative interest rates have failed to spark an adequate revival in economic fortunes as growth remains subpar. This year has seen the commencement of easing cycles by central banks in China and India, while the European Central Bank (ECB) has ventured into unprecedented negative territory. Richard Koo, Nomura Research Institute's chief economist, aptly stated that we have moved from an "unusual" world of persistently low and near zero interest rate policy (ZIRP) to a ridiculous one in which negative interest rate policy (NIRP) has become the norm.

As is the nature of economists, there has been widespread disagreement as to which emerging theory best explains the economic quagmire we currently find ourselves in. To better understand modern-day economics, it is important to delve into the main prevailing theories: Secular stagnation, global savings glut, as well as alternative theories such as Kenneth Rogoff's deleveraging theory, and Robert Gordon's long-term headwinds.

The previous chairman of the US Federal Reserve (Fed), Ben Bernanke, aptly wrote in his blog: "If you asked the person on the street, 'Why are interest rates so low?' he or she would likely answer that the Fed is keeping them low." According to Bernanke, the Fed's ability to control rates is "limited." To reach the equilibrium real interest rate (Wicksellian rate) consistent with full employment, the Fed needs to generate the requisite amount of inflation to compensate for its inability to breach the zero lower bound.

The real interest rate reflects current returns on capital investment, and therefore, it has become the focal point of central banks. Low rates reflect sluggish economic growth, while high rates reflect a higher return on investment and are typically a sign of growth. Deficits caused by expansionary fiscal policy may also result in higher rates as savings are diverted away from private investments. Since the equilibrium real interest

rate is estimated to be at record lows, Fed policy aims to set interest rates at similarly low levels that will clear savings and investment.

The conventional thought process has been that nominal interest rates cannot fall below zero, hence the term “zero lower bound.” The logic behind the zero lower bound constraint is that cash has an interest rate of zero, thus negative interest rates would create a substitution effect that causes investors to substitute bonds for cash. Central banks in Sweden, Denmark and Switzerland, in addition to the ECB have showed that the zero lower bound can be breached. They are implementing negative interest rate policy in an unconventional effort to stimulate growth.

Yet Europe has experienced little—if any—of the adverse substitution effect implied by sub-zero rates. The cash arbitrage rate can be used to explain Europe’s ability to get away with negative rates. Even though holding cash theoretically pays a zero interest rate, institutions with cash hoards too large to “fit under a mattress” incur fixed costs for storage, transport, security, insurance and lost convenience (opportunity cost). Secondly, because these costs are fixed, there are economies of scale from spreading the costs over a larger base. Thus, holding cash actually implies a negative rate, which means the real lower bound is not zero. It is actually negative, or the point where no large scale cash withdrawals will take place.

SECULAR STAGNATION

Certainly, any discussions of zero or negative interest rate policy inevitably bring up economist Larry Summers’ resurrection of the age-old secular stagnation thesis. Alvin Hansen, in his 1938 presidential address, predicted a prolonged slump in the economy caused by excess savings over investment. This would, in turn, prevent the attainment of full employment as firms were disincentivized to invest; naturally, Hansen was wrong as an economic boom soon followed.

However, seven decades later, his thesis may just hold some water. The case for secular stagnation involves the following scenarios: output below the economy’s potential; real rates above equilibrium; and scenarios one and two lasting for a prolonged period of time. *Prima facie*, the thesis certainly fits with what is being witnessed today. Rates are at an unprecedented low, yet the US saw its 2015 first quarter gross domestic product (GDP) growth revised down to -0.7% against the backdrop of a 2.2% GDP growth in fourth quarter of 2014. Even with negative real rates creating ample liquidity in the system, the demand for credit remains tepid. In the

US, the monetary base has increased 4.82x, yet the money supply and bank credit has only gone up 1.47x and 1.05x, respectively.

Banks' reluctance to lend has, in effect, negated the threat of inflation. Low inflation is not a good sign here as it prevents the Fed from matching the negative equilibrium real rate.

THE GLOBAL SAVINGS GLUT

Bernanke advocates a concept much akin to secular stagnation, the “global savings glut,” to explain the prolonged low growth and low interest rate phenomenon. The key difference between both theories is that Bernanke's thesis provides a global outlook that considers the global saving-investment balance. Additionally, it also focuses on the role of government policies versus fundamental factors in creating imbalances.

The theory makes a lot of sense, especially when one views the global changes in current account balances. In the late 1990s, an excess buildup of savings in Asia and the Middle East led to significant capital inflows into the United States, which depressed interest rates. These surpluses have declined as a result of “new normal” in oil prices and China's attempt to shift from an export to a consumption-driven economy. Bernanke believes that the correction of these imbalances should help eventually normalize global interest rates.

ALTERNATIVE THEORIES

Notable alternative theories that seek to explain secular stagnation include Gordon's headwinds and Rogoff's deleveraging theory. Gordon's thesis attributes low growth to falling potential output growth as opposed to the output gap or economic slack. The output gap is simply the difference between actual growth and growth that an economy could achieve if it fulfilled its potential. Gordon believes secular stagnation is the result not of the output gap itself, but primarily of the potential output.

Essentially, this implies the problem cannot be fixed by lowering real rates as it already matches the equilibrium. Instead, supply side factors have led to a structural slowdown that could last for a long time.

Rogoff's deleveraging theory predicts weak growth and economic slack only as long as deleveraging takes place. Meanwhile, he believes real rates are above equilibrium due to the risk premium associated with higher credit spreads.

Considering the blatant disagreement between some of the most distinguished economists on the fundamental causes of the current economic problems, a policy prescription looks far from certain. The prevailing theory among Fed members seems to be that of secular stagnation. Thus, we are likely to see close monitoring of the real interest rate in determining the timing and pace of rate normalization.

Evidence of the widespread dispersion of equilibrium real interest rate has been strong, however, this mainly stems from the use of different econometric models. Bernanke confirms as much in his blog, noting the widespread disagreement over where the equilibrium real interest rate currently is.

Considering the Fed's dovish bias, it makes sense to expect the Fed to opt for the path of least resistance by leaving rates "lower for longer." A premature rate hike would not only hurt economic growth and lower returns on capital investments, but also damage the Fed's credibility. For the moment, at least, it looks like the impending catharsis of higher rates remains some way away.

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How the US Interest Rate Might Affect You

Sam Cho

September 26, 2015

With all the talk of an imminent interest rate hike, there are likely to be winners and losers.

With the economy steadily improving and unemployment rates continuing to drop, the US Federal Reserve (Fed) is expected to raise interest rates for the first time since 2006.

Fed Chair Janet Yellen has made just shy of a promise to raise interest rates later this year. While the majority of economists and market analysts originally thought September would be the first rate hike in nine years, recent events in the global economy have forced the Federal Reserve to push back its “lift off” date.

But regardless of when it will be, any increase in interest rates will be modest and gradual in order to avoid triggering shocks to the market.

So how will this affect you and the overall economy?

UNITED STATES

An interest rate hike means the money supply will inevitably shrink and lead to an appreciation in the value of the US dollar. For the everyday consumer, the increase in purchasing power could drive up household discretionary spending.

The appreciation of the US dollar could end up being a double-edged sword for American companies. For small to mid-sized companies that sell products primarily to domestic consumers, the increased consumption can turn out to be a good thing.

But for most blue chip corporations doing business both domestic and abroad, the negative will likely outweigh the positive. If you’re in the business of selling overseas, an appreciation of the dollar is bad news because a higher exchange value will make your products dearer to other countries. In the end, this will squeeze profit margins and negatively affect cash flow.

In addition, if you’re a company that likes to borrow money in order to expand business operations or invest in research and development, the interest rate hike will make borrowing more expensive. As a result, a shortfall in a firm’s capital expenditure could have an adverse effect on overall company performance.

The Fed has also hinted at a slow and gradual hike of interest rates. This is good for prospective homebuyers because it means mortgage rates will likely not rise rapidly in the short-run. Still, over the long-term, a continuous rise in interest rates will lead to a

corresponding increase in mortgage rates. This will be especially true for variable interest rates; the same reasoning applies to credit cards.

Considering the Federal Government's budget deficit and debt, the government will end up having to pay more in interest for all that borrowing if the rates continue to go up. In fact, according to a study by the Congressional Budget Office, the US government could pay as much as \$2.9 trillion in interest over the next ten years.

GLOBAL ECONOMY

The appreciation of the US dollar may lead to an increase in consumer spending and, therefore, overall US demand for goods. The world economy will ultimately benefit from this, along with the international corporations that sell to the US. With Europe dealing with an ailing Greece, and East Asia grappling with a slowdown in both consumption and growth, the world economy could use this boost.

Countries such as Brazil, Turkey, South Africa and Argentina have benefited tremendously from the Federal Reserve's "quantitative easing." The abundance of liquidity has allowed for some of that capital to spill over into the emerging markets.

However, ever since the Federal Reserve announced tapering in December 2013, we've seen a capital outflow in these markets. In other words, there was less "free money." As the level of capital abundance slowed, so did the growth rate of those emerging economies. A hike in interest rates will likely continue this trend for emerging economies. If you're an investor in emerging markets, you've been warned.

All in all, raising interest rates will have a wide and varying impact on the economy. You will probably have noticed by now that all these factors and effects are interrelated. But the very gesture of raising interest rates is the Fed's way of promoting confidence that the US economy has recovered enough for the government to take a step back from propping it up—and that is a good thing.

Sam Cho is an analyst who works for a member of the US Congress.



ENVIRONMENT

The Future of Hydropower

Even Kuross

May 26, 2015

Given the strains climate change is putting on the planet's limited resources, what role can hydropower play in the future?

The Three Gorges Dam in China is the largest hydroproject in the world. Spanning 2.4 kilometers across the Yangzee River in Hubei Province, the dam captures 84.7 terawatts per hour (TWh) annually. China is, in fact, the world's largest producer of hydroelectricity, generating 687 TWh in 2011, which accounts for 15% of China's total electricity production. Hydropower actually makes up 6% of China's total energy mix—more than both natural gas and nuclear power—and the Chinese government plans to increase its output to 325 gigawatts (GW) by 2015. For a country that is also the largest emitter of carbon dioxide, hydropower is a vital source of clean energy that can help Beijing combat the pervasive pollution that blankets many major Chinese urban centers.

China is one of the many countries eager to take advantage of their natural topography to tap a clean source of renewable energy. Across the globe, the use of hydropower is on the rise, growing by 4% over 2013, as renewable sources of energy are touted as the most environmentally responsible alternative to finite carbon emitting fossil fuels and a valuable tool in fighting climate change. The runoff produced by precipitation, rivers and other waterways around the world combine to create 16% of the world's electricity every year, and more than 60 countries receive over half of their electricity through hydropower.

Norway is western Europe's largest producer of both oil and natural gas, yet it receives 97% of its energy needs from hydropower. Energy-rich Canada, Brazil and Venezuela all receive over 50% of their electricity from hydropower. Given the growing global push toward renewable energy, what does the future of hydropower hold?

HYDROPOTENTIAL

A recent report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) starkly outlined the long-term economic, social and environmental costs the world will be forced to contend with if climate change is allowed to progress at its current rate. The report concluded that the effects of climate change will affect every facet of life if it is not proactively dealt with. These effects are before the increased demand for energy and subsequent increase in carbon emissions are taken into account. The United Nations (UN) estimates that the world's population will consume 50% more energy by 2035.

Despite a growing need for an increase in sustainable energy, the energy landscape continues to be dominated by cheap fossil fuels, which accounted for 78.4% of the world's energy consumption in 2012. Renewables, on the other hand, accounted for only 19% of the world's energy needs in 2012—hydropower making up only 3.7% of that.

The world saw \$187 billion in investment in renewables 2012, and the UN reports that more than 70% of investment in renewable energy since 2000 comes from non-OECD countries. This comes on the heels of the Sustainable Energy for All (SE4ALL) initiative that was launched by the UN in 2011 to try meet three objectives by 2030, one of which was to double the share of renewable energy globally. The International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) believes that with coordinated action, renewable energy can account for up to 36% of the global energy mix by 2030.

The increased application of renewable energy such as hydropower would simultaneously cut carbon emissions and reduce pollution whilst producing a renewable source of clean energy. The European Union (EU) has set targets for its members to meet 20% of their energy from renewables and to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 20% by 2020. Of new electricity generation in the EU, 72% was from renewables. The US Department of Energy has set its own targets to achieve 15% of the country's electricity from hydropower by 2030—it is currently 7%. Elsewhere around the world, countries are pledging to meet more and more of their energy needs through renewable energy sources.

As one of the most established and ready sources of renewable energy, the expertise and capability surrounding hydropower is easily disseminated. Given the fact there are still 1.2 billion people living without electricity, many countries could potentially take advantage of their natural landscape to produce a steady future flow of sustainable energy. One place where there is huge untapped potential is in Africa, where

hydropower is already being used to supply electricity to large urban centers and 65% of the population lives in water basins where hydropower can be exploited.

Hydropower accounts for 74% of total renewable electricity generation. The International Energy Agency (IEA), an intergovernmental energy advisory organization, wants to see the output of hydroelectricity doubled globally by 2050. As mentioned, 16% of the world's electricity is generated by hydropower, but the current capacity could be tripled if all available resources were harnessed to generate approximately 15,000 TWh a year. Just this year, the global output of hydroelectricity reached 1,000 GW for the first time ever, and policy support for taking advantage of untapped hydropower capacity continues to grow.

LIQUID PROBLEMS

Hydropower may be a highly efficient renewable energy system, but there are also a number of impediments that prevent its continued application. One of the most glaring is the cost. These projects are capital intensive and an expensive luxury many countries in the developing world cannot afford, especially if it requires costly foreign borrowing. Rock extraction, construction and the additional costs of storage and connectivity to grids all create a hefty price tag.

The Three Gorges Dam, at \$28 billion, was the most expensive hydroproject ever undertaken. Furthermore, researchers at the University of Oxford found that prices of large dam projects ran 57% over their initial estimate on average. Just to make the area around the Itumbiara Dam in Brazil ready for construction required 96% of the project's initial budget. In Ethiopia, around 60% of the country's annual budget is being used to construct the Grand Ethiopia Renaissance Dam. Given the high price tag, the financial rate of return on many projects can actually be negative.

Another issue related to hydropower is that oftentimes the dams and reservoirs used to tap the natural current of water divert resources away from local communities. This can affect downstream irrigation capabilities and seriously hurt agrarian communities' ability to meet their harvest goals. The social costs of hydroprojects can be enormous if they lead to displacement or endanger the livelihood of locals.

Tajikistan is currently the site of an ongoing water-related dispute with its neighbor Uzbekistan, over the proposed construction of the world's tallest dam near the town of Rogun. The Rogun Dam, if built, is expected to double the country's power generation

capacity. However, the \$6 billion price tag and opposition from downstream Uzbekistan, which receives much of its water from the Vakhsh River, have stalled the project. This is an instance of a transnational dispute where international bodies can be utilized to mediate the dispute. However, if this were an internal matter with an autocratic regime pushing through a controversial hydroproject, the victims would be left to suffer the consequences.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Hydropower can also have a negative environmental impact on the surrounding ecosystem, especially on fish migration and other species, such as birds affected by shifting wetlands. The quality of water can be negatively affected through pollution, and dams and reservoirs can lead to the erosion of river basins, which can subsequently affect the quality of soil needed for local agriculture to flourish. The government of Chile recently rejected the HidroAysen project, which would have been the largest energy project in its history, over environmental concerns.

This is especially troubling given that freshwater resources around the world are drying up due to shifting precipitation patterns and increased usage due to population growth. Drier conditions and potential droughts caused by climate change will reduce the potential for power generation due to lower runoffs and lead to water scarcity.

Unfortunately, this will most likely happen in poorer countries that also lack the flexibility, funding or political will to tackle long-term alterations in their water systems. The work of Byman Hamududu of the Norwegian University of Science and Technology examined the projected changes in hydropower generation through 2050. He found that many of the largest depletions would occur in high-risk, tropical countries. Hydropower must, therefore, be employed as part of a balanced energy portfolio in the face of potential disruptions due to climate change.

IT'S HYDROELECTRIC

There may be a number of downsides to hydropower, but the environment points to the simple fact that it is a lesser evil than to allow carbon intensive finite fuels to continue to dominate energy portfolios. The potential damage of global climate change drastically outweighs the local consequences of hydropower.

As governments adopt policies to mitigate climate change, renewable sources of energy like hydropower will be key winners, especially if generous subsidies are extended to jump-start projects. If projects are extensively investigated before their implementation, many downsides of hydropower can be avoided. Innovations in technology and the wider adaptation of hydropower should make projects in the future more cost friendly.

Also, given that fossil fuels are finite, any future increase in the price of oil or natural gas would make renewable energy sources an even more attractive investment for governments and businesses around the world. More efficient turbines that can harness lower water levels can be applied to avoid the pitfalls associated with mega-dams or reduced run-offs. Fish-friendly dams have also been implemented incrementally to avoid damage to local fisheries.

Hydropower provides one of the most effective methods to achieve a renewable energy future. If it is adapted in a sustainable manner, it can be an environmentally responsible portion of any country's energy supply mix.

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Destroy the World... and Feel Good

About It

Derrick Jensen

July 1, 2015

There are “environmental extremists” on this planet, and Derrick Jensen believes they are called capitalists.

I have been sometimes labeled an environmental extremist, primarily because I believe the real world is more important than the economy, and because I believe we should do whatever is necessary to stop this extractive culture from killing the planet that is our only home.

Labeling someone an extremist is a standard rhetorical device to demonize the “extremist” and dismiss the person’s perspective. It’s kind of the loco-motion of the rhetoric world in that everybody’s doing it. The Nazis said the Jews were extremists. Slavers said abolitionists were extremists. The Founding Fathers of the United States complained of how poorly the Indians were treating them as they stole the Indians’ land.

Today, the US bombs extremists all over the world, oftentimes using as their reasoning the fact that extremists want to bomb the Americans, whom *they* label as extremists. Corporate apologists and other right-wingers often call environmentalists “extremists” for any reason. You want genetically modified organisms (GMO) labeled? They’ll call you an extremist. You want areas of the ocean off limits to fishing, they’ll call you an extremist. You want to stop logging of old growth forests? They’ll call you an extremist.

It happens on the personal level, too, as garden-variety abusers would never perpetrate their abuse if it weren’t for the extreme behavior of their victims.

CLAIM TO VIRTUE

It always pays to present oneself as the reasonable one—the one in the reasonable center—and one’s opponent or enemy as the unreasonable one, the extremist.

Robert Jay Lifton wrote about how people can’t commit any mass atrocity without having what he calls a “claim to virtue.” That is, they must convince others and especially themselves that they’re not in fact committing an atrocity, but rather a positive good. Nazis weren’t committing mass murder and genocide, but purifying the Aryan “race.” The United States has never committed mass murder, land theft and genocide, but rather it has “manifested its destiny.” The dominant culture isn’t killing the planet, but “developing natural resources.”

All of this is true in our personal lives too. I have never once in my life been a jerk, by which I mean that every time I have objectively been a jerk, I have had my actions fully rationalized.

And likewise, by definition, almost no one will consider their own position extreme. Their own position is the reasonable one, or they wouldn't have it. And their own position is in the center, once again by definition, because it is from their own perspective. This is as true of capitalists as it is of Christians, atheists, environmentalists, Scientologists or members of the Manson family.

All of which speaks to the power of rationalization.

But that doesn't mean we should throw up our hands and give in to any sort of relativism. The fact that an argument is misused doesn't mean the argument is never true. The Germans' excuse for invading Poland to start World War II was that a detachment of Polish soldiers had attacked a German installation. The fact these "Polish soldiers" were really Germans in Polish uniforms doesn't mean that no one can ever claim self-defense. The fact that people rationalize atrocities doesn't mean no one ever commits atrocities, and it doesn't mean that every statement everyone makes in defense of their actions is a rationalization.

The question becomes, where do we find solid ground?

Years ago, I got into an argument with a woman over whether rape is a bad thing. I said it was. She—and I need to say she was dating a postmodern philosopher at the time, and has since dumped him and regained her sanity—responded: "No, we can say that rape is a bad thing. But since humans assign all value"—and of course that statement is itself both inaccurate and a big part of the problem—"humans can decide whether rape is good or bad. There is nothing inherently good or bad about it. It just is. Now, we can certainly tell ourselves a series of stories that cause us to believe that rape is bad, that is, we can construct a set of narratives reinforcing the notion that rape is harmful, but we could just as easily construct a set of narratives that tell us quite the opposite."

There's one sense in which she was right: We can certainly create a bunch of stories that valorize rape (or that valorize the Aryan race and demonize Jews; or that valorize capitalism and demonize everyone who disagrees with it; and so on).

To bring this back to environmental "extremism," we can certainly create a series of stories that cause us to believe it makes sense to deforest the planet, vacuum the oceans, impoverish the majority of humans. If the stories are effective enough at

convincing us the stories are more important than physical reality, it does not only make sense to destroy the world, but we will feel good about it, and we will feel good about killing anyone who tries to stop us.

NOT ALL NARRATIVES ARE CREATED EQUAL

But not all narratives are equal. For example, what if someone told you story after story extolling the eating of dog shit. You've been told these stories since you were a child. You believe them. You eat dog shit hot dogs, dog shit ice cream, General Tso's dog shit. Maybe your enculturation is so strong that dog shit actually tastes good to you. But you have a physical body, and no matter what stories you tell yourself, this diet might make you sick or kill you. To make the example a little less silly, substitute the words Big Mac, Whopper or Coca Cola for dog shit.

Here's the point: Physical reality eventually trumps narrative. It has to. It can just take a long time. In the case of this culture's destruction of the planet, it has so far taken some 6,000 years (considerably less, of course, for its victims).

No matter what stories we tell ourselves, drinkable quantities of clean water are a good thing. I recently saw an article that began: "Fracking for oil and natural gas—or having enough water to drink. That's the possible dilemma facing a number of countries including the United States, according to a new report released by the World Resources Institute last week—though experts disagree on the real implications of the report and what should be done about it." The journalists evidently consider it perfectly sane to consider the choice between having water to drink and oil and gas from fracking a dilemma, and consider it perfectly reasonable for "experts" to disagree as to what should be done about this.

This is insane.

We are animals. We require clean water to drink. We require clean and healthy food to eat. We require a livable habitat. We require a livable world. Without them we die.

The health of the real world is the basis of a functioning, healthy, sustainable moral philosophy. It has to be, because it is the source of life.

ENVIRONMENTAL EXTREMISM EXISTS

And now, at last, to environmental “extremism.” I do believe environmental extremists exist. I believe it is extremist to intentionally fabricate quadrillions (with a q!) of lethal doses of Plutonium. I believe it is extremist to bomb the moon.

I believe it is extremist to construct so many dams—more than one large dam per day for hundreds of years—that 25% of this world’s rivers no longer reach the ocean. I believe it is extremist to build more than 70,000 dams over six-and-a-half feet tall in the United States alone (if we removed one of these dams every day, it would take more than 200 years to get rid of them all: salmon don’t have that time; sturgeon don’t have that time). I believe it is extremist to drive runs of salmon extinct, runs that were so big that entire rivers would be “black and roiling” with fish, runs so big you could hear them for miles before you would see them.

I believe it is extremist to drive passenger pigeons extinct, pigeons who flew in flocks so large they darkened the sky for days at a time. I believe it is extremist to cause 200 species per day to go extinct. I believe it is extremist to cause, as biologist Michael Soulè has said, vertebrate evolution to come to an end. I believe it is extremist to bathe the world in endocrine disruptors. I believe it is extremist to put so much plastic into the oceans that there is ten times as much plastic as phytoplankton (imagine that of every eleven bites you take, ten of them are plastic).

I believe it is extremist to have an economy based on infinite growth on a finite planet. I believe it is extremist to have a culture based on having been told to “go forth and multiply” on a finite planet. I believe it is extremist to destroy 98% of native forests, 99% of native wetlands, 99% of prairies. I believe it is extremist to go on destroying them.

I believe it is extremist to put in yet another shopping mall on the largest remaining prairie dog village in the Front Range of Colorado, especially when prairie dogs have been reduced by 98% of their range and population. I believe it is extremist to vacuum the oceans, such that if you weighed all the fish in the oceans, the total weight would be only 10% of what it was 140 years ago. Stolid scientists are saying the oceans could be devoid of fish within the next generation.

I believe it is extremist to murder the oceans. I believe it is extremist to murder the entire planet. I believe it is extremist to mass produce neurotoxins (e.g. pesticides) to release into the world. I believe it is extremist to change the climate. I believe it is extremist to steal land from every Indigenous culture. I believe it is extremist to commit

genocide against every Indigenous culture. I believe it is extremist to have one culture overspread the entire planet.

I believe it is extremist to believe the world was made for you. I believe it is extremist to act as though you are the only species on the planet. I believe it is extremist to act as though you are the only culture on the planet.

I believe there are “environmental extremists” on this planet, and I believe they are called capitalists. I believe they are called “members of the dominant culture.” I believe that unless they are stopped, these extremists will kill the planet. I believe they must be stopped.

Derrick Jensen is an author and environmental activist.



Preparing for Natural Disasters is Becoming Even More Important

Laura Janneck

December 6, 2015

As the world becomes more urban, and climate change picks up pace, natural disasters remain one of the greatest threats to human health and stability.

Cities are becoming larger, more humans on the planet are becoming urban, and city leaders are turning their attention toward the importance of preparedness and response to natural disasters.

It is anticipated that the majority of the world’s population growth in the next several decades will be in the cities of low and middle-income countries. Many of these cities are particularly vulnerable to flooding and extreme weather, located in low-lying coastal zones. Within these cities, slum settlements are often built on the most vulnerable lands, prone to landslides, or abutting waterways in flood zones.

Many natural disasters, particularly storms and hurricanes, are thought to be increasing in severity and frequency—in part due to climate change. Geophysical disasters such as earthquakes are having a greater effect on humans because more people live near fault lines. There were three times as many natural disasters in the 2000s than there were in the 1980s, according to researchers. On average, 218 million people per year were affected by natural disasters between 1994 and 2013. While exact costs are difficult to predict for the future, given the sporadic nature of disasters, the trend is clearly upward.

BEFORE THE ALARMS SOUND

Long before the alarms sound, disaster preparedness begins with stepping back and taking stock. Today's rapidly expanding cities start their response to natural disasters with an assessment of the risks. Individual cities vary in their approaches to disaster preparedness according to their particular risks.

Community surveys are conducted, mapping geographic vulnerability and identifying where the most vulnerable populations are located. Where are the flood zones, and how many people live there? Where do the poor, the elderly and the homeless live? Overlaid on this information comes an assessment of the resources a city has at hand to respond, and the vulnerabilities of those resources. Where are the hospitals, and are their buildings sound? Where are the water supplies, and how is the power grid laid out?

Many organizations, from the World Bank and international NGOs to slum dweller organizations, have been partnering with city leaders to create these risk assessments. New mapping techniques and technologies are being used to create spatial data of cities' risks, upon which plans for improved disaster response infrastructure can be built.

After an assessment of the risks has been laid out, city leaders then decide on effective ways to mitigate the effects of a future disaster, putting mechanisms in place before disaster strikes to reduce the effect of the disaster. Like a bicycle helmet or child's car seat, these are set in place to be present and ready at all times, and are aimed at making the infrastructure of the city less vulnerable and more resilient.

One example of this is the implementation of building codes in earthquake-prone areas. Engineers have devised architectural components that make buildings more sound and less likely to collapse in an earthquake—methods like base isolation or tuned mass dampers.

In the aftermath of disasters, retrospective awareness of how inadequate implementation of these methods can result in tremendous casualties may receive worldwide criticism, as was the case in China after the 2008 Sichuan earthquake.

In Seattle, recent media attention has increased public awareness of the Cascadia subduction zone off the Pacific coast which, according to geologists, has caused infrequent, but devastating earthquakes in centuries past. Many experts predict that the Pacific Northwest is due for another large earthquake that could potentially reach above 9.0 on the Richter scale, costing thousands of lives, and this likelihood has provided further motivation for the city to upgrade its buildings, which has thus far been happening at a snail's pace.

Early warning systems are another mitigation method that can help the local population be more resilient to natural disasters. Similar to tornado warning sirens in the American Midwest, early warning systems for tsunamis have been developed in cities around the Indian Ocean after the 2004 earthquake and tsunami, which killed over 230,000 people. International cooperation has made this possible, where detection of an earthquake on the ocean floor can lead to tsunami warnings for coastal communities within a matter of minutes. The development of the Indian Ocean tsunami warning system cost about \$19 million, and recent responses to earthquakes in the Indian Ocean have proven the system to be working effectively.

GEOGRAPHIC VULNERABILITY

With an understanding of geographic vulnerability to forces like flooding and landslides, urban planning can also be used to reduce the human impact of disasters by discouraging settlement on high-risk lands, using them as parks or watersheds instead.

This can be politically fraught, however, in cities where many of these areas are already densely settled as slums, which tend to grow on undeveloped land, or areas that are otherwise less appealing to residential development. The process of either relocating residents of slums, or building better infrastructure in these areas risks displacing these already-vulnerable people. Additionally, the breaking up of social

networks many counteract the benefits that arise from giving slum residents the opportunity to live in safer, but more distant neighborhoods.

No matter what a city can do to prepare, however, when disaster occurs, there is often significant damage and loss of life. Though the media often focuses on international assistance, almost all of the initial response for the first few days comes from local responders. Assessments of the damage, searching for survivors, establishing temporary shelter, food and water for displaced people—all of these are at least initially set up by local and regional first responders.

Experts in humanitarian assistance have been developing methods to increase the capacity of local level responders. Organizations such as Humanitarian Open Street Map use crowdsourced maps to determine where damage has occurred, where needs are and where incoming resources are being established. Creating order out of chaos is often the first step in the response, and new mobile technologies and social media are making this easier.

If local capacity for response is overwhelmed, the international humanitarian system mobilizes into action. In actuality, many international NGOs have long-term programs and an established presence in many cities where disasters happen frequently, but these operations are ramped up and new organizations flood into the area.

All of this attention can be problematic in itself. As humanitarian response has become a multi-billion dollar industry, organizations compete for influence and photo ops, and the influx of humanitarian aid can disrupt local markets or local capacity, or be diverted by combatants in armed conflicts. The most prominent example of this is food aid. When large amounts of food are introduced into a local market, the price of food goes down to the point that local producers and farmers are unable to maintain their livelihoods.

Recognizing the negative effects of such competition, leading humanitarian agencies have devised standards for humanitarian response, in an attempt to ensure some quality control. The original standards, however, were more applicable to refugee camps created in rural areas for large displaced populations. The constraints of urban infrastructure and the scale of urban populations have led some in the international community to reassess the current standards, and start the process for devising new standards more applicable to urban settings.

In addition to quality control, humanitarian organizations have devised the cluster system, by which agencies focus on particular areas of need—food, education, health—to avoid overlap and encourage better cooperation. Under the direction of the United Nations (UN), the cluster system divides the response tasks into different areas and assigns organization to focus on particular areas and defer to a lead organization for each area.

While a noble goal, in actual practice there is still significant disarray in response and cooperation, not only between international organizations, but also between international and local actors. After the 2009 earthquake in Haiti, over 900 organizations were involved in the relief efforts, most of which were small and inexperienced in large-scale disasters and, therefore, did not engage much with coordination efforts. Leaders within the UN criticized the slow progress on implementation of the cluster system.

AFTER THE DUST SETTLES

After the dust settles, the initial response phase transitions into longer-term recovery. There is a cyclic quality to disaster response in cities with recurrent disasters, whereby recovery aims to ramp up the assessment of risk, and implement more mitigation for the next disaster. With the influx of money, attention and energy, cities often have an opportunity after natural disasters to improve the infrastructure that was destroyed and rebuild it better.

But any attempt at radical change in the wake of a disaster is sure to have supporters and detractors. After Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans in 2005, the city's public school system underwent a severe overhaul. On one hand, students from the new schools—almost universally charter schools—have improved test scores and educational outcomes. On the other, many families have criticized the closure of historic neighborhood schools, difficulties in navigating the system and failures in providing for students with disabilities.

Local organizations working in the area long-term may also incorporate disaster planning and response into their mission. The health NGO Partners in Health has been working in Haiti since the 1980s. After the 2009 earthquake, they expanded their health clinics to serve people displaced in the settlement camps around Port-au-Prince, and scaled up their health care delivery, particularly for rehabilitation medicine and mental health services.

They built a new tertiary care hospital, which is in part an extension of their preexisting model of developing health care systems. But this also became a teaching hospital where medical and nursing trainees could sharpen their skills and develop as specialists—a need that was sharply felt after so many health care providers were killed or displaced by the earthquake.

As the people of the world become even more urban, and as climate change picks up pace, the impact of natural disasters on cities around the world remain some of the greatest threats to human health and stability. But as the potential for destruction grows, and inevitable future disasters loom, opportunities and ideas for better preparation, response and understanding are also developing at a rapid pace.

Ingenuity comes from human interconnectedness, and our urbanizing world presents many opportunities for the world's city dwellers to devise more and better ideas to protect themselves and their neighbors from the inevitable catastrophes to come.

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Why Do Some People Reject Climate Change?

Arek Sinanian

December 14, 2015

Despite the overwhelming scientific evidence of climate change and its effects, many people are still skeptical.

Climate change, its causes, its effects and how we should respond globally and individually are arguably one of the most divisive and challenging issues of our time. There is considerable and compelling scientific evidence not only for the causes, but

also for the long-term effects of climate change. Yet despite this, a global agreement among nations has been very difficult to attain. Despite the overwhelming scientific evidence, and explanations of what climate change is and how human activity is significantly contributing to it, the world is struggling to make the changes required to avert its inevitable effects on humans for generations to come.

There have been numerous global actions to coordinate and organize scientific consensus and global actions through agreements. Not least of these are the publications of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the activities of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Despite these positive global initiatives and considerable efforts to consolidate the science on climate, and despite the efforts to agree on equitable and workable actions to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases, we are nowhere near the targets needed to reach the levels of greenhouse gas reductions to minimize the potential catastrophic impacts.

There are many fundamental lessons to learn from the failure of the scientific community to communicate the messages, and for policymakers to act. These lessons may, in future, assist in dealing with other major global issues such as food and water supply, mass migrations, Internet-related problems, child pornography, human trafficking and others requiring globally coordinated actions and agreements.

It is interesting and important to explore the human behavioral and psychological aspects of climate science rejection. This is the first of a series of articles that provides a short summary of the various reasons for the rejection of the science (by some) and the complexities of developing and implementing appropriate global policies and actions. Where appropriate, reference is made to the relevant studies to allow for further research. Ultimately, it is hoped that a better understanding of the reasons for the rejection of, or difficulties policymakers and a minority in the general public have, in accepting the science of climate change and the urgency required for global action.

BACKGROUND

As an environmental management consultant over the past 30 years or so, and an advisor in energy efficiency, climate change risk management, greenhouse gas management and sustainability, I, like so many others, have been frustrated by the lack of adequate global action and agreement on greenhouse gas abatement mechanisms and policy. It is clear that while there has been some effort and

agreement to take action (such as the Kyoto Protocol and the latest deal following the 21st Conference of Parties), such actions have been patchy at best. But even more than frustration, there are a number of behavioral patterns in those who reject the science of climate change. The recurring question in my mind has been: Why do some people reject the science of climate change?

It is important to analyze the international community's (and in particular, some leaders' responses) to the threats of climate change as it may teach us a few lessons, and tell us how we should galvanize public opinion and address other global policy issues. The context of my analysis is this: Many studies have shown that the demographic of climate change denial has a significant peak for the "white, male and over 50" group. As this group has dominated (and still dominates) those in power, and particularly those making decisions on climate change policy, it is worth looking at the reasons for the rejection of the science and the lack of global agreements.

Before we begin, it must be recognized that the science of climate change is very complex. And although I believe that the scientific community could have done a much better job of explaining the basic scientific facts behind greenhouse gases and their impact on the climate, it has not been an easy task. Any discussion or explanation of climate change is complex due to the many elements of greenhouse gas emissions, the natural climatic patterns and the very complexity of how the climate behaves.

The Earth's climate includes the oceans, wind, the biosphere, upper and lower atmosphere, solar effects, glaciers, clouds, evaporation and so. Add to these the complexities in determining the long-term historical average temperatures of the Earth, and predicting future temperatures based on very large number of assumptions parameters and variables.

The study of climate change, therefore, involves the advancement and integration of our knowledge in all these areas of science, which individually are very complex. This complexity has contributed to the high level of misconception and misunderstanding by the general public, by the media and even by those in positions of power. Its complexity has also contributed to the difficulties experienced by the scientific community to fully explain the science and convince the global community in a cohesive and comprehensive manner.

Part of the complexity is the long-term trends and, at times, non-intuitive issues that have to be understood and accepted by the general public. For example, it is very

difficult for the general public to understand why and how a degree or two or even three increase in the global average can have such catastrophic impacts on the climate. It is also very unintuitive for the general public to understand why we still have very cold winters when there's global warming.

Adding to the barriers to global action on climate change are the very complex and enormous challenges in the development of equitable, fair and balanced actions that can be agreed upon by all nations and economies. Not least of the complexities are the wide gaps that exist between the developed and developing economies, the historical responsibilities and "ownership" of the atmospheric greenhouse gas emissions, and the enormous future costs of actions required to considerably reduce global emissions.

While accepting and being mindful of the many complexities and challenges, I have come up with a number of thoughts and theories, some quite unusual, in trying to understand why some people find it difficult to accept the science of climate change.

THE NEED TO BELONG

This is what normally happens to me. I'm at a private or public function. I'm introduced to someone who asks me what I do. I explain that I'm an environmental management consultant and a specialist in climate change and energy efficiency. Almost before I finish my explanation of what I do, my listener who is invariably male and over 50, interrupts me to say something like, "I don't believe in climate change."

Most go beyond that and say something like, "I think it's a rort, a sham" or words to that effect.

I'm so used to this that I don't react, and without changing my tone or showing any emotion, I ask the person, "... and what expertise in climate change do you have? Have you done a lot of reading on this topic?"

Without exception, the response is, "I actually don't have any expertise; I just don't believe it."

Again, I don't react. I stay calm and ask for further clarification saying, "What gives you this belief? Is it the science that you don't believe?"

Again, I either get a shrug of the shoulder or silence, so I continue trying to understand this person's reasons for not accepting or not "believing" the science, and I ask, "... and if it is the science you can't accept, what would it take for you to be convinced?"

Invariably, I'm not given a valid reason, and I'm told, "I just don't think climate change is happening, and even if it is, I don't think humans are responsible for it."

The above conversation, or similar, has taken place so many times that I am astounded by the consistency and regularity of it. It is this consistency that has made me investigate and research the reasons, and the psychology behind it. These types of responses are even more astounding when I consider that the vast majority of the people I'm referring to are seemingly intelligent, educated and generally well read and traveled.

Here is my explaining of it in terms of branding, of identity and of belonging. Humans are essentially and necessarily social animals, and the need for belonging to a mob or a tribe has been, and still is, vital for identity and our instincts for survival, dating back to the time when we lived in caves and hunted and gathered in groups. This instinct appears more prevalent in males and particularly those with some sense of responsibility—the "baby boomers." There are many badges we all wear to belong to a group or mob; the sporting team we follow; the religious group we belong to; where we live; even the type of food we eat.

I cannot find any other reason why a polite, intelligent stranger, having just met me, and even after knowing that I have spent my entire professional life pursuing sustainability and have considerable understanding of climate change, would hasten to tell me that it's a sham and that it does not exist. This is, in modern terms, a branding exercise on a personal level. It is a "badge of honor" that people want to wear, similar to belonging to a club, or a religious group and the like. It's why people wear the colors of their sporting team when they go shopping, wear religious clothing, dress in "gothic" style, etc.

Humans are fundamentally social animals and need to belong to a tribe. It's part of our survival instinct. Belonging to a tribe has been vital to our survival and development. In modern times, thousands of years after leaving the cave, we still have the need to belong. It helps shape our identity and self. And we do this through religious groups and affiliations, sporting clubs, political parties, environmental groups, social and many other groups.

While many other global issues such as child pornography, pedophilia, human trafficking and slave labor do not allow “camps” of views, climate change allows a number of camps. Here are some of the climate change camps or clubs that one can belong to:

- 1) Total acceptance of the science and the significant contribution of human activity to climate change, and acceptance that urgent action is needed;
- 2) Acceptance of climate science and that human activity is contributing to it, but also that we can't do anything about it, it's too far gone and too difficult. Let future generations and new technologies deal with it;
- 3) Acceptance of climate science and that human activity is contributing to it, but also that the contribution of human activity to climate change is insignificant or not large enough for major action and sacrifice;
- 4) Acceptance of the science of climate change, but not accepting human activity's contribution to it; it's a normal cycle of climate change that the globe has been experiencing for many millions of years;
- 5) Non-acceptance of climate science and whether it's happening at all;
- 6) Non-acceptance of climate science and whether it's happening at all, indeed that it's a conspiracy by those who want to destabilize developed economies.

Unlike the other global issues nominated earlier, climate change allows people to belong to the camps above.

In the next article of this series, I will explore other reasons for the difficulty that some people have for accepting climate change science.

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Climate Deal Will Only Stick If It's Just

Atul Singh

December 15, 2015

COP21 has ended with a deal, but the treaty will only stick if the rich in general and the US in particular lead by example and make painful sacrifices.

The 2015 Paris Climate Conference, or COP21 as it is otherwise known, has come to an end. The BBC says that a landmark deal has been agreed upon. Nearly 200 countries have agreed to cut emissions by 2020 that would limit global warming to “well below” 2 degrees Celsius. But will the treaty end up like the Rio Convention of 1992, a document of pious homilies that is conveniently ignored, once people leave Paris? Lest we forget, the Kyoto Protocol was never ratified by the US, and Canada withdrew from it in December 2012.

A QUESTION OF JUSTICE

Most educated people now recognize that climate change is dramatic and dangerous. Yet most are wedded to wanton consumption in their daily lives. Americans are a classic example. Their gas guzzling cars, manicured golf courses and factory farms are wrecking the environment. The American love of ever more stuff can be seen at Walmart or on Amazon. It keeps Chinese factories chugging away and increases toxic emissions. This makes the world warmer and might put places like Bangladesh and the Maldives under water. The poor and the marginalized suffer disproportionately from climate change. Is this just?

One view is that climate change is what it is. Some people are simply not bright, tough and lucky enough to make it. In the past, Native Americans and Aboriginal Australians lost their land, livelihoods and their lives because they could not adapt to changing circumstances. They were the human equivalent of dinosaurs. White settlers had superior technology and organization if not better genetics or religion. Now, it is the turn of Bangladeshis, Sudanese and others to fall by the wayside.

Another view is that climate change is clear and present danger. An overwhelming majority at COP21 shared this view. Doing something about it becomes tricky because

there is a fundamental contradiction in the way we live. We want to have our cake and eat it too. Wealthy countries became rich by using fossil fuels to power their economic growth. Others now want to do the same. To curb climate change, at least one of two things needs to change. Either demand for energy goes down or supply of energy becomes cleaner. How do we achieve either without tackling questions of justice?

For instance, should villagers in India or Malawi live without electricity or should Americans consume less of it? If electricity is essential to modern life, then should poor countries build coal-fired power plants? Should Americans build more public transport, use less gas guzzlers and drive less? Similarly, should the Chinese stop buying cars? If Bangladeshis suffer, who is responsible? Is it the Americans or the Chinese or others? When flooding occurs, where do refugees go? Do they deserve compensation, and if so, by whom?

A small percentage of the global population is responsible for most of the climate change. More importantly, it causes unequal burdens. The poor end up paying for the sins of the rich. A response requires sacrifice. Who bears that sacrifice and how is a matter of ferocious debate. Climate justice is quite simply an issue of fairness. How does the human family of over 7 billion distribute the burdens and share the sacrifices of dealing with climate change somewhat fairly?

ECONOMIC GROWTH VS ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

Right from the dawn of civilization, human beings have had an adverse impact on the environment. As long as we lived as tribes in forests, grasslands, deserts or snowy expanses, our social organizations were largely equal and our environmental footprint negligible. Settled agriculture led to complex hierarchical societies where elites appropriated surpluses, patronized art and built impressive edifices. Even the hallowed Athenian democracy flourished on the backs of slaves.

Over time, wild landscapes have given way to farms, towns and cities. This process has increased exponentially since the Industrial Revolution. In China, the biggest and fastest industrialization in human history has taken place in barely three decades. It turns out that human beings are infernally clever apes with insatiable needs and wants. They have been plundering and pillaging the planet with gay abandon for far too long.

Over the last few years, the impact of human action is starkly visible and climate change is causing unease if not dread or foreboding. The Rio Convention of 1992,

better known as Earth Summit, achieved precious little for a very simple reason. From 1991, a new *zeitgeist* dominated the world. The Soviet Union had collapsed. The American economic model with its cars, malls and golf courses was on the ascendant. Harvard and Hollywood came to dominate the global cultural imagination.

It turns out there is a slight wrinkle. Economic growth of the modern era is only possible through devastating environmental damage. In the headlong chase for wealth since 1991, no one has cared much for the environment. American consumers want cheaper stuff at Walmart. Chinese factory owners are eager to sell to Walmart. Investors want to maximize their returns. If this means open pit mining of gold that wrecks the landscape and ecological balance, then so be it.

In 1991, even socialist strongholds and Soviet allies like India capitulated to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In 1992, Deng Xiaoping doubled down on his 1978 bet to embrace markets. After *Nanxun*, his post-Soviet Union southern tour, he called for radical reform and the opening up of the Chinese economy. China has experienced rapid rates of economic growth since. It is now the workshop of the world and a hell of a lot richer than it was in 1992. The same is true for many Asian countries.

Obviously, this has come at a huge cost. Earlier this year, Indonesian forest fires generated more emissions per day than the US. Far too many species have gone extinct and emissions continue to rise. Floods, hurricanes, fires, droughts and other extreme weather conditions indicate that cataclysmic climatic conditions might not be that far off into the future. Yet our economic model is still based on the idea that human wellbeing is best captured by increasing growth. Ironically, Simon Kuznets, the pioneer who made calculation of growth possible, observed that “the welfare of a nation can scarcely be inferred from a measure of national income.” He went on to say that it was essential to distinguish “between quantity and quality of growth, between costs and returns, and between the short and long run. Goals for more growth should specify more growth of what and for what.”

TO BE RICH IS GLORIOUS

Details of the Paris deal are emerging, but the treaty will go the way of the Kyoto Protocol unless there is a change of culture and a shift in consciousness. If everyone uses the same amount of toilet paper as the Americans, there will be no trees left on the planet. If everyone buys the same amount of stuff as Uncle Sam’s covetous inhabitants, open pit mining would increase exponentially, factories will belch more smoke into the atmosphere and effluents would be released into already fragile water systems. Similarly, industrialized food production of the kind that has been recently

captured in a gruesome video of dairy farming in New Zealand has to end. It is cruel, gratuitously violent and terrible for the environment.

Truth be told, Americans have to jettison their economic model that is not only causing greater pollution, but also increasing inequality. A small number of people control an overwhelmingly large share of America's wealth. It is little surprise that US presidential elections are a circus that cost a packet and are increasingly a racket. *The New York Times* recently reported that "just 158 families have provided nearly half of the early money for the efforts to capture the White House."

The rich in other countries are aping their American counterparts. Russian oligarchs live lavish lives and buy assets like Chelsea Football Club. India's super rich lives in medieval-era opulence, and the richest man in the country has built a billion-dollar home. China's *nouveau riche* has an insatiable appetite for real estate in places like London and luxury brands like Gucci.

The robber baron capitalism of these countries has often led to nepotistic privatization of public wealth. A culture of consumption has developed, and the new rich are threatening to outdo their American counterparts with the typically fervent zeal of new converts. Disillusioned by socialism and communism, consumption is the new *mantra* in these lands. This *zeitgeist* is best captured by an iconic phrase used by a young Chinese woman to shoot down a poor suitor: "I would rather cry in a BMW than smile on a bicycle."

NO MACHINE GUN BACON

It is a tragedy that much of the world is aspiring to lead lives like the Americans. McDonald's and Coca Cola represent a culture of mass consumption and provide a buy one get one free deal of heart attacks and diabetes. Besides, they are crude fare, lacking the taste or sophistication of cuisines with centuries of tradition and a connection with what the French call *terroir*. The time has come for the rich in general and the Americans in particular to become more frugal. They have made the biggest contributions to climate change, and they now need to make the sacrifice if the Paris deal is to stick.

US President Barack Obama gave a typically rousing speech at COP21. Yet the US Congress that works ceaselessly to undercut him has already passed two resolutions against Obama's new rules to limit emissions by coal-fired power plants. These

resolutions aim to keep the US competitive in a fragile global economy by keeping the cost of energy low.

Others want to emulate the rich world and pursue economic growth through cheap energy. Before COP21, Arvind Subramanian, India's chief economic advisor, came out with guns blazing against "the rich world's move against fossil fuels." Already, India, China and other emerging economies are uncomfortable with many provisions of the climate deal. Americans could do well to remember that when rich white men jump up and down in woolen underwear waving their arms in alarm about the environment, others wonder if this is a cynical move to keep poor countries down. Few in the non-white world forget that after the first Thanksgiving, Native Americans or "Indians" were slaughtered even more than the turkeys.

Obama's enemies like Republican presidential candidate Ted Cruz do not help. The wonderful video in which he "cooks" bacon makes even the English with a penchant for porky breakfasts queasy. Cheap mass produced bacon from a dehumanized supermarket is rolled on the barrel of a machine gun covered with tin foil. Cruz then proceeds to fire the machine gun at a target until it is piping hot and the bacon is cooked. He then proceeds to eat this bacon with relish.

The Paris deal will stick only if it is seen as just. The world's dominant superpower and richest nation has to create new technologies that are cleaner but also by sharing them with others. Climate justice demands that the US changes its insane culture of revoltingly wasteful consumption. This will entail painful sacrifices, however, the US has no choice but to lead by example. The time has come for Uncle Sam to give up machine gun bacon.

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



Lebanon's Health Care is under Strain over Syrian Crisis

Lana Khattab

April 20, 2015

Health care workers in Lebanon struggle to cope with challenges caused by the Syrian refugee crisis.

With the Syrian crisis entering its fifth year, Lebanon currently hosts over 1.1 million Syrian refugees. This high intake of refugees has increased political tension but also vastly strained the already limited resources and infrastructures of a country with approximately 4.5 million people.

In January, Lebanese authorities announced new visa restrictions for Syrians crossing the border into Lebanon, making it practically impossible for refugees to enter the country.

International organizations and United Nations agencies have been delivering humanitarian assistance and attempting to fill gaps where possible. That includes providing food and cash assistance for refugees, as well as supporting the Lebanese government to respond to increased demand in the several sectors such as health care.

The capacity of the Lebanese health care sector to deal with the demand is vastly overstretched. Today, several years into the Syrian refugee crisis, conflicts around health care provision are visibly surfacing, most notably in health clinics.

With a large part of the international assistance directly targeted at Syrians, many Lebanese feel unfairly treated and left behind, since they also often struggle to cover the rising rent, utilities and health care costs.

These rapid developments over a short time-span have brought about a number of changes and challenges for health workers across Lebanon.

JUGGLING TENSION AND WORKLOAD

“Since the Syrian refugee crisis started, the stress levels at work have increased a lot,” says Safa, a receptionist and administrative assistant at the Makhzoumi Foundation’s health clinic in Beirut. “Instead of arguing with ten patients a day, I now argue with 30.”

As clinics across Lebanon have seen an increase in the number of Syrian refugee patients, frontline staff such as receptionists and nurses have often found themselves exposed to a new set of challenges in the workplace.

“The number of patients we get has increased over the past few years. I often don’t get a break during the day anymore,” says Safa.

But aside from the increased workload, health care workers are also faced with tension between Syrians and Lebanese.

“As we were getting more Syrian patients, the waiting rooms would fill up quickly. When our Lebanese patients would step in and find no place to sit or stand, they would often leave,” mentions Safa. “Lebanese don’t always want to wait with Syrians.”

A common solution adopted by health clinics is to segregate Syrian and Lebanese patients. Safa says this used to happen at her clinic until she came up with a new system: “Syrian patients would come and accuse me of letting Lebanese jump the queue, and the latter would come and accuse me of favoring Syrians over them. To avoid more tension, I developed a new numbering system. Now everyone knows whose turn it is to see the doctor.”

Nonetheless, she admits this has not solved all problems. Lebanese patients often call and take appointments in advance, to avoid waiting with fellow Syrian patients.

The most significant point of contention, however, is the specific targeting of assistance toward Syrians. Syrian refugees registered with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) pay three to four times less for a consultation fee at health clinics than Lebanese patients. Mirna, a certified nurse and colleague of Safa, explains: “A lot of issues happen around the differences in fees. Our Lebanese patients get upset and ask us why they don’t receive support as well.”

While health workers explain that the UNHCR covers part of the fee for Syrian refugees, they are often left vulnerable to patients' frustrated comments and questions.

"Lebanese seem to think that Syrians get everything for free but while that is not true, some Syrian refugees also think that and then accuse us of taking advantage of them," adds Mirna. "Most of my energy is spent explaining, clarifying and mediating between both sides."

FINDING WAYS TO DEAL WITH TENSION

So far, frontline health care workers have had to cope with these new challenges in a mostly improvised manner. As it seems unlikely that those Syrian refugees already in Lebanon will be able to leave the country anytime soon, an urgency exists to solve some of the pressing issues in the health care sector. While some short-term solutions are, to some extent, being used across Lebanese health clinics — such as segregation or prioritizing Lebanese patients — they may harm long-term cohesion between host and refugee communities. Health care workers as frontline staff play a pivotal role in bridging gaps and alleviating tension between both sets of people.

"For a good while I was chronically stressed," says Safa. "I would get home after work and not want to speak to my family. I became very snappy and avoided going out to meet friends. I then realized that the constant interaction with people at work has tired me out and the stress was affecting my private life."

Mirna has found another way of dealing with the difficult working conditions. She says: "I have started blocking my emotions toward the stress and conflict and am using humor to get me through the day. I laugh a lot and even sing at work, my colleagues find it amusing."

Some organizations have included stress management in their technical trainings for medical staff. International Alert, however, is the only organization that has focused on tension arising from the presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

As part of three-day trainings for health care staff held across Lebanon, over 120 nurses, receptionists and social workers met and discussed the issues they face at work. Using discussions and role-plays, health care staff learned and practiced how to communicate better with their Lebanese and Syrian refugee patients and prevent escalation.

Safa was very positive about her participation. “I was surprised to see that everyone is facing the same challenges,” she says. “I now feel much more confident in taking the responsibility away from myself when it really is not my fault. We cannot change the structure of things, but I can change my attitude in communicating better with patients and in not letting stress at work affect me. We really need more practical assistance to help us deal better with the changed working conditions.”

Lana Khattab is a programme officer at International Alert.



When Corruption Becomes Oppression in Bangladesh

Maria Khwaja Bazi

May 28, 2015

Maria Khwaja Bazi explores the systemic corruption hindering the effectiveness of educational investment at a Dhaka school.

A city of 16 million people, Dhaka is an assault on the senses. In April 2014, we whizzed through traffic behind the caged door of a rickshaw to visit a small private school. After a few training sessions, the teachers and I sat around a table, fans whirring overhead, and discussed the biggest issues they faced.

Bangladesh, famous in the development world largely for Grameen Bank, Mohammed Yunus and BRAC, struggles from many of the same issues as most developing countries with regard to education: lack of teacher training, low salaries and motivation, absenteeism, poor resources, unreachable rural areas and a lack of resources. Predictably, when sitting around a table with several teachers, the majority of complaints revolved around the rights and position of teachers.

“We only make \$100-300 per month in government schools,” the art teacher said, “and in private it can be as low as \$25.”

“Everyone says that the teaching profession is not very important,” said the mathematics teacher. “Everyone looks for a higher salary.”

Yet the truth of Bangladesh’s educational issues come down to the labyrinthine corruption of the system. Even in a reasonable school, with a highly motivated child, it is clear that no one could get anywhere without bribery and a solid ethnic or personal network to manipulate.

“What do you really need in Bangladesh?” the headmaster said to me. “Good grades, some connections and a bit of money.”

Investment in school is an ongoing and controversial subject. Although oft-quoted studies suggest a 10% return on education per year in school, the reality on the ground seems a bit mistier. The massive focus on primary education and universal literacy appears to work in Bangladesh’s favor, with 96% of children enrolled in primary.

However, the issue becomes cloudy in secondary and upper primary, where dropout rates begin to steadily increase, topping out at 65-70%. Although these rates have been declining, one can’t help but wonder why a child would choose to stay in school when their family cannot afford to bribe or manipulate their way into a job or university, afterward.

In fact, children and parents still seem to believe that education — primary education at least — is a valuable investment. The proliferation of low-cost private schools attests to this: “We have a commercial issue now, also,” the owner of the school stated. “I had to invest in a school. It was a good opportunity. I was thinking about earning some money.”

The abundance of low-fee private schools, in addition to the prevalence of bribery, unfortunately seems to further exacerbate the inequality in access to Bangladesh’s education system. Transparency International’s report on corruption shows that Bangladesh’s system disproportionately impacts poor families. As the report states: “For [higher income households] the rate of loss of income was less than the average whereas for the lowest income category of household the ratio was much higher, at 5.5 percent.”

It is clear the system fails the children who still enthusiastically dress in crisp uniforms every morning and walk to school, lunch bags swinging. The public's largely negative attitudes toward education as a means for advancement are a testament to this, as well. Everyone in the country who has experience with schooling highlights the lack of places in universities, the teachers who charge extra for tuition and the random fees that appear in "free" schools.

As a World Bank report states: "But it is not appropriate simply to presume that any spending on schools is a productive investment that will see the returns estimated for attainment. It is instead necessary to ascertain two things: how various investments translate into quality and how that quality relates to economic returns."

Perhaps a further question is whether investment is worthwhile when there is a social construct that prohibits growth and development for children. Even while corruption in aid and business is posited by individuals such as Bill Gates as being minor, corruption in education is clearly an issue that does require the "zero tolerance" measures if children are to succeed.

Corruption is not simply a "donor tax" in Bangladesh; in fact, it is the cause of, among other things, insufficient university places, poor families scrounging to send their children to schools that may or may not succeed, and children being prevented from learning because of an inability to pay.

The issue, of course, is the proverbial chicken-and-egg of whether people cheat the system because of opportunistic behavior, or whether they cheat the system simply because the system is already a failure. As Transparency International states: "Rather, [families in developing countries] seem to be rooted in the perception that education is failing to deliver what is expected, and that bypassing rules is a possible — and sometimes even the only available — 'remedy' for schools."

It is impossible not to consider corruption in a discussion on education and new programs, like Tanzania's Big Results Now, which are meant to increase accountability within education. Even Transparency International, with its focus on small-scale community accountability and integrity building, seems at a loss as to how to deal with the corruption epidemic.

As I sat around the table talking to teachers and students, their resignation weighed on the conversation.

“The brilliant students don’t get opportunities if they are poor,” the headmaster said, his hands folded in front of him. “That’s how it is here.”

It seems apparent that, in the case of a country like Bangladesh, education cannot be treated as an issue separate from politics, nepotism and corruption on a larger scale.

Although many organizations and nonprofits treat education as a “common good” goal, as with the Millennium Development Goals, a lack of focus on the fact that politics heavily influence and reduce chances for children may do more harm than good.

“It’s the exams we take in the dead of night because of bribes. The professors who do nothing. The schools with no teachers. These are all politicians,” one teacher sighed.

Perhaps, then, a first step to building a better system is a stronger enforcement of rules and regulations, from the top all the way down. At least in the case of Bangladesh, it appears this would give hope to children who leave school because success is an unattainable dream.

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



Is There a Role for Citizens in India’s Smart Cities Challenge?

Florence Engasser and Tom Saunders

October 30, 2015

Technology is helping India overcome its wide range of urban problems.

India faces a wide range of urban challenges—from serious air pollution and poor local governance, to badly planned cities and a lack of decent housing. India’s Smart Cities Challenge, which has now selected 98 of the 100 cities that will receive funding, could go a long way in addressing these issues.

According to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, there are five key instruments that make a “smart” city: the use of clean technologies, the use of information and communications technology (ICT), private sector involvement, citizen participation and smart governance. There are good examples of new practices for each of these pillars.

For example, New Delhi recently launched a program to replace streetlights with energy efficient LEDs. The Digital India program is designed to upgrade the country’s IT infrastructure and includes plans to build “broadband highways” across the country. As for private sector participation, the Indian government is trying to encourage it by listing sectors and opportunities for public-private partnerships.

Citizen participation is one of Modi’s five key instruments, but this is an area where smart city pilots around the world have tended to perform least well on. While people are the implied beneficiaries of programs that aim to improve efficiency and reduce waste, they are rarely given a chance to participate in the design or delivery of smart city projects, which are usually implemented and managed by experts who have only a vague idea of the challenges that local communities face.

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Engaging citizens is especially important in an Indian context because there have already been several striking examples of failed urban redevelopments that have blatantly lacked any type of community consultation or participation.

The Babasaheb Ambedkar Nagar area in Mumbai is a good example of these types of practices, where planning is left entirely to private developers, and solutions often make the initial problem worse. For example, a policy that allows developers to build luxury housing on slum land in exchange for providing free housing for the relocated slum-dwellers has seen many high-rise apartments built, which have the minimum legally required living space per capita. The replacement housing that slum-dwellers are offered is also usually high-rise flats.

This is extremely problematic because it does not take into the account the fact that many of them earn a living by turning the ground floor of their home into a shop or workshop.

Anticipating some of these criticisms, Union Minister of Urban Development Venkaiah Naidu recently stressed the need for every candidate Smart City plan to reflect citizens’ aspirations and be built in consultation with local communities.

A NEW APPROACH ?

In practice, how can Indian cities engage residents in their smart city projects?

There are many tools available to policymakers—from traditional community engagement activities such as community meetings, to websites like Mygov.in that ask for feedback on policies. Now, there are a number of reasons to think smartphones could be an important tool to help improve collaboration between residents and city governments in Indian cities.

First, while only around 10% of Indians currently own a smartphone, this is predicted to rise to around half by 2020, and will be much higher in urban areas. A key driver of this is local manufacturing giants like Micromax, which have revolutionized low-cost technology in India, with smartphones costing as little as \$30 (compared to around \$800 for the newest iPhone).

Second, smartphone apps give city governments the potential to interact directly with citizens to make the most of what they know and feel about their communities. This can happen passively, for example, the Waze Connected Citizens program, which shares user location data with city governments to help improve transport planning. It can also be more active, for example, FixMyStreet, which allows people to report maintenance issues like potholes to their city government.

Third, smartphones are one of the main ways for people to access social media, and researchers are now developing a range of new and innovative solutions to address urban challenges using these platforms. This includes Petajakarta, which creates crowdsourced maps of flooding in Jakarta by aggregating tweets that mention the word flood.

MADE IN INDIA

Considering some of the above trends, it is interesting to think about the role Smartphone's could play in the governance of Indian cities and in better engaging communities. India is far from being behind in the field, and there are already a few really good examples of innovative Smartphone applications made in India.

Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (translated as Clean India Initiative) is a campaign launched by Modi in October 2014, covering over 4,000 towns all over the country, with the aim to clean India's streets. The Clean India mobile application, launched at the end of 2014 to coincide with Modi's initiative, was developed by Mahek Shah and allows users to take pictures to report, geolocate and timestamp streets that need cleaning or problems to be fixed by the local authorities.

Similar to FixMyStreet, users are able to tag their reports with keywords to categorize problems. Today, Clean India has been downloaded over 12,000 times and has 5,000 active users. Although still at a very early stage, Clean India has great potential to facilitate the complaint and reporting process by empowering people to become the eyes and ears of municipalities on the ground, who are often completely unaware of issues that matter to residents.

In Bangalore, an initiative by the MOD Institute, a local nongovernmental organization, enabled residents to come together, online and offline, to create a community vision for the redevelopment of Shanthinagar, a neighborhood of the city. The project, Next Bengaluru, used new technologies to engage local residents in urban planning and tap into their knowledge of the area to promote a vision matching their real needs.

The initiative was very successful. In just three months, between December 2014 and March 2015, over 1,200 neighbors and residents visited the on-site community space, and the team crowdsourced more than 600 ideas for redevelopment and planning both on-site and through the Next Bangalore website.

The MOD Institute now intends to work with local urban planners to try get these ideas adopted by the city government. The project has also developed a pilot app that will enable people to map abandoned urban spaces via smartphone and messaging service in the future.

Finally, Safecity India is a nonprofit organization providing a platform for anyone to share, anonymously or not, personal stories of sexual harassment and abuse in public spaces. Men and women can report different types of abuses—from ogling, whistles and comments, to stalking, groping and sexual assault. The aggregated data is then mapped, allowing citizens and governments to better understand crime trends at hyper-local levels.

Since its launch in 2012, SafeCity has received more than 4,000 reports of sexual crime and harassment in over 50 cities across India and Nepal. SafeCity helps generate greater awareness, breaks the cultural stigma associated with reporting sexual abuse and gives voice to grassroots movements and campaigns such as Sayfty, Protsahan or Stop Street Harassment, forcing authorities to take action.

SOME ISSUES AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

It would be wrong to believe that smartphone applications have the ability to radically transform participation. Research from MySociety on who uses its technology, including FixMyStreet, found that digital tools usually help the most affluent, educated and connected segment of a city's population engage with their city government, rather than broadening engagement to new communities. Below are some of the most obvious issues which, if not resolved, might seriously hamper the effectiveness or impact of new methods for participation in an Indian context.

First of all, there is a certain aspect of hype behind any new technology, in the way it can deliver positive impact for processes like citizen engagement, or their potential in resolving market or government failures, particularly in the developing world. This is to be put in perspective against the visible impact these apps have had so far. Studies show that in fact the number of app downloads or active users remain too low to achieve any real impact.

On top of this, there has been a failure in linking up these apps, often created by citizens or small businesses, with the government services in charge. As Eric Bellman justly underlines in his article, of what use is an app to report sexual abuse if it fails to be connected to local police services?

There is also the danger of substituting offline, traditional participation methods, to exclusively online ones, especially in a country such as India, where one out of five citizens (22% of the population) live under the poverty line. These citizens, forming the "bottom of the pyramid" (BoP) are deprived from accessing new technologies, including smartphones, computers or the Internet. In 2014, only 19.1% of the total population had access to the Internet, regardless of the device.

These BoP communities often rely on low-tech or frugal solutions. A good illustration of this is the large numbers of text messages exchanged each year in India: over 332 billion in 2013 alone. These communities in particular are the ones who risk being left

out by digital and smartphone-enabled consultations, but whose needs in reshaping their cities and communities are the most pressing.

So, how can Indian cities make the most of citizen participation in their Smart Cities Challenge projects?

First of all, municipal governments across India need to make sure traditional channels for participation (public consultations, forums) are in place and ensure citizens are consistently informed of what is happening in their neighborhood and are given the opportunity to have a say in it.

This needs to happen before local governments even start daydreaming about the novelty smartphones could bring. City officials could also start thinking about combining online and offline citizen engagement tools, such as what Next Bangalore has been doing, to enhance citizen engagement, ensuring the inclusivity of the process while modernizing it and improving its reach.

Additionally, municipalities, in their effort to develop a smart city vision, must build on the unique advantages of Indian cities and the great work that citizens, community groups and small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) are already doing, rather than starting from scratch or adopting “best practice” from developed world cities.

Finally, to enable a move toward a greater share of online participation channels, such as through smartphone applications and social media, municipalities need to make sure they invest in smart people and not only in smart technologies. A recent Nesta report on bottom-up smart cities highlighted the necessity for city government employees and citizens to develop a better understanding of data and technology in order to make the most of the new opportunities they offer.

Only then will tools like smartphones and mobile applications have the potential to revolutionize city governance and contribute to the making of a people-centric smart city.

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Business Should Step in on Behalf of Migrant Workers in the Gulf

David Segall

November 11, 2015

The rights abuse that migrant workers face in the Gulf is a classic case of collective action failure.

No one can deny the benefits of urban development and modernization, which can lift people out of poverty, create affordable housing and inspire flourishing arts and cultural scenes. Ambitious construction projects can create thousands of jobs, and often are sources of national pride.

But in the modern global economy, where tasks are highly specialized and goods and services seem to emerge from nothingness at the terminus of complex supply chains, we often forget those who actually do the building.

The migrant workers who are increasingly taking up construction work far from home are generally grateful to have the opportunity to earn higher wages than they otherwise might. But businesses and governments alike must ensure that these workers, like others contributing to long and sometimes convoluted supply chains, are adequately protected.

For decades, labor rights advocates have attempted to push for a set of international legal norms that would give migrant workers the same labor rights as workers who are citizens of their countries of employment. Due largely to political dynamics in countries that receive migrant workers, however, they have been mostly unsuccessful in achieving consensus on this front.

CURRENT CHALLENGES

In recent years, advocacy groups and the media have highlighted the situation of migrant construction workers in Arab Gulf countries, including the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait and Bahrain. As these nations continue to draw on oil and natural gas revenues to develop at a furious pace, and as plans for Qatar to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup and for the UAE to host Expo 2020 ramp up,

hundreds of thousands of construction workers continue to stream into the region. These migrants travel to the Middle East in search of marginally improved economic possibilities. Most come from South Asian countries, including India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka, where widespread unemployment or conflict severely limits their opportunities.

The case of migrant construction workers in the Gulf is illustrative of broader challenges related to global migrant labor. The serious problems faced by migrant construction workers there are well-documented, including the payment of burdensome recruitment fees, late or nonpayment of wages, substandard housing, passport confiscation and lack of access to legal remedy. Many workers have even lost their lives due to unsafe site conditions or inadequate training procedures.

Critics of this system have recommended a series of measures Gulf governments should take to alleviate these hardships, including legal reform of the *kafala* (sponsorship) system, more robust enforcement of existing protective provisions and the mandating of specific practices by corporations and recruitment agencies operating there.

For a variety of reasons, however, Gulf governments have to date been slow or uneven in enacting meaningful policy shifts. For example, only some Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members have moved to ensure electronic wage payments to workers. And while Bahrain and the UAE have taken steps to permit workers to change employers after a specified time period, Qatar has yet to implement this change. Most importantly, no Gulf country has yet demonstrated an adequate commitment to enforcing its own laws against late or nonpayment of wages, passport confiscation or substandard housing, or has meaningfully eased barriers to justice for workers with grievances.

OPPORTUNITY TO PROMOTE LABOR RIGHTS

Businesses with interests in these construction projects also have an important role to pay in helping to address these challenges.

Some of these businesses have already publicly expressed a desire to improve conditions for workers, but their success in doing so has been uneven at best.

One reason for the lack of progress is the absence of well-defined rules for the recruitment of construction workers with clear operational boundaries. Corporations source and subcontract so often and with such vigor that business leaders often genuinely don't know who makes their own companies' products or does their construction work. This reality has spurred the creation of multiple initiatives aimed at improving supply chain transparency and responsibility.

In many ways, the current situation is a classic case of collective action failure. No one stakeholder wants to take initiative unless others also commit to taking the plunge. In the case of the Gulf, the cultural, sports and academic institutions that sponsor some of these projects—often based in developed countries—claim that they have no authority over GCC policies. Contractors, in turn, often note that they cannot reasonably be expected to police all subcontractors to which they are increasingly farming out work. Subcontractors, for their part, complain they are often not paid on time by principal contractors, making it difficult for them to pay their workers on time and in full, or to provide adequate living accommodations.

The governments of the workers' countries of origin, which benefit from the economic boost provided by remittances, have minimal political leverage over the governments of the Gulf countries hosting their workers. But they also do very little to crack down on illegal or unscrupulous recruitment agencies within their own borders that compel workers to pay onerous fees. This process often leaves workers heavily indebted even prior to embarking on their journeys.

Of course, workers themselves sit at the bottom of this very complicated and heavy chain, and bear the brunt of its cost with little recourse.

The complexity of this business and political landscape means that any comprehensive solution to the crisis will ultimately require multi-stakeholder cooperation, and a sharing of moral—and financial—responsibility. This is a major challenge that will not be easily accomplished. But it *can* be accomplished.

Organizations that commission or sponsor large projects can insist—in the form of contractual conditions for their cooperation—that GCC governments institute and implement stronger measures. Contractors can likewise refuse to partner with subcontractors that fail to live up to high labor standards. These construction firms can work cooperatively to ensure that they do not undercut one another in this regard. And the governments of countries sending workers can, at the very least, crack down on

unscrupulous recruitment agencies within their own borders, clearing the field for ethical recruiters who play by the rules.

Construction firms should recognize that working with ethical recruiters, ensuring on time and in-full payment to workers and providing adequate safety and accommodation provisions are not only the right things to do—they're good business. These steps minimize reputational and legal risks, and can encourage long-term and more stable business relationships with their suppliers.

MOVING FORWARD

In today's increasingly interconnected but unequal world, economic migration can serve an important equalizing function. Wages earned abroad and sent home by migrant workers can be transformative for affected families, villages and even entire countries. And while the free movement of workers and their wages across borders is no substitute for long-term economic development in impoverished regions, most labor and human rights advocates would argue for continued migration through less restrictive border crossing policies.

Indeed, as globalization continues to define economic and labor trends, the faces behind the glitz and glamor of urban development and renewal are increasingly those of migrants. But because of their transitory status, these workers are often vulnerable to abuse in their destination countries.

While the governments of countries that send and host these migrant construction workers—including GCC and South Asian countries—can and should take action to reform recruitment and employment practices, workers must not be held hostage to their present inaction.

Businesses should urge governments to live up to their obligations. But until that happens, they also can take important and immediate steps of their own to improve the situation for workers—steps that are in line with their obligations to shareholders. Most importantly, if successful, these steps will be a boon to business *and* will ultimately inspire Gulf and other governments to enshrine best practices in their legal and regulatory systems.

The major practical obstacle to improving the lives of migrant construction workers is the multi-layered nature of business interests in these projects. That is why the cultural

and academic institutions, contractors, subcontractors and recruitment firms which are—understandably—looking to turn a fair profit, need to work collectively to develop industry standards aimed at addressing current human rights challenges.

Just as consumers, investors and businesses are becoming increasingly attuned to the human rights of workers who produce the food they eat and clothing they wear, those who benefit from urban growth booms must take steps to ensure that the people who construct our skylines are adequately protected. The results would be extraordinary and inspiring, and workers cannot afford to wait any longer.

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The Dangerous Job of a Human Rights Defender

Deeyah Khan

December 21, 2015

The life of a human rights defender can be very lonely and isolated.

Growing up, I was exposed to courageous feminists from Pakistan, the Middle East and India when my father would gather artists and intellectuals from different parts of the world in our home for discussions about world politics, human rights and social justice. As a young girl, I was inspired and moved by these women, mesmerized by their courage, kindness and fearlessness. Women who were larger than life speaking truth to power, regardless of the personal costs. I was in awe of what they stood for, but at that time I had very little sense of the danger they were in.

However, over the years, I have come to realize that being a lawyer, journalist, artist or trade unionist can be a job with more risk of physical injury than working in a mine or

construction site—if those legal, literary or organizational skills are directed at securing human rights.

SAFETY ON THE LINE

It is those who work to secure the human rights of women, sexual and ethnic minorities, and the poor who are the least secure themselves—vulnerable to state and corporate harassment from hired thugs, the forces of the law and armed groups; vulnerable to smear campaigns presenting them as terrorists, security threats or immoral persons; invasions of their privacy; harassment of friends and relatives; intimidation; imprisonment; seizure of their assets.

Endless methods are applied to attempt dissuading human rights defenders from raising their voice against injustice, discrimination and oppression. These women are not just fighting for their own rights to freedom and equality in dignity and rights, but they are also fighting for me and all women and girls around the world.

If these women put their own safety on the line for all of us, then what are we doing for them? What can we do for them?

I believe solidarity is key. When I participated in a panel conversation at the United Nations (UN) in Geneva for Human Rights Day 2013, I met one of my heroines, Pakistani activist Hina Jilani, who mentioned that the life of a human rights defender can be a very lonely and isolated one. Her comment shows the importance of solidarity. That's the least we can do for our sisters on the frontlines of the struggle for women's emancipation from discrimination, violence and injustice.

In 2013, the organization Frontline Defenders noted the killing of 26 human rights defenders from countries as various as Cameroon, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Guatemala, Honduras, India, Kenya, Pakistan, the Philippines, Somalia and Venezuela. Of course, many people have simply disappeared, and their ultimate fate will never be known.

The range of abuses these brave individuals confront is immense—for activities from protecting the environment and defending the cultural rights of indigenous peoples, to attempting to unionize labor. One of the more precarious areas of activism, however, is campaigning for women's sexual and reproductive rights, and against violence against

women, because these confront deep-seated patriarchal ideologies around “family values” and “morality.”

According to the Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition, female activists “face the same types of risks faced by all human rights defenders but because of their gender they are also the target of gender-based violence and gender-specific risks.”

In Iran, for example, women’s rights defenders have faced imprisonment, which may include torture, for crimes as trivial as attending peaceful demonstrations. Nasrin Sotoudeh, an Iranian lawyer and winner of the European Parliament’s 2012 Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought, was given a sentence of six years for her defense of children facing the death penalty. The charges against her included not wearing a headscarf in a video and “acting against national security,” as well as spreading anti-regime propaganda.

Although she was released early, there remain an unknown number of political prisoners in Iran’s notorious Evin Prison, in which the torture and sexual abuse of prisoners have been suspected.

VIOLENCE FROM ALL SIDES

Violence against human rights defenders does not only come from the state, but can also come from the family. Laxmi Bohara, a Nepalese activist, was allegedly murdered by her husband and his mother in 2008. Her husband and his family saw her activism as tantamount to adultery and unsuitable for a “good” Hindu woman. Those of her friends and colleagues who campaigned for justice in her case were themselves targeted with threats and violence.

There is a dizzying amount of evidence for the persecution of female human rights defenders. Wabiwa Kabisuba ran a center for victims of sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo. She was dragged from her home by eight uniformed men and shot dead. Kabisuba is only one of many women threatened and attacked in the DRC.

Lorena Cabnal was one of many women opposing the exploitation of mineral resources upon land claimed by the indigenous Xinka people of Guatemala, and supporting women’s rights. She has received death threats for her work from 2004.

Hina Jilani, who served as special representative of the UN secretary general on the situation of human rights defenders from 2000-08, is unequivocal about the value of protecting human rights defenders, which she identifies as “central to the promotion of human rights, the development and strengthening of democracy and the respect for the rule of law.”

The current political climate does not make this easy. The present special rapporteur, Michel Forst, says: “Around the world governments are using the imperatives of economic development and the need to counter terrorism and violent extremism to justify, or as a subterfuge for, laws and policies which unnecessarily and disproportionately restrict the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly. Increasingly, these laws not only restrict but criminalise the exercise of these rights and the vital work of human rights defenders.”

IN OUR DEBT

We owe it to these heroes on the frontlines to consider the work to defend human rights activists: a free and fearless civil society is essential to democracy, peace and justice. The actions of human rights defenders like Nasrin Sotoudeh, Laxmi Bohara, Wabiwa Kabisuba and Lorena Cabnal serve on the frontline of the fight for human rights for us all. The most dangerous job in the world is the most vital for humanity.

It is in all our interests to take every possible step to reduce the hazards of standing up for the victims of human rights abuses. These courageous and compassionate women are making the world a better place for the coming generations. I acknowledge their sacrifices and contributions for human dignity and equality, and my heart is filled with gratitude and respect for them. I stand in support and solidarity with the very best expression of humanity and courage—these remarkable champions of human rights—I stand with them in respect and solidarity.

Deeyah Khan is a critically acclaimed music producer and Emmy and Peabody Award-winning documentary film director.



One Year Ago, I Was in Baghdad When ISIS Took Iraq

Landon Shroder

July 2, 2015

Over a year has passed since the Islamic State stormed Mosul, and there is little to be optimistic about in Iraq.

One year ago, I was in Baghdad as the Islamic State (IS) overran Iraq. By that time, I had already spent seven long years of bombings, rocketing, shootings and mass killings inside the war-torn country.

Over the years, most of us tried to work normal jobs, but somehow, we always returned to Iraq in one form or another: contractor, oilman, security—it didn't really matter, the skill set was transferable between each of them.

This is why none of us ever really left Iraq. Understanding terrorism and insurgency had become the only thing we were really good at. We had become fluent in the tactics and techniques of groups with names like IS, JRTN and MRTC—each having their own signature, their own trademark. And on June 10, 2014, we watched as IS overran most of Iraq's Sunni provinces. Within 48 hours, a full-blown insurrection had developed only a mere 70 miles up the road from us in Baghdad.

For all the promises and ambitions, Iraq was never going to recover after the invasion of 2003. Certainly not in the way American politicians thought it could, or would; our cultures were never compatible, our religions too foreign and our styles of business not well-suited. The old sectarian hatred ran too deep.

And, once again, as the United States widens its involvement in Iraq, one inescapable fact must be remembered. Without the US invasion of Iraq, there would be no Islamic State. The disbanding of the Iraqi army, police and intelligence services, along with various political and military mistakes, allowed IS to thrive and metastasize in the

chaos that followed Saddam Hussein's removal—first as al-Qaeda in Iraq, followed by the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) and finally, in its current form, as the Islamic State—or the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

For those of us who had spent years in Iraq, IS was not something new, but a constant reminder of just how tenuous the balance of power had become in the Middle East after the invasion in 2003. Iraq had become a battleground for countries such as Saudi Arabia and Iran to project their influence through religious, cultural and military means. Proxy groups and terrorist networks killed hundreds of thousands of civilians as a result.

After almost \$2 trillion and 4,486 soldiers killed, US foreign policy landed right back where it began: in the middle of a conflict it could never win.

BLACK FLAGS ON HUMVEES

None of us were really surprised when reports started circulating that places like Mosul, Tal Afar and Hawajjah had become occupied by insurgent forces. While IS was a crack fighting force, whose skills had been sharpened during a decade of war-fighting in Iraq and Syria, the Iraqi Security Forces also lacked any real motivation to stand and fight. The billions spent on equipment and training had become worthless once the army was divided along political and sectarian lines. The pictures of abandoned army barracks, discarded uniforms and insurgents riding on US Humvees—flying the black flag of the Islamic State—only confirmed this further.

What did surprise us was the organization, and ground game, which had been put in place to support the growing Sunni insurgency. Rather than being a spontaneous outburst of violence, this was a coordinated campaign, bringing together IS, anti-government tribes, former Baathists and jihadist adventurers under one de-facto command structure. Nothing like this had ever happened before, and there was little expectation that the Iraqi government could contain what was occurring. Everyone in Baghdad was preparing for the worst.

The foreign policy mistakes in Iraq have been truly remarkable. Some were made due to a naive confidence in American influence, others due to uncompromising political positions. Not accepting that Iraq and Syria were becoming a single continuous battlefield, as far back as 2012, was a perfect combination of both.

Due to a lack of unified policy, IS could extend its forward operations within striking distance of Baghdad, while connecting to a strategic axis that led right back into Syria. This ensured that a steady flow of fighters, finance and weapons could be facilitated with relative ease. Any significant military defeat could be simply managed by retreating back across the border, where one policy ended and another began. Only the US could conceive such a schizophrenic regional strategy. And yet one year later, as bombs keep falling and soldiers continue to deploy, no policy has been implemented to address this reality.

THE MARCH OF WAR

The Islamic State continued to advance toward the capital on June 12, as the tension spreading throughout Baghdad was palpable and alive. No one was confident that the security forces could defend the city in the event of an assault. If the defenses were breached, law and order would have immediately broken down—mayhem would be the result. This was not an existential fear, but a near certainty, given the dissolution of the Iraqi army throughout the Sunni provinces, which bordered Baghdad to the north, east and west. Food and fuel prices had inflated almost 300% on the news that major towns such as Baiji and Tikrit were being occupied by insurgents.

If we had to evacuate by road, our only option would be to move south, through the “Triangle of Death,” an area renowned for its attacks against the US military during the darkest days of the US occupation. An intelligence review of this maneuver, at the time, read something like this: “A southern road move could result in a catastrophic incident, along with an inability to provide any support if an incident did occur.”

As we planned for an evacuation scenario, reports started circulating that an international security team had become stranded at the country’s largest oil refinery in Baiji. Their fate was unknown, but IS had closed in on all sides and prevented their evacuation.

Iraq is a country that should have never really existed and was only created as a result of a secret agreement between the British and French governments during World War I. Its national boundaries are artificial and do not conform to the tribal, ethnic or cultural makeup of the region. When insurgents captured the border crossings between Iraq and Syria, those boundaries were effectively erased, eliminating 100 years of colonial history. This had always been the ideological objective of the Islamic State, even before the conflicts in Syria and Iraq were indistinguishably conjoined. The idea of the

“caliphate” is central to this, and we all knew that as the border dissolved, so too would the existing geopolitical reality in the Middle East.

When Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, Iraq’s most senior Shia cleric, issued a call-to-arms in defense of the state and holy places, we knew the security forces had lost the initiative. The government was failing to control the situation, and thousands of young men were now joining Shia militias to fight against IS.

During the darkest days of the previous insurgency, Shia militias murdered civilians and attacked US forces with near impunity. In 2007, the militias kidnapped five British citizens from the Ministry of Finance in Baghdad, killing all but one. The same groups were now mobilizing only a few streets over from us.

With support from Iran, the conflict would soon take on a permanent sectarian dynamic, making any kind of reconciliation between Sunni and Shia almost impossible. Armed young men were openly roaming the streets of Baghdad, inspired by a religious mandate not subject to any government authority.

The Iraqi government started shutting down media and communications on June 13, and the assumption throughout the international community was that Iraq was on the verge of meltdown. These were desperate acts, which had also preceded government collapse in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya. Legislation was passed restricting national media from reporting on battlefield losses, and a memo started circulating from the government explaining the need to obstruct the Internet and social media.

We could no longer access Facebook, Twitter or YouTube in Baghdad. The conflict was being played out on social media, which was rapidly becoming one of our most valuable sources of information. IS fighters and civilians were posting real-time images and video direct from the battlefield. They were startling and brutal in their immediacy, some occurring only moments before being posted. Pictures would soon appear on Twitter documenting the mass execution of around 700 Iraqi soldiers. They were ordered to face down in a ditch, while militants indiscriminately fired into the mass of bodies.

The possibilities seemed endless for a conflict that combined the legacy of religious crusading with 21st century social media technology. The Middle East would never be the same because of it.

THE LONG CYCLE OF VIOLENCE CONTINUES TO GRIND ON

Before long, I was relocated out of Baghdad. By our estimates, at least 22 cities and towns had been occupied by insurgents in the space of 72 hours, and eight were still be contested. They had also secured six airbases, five pieces of national infrastructure and innumerable pieces of military hardware. Of the almost 200 fighting units of the Iraqi Security Forces, only 80 could be accounted for. The rest had either been abandoned, captured or scattered throughout the Sunni provinces.

On the day I left, the airport was a disorganized mess of people, everyone trying to board a plane for somewhere else. Soldiers lulled about in worn US military surplus, smoking and laughing, while trucks crammed with militia recruits headed north—most would be dead in days.

One year has now passed since the Islamic State stormed Mosul, and there is little to be optimistic about in Iraq. Victory can only come from politics and reconciliation, and a defeat of sectarian ideals, but this is unlikely, given the current state of affairs in the Middle East. The conflict in Iraq has been ongoing in one form or another since the Battle of Karbala in 680 AD. For those involved, either Sunni or Shia, this history will never be limited by the narrow politics of 2014, but connected to a deeper worldview that transcends things like national boundaries and international assistance.

US policy in Iraq never accounted for this, and it still doesn't. For many years to come, Iraq will be one of the great political conundrums for policymakers because there will be little strategic gain for continued involvement. Nonetheless, the decisions made by the US government inflamed the old animosities, and now there is a real responsibility to ensure people are not slaughtered endlessly because of failed military adventures. Even if the Islamic State should be defeated militarily, its ideology will continue to persist, and Iraq will still have militias, tribes, former regime types and armed factions to contend with. Each of which will fight to defend their own interests. The conditions have now been set for permanent instability, and like everything else in Iraq, the long cycle of violence will continue to grind on.

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Yemen Faces a Catastrophe as Violence Intensifies

Dina Yazdani

October 2, 2015

The Saudi-led fight against Houthi rebels in Yemen will lead to irreversible consequences for the stability of the country and its people.

Six months after a Saudi-led coalition launched an offensive against Shia Houthi rebels, it is difficult to conceive how the situation on the ground in Yemen has improved. The collateral damage caused by the onslaught has been colossal and potentially irreversible.

Yemeni civilians have never been as vulnerable as they are now. The war has created a humanitarian crisis that has not only left them terrorized in the crossfire, but also vulnerable to the rise of radical Islamist actors who have taken advantage of the ensuing power vacuum. If the war continues, there is little prospect of a peaceful end to the conflict.

After the Iran-aligned rebels seized the capital Sanaa in November 2014, the Saudis feared a total Shia takeover of Yemen. In the first month-long military campaign dubbed “Operation Decisive Storm,” Saudi Arabia launched airstrikes on Houthi targets primarily in their strongholds of Sanaa and Aden, in hope of forcing their complete withdrawal and restoring the ousted President Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi to power.

The coalition has continued to bombard Yemen vis-à-vis airstrikes, and now an Emirati and Qatari ground invasion has followed in what was supposed to be a “limited” military operation. The outcome has been catastrophic for the stability of Yemen and its people.

WATER CRISIS IN YEMEN

The humanitarian crisis created by the war is staggering in even the tumultuous history of the small Arab state. According to the United Nations (UN), the conflict has left nearly 2,000 Yemeni civilians dead—half of the total death toll.

This should not come as a surprise. In the first month of Operation Decisive Storm, the Saudi-led coalition's targets included a village, market, multiple schools, a mosque, health facility and dairy factory. The coalition has showed an extreme disregard toward civilian life, especially Shia. It has purposely targeted Shia Yemenis—the Zaydis—for simply belonging to the same Islamic sect of the Houthis. The concentration of airstrikes have taken place in the Zaydi-dominated Saada province in the north, far removed from the Houthi-occupied Sanaa and Aden, which evidences the coalition's malicious intent to punish the entire Zaydi population for the Houthis' actions.

The UN also claims that the area with the most egregious access constraints for humanitarian assistance is in Saada, whose residents have essentially been put in a chokehold by Riyadh. Although the Saudi-led, Sunni Arab-dominated coalition claims the goal is to transfer power from the Houthis to the former government, its actions have demonstrated a clear desire to weaken the Shia population in order to guarantee that Yemen remains in the hands of its Sunni allies.

Yemeni civilians have not only been caught in-between the clashes. They also suffer from a water crisis that preceded the conflict long ago. Before the Saudi-led "intervention" against the Houthis, 13 million Yemenis lacked access to clean water. Now, Oxfam reports that in the past few months alone, a further 3 million Yemenis are without water as a direct result of the war. That leaves a total of two-thirds of the population, or 16 million, without access to clean water.

Consequently, Yemenis have been forced to rely primarily on trucks to transport water. However, the control of maritime traffic by the Saudi-led coalition has prevented commercial goods from entering the country, which has adversely led to fuel shortages. As a result, the price of water has quadrupled in some areas. Not only did Yemen face a shortage of natural water, but now Yemenis struggle to have safe access to water or even afford it.

HERE COMES THE ISLAMIC STATE

The humanitarian crisis sparked by the war is, and will continue to be, disastrous for the Yemeni people. However, equally a threat for the future stability of the country is the rise of radical Islamist groups, including al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the even more draconian Islamic State (IS).

The latest conflict has rendered years of US drone strikes on AQAP strongholds useless and has ultimately reinvigorated the terrorist group. One month after the Saudi-led offensive began, AQAP took advantage of the deteriorating security situation and freed hundreds of its members in a mass jailbreak in the northeast.

AQAP, however, is less interested in bringing down the Houthis than it is in gathering support. One strategy it has taken is by sharing power with those it has either liberated or protected from the Houthis. In the city of al-Mukalla, Ben Hubbard from *The New York Times* reports, AQAP only maintained control of one police station after chasing Houthi rebels out. It fostered the creation of a civilian council and provided it with a budget to run the city instead of capitalizing on the opportunity to expand its power. Locals consequently began to view AQAP as a savior, not an enemy.

The Islamic State has similarly capitalized on the Saudi-led war against the Houthis. Prior the Houthi takeover, IS was virtually nonexistent in Yemen. The group paved the road of sectarianism when four of its members burst into two Shia mosques strapped with explosives in Sanaa and blew themselves up, leaving 137 worshippers dead.

IS continues to launch attacks throughout the country that target Zaydi Shia, not just Houthi rebels, in hope of exasperating the sectarian divide. While the resurgence of AQAP has predominantly taken place in the south, IS has begun to grow in the north. The Islamic State has resorted to arming and recruiting local tribesmen to join its fight against Shia.

A new crisis could emerge as the two terrorist organizations expand into central Yemen and compete for support among the locals, which would not only jeopardize the country's security even further, but also make the conflict that much more complicated and difficult to resolve. Additionally, what is significant about the rise of these Islamist actors is how it posits the United States and the Saudi-led coalition on the same side of its traditional adversaries: al-Qaeda and the Islamic State.

TRIBAL WARFARE

Another consequence that has been relatively overlooked and could shatter Yemen's historical tribal system is the arming of Yemeni tribesmen by the Saudi-led coalition. After the launch of Operation Renewal of Hope—the ground operation—Riyadh began flying in hundreds of tribesmen from southern Yemen to Saudi Arabia to train and provide them with light arms.

These Yemenis have proved to be a formidable force against the Houthis because of their familiarity with the terrain and support among locals—many of whom are skeptical of the foreign coalition. Arming them could have dire consequences.

First, considering both IS and AQAP's growing support from these groups, it would be unlikely that some of these weapons provided by Saudi Arabia would *not* end up in the hands of these radical Islamist groups—whether voluntarily handed over, coerced or forced.

Second, these tribes, which have historically practiced nonviolent methods of mediating disputes, will now have weapons that they could use as leverage against weaker and unarmed tribes. The southern tribesmen could potentially use their arms to launch a stronger military campaign to secede from Yemen, which they have wanted for decades. Their training and armament could be a game-changer in their movement for secession.

Yemen has struggled under decades of turmoil. The latest war launched by the Saudi-led coalition has only deepened the fragile state's preexisting struggles and could leave behind irreversible damage. The rise of the Islamic State and the resurrection of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula will continue to pose a major threat to Yemen's security even after the inevitable ouster of the Houthis from power.

However, the likely destruction of past, present and future peace talks between the rival political groups could have an even more disastrous outcome: the lack of a unified government to resolve these issues in a post-war Yemen. Now that the Houthis have grown power-hungry as they slowly expand their territory and that sectarianism has peaked, there is little prospect of any power-sharing arrangement being made.

The current conflict could have been entirely avoided, and Yemen could have been facing a transitional period of a new unified government instead of being dragged through yet another war. According to Jamal Benomar, the former UN envoy to Yemen, a peace deal between the Houthis and warring factions was near to being reached before the Saudi airstrikes began. It is difficult to imagine one being made under the current circumstances, especially with the shadow of Yemen's overpowering neighbor: Saudi Arabia.

Dina Yazdani is a freelance journalist and a reporter at Fair Observer.



Terrorism in Paris is Not France's Fault... It's Europe's

Bruce Newsome

November 15, 2015

Europe must improve border security first, before it blames national security.

In less than three hours on the night of November 13, seven terrorists killed at least 129 people and wounded 352 others, mostly with small arms (their suicide explosives were used to martyr themselves at the end of their killing sprees). The Islamic State (IS) has claimed responsibility.

France's terrorism risk is out of control. The government put thousands of soldiers on the streets following the attack on the *Charlie Hebdo* office on January 7, whose conspirators killed 12 people and also claimed allegiance to IS. On November 13, the attackers avoided the soldiers by striking at unprotected restaurants, bars and a concert hall. Clearly, more soldiers cannot secure Paris.

So far, the focus of blame is France's intelligence failure. But how could French intelligence be expected to track people deemed to be a threat who may have been in Syria a month ago? Even if French intelligence could track such people, how would France have stopped them crossing into the country once they had entered Europe?

France cannot secure itself with open borders. No state could secure itself with open borders. Homeland security is impossible without control of borders. Yet the European Union (EU) maintains the principle of free movement of peoples within the borders of its member states as if it has no implications for security, and as if the principle is so inviolate that one should lie about its implications or be accused of being anti-European.

Within an hour of the first attack, France declared that the borders had been closed, but in fact they were not: They were simply subject to random spot checks, which amounted to asking drivers to wave a passport. France kept no record of whoever arrived or departed across its borders during the state of emergency, unless the traveler was heading from a non-EU country on a non-EU passport. Most disruption was due to the voluntary cancellation of trains or flights by cautious operators.

At least one of the attackers was a French citizen with a criminal record and a known jihadist history, which probably means he had traveled to Syria to fight with IS and returned to Europe without official discovery.

Another attacker was probably an illegal immigrant from Syria. One of the individuals carried a passport used by an illegal migrant who registered in Greece as a refugee on October 3, having crossed the sea from Turkey. France is searching for another two men who registered as refugees in Greece around the same time. Whether the attacker is the same person as the migrant will need confirmation, but even if the passport was stolen, its own travels prove that once a threat is within the EU, that threat is to practically anywhere within Europe.

One team of attackers hired a car in Belgium, whose discovery prompted five arrests there. Another suspected attacker was arrested in Germany over the previous week, with weapons found in his car and the car's navigation system set for Paris.

These foreign staging areas should remind us of France's prior lucky escape. On August 21, a Moroccan male got on a train from Amsterdam to Paris with several small arms, but his rifle jammed long enough for him to be over-powered by alert passengers—he wounded four but did not kill anyone. This occurred just after the train crossed the border from Belgium into France.

On the day before the latest Paris attacks, the European Council's president warned that the Schengen area was under threat, but failed to offer change. The Schengen regime requires signatories—almost all members of the EU—to allow completely free movement over their shared borders.

The EU itself has offered nothing that significantly improves the security of the Schengen area, despite months of international migrant crises and national defections. A couple weeks earlier, the EU promised millions of euros to Turkey. A few days before the Paris attacks, the EU threw more millions at African states to help them prevent migrants leaving their borders, but without any guarantees. Those millions are more likely to fund the corruption and conflict that drive migrants away in the first place.

EU BORDER CONTROL

Meanwhile, the EU has failed to agree a policy on the currently received illegal immigrants, which have surpassed 750,000 this year—almost all of them claiming asylum. Media outlets have focused on migrants from war-torn Syria, but most are not Syrian, and genuine refugees from Syria are already accommodated in Turkey or Jordan.

The EU has agreed no policy to prevent illegal immigration, to filter refugees from false claimants or to deport illegal migrants. The EU effectively sees all illegal immigrants as if they are refugees, after which it loses track. It leaves all immigrant problems to member states, while complaining when EU states act unilaterally.

Britain has not joined the Schengen area, but its border controls are still restricted by the EU principle of free movement. Not even the English Channel stops illegal migrants. From June to August 2015, illegal migrants effectively shut down the main ports between France and the United Kingdom, but when French or British politicians acted to secure the ports, they were accused of heartlessness and racism. To conflate criminal entrants as if they are legitimate refugees is no better than to conflate all refugees as if they were economic migrants.

Not filtering immigrants is even worse for genuine refugees: Insecure borders favor the young men with the most capacity to travel, to find work and to evade access controls; families with enough money to pay the smugglers also do well; and IS fighters who are both young men and wealthy do best. The huddled masses and those yearning to breathe free are not favored.

IS leaders have boasted that they have sent fighters to Europe via the illegal maritime route. One Syrian member claimed the Islamic State had smuggled in more than 4,000 fighters.

Over the past year, the international community has been complacent about the capacity of air strikes to defeat IS and about the group's intent to strike in the West. Yet the immediate response to the Paris attacks is more conservatism and complacency. For instance, Chris Phillips, the former head of Britain's National Counter Terrorism Security Office, told the BBC that we should "learn" from the Paris attack, but we should not "change" because "the whole point of terrorism is it makes us change. The best thing we can do ... is do everything we can to keep going." Yet this is despite France suffering its deadliest attack since the World War II.

The threat from the Islamic State is growing internationally. The day before the attacks in Paris, IS claimed responsibility for suicide bombings that killed at least 43 people in Beirut. On October 31, the Islamic State bombed a Russian passenger plane over Egypt, killing all 224 people on board. On October 10, the group's suicide bombers killed at least 128 at a peace rally in Turkey. Clearly, no country alone can counter this threat.

European security needs to change. France has the most at stake and the most influence in the EU. It needs to improve European border security first, before it blames national security.

Bruce Newsome is a British-born professor of International Relations at the University of California, Berkeley.



Resolve, Not Rhetoric, Will Defeat the Islamic State

Gary Grappo

November 23, 2015

Can the Islamic State be defeated from the air alone? The answer: no, it cannot.

It is impossible to understand, let alone read, the torrent of commentary, analysis and just plain venting that has followed the unspeakable tragedy in Paris on November 13. No one could be blamed for simply tuning out. How much human suffering inflicted for apparently wanton cause can one person tolerate?

But confront the tragedy of Paris—and let us not forget Ankara, Beirut, the skies over the Sinai, and Baghdad—we must.

Throughout our history, humanity has had to confront evil as perpetrated by one against another. On a grand scale over sometimes-inordinate periods of time, good—or something better than the evil it opposed—has usually prevailed.

Whether one chooses to attribute that to divine providence or mere survival, triumph of good over evil has been the case. But it is only true when the forces of good take concerted, determined action, with all the sacrifices that may entail, to confront evil. So it can be in the face of mankind's latest challenge, the diabolically ruthless, violent and uncompromising Islamic State (IS). We can and must move forward.

WHY PARIS?

Before deciding the strategy for defeating IS, let us first stop and consider what Paris and the tragedies that preceded it might be telling us about humanity's latest incarnation of evil.

What conceivable advantage might IS have gained by attacking thousands of innocents in Paris? Militarily, none really. The attack killed not a single member of France's armed forces or destroyed any target of military consequence. It struck fear and panic, to be sure, but the French, having suffered through two World Wars whose atrocities were infinitely worse than Paris' sad toll, are hearty souls with a fierce sense of liberty and independence. They, like their European and American allies, will not bow—ever.

In fact, the senseless act in Paris is more a declaration of purpose by IS. A fundamentally apocalyptic organization, the Islamic State is not merely content with a neat little caliphate. It wishes to fulfill its mission to lead the forces of Islam—that is the group's Islam and not that of the 99.9% of other Muslims around the world—against the forces of the anti-Christ (the crusader West, their quisling Muslim collaborators and Islam's apostates, like the Shia). There can be no compromise, no appeasement and no ceasefire.

So, in the Islamic State's perverse logic, provoking its enemies in the West expedites militarization of the coming apocalyptic confrontation. Post-Paris calls for a united front to oppose IS are present proof of the organization's claim that the forces of the anti-Christ—the West, Muslim collaborators and the apostates—will unite in the great battle against the forces of God (i.e., the Islamic State). So, the post-Paris calls really come

straight from IS' ideological handbook. Paris and tragedies to follow are intended to provoke this reaction.

To fulfill the mission of taking on such a massively manned and equipped enemy, IS will need soldiers. Lots of them. The most optimistic current estimate of the Islamic State's strength is some 30,000 fighters. That's hardly enough to defend its caliphate, now under even greater pressure as coalition aircraft ramp up attacks and Kurdish forces press in from the east and north.

But a world-shaking attack at the heart of the crusader kingdom offers a spectacular recruiting bonanza. With more likely to follow, IS will doubtlessly saturate social media with the inevitability of its victory over the anti-Christ and the rewards of death in the service of God's ultimate calling.

In fact, IS cannot pursue its mission, much less take on the so-called "forces of evil," without more fighters. It has bled dry the areas it occupies of fighting men and must resort to outside recruitment. For a so-called state, it may be the first that cannot even defend itself with the forces it has and must resort to hiring what amount to mercenaries. True, many share the IS ideology, but fervor alone doesn't pay the bills; the \$700 to \$1,000 IS pays its fighters is also essential.

Signing up to fight for an ideologically far-fetched organization is a risk. So, IS must prove that it can win, that it can take on the most powerful forces of its enemies, especially those of the West, and that it can inflict real damage on its enemies. Paris and the attacks that preceded it are the proof. Paris, as the IS media machine would portray it, proves to would-be IS fighters that the Islamic State is, in the words of Osama bin Laden, the "strong horse" that Muslims will naturally support, as opposed to the weak one—the West.

Post-Paris, where are the enemies of IS?

To be sure, France and the United States are actively attacking IS forces and strongholds, all be it from the air only. The Arab countries previously participating in the US-organized anti-IS coalition haven't flown missions against the Islamic State in months. The Saudis and Emiratis are engaged in their foolhardy war on Yemen and cannot spare the aircraft and resources. Russia has declared its opposition to the Islamic State but is directing the lion's share of its aerial bombardments against largely

US- and Saudi/Qatari-backed opposition forces directly threatening Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, not IS.

Turkey, paranoid about perceived Kurdish ambitions across the border, seems exclusively focused on the Syrian Kurds, who with their Iraqi Peshmerga counterparts appear to be the only genuinely effective counter force to IS on the ground in either Syria or Iraq. Iran, not part of the Islamic State's Western enemies but IS' apostates exemplar of Islam, appears determined to protect its Syrian puppet, President Assad, at all costs, financial as well as military, and is unwilling to make that kind of commitment to fighting IS, absent a direct challenge to Assad from IS.

It would seem, then, that even attacks as morally repulsive and emotionally wrenching as Paris and the downing of the Russian passenger airliner cannot overcome more deep-seated political goals.

TAKE BACK ISLAMIC STATE TERRITORY

Even so, the French and Americans are more than capable of carrying out doubtlessly punishing air attacks against IS. But one must ask the question, can the Islamic State be defeated from the air alone? The answer: no, it cannot. Degrade, yes. But annihilate or defeat, most definitely not.

To defeat IS and undermine its status as a caliphate, it must lose its territory. Under the established prerequisites for a caliphate, no territory means no state, no caliph and no IS. That can't happen without victories on the battlefield, for which ground forces are necessary. In Syria currently, such forces consist of the Syrian Kurds and a small band of allied Arab tribes. In Iraq, it is the remnants of the Iraqi army routed by IS in Mosul in June 2014. They have their hands full retaking Ramadi, even with American help.

Clearly, then, additional ground forces are necessary in Syria to win battles and retake territory. From where might they come?

President Barack Obama has made clear he will not return American ground combat forces to the Middle East and most definitely not to this conflict. His Republican critics have called for a US-led ground force, comprising a modicum of American troops but mostly allied Arab forces. But would the Arabs commit their armies?

It is highly unlikely for several reasons.

First, there is no definitive American plan that convincingly leads to a defeat of IS. Why would any government commit troops to a campaign without a plan? Second, without serious American ground-troop buy in, Arab governments would balk. Third, if the Arabs are unwilling to commit even their air forces now, why would they commit their ground forces?

A coherent and credible US plan that included a US-troop commitment might change their minds, however.

There is a final, and less often mentioned, reason. There is a genuine fear on the part of some of these countries' leaders that some of their forces might defect to IS. Clearly, the Islamic State would see the presence of Arab Muslim soldiers on the battlefield as a recruiting bonanza and an opportunity to colossally embarrass Arab governments. And it would not take many defections for IS to capitalize. Better not to risk it, the Arab governments wisely conclude.

THE MISSING ELEMENT

So, where does all this leave those of us revolted by the Islamic State, its repellent ideology and its unspeakable atrocities?

To repeat the assertion made at the outset, evil is only defeated when the forces of the opposing good take concerted, determined action, with all the sacrifices that may entail, to confront evil.

Until the peoples and the governments that lead them resolve to marshal all that is necessary to confront and defeat the evil of the Islamic State, its diabolical machinations will persist.

Resolve, not rhetoric, will defeat the Islamic State.

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Is Europe's Buffer Zone in Ukraine keeping it Safe?

Olena Lennon and Brian Milakovsky

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Ukraine must protect civilian populations in the Donbas region and seek a political solution to the conflict.

European and American foreign policy elites have come to regard the brutal war in eastern Ukraine almost entirely through the lens of geopolitics. The terrible human suffering of the war remains an unfocused foreground that they gaze through at a “resurgent Russia,” “Europe in the balance,” “challenges to world order.”

The distorting effect of this distance became visible to the authors of this article, one of whom spent September 25 rubbing elbows with policymakers at the congressional forum, and the other as the guest of a young Ukrainian family on the frontlines of this conflict.

MAINTAINING THE ILLUSION

The forum brought together prominent Ukrainian, European and American politicians and activists to advocate for humanitarian, economic and “yes, military aid” as Ukraine gradually recedes from the headlines. But they were matched by numerous speakers who called for a reignition of the very conflict that has brought that crisis on. They stated that Ukrainians must be armed for the preservation of European order, because—as former Georgian Ambassador Temuri Yakobashvili put it during a discussion at the forum—“they are the only ones who know how to fight Russians.”

Lest anyone think that a return to armed hostilities might come at too high a cost for the already traumatized country, Ukraine was reminded over and over that the stakes are pan-European, if not global.

“A successful democratic struggle in Ukraine will help revive the democratic spirit in Europe and the United States,” said Carl Gershman, president of the National Endowment for Democracy. “Ukraine *can* succeed, and if it does, it will not just be a

triumph for the Ukrainian people. It will also make possible a Europe that is whole and free.” Similarly, General Wesley Clark emphatically stated in his keynote address that “much of mankind’s future is being decided in Ukraine” and “if Ukraine completes this transition to Western democracy ... there’s no more war in Europe. Ever. Ever!” No pressure.

Astonishingly, bellicose statements like those of Yakobashvili and Clark received cheers and applause from the audience. While these statements may sound like a compliment to the Ukrainian people, this position reduces their country to a buffer zone—a perpetual frontline. Neither American nor European politicians can afford to tell their domestic audiences that they are not doing enough to stop the Russian aggression (especially given its recent involvement in Syria). And so to a great extent, Ukraine is expected to be more aggressive in its fight against Russia in order to maintain the *illusion* that there is still progress in containing Moscow.

And behind the cold, pragmatic concept of a “buffer zone” hides its true meaning: “buffer people.” It is Ukrainians who are to engage the Russian armed forces with the long-promised advanced weaponry, and Ukrainians who will comprise the entirety of the collateral damage.

While US President Barack Obama vetoed the national defense budget, which included \$50 million toward defensive weapons for Ukraine, he announced that Washington would still supply Ukraine with counter-battery radar systems. And if US officials don’t see provision of radars as potentially escalating the conflict, Russia certainly does—and it already threatened retaliation.

Obama is wise to avoid the more escalatory move. The cost of a return to full-on war for Ukraine would be untenable. At the United Nations’ conservative estimate, the war has killed 8,000 people and displaced approximately 1.4 million. The life-giving mining and industrial sectors of Donbas are ravaged, and the economic crisis induced by the war is spreading that effect far into government-controlled territory.

ON THE GROUND IN DONBAS

Figures cannot express the full cost of suffering and strife, and the deep alienation in the eastern Ukraine. One of these authors spent the lovely autumn day of September 25 far from Washington at a young family’s half-finished home on the Donbas frontline. Denis and Yulia survived the shelling in summer 2014, when the Ukrainian army drove

the separatists out of their city. But that winter, their home was destroyed by a direct hit from separatist artillery, killing both of Yulia's parents.

They returned, and for months cleared the rubble and planted their garden under intermittent shelling. Their children learned to identify the sound of different shells as they passed overhead in both directions. With the help of aid organizations and volunteers, they began rebuilding their shattered home. Gazing at the cinderblock walls of their house Yulia sighs: "For me and the kids, this is already happiness. Just give us peace so we can enjoy it!"

Just give us peace.

This is the phrase one hears from so many refugees and frontline civilians in Donbas. From people like Natasha, who fled the Syrian conflict three years ago (she was married to a Kiev-educated Arab) for the refuge of her parent's home in Luhansk. When the city came under fire by the Ukrainian army last spring, she and her children became refugees again, moving to a government-held town across the river, which itself was under constant fire until the guns went silent two months ago.

And now, in the midst of its unaccustomed and fragile silence Natasha, Yulia, Denis and thousands like them are cautiously allowing themselves to hope that this is no mere lull in the fighting, but the end of the war that has overturned their lives. This is reflected in the falling numbers of internally displaced persons (IDP). In October, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) reported roughly 1.5 million IDPs in Ukraine; a month later, the number dropped to under 975,000—a staggering 35% decrease. Encouraged by the reduced fighting, people are returning to their homes.

If their hope is rewarded, and they are not forced to spend another winter hiding from the bombs in freezing basements and root cellars, then it could become a potent force for reconciliation and stabilization in Ukraine.

PEACE IS VICTORY

Treating Ukraine as a shield against Russia, as a "buffer zone," could mean keeping that country in a near perpetual state of armed conflict and everything that Europe hopes to reduce on its perimeters—instability, poverty and mass refugee flows.

The US should increase diplomatic support to resolve the Minsk Agreement's central quandary: If the so-called people's republics are to remain in Ukraine, how will they take part in the politics of a country they have recently been in armed conflict with?

Any sustainable resolution is likely prove as messy as the political resolution that ended the fighting in Bosnia 20 years ago. The horse-trading and gerrymandering of that deal were repugnant, but unquestionably preferable to the fratricide that preceded it.

Stabilizing Donbas will also require Ukraine to rethink its economic blockade of the breakaway regions. If the artificial internal border between the two halves of Donbas remains a persistent barrier to trade, then both sides are doomed to economic decline. It is only a question of *which* sponsor can prop up *its* Donbas longer.

Even if economic relations in the east are restored, huge injections of foreign aid will still be necessary to prop up the economy of Ukraine proper. In March, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved Ukraine's request for \$17.5 billion. For good measure, the US has committed \$2 billion in loan guarantees. However laudable, this level of financial support is nothing compared to the hundreds of billions the European Union has poured into Greece; and in the words of David R. Cameron, director of Yale's Program in European Union Studies, Western assistance to Ukraine has been "quite literally, nothing but cheap talk."

Western leaders should focus on helping Ukraine stave off economic collapse in the east, capitalize on this renewed sense of hope and continue to search nonmilitary solutions. With the return of civilian populations to Donbas' conflict zones, the stakes are only getting higher. No weapon, however precise, will eliminate Ukraine's enemies, deter Russia or make Europe safer without the political will of the conflicting sides to agree to a peaceful coexistence.

Yakobashvili is right in saying that "a successful Ukraine will be a crucial part of the European and Euro-Atlantic economic and security architecture, and a stimulus for the rest of the post-Soviet region, especially to Russia, to reform and drag themselves out of the swamp of corruption and forced ideologies." Ukrainians *can* be role models for humanism and democracy, and the place to start is in the volatile peripheral zone of the east.

If Ukraine is to become a model and not a cautionary tale, then the West must help it to protect civilian populations in Donbas and seek a political solution to this conflict.

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