

Fair Observer

Quarterly

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Fair Observer Quarterly



December 2016

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ABOUT FAIR OBSERVER

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Fair Observer Quarterly

Atul Singh

December 31, 2016

In both hemispheres, this is holiday season. North of the equator, the nights get longer while the reverse occurs in the south. By the end of the year, economic activity slows to a crawl, as families and communities come together to celebrate festivals like Diwali, Hanukkah and Christmas.

This quarter and indeed this year have not given humanity much reason to celebrate. In the first quarter itself, this author observed that this was “turning out to be an eventful year.” In the second quarter, Brexit and Brazil took center stage as David Cameron and Dilma Rousseff had a great fall. Their countries entered full-blown political, constitutional and economic crises. In the third quarter, an Olympics plagued with corruption failed to lift the shadows of uncertainty, inequality and anger. People were turning against globalization and, even in the US, “tuning into the siren song of Donald Trump.”

This quarter will be remembered in history when Trump took charge of the land of the free and the home of the brave. First, the self-proclaimed billionaire with a taste for garish buildings, outlandish comments and beautiful women pulled off a hostile takeover of the party of moral values that is not fond of Charles Darwin, opposes abortion and prizes chastity. In the process, Trump poured contempt on the Bush clan, damned the Iraq War and championed protectionism. Then, he beat Hillary Clinton to the punch despite her burgeoning coffers, well-oiled party machine and massive media support.

In the aftermath, people assigned a range of reasons for Trump’s victory. Some called it a “whitelash” of insecure white Americans who fear becoming a minority as the population of colored people rises. Others blamed the Clintons for hugging Wall Street too close.

Still others damned the Clintons for failing to show up in states like Michigan and Wisconsin. Young Democrats blamed the Republican director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation who made an issue of Clinton’s emails just before the election. A few blamed fake news on Facebook. The truth of the matter is that many factors

contributed to Trump's election victory. It was a perfect storm that might change the direction of American history.

Trump has won at a time when house and stock prices are touching record highs despite the continuing weakness in the US economy. The rich are getting richer even as much of the population finds the cost of living increasing with higher costs of housing, health care, childcare and schooling.

In the US today, Lewis Carroll's memorable words ring true: "Now, here, you see, it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!"

It turns out the rest of the world is not doing that much better. Inequality is increasing everywhere. The global economy has had a woeful year. Jobs are scarce from Shanghai to São Paulo and automation is not helping. World trade is experiencing a slowdown after more than three decades of explosive growth as anti-trade sentiments boil over in richer countries. Debt has surged to new heights and McKinsey estimated it to be \$199 trillion at the end of June 2014. The World Bank estimates the global GDP for 2015 to be \$73.9 trillion.

Trump's triumph and the woes of the global economy were punctuated by the death of Thai King Bhumibol Adulyadej and Cuban revolutionary Fidel Castro. Bhumibol and Castro were on opposing sides of the Cold War.

The former left a country where 0.1% of the population owns nearly half its wealth and where anyone can be locked up for insulting the royalty. The new king is dissolute and worthless but will still be treated like a living god. Castro left behind a country with good schools and hospitals despite the vindictiveness of his Goliath-like neighbor. Yet Cuba's economy is weak, its regime is repressive and the big boss of the country is Castro's younger brother. Communism was not quite able to get rid of dynastic rule even in the New World.

Finally, two tragedies continued to unfold till the end of 2016. First, the butchery in Aleppo was brutal even by the grim standards of the Syrian Civil War. With local, regional and global actors all joining the fray, this war is turning out to be relentlessly tragic and infernally complex. Second, climate change is causing the extinction of species and decimating populations of vertebrates. The Living Planet Report 2016

revealed that mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and fish are all dying out rather dramatically.

This quarter capped off a challenging year. As citizens, we are facing political, economic, social and environmental issues that matter not only for our species, but also for other living beings. How we make sense of these issues will define our future.

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



OCTOBER

Delayed Elections Sabotage Somalia's Democratic Dreams

Yusuf Hassan

October 4, 2016

For Somalia to achieve peace and democracy, state-building must be the new federal government's cornerstone policy.

Somalia was supposed to have a new parliament in August, followed shortly thereafter by parliamentarians voting in a new president on September 10. This imperfect system has brought to power four new presidents since 2000.

The postponed elections put an extra burden on a fragile political, security and humanitarian situation. In addition to years of political instability and terrorism, the United Nations (UN) says that more than 5 million people are [suffering food shortages](#), further exacerbating local conditions.

The initial [revised electoral calendar](#) expected a new parliament in office by October 20 and a presidential election on October 30, but the election commission has [announced more delays](#). The commission now says that the federal parliament will be established by November 23 and a presidential election held on November 30.

The delays come as a major disappointment, and the UN's special envoy to Somalia, Michael Keating, [has warned](#) that "the new extension does not create additional space for manipulation or disruption by spoilers." The outgoing government's interference in the election commission's mandate and in the selection of delegates is a cause for concern. Opposition candidates are worried that government officials are manipulating the process and exploiting clan politics.

HOPE AND RECOVERY

In 2012, when the first permanent Somali government in 22 years came to power in Mogadishu, it was welcomed with optimism and high hopes. Four years on, however, Somalia remains a divided and unstable country, one that is politically fragmented, institutionally weak and vulnerable to foreign exploitation, terrorism and [human rights abuses](#) by all parties to the conflict.

The federal government's recent hosting of an Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) [heads of state summit](#) in Mogadishu offered an opportunity for East African leaders to draw attention to the African Union Mission in Somalia's (AMISOM) achievements, especially in light of the European Union's [20% AMISOM funding cut](#). The summit also accorded a symbolic moment for a president besieged by his political rivals.

But the summit's short-lived symbolic value was punctuated by the continuing wave of militant attacks, including a September 18 bombing outside the Ministry of Defense in Mogadishu, killing Somali army division commander [General Mohamed Jimale Gobale](#). On that same day, the militants were blamed for an assassination in the city of Galkayo and for [overrunning a military post](#) in Gedo region, near the Kenyan border.

The attacks underscored the insurgents' capacity to perpetrate horrific violence with impunity, and exposed the government's security weaknesses and the lack of cooperation between federal and state institutions.

SOMALIA: WEAK INSTITUTIONS, INDIRECT ELECTIONS

The path to indirect elections came at the conclusion of a [marathon of meetings](#) and talks between federal and state leaders, grouped under the National Leadership Forum (NLF). Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, whose presidential term ended on September 10 and holds power in a caretaker role disputed by opposition leaders, [has claimed](#) that the 2016 election will be a "step closer to universal suffrage."

The outgoing president is overstretching. An "electoral college" of nearly [15,000 delegates](#), who will elect the 275 members of parliament (MP) of the lower house, is no substitute for a general election where all eligible citizens vote in a nation of 10 million people. The anticipated process, however, encourages public participation in comparison to the limitations of the [2012 election](#), when 135 traditional elders handpicked parliamentarians. Somali leaders have also committed to a 30% quota for

female legislators. If achieved, it will become a milestone in a traditionally male-dominated political landscape.

President Mohamud's exaggerated justification may also be interpreted as a diversion tactic to draw attention away from his administration's shortcomings: in the constitutional review and federalization process, social reconciliation, economic and institutional reforms, rebuilding national forces and holding timely elections.

LEADERSHIP FAILURE

There is no question that the federal government's institutional weakness and leadership failure have undermined Somalia's democratic dreams. Lacking from the country's transition to democracy is political commitment and structural reforms that prioritize state-building, social and political cohesion, and economic revitalization.

While the UN's Michael Keating [says that](#) the 2016 election will be "much more inclusive" than past elections, the reality is that the political environment is characterized more by political violence and fragmentation, and less by inclusive politics and democratic practices.

The outgoing president's re-election bid is challenged by a [host of former leaders](#) and political newcomers, including one ex-president and two ex-prime ministers, the former president of Puntland state, ex-cabinet ministers, the former ambassador to Kenya, Mogadishu's ex-mayor and the [only female presidential candidate](#).

Opposition presidential candidates, most of whom are organized under the [Coalition for Change](#) in Mogadishu, have challenged Mohamud's extended stay in office and demanded that he transfer power to the speaker of federal parliament, Mohamed Osman Jawari. Abdirahman Abdullahi Baadiyow, the 2012 presidential candidate, scholar and member of the Coalition for Change, said in an emailed response: "The incumbent regime has failed to deliver all of its Six-Pillar Policy and is adamant to come back to power using state resources, unprecedented corruption and vote-buying."

Baadiyow also indicated that the outgoing president was "blocking all avenues of dialogue" with opposition candidates.

Allegations of power abuse, [corruption](#) and divisive policies have marred the outgoing president's term. Under President Mohamud, opponents say, security conditions deteriorated, social divisions widened, the economy nearly collapsed, and political and institutional reforms lagged.

But in April, the outgoing leader told the [UN Security Council](#) that "Somalia has made extraordinary progress" in peace and governance, while claiming economic reforms with an annual growth of 3.7%.

CONTINUING CHALLENGES IN SOMALIA

No matter who is elected in Somalia, the next government faces continuing challenges in peace, institution-building and economic reforms. The [International Monetary Fund](#) affirmed that "weak institutional capacity, complex clan politics, and a challenging security situation have complicated the country's economic reconstruction."

Political stability and economic recovery can only be assured once Somalia has peace and reconciliation. With a stable government, the country can benefit from its wealth of natural resources. Political will, enhanced institutional capacity and federal-state cooperation can build on security gains, initiate an economic transformation, and address the delicate politics of grievance and identity that sit at the heart of a prolonged conflict.

An election alone cannot reverse decades of turmoil and economic ruin. There is hope that Somalia is on the path to progress, and renewed optimism that it can elect new leadership that brings change. For Somalia to achieve peace and democracy, state-building must be the new federal government's cornerstone policy.

**Yusuf M. Hassan is a Somali-American journalist, political and media analyst, and communications adviser. This article is available online at [Fair Observer](#).*



How Did Intervention Become a Dirty Word?

Edward Marsh

October 13, 2016

Civilians in Iraq and Syria are paying the price for Western weariness of military interventions.

The Syrian city of Aleppo now resembles an eerie ghost of Dresden or Stalingrad—burning, in ruins, decimated and helpless. Millions have been displaced across the region, hundreds of thousands dead, with the United Nations (UN) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) watching with indifference for [five long, relentless, disastrous years](#).

The argument for military intervention, while difficult politically for the West, must never be ignored because of economics, party politics or public sentiment. To do so would be erroneous and, as in the case of Iraq and Syria, critically unforgivable.

Watching footage from the bombed-out hospitals in Aleppo must fill even the stoniest of us with helpless, gut-wrenching sadness: the endless flow of amputees, widows, orphans, the dead and the still living, spilling into every corner of the emergency departments—demonstrating further the helplessness of the situation. These halls are inundated with screams and utter horror as the war between its all-[too-many participants](#) continues to rage around them.

LEFT ON THE GROUND

Thoughts turn to those left on the ground. In the east of the city, what must they think of the world—one seemingly void of humanity, haplessly watching on? Why has Syria been left behind, year after year? How has it come to this?

The opaque rhetoric pouring out of the UN and NATO must seem a small, if any, consolation to those whose lives have become a daily labor with the simple clinical objective: staying alive from dawn to dusk.

The situation in Iraq is also dire, albeit better than the current predicament of Syria. With years of sectarianism, suicide bombings, corruption and the daily threat from the so-called Islamic State (IS) from its stronghold in the north of the country. As the [battle for Mosul](#)—the last city held by IS in Iraq—is due to begin imminently, three years after IS took control, we may finally be seeing the beginning of the end of rogue state-building. But in exchange for what?

When Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi announced the IS caliphate in 2014, he did so from the newly-acquired city of Mosul. The locals threw rocks and whatever they could find at the retreating Iraqi forces who had capitulated, with many fleeing from the fight. They are only returning now, with the increased support of British, American and French forces.

In Iraq, IS undeniably took advantage from a weak government and the early withdrawal by the newly-formed Obama administration while exploiting the revolution in Syria. History, as always, will judge the hows and whys of the civil war in Syria and the emergence of IS in Iraq, but we in the West must be our own staunchest critics regarding our undisputable hopelessness and incapability to intervene sooner in both countries. These are conflicts we have been hesitant to fully commit to, yet they have had a greater effect on global security than the wars in Afghanistan or the post-2003 chaos in Iraq itself.

Unfortunately, we have precedence here, and an all-too-recent one. It appears to be acceptable to persecute and massacre your own citizens, as long as you don't cross a border. Europe watched as systematic ethnic cleansing was carried out in [Bosnia and Herzegovina](#), and the UN remained blind to the genocide in Rwanda, where the estimates of the dead range from 500,000 to 1 million. The genocide in Darfur in 2003 cost another half a million lives. Indeed, the Halabja chemical attack against the Kurds by Saddam Hussein, the bombing and chemical attacks by Bashar al-Assad, and the relentless, barbaric crimes against humanity currently carried out by Islamic State have all been allowed to happen without serious consequence.

The tragedy is that these are not events of old, not history that we look back on and shudder at, like the horrors of the two world wars. This is modern history—a history we continue to allow to be written in our time.

RED LINES

The trouble with our sterile political state in the West is that while we have remained passive or verbally condemned—rather choosing to offer local forces air support and training—the problem in the Middle East has not only intensified drawing in multiple states each with fiercely different international visions, but the threat has moved, genuinely this time, to our doorstep. Just like Iraq, [Europe](#) and Asia have seen appalling atrocities on their streets and, most conspicuously of all in recent months, the ticking time bomb of radicalization is showing its face in America. All of these acts are built on the foundations of the war in Syria and the rise of the Islamic State.

Much of the problem can be put at the feet of the UN which, when it comes to conflict, is now by all purposes surplus to requirements, weak, uncompromising and inept at any form of swift response other than condemnation. It is rather NATO that must take a lead with military action in the case of IS and Assad.

This is not advocating for military intervention as and when we fancy, but rather a demand for simple policy. In Britain, we have become “war weary.” The 454 British soldiers killed in Afghanistan were too many to stomach in the 21st century. And yes, the Afghan campaign has serious questions about its objectives and ultimate outcomes, but what we need to be watchful of in the West is not to allow the wars post 9/11 to blur the need to reengage today.

The war in Iraq, whatever the reasons, was never meant to end in a counterinsurgency operation. Likewise, the “rebuilding” of Afghanistan was never meant to turn into, as the British found out in 2006, a daily fire-fight against the Taliban. These wars are not on the same military page of doctrine as the strategic problem both IS and the war in Syria pose. It is abundantly clear that no one is particularly good at counterinsurgency, but this should not deter strategy and policy from being adopted for military counterterrorism operations on a larger scale.

It is now too late for military intervention in Syria: The issues are [far too complex](#) and it is a case of missed opportunities by US President Barack Obama, who had a clear mandate to intervene when Assad used chemical weapons—directly convening international law. However, as we know, despite President Assad’s crossing of the “[red line](#),” Obama’s resolve failed, allowing Russian President Vladimir Putin to exploit his weakness.

FUTURE WARS

Iraq, however, can be resolved. But it will take concerted military involvement, in conjunction with strategic long-term engagement from both Sunni and Shia communities. But why has it taken the international community such a staggeringly long time to increase military aid in Iraq?

The French and Americans have all suffered—the former with unprecedented scenes of terrorism. For three years, local Iraqi and Kurdish forces have toiled trying to defeat IS. Every day that passed claimed more civilian lives and the message of Islamic fundamentalism spread further among Muslims in the West.

Our inaction has demonstrated that IS terrorism would not stay within its boundaries as the region is being shredded apart. The question is: what's next?

As we have seen from long drawn-out counterinsurgency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, they are unwinnable. No one wants to return to those campaigns. The real risk now is that is exactly the direction we are headed, and the shadow from the Islamic State—long after its territory has been reclaimed—may draw out for many years and over many miles.

The conflicts have also brought other problems to the fore: the Kurds' claim for independence; Turkish unrest and recent coup attempt; Russia seemingly ambivalent toward international law; Russian, Turkish and Iranian alliances; the rise of various Islamist groups in Syria; the Islamic State; and, of course, Assad. The future is [beyond bleak](#).

What has been vital over the course of these conflicts is strong leadership in the West that will remain focused and, when and where necessary, compromise political party politics and go against the zeitgeist. Intervention is not a dirty word as the French proved in Mali in 2013, the British in Sierra Leone or the task force in Tora Bora that drove al-Qaeda and the Taliban from Afghanistan in 2001.

As a public, we must learn the parameters of why we are at war, but we should also be entitled to judge from coherent, planned objectives as to why we should engage in future wars, why boots on the ground can work, and why this should undoubtedly have been contemplated at an early stage against IS and Assad. We appear fascinated with

the [despair on our television sets](#), the political discourse and complexities of the situation, yet we are unable to recognize a “just war.”

Ask the families in Aleppo and [Mosul](#) tonight if they would welcome intervention tomorrow morning, after years of persecution and death. While they would, they most likely no longer have faith in the world and those who could intervene on their behalf.

**Edward Marsh is London-based security analyst. This article is available online at [Fair Observer](#).*



How One Couple Brought Health Care to Haiti

Shelley Briggs Callahan

October 14, 2016

Amidst a doctors' strike and a hurricane in Haiti, a story of one couple's determination to bring health care to the island.

In May 2016, when I heard the news of the doctors' strike taking place in Haiti, my heart sank. Doctors, nurses and medical residents had been on strike since March as they protested low wages and demanded better working conditions, leading to the shutdown of Haiti's largest hospitals. And now, as the news of the devastation caused by Hurricane Matthew floods in from Haiti, ever more families need access to health care and medicine as quickly as possible.

Since the strike began, hospitals have essentially closed, and Haitians in need of medical care have been left to compete to get into NGO-run hospitals whose facilities are overwhelmed, with no room for patients or enough resources to treat the abundance of injured and ill that fill the waiting rooms.

After spending the last six years working at a medical clinic near Jacmel, in Haiti's Sud-Est Department, I knew firsthand just how desperately Haitians needed a reliable

health care system and how devastating a strike of such magnitude must have been affecting the country.

WITNESS TO HARDSHIP

For a long time, I have been aware of how important the Friends of the Children of Haiti clinic (more commonly referred to as the [FOTCOH clinic](#)) is to Haitians. It was built in 2000, after its founders, Dick and Barb Hammond, had been bringing doctors and nurses to Haiti to create pop-up clinics to treat patients in incredibly remote areas of the country for nearly 15 years.

Since its completion, every year nearly 15,000 Haitian patients travel to the clinic to receive free medical care from visiting volunteer medical teams. FOTCOH provides much needed medical, dental, surgical and nutritional support for the poorest Haitians who would otherwise go without being treated, having no other means to afford to see a doctor. In the Sud-Est Department, there is only one main hospital, the St. Michel Hospital, and the cost to a patient exceeds the opportunity to meet with a doctor by a long margin. Patients are also expected to pay for medications before receiving them, as well as pay for their own food if it is required that they stay in the hospital overnight.

I met Dick and Barb in November 2011 when I traveled to Haiti for the first time. I had been recruited by my sister, Erin—a pharmacist in the United States, after she had worked alongside Dick and Barb in Haiti—to help at the clinic as a non-medical volunteer counting pills for the pharmacy. I didn't think much about what the trip would serve for me, other than an opportunity to visit a country I was unfamiliar with. But my time in Haiti would be so rewarding that I would continue to return year after year to work at the clinic.

The ongoing political turmoil in Haiti, corruption, an unstable government and poor infrastructure have created continuous hardship for those living on the island. It was difficult to witness the hardships that people faced in a country where nearly 59% live on less than \$2 a day. And yet Haiti was one of the most beautiful countries I had ever traveled to, not only because of its scenic landscape, but for how vibrant, welcoming and grateful I found its people to be.

RETIREMENT PLAN

While working at the clinic, I got to know Dick and Barb well. At the time I met them, both were both in their mid-70s and had been traveling to Haiti for more than 30 years. They were full of energy and exceptionally hospitable, and I loved listening to their stories about their decades of work in the country.

As I got to know them, I became fascinated by how they came to build a clinic in Haiti, not only because of their inherent persistence and dedication to helping others, but because most of what they accomplished in Haiti they did much later in life, after both of them had retired from their careers back in the US. When most people would have settled into a leisurely retirement, Dick and Barb spent their time helping ensure that Haitians in need could see a doctor on a regular basis.

Dick and Barb Hammond grew up in Peoria, Illinois. They met in high school and married shortly after. Like many couples in the 1960s, they raised a large family as Dick worked at an architectural woodworking firm and Barb as a teacher. Neither of them ever thought that their lives would lead them to work in Haiti, but when they became involved with a nonprofit organization in the late 1970s called the Parish Twinning Program of the Americas, they began supporting educational programs in the southern region of the country.

Dick would go on to meet a priest by the name of Father Michel LaBourne, who would put the idea in Dick's mind to bring doctors to Haiti. Nearly three decades later, the FOTCOH clinic hosts hundreds of volunteers every year who work to provide medical support for patients who can't afford basic necessities in life such as food, clothes or clean drinking water, let alone medicine or doctor's visits.

NO EASY FIXES

Dick never told tales of instant success or easy fixes. He talked about never being quite sure of how he was going to pull off bringing medical teams to Haiti or afford to construct a building in a foreign country. But he and Barb managed to overcome obstacles and get results in the end. Initially, they didn't have the money for a clinic but decided to start looking for a property to purchase anyway, not wanting to let their lack of funds put their dream on hold.

It ended up being the right move. They found a property that was sufficient to build on, and as Dick worked on obtaining his Haitian residency, Barb hosted bingo nights at

home, which ended up being a huge success, affording them the cost of the land and construction. They didn't always know what they were getting themselves into, but it didn't stop them, and I appreciated the message that came from their accomplishments—that the uncertainty involved was overshadowed by the need to help others.

I recall getting up from the table after we had talked for a few hours, and once I said goodnight to Dick and left to head off to bed, I heard him say, "You know, someone should write a book about our lives." Without hesitation I replied, "I'll write your book, Dick," barely turning around as I continued up the stairs. Two months later, I was flying to Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, to meet with Dick and Barb at their home—a small condo in a modest retirement facility that they had migrated to a few years before to get out of the cold of Illinois.

I didn't have a clue what I was doing. Although having experience as a writer, I didn't have a definite plan on how I was going to complete a novel, but I knew I wanted to get started no matter what, because I didn't want to break my promise to Dick. Just like Dick and Barb had not been sure how they would build a clinic in Haiti, I wasn't sure how I was going to write a book about their lives, but I knew it was an important story to tell, and I let that feeling dominate my uncertainties.

In our interviews, they never recalled the past as though they had it all figured out. They were entirely aware of their faults, pointing out the many times when they jumped into situations with limited knowledge, and they talked about how they sometimes even got themselves into dangerous situations. Like the time when Dick got a gun pointed at his stomach at the airport in Port-au-Prince, or when a gang came looking for someone at a guesthouse he was staying at. Although they weren't looking for him, the experience had been terrifying.

I not only gained a deeper understanding of how much those two loved the Haitian people, and I started to understand just how important the clinic was, not only because it provided much needed health care, but because it offered consistency in people's lives.

THE HOUSE OF LIFE

In Haiti, many of its residents are more used to seeing aid organizations come and go over the years, especially in the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake, than to see NGOs establish themselves for the long term. It became apparent that the longevity of Dick and Barb's work and the permanency of the clinic were especially valuable.

Andres Boyer has been working with the clinic since 2002 as the Haitian director of operations, and he put into perspective just how important the clinic is to Haitian patients: "FOTOCH gives medication, soap, toothbrushes, food, shoes, clothes and all the kinds of things. If people are sick they know they are going to get medication, and then they will ask for other things they need so much to live, and FOTOCH can provide. FOTOCH gives so much to my people. That is why people call it the house of life."

I have been to Haiti 10 times in the last five years, and each time I return, I feel more strongly about how important the FOTOCH clinic is for the Haitian people. Each and every day, a certain patient or a particular case would remind the entire team that without the clinic, many Haitians would simply not survive. It was especially apparent when it came to injured patients, and more commonly burn victims. During our trip, a small girl of maybe 12 came to clinic with severe burns down both her legs from an overturned pot of hot oil. The accident had happened four days before, and she had nowhere to go to receive treatment to keep her wounds from getting infected.

Other patients rely on the clinic to receive medications for chronic illness such as diabetes and hypertension, which they could never afford or even possibly gain access to.

With the current doctors' strike, and now the devastation caused by Hurricane Matthew, that is more evident than ever. The Haitian government and relief workers are concerned about the onset of a public health crisis after the 145-mile-an-hour winds caused hundreds of deaths and left 60,000 people displaced. The threat of a [cholera outbreak](#) is a major concern; 13 people have died from cholera after widespread flooding due to the storm.

Families in Haiti need access to health care and medicine fast. Thankfully, the FOTOCH clinic was unharmed in the storm, and the Haitian doctors who work there are still treating patients despite the strike, as well as running their own private

practices. But there is only so much they can do, and many Haitians continue without any services at all as the main hospitals remain closed.

In just a few short weeks, the volunteer medical team will be in Haiti to provide additional medication for patients who lost theirs in the storm, treatment for cholera and nutritional support for severely malnourished children who are brought to the clinic after suffering without food since the hurricane.

Even after traveling to Haiti hundreds of times, Dick and Barb still get that same feeling about how important the clinic is to the Haitians, and what they have done for Haiti and what they continue to do is making a difference. As a FOTCOH volunteer, as a writer and as a person, I feel honored to have gotten the chance to hear about their lives and have the opportunity to tell their story.

**Shelley Briggs Callahan is a humanitarian worker and author. This article is available online at [Fair Observer](#).*



The Phenomenon of Donald Trump Will Live On

Tom Benner

October 18, 2016

The causes that have put Donald Trump so close to the White House must be addressed.

I am not worried about Donald Trump winning the [US presidential election](#) on November 8. He won't, the experts keep telling us. And right-thinking people all over the world want to hear that.

But I do worry that Donald Trump, the phenomenon, is bigger than Donald Trump, the candidate. And that his impact will last long after he concedes defeat—or plays the poor loser—on election night.

DONALD TRUMP, THE CANDIDATE

It's easy to fault candidate Trump. We have never seen such a mean-spirited, self-serving candidate running for president. Enough can't be said about the ways he's broken not just political norms, but the rules of common decency.

With Trump, there is no longer any honest disagreement between honorable rivals. He impugns the motives, and slanders the character, of anyone who gets in his way. He speaks in falsehoods and exploits fears to build himself up.

Claiming the first black president isn't American born. Saying he's smart for not paying taxes, and for stiffing the contractors who built his empire. The awful way he treats women. The idea of imprisoning political opponents. Trump is a child, a bully, a slanderer.

And I don't buy the argument that loyal Republicans should vote for him because he represents—in bits and pieces—the party philosophy. In reality, he believes only in his own self-advancement. There is no Trumpism without Trump. Look what he's done to his own party—he'll do that to the country and the world.

DONALD TRUMP, THE PHENOMENON

But while he will lose, Trump the phenomenon has already won, in many respects. He has transformed political dialogue. He made it OK to hate minorities, to espouse violence, to embrace torture. White nationalism, sexism and racism are back into mainstream thinking, thanks to Trump. He has done his best to undermine belief in American ideals, traditions and institutions.

Trump has dumbed-down the level of public dialogue. He has robbed us of the opportunity for informed debate and brought us down to his gutter-level. He has let the genie out of the bottle that won't go easily back in. He has brought the country to new lows in how debased and uncivil political discourse can be. Make America hate again—that he has accomplished.

Once Trump loses, and the world wakes up the morning of November 9 from one dizzying hangover, we will need to start recovering. Two things need to happen.

First, the Republican Party needs to rebuild itself. After the defeats of Republican presidential hopefuls John McCain in 2008 and Mitt Romney in 2012, Republican strategists pledged to build a base beyond the shrinking demographic of the aging white voter and reflect the growing diversity of the US. Trump's race-baiting complicates the party's efforts to put together a winning coalition that takes into account the country's changing demographics, but at least there is proof that the party must now reach out.

Trump represents a historic low point for the party of Abraham Lincoln, but not its end. The pendulum is always swinging back and forth in US politics, and traditionally, two years after losing a presidential election, the minority party makes gains in midterm elections. There is also some evidence that split ticket voting will take place to put a check on a Hillary Clinton presidency.

And historically, it's unusual for a single party to have a lock on the White House for more than three terms. The Republican terms of Richard Nixon, Nixon again and Gerald Ford were followed by Democrat Jimmy Carter. The Republican terms of Ronald Reagan, Reagan again and George H.W. Bush were followed by Democrat Bill Clinton. Long runs of single-party dominance over the White House and Congress are rare in modern US politics.

Second, we must look at the causes that put Trump so close to the White House. Both [Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton](#) have remarkably high negative polling numbers, and they are deeply disliked by voters, many of whom are holding their noses to vote for them. Clinton is seen as a career politician and very untrustworthy. Trump is seen as stunningly ill-prepared to be commander-in-chief and a dangerous demagogue. Many Americans are feeling left out and the country feels divided.

But beyond their personal baggage, we must look at why the US party system is troubled—for example, the sense that the political elite is out of touch, as has been argued in the [United Kingdom with the Brexit vote](#) or Europe with the rise of the far-right. The same simmering discontent and economic angst can be seen elsewhere. Yet serious plans for the election's most important issues, such as the economy, income inequality and unemployment, have received scant attention.

DEINDUSTRIALIZATION AND GLOBALIZATION

The US is paying the price for not addressing the impacts of deindustrialization and globalization: the displacement and loss of jobs that have happened over the past several decades. Technology and innovation have changed work and employment, benefitting the incomes of educated workers at a cost to middle-income jobs and economic mobility. Globalization has meant winners and losers, and those who are left out understandably have had it with a political system they feel has done little to help them.

Trump would not have been able to demonize free trade and revive nationalism on his own. He has been enabled and empowered by a large number of Republican Party voters desperately trying to send a message.

Those who feel left behind aren't buying someone else's idea of progress, and they feel like they're being heard when politicians point the finger of blame at international trade and immigration.

How do we help them?

For a start, workforce training can better equip displaced workers for 21st century jobs. Better access to affordable, quality education is an overdue part in finally addressing the rich-school, poor-school disparity in the US. Revitalization efforts and assistance can help the regions hardest hits by trade deals and global economic trends.

Much more needs to be done to address the impacts of globalization so that its benefits are shared and sustainable. Or we can build a wall and try to solve our problems that way.

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5 Ways to Make Indian Universities World-Class

Shail Kumar

October 23, 2016

Urgent and comprehensive reforms will enable India to successfully attain its quest for world-class universities.

Winds of change may be blowing across India these days. [Surgical strikes against Pakistan](#) have raised expectations from Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The Ministry of Human Resources Development (MHRD) has a new leader in Prakash Javadekar. Everyone the author spoke with is of the view that Javadekar is more open to new ideas than his predecessor. More importantly, the MHRD is launching [Operation Vishwajeet](#), with the objective of improving the global rankings of seven Indian Institutes of Technology.

In addition to the above operation, the MHRD is seeking inputs on yet another ambitious project. This one seeks to create 20 world-class universities, and this author has read the MHRD's 29-page public consultation document titled [Policy on Establishment of World Class Institutions](#) several times. This is a new step in Indian policymaking, and this author recommends all readers to send their feedback to the MHRD.

In the next 35-50 years, about 700 million to 1.3 billion youth could potentially go through India's higher education system. Existing multidisciplinary universities have lost their way. Most have declined in their reputation, selection and rigor. After nearly 70 years of independence, India does not have one world-class multidisciplinary research university. In fact, only one university in the country, the [Indian Institute of Science Bangalore](#), is ranked in the top 500 globally.

This author has repeatedly [argued](#) that higher education system is the nerve center of a society and nation; this nerve center in India is not functioning well; and that India needs a "Gray Revolution" that ushers in long overdue comprehensive reforms. At a time when the MHRD is seeking public consultation, this author has five ideas to make India's higher education institutions truly world-class.

IMPROVING INDIAN UNIVERSITIES

First, the MHRD must appoint a leader and a team with credibility. They must understand how to build and run world-class universities. The University Grants Commission (UGC) must stop chairing and managing the various selection and approval committees. Those who got the higher education system in the current mess cannot be trusted to transform it. The policy document itself recognizes the UGC's failure, when it notes: "The above initiative is the beginning of our journey to restore the original mandate of higher education regulators, as facilitators and guides, driven by norms of self-disclosure and transparency, instead of top-down command and control and micromanagement, in the quest to achieve world-class standards in all colleges and universities."

The information technology CEO [Nandan Nilekani's Aadhaar project](#) is the most recent and visible example of successful nation-wide government initiative. Nilekani brought instant credibility, insights and a network of the good. He and his team also demonstrated what a small group of dedicated, smart and hardworking people with domain expertise can accomplish in a relatively short time. The government would do well to replicate this model for the world-class universities initiative as well.

Second, the MHRD must create a transparent merit-based criterion to select these institutions. The policy document declares its intention to create 10 public and 10 private world-class universities. This declaration smells fishy. If the intent is to accelerate the establishment of world-class institutions, then the most effective and efficient strategy is to focus on the current premier institutions such as the Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT), Indian Institutes of Management (IIM), Indian Institute of Sciences (IISc) and the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), and transform them into world-class multidisciplinary research universities. They have a much better reputation, infrastructure and resources than most other institutions.

In addition, most of the top 10 colleges across most of the disciplines are public institutions. Is the focus on 10 private institutions an outcome of big business lobbying? Otherwise, why not have 15 public and five private world-class institutions—or 16-4? What will the selection criteria be? Will there be any transparency in either selection criteria or the selection process?

Third, the MHRD must attract the best and the brightest talent to be faculty members in colleges and universities by instituting market-based compensation, merit-based incentives and an effective accountability system. “All of these schools [two-thirds of the best American universities] correctly assume that the quality of the faculty is the most important factor in maintaining their reputation and position,” wrote Henry Rosovsky, former dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences and briefly acting president of Harvard University, in *The University: An Owner’s Manual*.

Stanford University’s transformation from a regional university in the early 1940s to among the top five in the world can be attributed to its commitment to attract the best talent from around the world to its faculty. The MHRD’s policy document misses this point completely, except to say the institutions “should have a good proportion of foreign or foreign qualified faculty.” It forgets that these foreign or foreign-qualified faculty could turn out be mediocre and unmotivated.

Fourth, the MHRD must leverage massive open online courses (MOOC), technology and innovations to scale with speed and excellence. MOOCs are a relatively new innovation but one that offers India an opportunity to leapfrog existing methods of education—much like wireless technologies did for communications and commerce. Currently Swayam, India’s MOOCs initiative, boasts of 93 undergraduate and 83 post-graduate program choices. The Swayam model has to be replicated. Instead, the MHRD policy document arbitrarily decrees that “not more than 30% of the program should be in online mode.” This is arbitrary, regressive and nonsensical. If India is serious about creating world-class institutions, it has to use MOOCs without restrictions.

Finally, the MHRD must not limit its new framework to just 20 institutions. Thousands of colleges and universities must benefit from a more enabling regulatory environment. In India, 20-26 million children are born each year. If the country is to be ready for this tsunami-scale wave of tens of millions of people, then it has to transform its higher education system.

India could do well to learn from tiny Singapore. Ben Wildavsky, author of *The Great Brain Race: How Global Universities Are Reshaping the World*, notes: “One final distinguishing feature of NUS’s [National University of Singapore] rise to excellence is that it has cultivated a meritocratic culture, backed by resources and freed from bureaucratic hiring constraints.” India could also learn from other countries such as the

United States, Britain, China and South Korea that have established a world-class higher education system.

SOCIAL MOBILITY IN INDIA

Once in place, a vibrant system of colleges and universities can address India's mega challenges such as poverty, energy, water, food, health and education itself. They would also boost the research, innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem. Furthermore, world-class universities would improve social mobility and foster sustainability in a class- and caste-divided country hurtling to environmental disaster. Winds of change are blowing in India. The country faces a big question. Will its leaders demonstrate vision and will to reform a crumbling education system that fails to serve the needs and aspirations of hundreds of millions of Indians?

The best time to reform India's education system was yesterday. The next best time to do so is now.

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The End of Nuclear Diplomacy Between Russia and US

Polina Popova

October 25, 2016

A world without nuclear weapons seems as far removed now as during the 1980s.

In 2000, Bill Clinton and Vladimir Putin signed a deal calling on both countries to reduce their stockpiles of weapons-grade plutonium. The deal, called the Plutonium Management and Disposition Agreement (PMDA), was the hallmark of an era when both countries were committed to healing the deep wounds left by the Cold War.

Earlier this month, following two years of conflict and disagreements that shook US-Russia relations, [Putin suspended the 16-year-old deal](#) with America. In a statement on October 3, President Putin said the decision stemmed from “the emergence of a threat to strategic stability and as a result of unfriendly actions by the United States of America towards the Russian Federation”—a reference to the uproar caused by Russia’s continued bombing of civilians in Aleppo.

Ostensibly, the reason the PMDA was scuttled is because President Barack Obama recently [proposed changing the method](#) that was used to render plutonium unusable. Instead of irradiating the plutonium and transforming it into mixed-oxide (MOX) in a special facility that is currently under construction in South Carolina, the administration switched to something called “immobilization” by which the material is mixed with radioactive waste that renders it unusable in bombs.

DIFFERENT ERA

The PMDA, which was renewed in 2009 when Hillary Clinton served as US secretary of state, was the product of a very different era of diplomacy between the two countries. Today, against the backdrop of two proxy wars in Ukraine and Syria, Putin is manufacturing technical explanations to fault the United States for not living up to its end of the deal. And while Ukraine has simmered down in recent months, and is more and more resembling one of the many frozen conflicts found on the Russian periphery, the war in Syria has brought bilateral relations to arguably their lowest point since the Cold War.

The breakdown in relations is especially frightening in terms of the downturn in nuclear cooperation. Efforts such as the [Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty](#) were essential to disarmament after the collapse of the Soviet Union. US-Russia cooperation [enabled the blending down of 500 tons of enriched uranium](#) from Soviet nuclear weapons, which were then purchased by the US for use as reactor fuel. Some 900 [missiles were destroyed](#) and 7,600 warheads were deactivated. Weapons scientists were placed in stable jobs with salaries generous enough to discourage the sharing of their knowledge with rogue states or terrorists. While this entente ensured a reduction of risks after the Cold War and was an unabashed success for more than a decade, the architecture starting crashing down in the early 2010s.

Suspicious of American nuclear inspectors, Russia decided to depart from practically all bilateral nuclear security cooperation mechanisms, even refusing to participate in this year's biennial Nuclear Security Summit. This was a turning point in relations, especially since both sides had agreed to always cooperate in matters of counterterrorism and nonproliferation, which were long seen as issues of the utmost importance.

Even if Moscow and Washington held throughout the past two decades different views over the nuclear programs in Tehran, Pyongyang or Tel Aviv, they were still dedicated to working together. And now, by pulling out of the 2000 PSMA, Putin is essentially [conflating actions he perceived as hostile](#) in Syria and Ukraine, with grievances regarding the US handling of its own side of the plutonium deal.

DECLINE IN COOPERATION

The decline in cooperation between Russia and the West comes with serious consequences in the civilian sector as well. Projects undertaken by Russian state-owned atomic energy company Rosatom have been accused of [questionable safety practices](#). Nuclear power plants such as the Ostrovets reactor in Belarus may live up to local safety standards, but not to [those of the neighboring European Union member states such as Lithuania](#). Ostrovets, which is just a one hour drive from Lithuanian capital Vilnius, has seen [a number of dangerous accidents](#), including a [dropped reactor shell](#) and an explosion of an oxygen gas tank, which killed a worker.

The fact that Belarus is using a new, untested reactor and has repeatedly stonewalled European demands for nuclear inspections is not reassuring either. Similarly, Rosatom is also building a reactor in southern Turkey, at Akkuyu, and this project has also been [criticized for bad planning](#) and a lack of independent oversight.

Getting the two powers to talk to each other will not be an easy feat, especially after leaders such as US Secretary of State John Kerry and French President Francois Hollande have called on Russia to be brought before an international tribunal for [war crimes](#).

And Moscow isn't backing down either. In the same press release that announced the termination of the PMDA, the Kremlin put forward a laundry list of demands for its resumption of nuclear cooperation. Russia is demanding a rollback of sanctions,

compensation for economic damage incurred, reductions of US military presence in certain areas, and the repeal of the Magnitsky Act. This act, instituted in 2012, allows Americans to freeze the assets of Russian officials suspected of involvement in human rights violations.

These events all cast a shadow over President Obama's initiative to rid the world of nuclear weapons, [announced just months after he took office](#). Since then, his own administration has indicated that \$1 trillion would be spent over the next decades, not on eradicating nuclear weapons, but on [modernizing the US arsenal](#). The issue of following through on this vision of a nuclear-free world has scarcely been mentioned in the current presidential campaign, and is [difficult to even imagine after years of continued tensions](#) with North Korea, violent instability in the Middle East and the diplomatic conflicts with Russia.

The significance of the breakdown in nuclear cooperation cannot be overstated. These bilateral security agreements were one of the great successes of the end of the Cold War. Now, the ideal of a world without nuclear weapons seems as far removed as during the 1980s.

**Polina Popova is a Russian-British writer and journalist. This article is available online at [Fair Observer](#).*



NOVEMBER

Populism is Straining Regional Relations in North America

Daniel Kapellmann and Jamie Stark

November 3, 2016

Right-wing polarization may disrupt the bilateral relationship between Mexico and the United States.

When Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump visited Mexico on September 1, 2016, local protesters made it clear: His offensive, untrue and divisive rhetoric about the Mexican people was not welcome. Amid that backdrop of rejection on both sides it's easy to forget that the United States and Mexico have been tied together by economic, cultural, political and geographical bonds for a long time.

Both countries share a [2,000-mile border](#) where hundreds of thousands of people cross both ways legally each day, enabling up to \$1.4 billion of annual two-way trade and more than 34 million tourists a year that generate a significant economic spillover on both sides.

Both countries share similar challenges along their sprawling border. Despite close collaboration between both governments, estimated [billions of dollars in spending](#) on border controls from the US side and thousands of people dying on their attempts to cross the border, [millions of immigrants from Mexico](#), Central and Latin America continue to come across the border without proper papers. It is nearly impossible for authorities to patrol such an expansive border. Far worse than unregulated crossings, powerful drug cartels in Mexico tied to the demand for drugs in the US have led to continuous violence in certain border regions.

It won't be easy to solve these problems, but certainly collaboration between the US and Mexico would be necessary to improve security and migration mechanisms. An example of such collaboration, the Merida Initiative, has since 2008 promoted support between both governments to tackle the drug cartels and secure the border. However,

the right-wing polarization promoted chiefly by Donald Trump threatens to halt cooperation within the region.

DIVISIVE FOREIGN POLICY

Trump launched his campaign in June 2015 accusing the Mexican government of intentionally sending criminals across the border, and accusing Mexican immigrants of crimes they are more likely to be fleeing than committing: “When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best. They’re sending people that have lots of problems. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists ...”—followed by the promise of building a great wall around the southern border of the US.

One year later, during his first [foreign policy speech](#) as a presidential candidate, Trump expressed his disapproval of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and advanced his nationalistic world view of adopting closed-door politics to better resolve internal affairs. Founded on the phrase “America First!” the candidate sells an isolationist foreign policy based on nationalistic and hyperbolic claims.

Even though the three signatory countries—Canada, the US and Mexico—have expressed the need to review current NAFTA conditions, it is clear that the treaty has generated relevant benefits for its members. Over its first two decades, [US trade with its neighbors has tripled](#) and regional commerce has increased from \$290 billion in 1993 to more than \$1.1 trillion in 2016.

In spite of controversial discussions regarding the flux of money and employment, it is clear that changes in the agreement would have sharp effects on the regional economies.

Besides serious threats posed to global trade, immigrants seem to be the most affected by the Trump tornado. The United States is a nation built on immigration. It is being particularly divided by Trump’s campaign, which seemingly purposefully generates clashes among different groups of the population—as would of course his election for president.

Strong right-wing nationalism tends to be associated with rejection of people from different races and origins. In the case of North American relations, this scenario could

potentially affect more than [11.7 million Mexican immigrants in the US](#) (27.6% of the overall foreign population) thus generating further tensions with its neighbor country.

Whereas anti-discrimination laws in the US are generally robust to protect diversity, the consolidation of an environment prone to right-wing nationalism and xenophobia is exacerbating division between the Democratic and Republican parties, as well as within families and neighborhoods.

POLITICAL GRIDLOCK

Since 2014, findings from the [Pew Research Center](#) indicate that Republicans and Democrats diverge more than ever before in American history. As a result, antipathy between the left and the right wing has risen, as well as political confrontation between opposite ideologically oriented citizens and politicians.

The bipartisan polarization in the US has in the past years already led to severe political gridlock in Congress, which has prevented necessary reforms in many policy areas, as the latest edition of the [Bertelsmann Stiftung's Sustainable Governance Indicators](#) (SGI) project [finds](#): "Governance suffers in the United States ... because of the gridlock that results from polarized parties and divided government ... the main manifestation of this gridlock is a low level of ability to implement government goals."

This is one of the main reasons why the US is doing so badly in [SGI's international assessment of policy making](#). In terms of the quality of economic, social and environmental policies, the US ranks only 26th of all 41 OECD and European Union nations. The country has been slow to recover economically after recent crises, unemployment among minorities is high, social policies lack efficiency, and inequalities in education and income are increasing.

The high levels of polarization that are present in the America today endanger the future growth of North America as a region and promote a context in which Donald Trump's divisive agenda has gained wide support. Building walls on the border is certainly not a feasible solution for tackling these and other problems currently affecting the region.

Promoting stronger collaboration and empathy between countries, political parties and people seems to be a better option. The real barrier to achieving this are not just the

results of the US presidential election, but whether Trump's attitudes and policy prescriptions maintain strong support in the US long after November 8.

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Feminism After the Arab Spring

Dina Yazdani

November 7, 2016

Women have served as indispensable agents of change during and after the Arab Spring and have made significant gains but have a long road ahead.

It was not uncommon to see news of the Arab Spring accompanied by photos of women on the frontline. Women participated, organized and even led many of the uprisings throughout the region. In some countries, it was women who became the face of the revolution, including Tawakkol Karman in Yemen and Zainab al-Khawaja in Bahrain, to name a few.

Even for the average woman, squares where protests took place became liberating spaces with few social boundaries. Men, realizing the integral role that women would play in the revolutions, welcomed and accepted them into what traditionally was their space. The promise of freer and democratic societies would presumably facilitate greater women's rights. As it would turn out, women had the most to gain—and lose—from the Arab Spring.

AFTERMATH OF THE ARAB SPRING

For many of the countries that saw an end to their despotic regimes, the immediate aftermath of the Arab Spring was positive for women. In Yemen, women played a tremendous role in the political transition after the ouster of Ali Abdullah Saleh from his presidential throne in 2012. The international community hailed the National Dialogue Conference (NDC), which lasted around a year from early 2013, for its inclusion of

women. Women occupied 30% of seats at the conference, and headed three out of the nine committees within it. The other six committees? They served as deputy presidents.

Women organizations rallied together as the NDC convened its constitution drafting committee, and called for a 30% quota of seats in government to be allocated to women. Their tenacity, months of rigorous lobbying both to members of the committee and their own communities, were rewarded. Not only was a 30% quota of seats in the legislative, judicial and executive branches reserved for women, but the minimum age of marriage was also set to 18. (In some places in the United States, girls can still marry [as young as 12](#).)

Women saw an increase in political representation even in countries whose political vacuum was filled by Islamist political parties. In Libya, the Justice and Development Party, affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, comprised the second largest number of women of all political parties represented in the General National Congress (GNC) before it was disbanded in 2014. Overall, women occupied 33 out of the 200 seats in the GNC. Similarly in Tunisia, by 2014 women had won 49 out of the 217 seats in the Constituent Assembly. Out of all of the women representatives, 42—a vast majority of them—are members of the Islamist Ennahda party.

Egypt, however, is another story. The premature elections held after the ouster of President Hosni Mubarak ushered in an Islamist government controlled by the Muslim Brotherhood that saw a reversal of women's rights, rather than an advancement. Had the Morsi government remained in power before its overthrow in 2013, patriarchy would have been codified by the new constitution.

Not only were provisions guaranteeing equality between men and women left out from the old constitution, but the constitution no longer forbade discrimination on the basis of gender. For many, the new constitution marked the breaking point for their tolerance of the Morsi government, and it provided the green light for a military coup d'état led by the current president, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

In the latest [Egyptian elections](#), women won 75 out of the 568 seats in the House of Representatives. Sisi appointed an additional 14 female representatives, which meant that Egyptian women now comprise almost 15% of seats—a record high for Egypt. In 2012, the first election after Mubarak's fall, and the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood

government, women made up only 2% of the total representatives, which was a drastic drop from 13% in 2010, before the Arab Spring.

There is relative progress in Egypt. However, women continue to be subject to sexual harassment in public and violence in private spaces, not least of which is domestic violence at home, and torture and rape in prison.

HITTING THE CEILING

Egypt may offer some hope for the status of women today, but the future in Yemen and Libya looks grim. The government has all but collapsed in Yemen after the Houthi takeover of the capital, Sanaa, the re-emergence of al-Qaeda and the rise of the Islamic State (IS) to fill the power vacuum, and the war between the Houthi rebels and the Saudi-led coalition that has left destruction, food, water and refugee crises, and an alarmingly high civilian death toll in its wake. Libya continues to suffer from a civil war between different tribal groups vying for control over its land that has rendered its political process all but obsolete, and fragmented at best.

While women continue to be active on the ground in Syria in documenting the crimes of the Assad regime and engaging in hands-on work on the ground as teachers, doctors and other civic positions, they are poorly represented among the opposition leadership. Indeed, the Syrian National Coalition (SNC) has persistently failed to bring any women to peace talks with foreign states. This begs the question of whether or not a political transition—be it after the fall of the Assad regime or the federation of Syria—will continue to be male-dominant, despite the integral role women have played in Syrian civil society.

However, for the states that have avoided collapse and continue to rebuild and pursue a democratic transition after their Arab Spring, what does the future of women look like?

Historically, agency of women is egregiously reduced in a time of war. Even in stable countries like Tunisia and Egypt, women pursuing the advancement and codification of their political, social and economic rights are hindered by deeply conservative societies and dominant Islamist political parties. Unless these realities change, will women eventually hit a ceiling in their pursuit of equality?

FEMINISM IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

Today, discourse on feminism in the Muslim-world has largely revolved around whether or not women's rights are compatible with Islam. Can women achieve equal rights under an Islamic government? To what extent can they campaign for women's rights in a conservative society?

[Deniz Kandiyoti](#) argues that there are only two trajectories feminist discourse can take: either deny that Islamic practices are oppressive, or claim that oppressive practices are not Islamic.

Both trajectories fail to address the limitations and shortcomings of feminism that operates within an Islamic framework. For one, any form of Islamic governance or jurisprudence is incompatible with pluralism, because the imposition of any religion will inherently restrict individual choice. It is difficult to deny that women's rights are best progressed in environments that promote pluralism, such as a secular democracy.

However, publicly criticizing Islam or promoting secularism could be more problematic than beneficial for women's-rights activists. For one, it could delegitimize these campaigns, especially if they are operating in conservative societies. Government authorities themselves could accuse them of being funded by the West, and outright ban them. Inversely, these new governments also realize they cannot belittle women's-rights movements, especially after the role they played in the Arab Spring.

Islam can not only define the work of some women in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), but can also help enable them to become agents of change in their communities. This is especially helpful for women in conservative societies that require time to open up and undergo an organic process so that rights codified in law also become norms on the ground.

In Egypt, for example, the hijab (headscarf) can provide women with agency to navigate male-dominated public spaces. As Leila Ahmed writes in her book, *The Quiet Revolution*, the hijab gives religious authority to women who feel confined to their home. In instances like this, the hijab can be liberating.

However, in countries where it is mandatory for women to wear the hijab, it can be oppressive. The pursuit of women's rights in Iran, which includes re-imagining the hijab

as an accessory rather than part of the Islamic dress code, serves as an interesting case study of how women can be agents of change in the Muslim world.

LIPSTICK JIHAD

Although not a part of the Arab Spring or the Arab world, the movement inside Iran to advance women's rights is multifaceted and can potentially serve as a model to emulate for women in MENA. In Iran, women are at the frontline and behind-the-scenes in the struggle for women's rights. During the 2009 Green Movement, women adorned green veils and marched beside men to protest the speculated fraudulent election results that brought President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to power. It was Neda Agha-Soltan, a young philosophy student, who became the symbol of the movement after she was shot dead during a protest—her death caught on camera and seen around the world.

Iranian women continue to play a pivotal role in the reform movement, which advocates for the expansion of women's rights in addition to a variety of other political and social rights. In the 2016 parliamentary elections, women made [sweeping gains](#) where they now hold a record number of seats. Their greater political representation will provide a louder voice for women in Iran, and encourage political parties to appeal to the demands of women now that they have proved that they are a crucial voting bloc.

However, it is not only on the frontline, like in the Green Movement, or in government that women are serving as agents of change. It is also—and arguably most effectively—through everyday acts of resistance. Women will wear their mandated hijab far back on their head, allowing their hair to escape in the front, bold make-up and body-hugging overcoats. Journalist Azadeh Moaveni describes this act of resistance, even if it is carried out passively by some, as “[lipstick jihad](#).” Iranian women push the boundaries of the Islamic dress code by re-imagining it into a unique fashion that has influenced the style of Muslim women around the world.

Iranian women are also changing society by dominating professions that most strongly influence civil society and culture overall—publishing and the arts. Through cinema, literature and the press, these women are slowly prying society open and exposing it to new ideas. If society can begin to open, which it has been, and undergo gradual

cultural reformation, then this will usher pressure for the government to eventually follow suit.

Progress in Iran is slow. However, its diverse and creative approaches to advocate for women's rights could serve as a model worth emulating for conservative societies and states governed, or influenced, by Islamic law. Lipstick jihad is unique to Iran, and irrelevant for women in countries where the hijab is not imposed. But what can be learned from Iran is that these individual acts of resistance that occur parallel to more organized efforts by women's rights organizations and reformist political parties that help penetrate every echelon of Iranian society.

WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS

While Iran experiences slow cultural reformation that quietly resists the Islamic Republic, women in countries that are actually beginning the slow process of democratization have a tremendous opportunity to shape the future of the state—one that is more inclusive of women in its political process and a guarantor of their rights—while simultaneously leading grassroots efforts to carve more public spaces for women in civil society.

The future for Arab states like Syria, Yemen and Libya paints a grimmer picture. Women historically bear the brunt of war and conflict. Rape is commonly used as a weapon of war against women to terrorize societies. Women also typically make up the largest number of civilian casualties. In Libya and Yemen, the hope is that an eventual transition process will incorporate women like it did in the immediate aftermath of the Arab Spring, and that Syria will follow suit. If not, women will continue to challenge patriarchy as they always have in these countries by other means.

There is a long road ahead for the region as a whole to achieve full social, political and economic rights of women. Women will still need to challenge patriarchy, whether it be by electing more female candidates to political office, utilizing the arts and press—cultural conduits to spread their message and transform society—or taking to the streets to protest and demand change. Or, perhaps, all of the above.

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The Black Swan Moment of Donald Trump

Steve McCabe

November 10, 2016

Donald Trump's victory adds to the sense that we live in "interesting times."

With the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States of America, I am reminded of the phenomenon known as a "black swan event." This phenomenon is something that is such a surprise that the occurrence would not have been reasonably contemplated. However, once the event has occurred, there is usually a frenzied attempt to explain or rationalize it.

The notion of "black swan events," which is something that has been around for centuries to mean, quite literally, the belief of a bird that did not exist, gained widespread popularity as a result of a book published in 2007 by Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*, which, using his knowledge of mathematics and philosophy as well as business, was a sole vice in predicting the Global Financial Crisis of 2008. As Taleb asserted, there are some events that occur with such speed and are of such an unpredictable nature that previous experience provides no clues.

The election of Donald Trump is, in reality, not a "black swan event." After all, in a two-horse race, which is effectively what the American presidential election is, the fact that one of the horses actually wins should come as no surprise. However, Trump's election is a surprise as we were told by pollsters that his rival, Hilary Clinton, was likely to win.

IT'S THE ECONOMY, STUPID

What is sending shockwaves around the globe is the fact that the man who will become the most powerful person in the world, assuming that Russian President Vladimir Putin is second, has no experience of being involved in public service or holding any government office whatsoever. There are the issues of his statements and outbursts during the election campaign too, some of which border on racist.

However, as the expression goes, “it’s the economy, stupid,” which was coined by James Carville, the campaign strategist of Bill Clinton’s 1992 presidential campaign. It was meant to send a powerful message that change was required to make people feel better. Ironically, it is Trump who has made the argument that he can bring change to those who feel impoverished as a consequence of losing jobs in America’s “rust belt” due to international competition. Hillary Clinton argued that what was needed was continuity rather than radical change.

Trump has said: “We’re going to rebuild our infrastructure, which will become second to none. We will put millions of our people to work as we rebuild it.” He claimed that huge investment was needed and that he would double the amount Clinton proposed to spend. This would mean over \$500 billion.

However, given that he has claimed he would cut the federal tax rate from 35% to 15% as well as reduce income taxes for individuals, it is questionable how he can raise this money. Significantly, Trump has never explained the basis of his economic policies in detail.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNDER DONALD TRUMP

Voters in the US have voted for change to be carried out by a man who has promised to make them feel better off. The question is what this will mean in practice, and what it will mean for the rest of the world, including the United Kingdom?

Trump’s pledge to “tear up” international free trade agreements—if it comes to pass—will severely disturb relationships that have existed for decades and, many argue, will be negative for global economic growth. The idea of protectionism, something Trump is an advocate of, was believed to be outdated in a world in which barriers and borders were less important. If America under Trump does this, there will be others who will respond in kind and retaliate.

Early signs show that markets are taking time to consider what the realities of Trump’s victory will really mean. Because of his distinct lack of pedigree or experience—this is a man who has been criticized for poor judgment in running his own businesses and has been widely disowned by many significant figures in the Republican Party, including George W. Bush—there is uncertainty.

As we continue to experience the vicissitudes resulting from Brexit, and there are still concerns about the Chinese economy, Trump's election as president of the United States really does add to the sense that we live in "interesting times."

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How Presidential Candidates Are Sold to the People

Peter Isackson

November 11, 2016

If candidates have become commodities, voters have become passive consumers.

Donald Trump began his rise in June 2015 by descending an escalator while boldly introducing a new degree of vulgarity and bigotry into presidential political discourse. Clothed in the armor of what the public took to be frank discourse, over the next 12 months he engaged in a series of mortal jousts with rival Republican knights, vanquishing more than a dozen opponents, each mounted on their official Republican Party steed.

After which, surrounded by his family at the July convention, he became the lonely but fearless leader of a party that mourned its dead in the absence of its surviving but ailing champions, about to venture forth to complete his heroic crusade. It would lead him to face off against the invincible Knightess of the Democrats, whose armor had been honed by the world's most experienced and renowned political smiths. Her only known weakness, as some had discovered, was the eventual frailty of her mail.

Then, just when all seemed lost as his past sins were revealed before being confessed in public, he achieved a resounding victory that placed him on the coveted throne at the White House, gainsaying the divinations of the political seers and wizards who had

predicted the triumph, foreordained by the stars of Washington and Hollywood, of the Knightess Hillary.

PRESIDENTIAL THRONES

This imaginary telling of a contemporary game of presidential thrones is one way of summarizing the story the entire world is now acquainted with. It's the story of a successful 16-month quest, expurgated of course of many of the less recommendable episodes concerning multiple damsels in distress, outrageously formulated prevarications, tax write-offs and various insalubrious and violent incidents. It was a drama clearly written for an agonizing empire, the land of the ailing Fisher King, protector of the Holy Grail, longing to bring back the prosperity of the past to a land gone hopelessly arid.

In the age of cable television, many of us count on dramatized stories to provide us with the means to understand both the past and the present.

THE SURREAL DRAMA OF POLITICS IN AMERICA

The founders of American democracy designed their political system to give informed citizens a voice in the affairs of their government, and the power to select those who would have the dual task of translating their needs into law and representing their point of view in the national dialogue. Most—with the possible exception of [strict constructionists](#)—will admit that a lot has changed since the drafting of the Constitution.

In the age of powerful print and audiovisual media that facilitate the easy creation and circulation of cultural memes, democracy has long since succumbed to the logic elaborated by [Guy Debord](#), the French theorist, in his book [Société du Spectacle](#), published nearly 50 years ago. Debord describes a society that has transformed social relations from a state of *being* (living directly) to *having* (acquiring and possessing), and from having to *appearing*, in the form of a spectacle, as an object that can be consumed in the moment and discarded.

The phenomena he described in that book were only just emerging, but they have increasingly dominated the political landscape ever since. Some say it began with the televised John F. Kennedy Richard Nixon debates, in which the image of the

candidates had a far greater impact on the election results than the positions the candidates expressed during the debate. Madison Avenue immediately sensed an opportunity and thus began the era of “scientific” political marketing orchestrated by the new generation of Mad Men. Ten years after Kennedy, Jess Unruh, a traditional politician informally dubbed the “[kingmaker](#),” famously complained that Ronald Reagan, his opponent for the office of governor of California in the 1970 election, was packaged “[like a bar of soap](#).”

If candidates have become commodities, voters have correspondingly become passive consumers. They are expected to do nothing more than commit to a product presented to them through the media. Because of the two-party system that has dominated American politics for nearly two centuries, voters understand that the choice of the product will always be presented in the simplest possible terms, as an option between product A and product B.

Armed with the foreknowledge of this fatally binary logic that applies to every political campaign, the marketers could get to work modeling, sculpting and packaging their political products—the candidates. In the list of ingredients on the package, they are always careful to include some “big ideas,” one or two “ideals” and an example or two of the “original thoughts” of their product-candidate. Bundled together, these will appear as their party platform or legislative program. Like food labeling, it permits the consumer to check whether an essential policy ingredient is present or whether there’s an industrial chemical to be avoided.

But unlike food products, marketers cannot simply put their merchandise in stores, launch some advertising and expect people to buy and consume it. Because elections are about citizens exercising democracy and the engagement of voters in the construction of their own political history, the marketers must be able to turn the product as frequently as possible into “news.” They must create the belief that their candidate represents at least one essential theme that will be beneficial to society, and that their product will contribute to the history of the community, if not the nation.

And, of course, getting people to vote isn’t enough. The candidate must win, otherwise all is for naught. This means that beyond the packaging and advertising, the news factor has become increasingly important.

Donald Trump understood this from day one, possibly because he came from the world of media and show business. But the highly professional political marketing scientists of Hillary Clinton's campaign clearly underestimated this factor, possibly because they assumed that Hillary had a stockpile of news from the past that could be referenced at any time. In doing so, they left a clear path for Trump, news manipulator par excellence, to coast to victory.

THE ELECTORAL PROCESS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

The exceptional, authentically surreal American presidential election campaign of 2016 offers us a rare opportunity to probe how the process of 21st century electoral politics works—in particular, how the media condition and manage perception of the goods on display, aka “the candidates.”

The first thing to notice is the nature of the choice given to the consumers. At least since the Kennedy-Nixon election, the media have perfected the art of reducing presidential elections to simple popularity contests. They are complicated only by the idea that one key ingredient in the process is to incite voters not just to support, but also to identify with their chosen candidate and, in the heat of the final phase of the battle, to feel and personally react to their triumph or defeat.

Clinton supporters interviewed by the media on the following morning typically said things like, “I don't understand how we lost,” as if they were personally an integral part of the team.

Let's take a closer look at how this identification with the industrially packaged candidate is achieved.

First, the political marketing team packages their candidate, usually following the branding norms of their party, Democrat or Republican. They thus offer the public a simple consumer choice between product A or product B. They set the scene and deliver the goods to the media, who then take over to create drama by redesigning the election according to the model of a sporting event.

From that point on, the polls will play the function of scorekeeping, while the candidates are expected to demonstrate their personal skills and political muscle by exciting crowds. This transformation into the simulacrum of a sporting event is

facilitated by the fact that the two-party system ensures that every election will function as a binary opposition, and that the campaign will last for the equivalent of an entire sports season, a time scale no other Western democracy is ready to adopt.

This basic model has been in existence for decades. It works even when no serious contrast exists between the candidates other than style, level of “talent” and superficial image (including dress). The lack of fundamental contrast is in fact the norm, as there is an implicit “presidential” bearing, style and “level of seriousness.”

This has been the case in all previous elections, where the Republican and Democrat presidents would be given the opportunity to differentiate themselves by promoting cultural issues linked to the official ideologies of their respective parties, while managing in virtually identical fashion the essentials: the economy and foreign policy, including the permanent expansion of the military-industrial complex that ties the two together.

Once the media had taken over the management of the drama of presidential campaigns, they would skew the story away from the issues and put the spotlight on the personalities of the two gladiators in the ring. Under the control of the marketers, the candidates would then predictably and relentlessly repeat their pet themes to their rallies and private events, “appealing to their base” and reassuring their fans.

At the same time, the media would systematically ignore or underplay the themes of their campaigns, which they treat as the inalienable intellectual property of the candidates or their parties. Instead, they would focus on testing and comparing the candidates’ respective skill sets. This process is never more evident than in the debates, which rarely produce anything resembling political insight but immediately provoke reams of commentary worthy of a sports page, dedicated to assessing who won and who lost.

It would be unthinkable that a debate should raise questions to be further explored when the media and the public assume that the whole point of it is to score points, knockdowns and, with a bit of luck, knockouts. But since there are no physical criteria for the scoring of a presidential debate, the media offer us subjective judgments about “presidential manner,” attitude and temperament. This author is particularly amused by the importance given by all the media to what’s called “fact checking,” as if it was the equivalent of counting points per round in a boxing match.

DONALD TRUMP'S NEW PARADIGM

Up until the 2016 campaign and the emergence of Donald Trump, candidate packaging and marketing always followed the same tried and true pattern. It was designed to take place in two distinct phases.

In phase one, the marketing teams first packaged and then launched their candidates. They were fitted with campaign themes they could constantly repeat or fall back on to prove their high seriousness and mobilize their base.

Then, in phase two, the media took over the task of fabricating “news” around the campaign and then finding ways of building the drama. The campaigns themselves have generally sought to build drama not for their own candidates, but by planting or highlighting negative “news” concerning their opponent. This is the strategy the Clinton campaign used right up to the end, with a panicked acceleration in the days before voters went to the polls.

Wittingly or unwittingly, Trump did the opposite. Like Muhammad Ali in the ring, from the opening bell he came out with his guard lowered and began prancing about, from news station to news station, making himself look easily vulnerable to the attack of his opponents while at the same time appearing evasive, as if he didn't even want to be in the ring. The young Cassius Clay knew how to upset and confuse his opponents before coming to believe, as his career advanced, that he could outbox them with his strength, speed and endurance.

One after the other, with his incessant and hyperactive footwork, especially in the Republican debates, Trump, like Ali, wore his opponents down and “proved” it by calling them “low energy.” He thus successfully eliminated the anointed champion of the Republican establishment, Jeb Bush, and then dealt summarily with Marco Rubio, Ted Cruz, Chris Christie, Ben Carson and the others. Like Joe Louis and Muhammad Ali, he raced through his “bum of the month” club and came out of the Republican National Convention with the champion's belt. For the general election, he increased the volume of his verbal provocations not only against his opponent, but toward the public as well. He even scored a surprise knockdown when his opponent faltered and collapsed on the most symbolic of days, 9/11.

Trump turned the well-oiled two-party campaign system on its head and managed to punch his way through the long rounds of the championship fight, like Joe Louis, Rocky Marciano or Muhammad Ali. Some believe he overturned the rules because he never expected to win and didn't really care.

It remains true that instead of starting with the scientific marketing of phase one, he launched straight into the drama of phase two. Before he had a product to package—and one is left wondering whether he ever created one—Trump was not only in the news cycle, but he clearly understood how to dominate it.

Having seen the most unorthodox and surreal of candidates bully his way to victory, we must now ask ourselves two things.

First, what happens within the sophisticated global military-financial-industrial system when there's an unorthodox, surreal captain at the helm? At this point, nobody—and least of all Donald Trump—knows the answer to that question, partly because he will not have a ring to dance around in anymore and must for the first time sit down and think it out. He will be confined to a series of tightly controlled dialogues in the Oval Office with those mostly anonymous managers who have their hands on the complex reins of global power.

The second question looks further forward into history: What does this mean for the future of presidential campaigns? Has Trump created a new paradigm and, if so, can anyone else imitate it? It may appear that he learned many of his tricks from former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, who was more of a distant model than a mentor. Trump may be less of an innovator than people give him credit for.

But it makes no sense to compare Italy, a political province of Europe that was never properly unified, with the United States. Trump has, in any case, possibly delivered the *coup de grâce* to the traditional logic and elaborate rituals of presidential campaigns in America. Unloved by the establishment figures of his own Republican Party, he has also wounded the two-party system in ways that are too early to assess.

This author has not mentioned the other key innovative factor in this campaign cycle: Bernie Sanders. Without Bernie's unexpected and equally provocative disturbance of the process on the Democratic side, Trump may never have succeeded. Both parties were not only challenged, but seriously destabilized, possibly even fatally. Those two

candidates, in radically different fashion, revealed the weakness and hypocrisy of a system built by the parties, controlled by marketing professionals and sold by the complicit media.

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Survival Sex: A Violent, Dangerous Game

Anna Pivovarchuk

November 21, 2016

At the fringes of the sex industry in the north of England, men and women are selling sex to survive.

Any local pizza parlor, on any given day. Bright lights, cheap plastic, the smell of frying grease. Men hanging around the cramped tables, coddling beer bottles, chatting. The owner lets a woman take a client into the back room to sell herself to him for some cash and warm food, as he waits for his order.

This is not, as you may have imagined, Eastern Europe in the unhinged 1990s. This is today's Great Britain, where a generational cycle of poverty, violence and addiction drives both men and (mostly) women to the lowest rung of the sex industry: survival sex.

In 2014, the Office of National Statistics' (ONS) inclusion of the [shadow economy in calculating the country's gross domestic product \(GDP\)](#) added an estimated £5 billion from prostitution alone. Many have pointed to the [problematic nature](#) of such valuations, questioning the suggested [61,000 sex workers in the United Kingdom](#) charging an average of £67 per client. Given the off-the-books nature of the sex industry, we will never know the exact numbers of people involved in it.

What is much more important is that there exists a stratum of this population that does not fit the ONS “[miscellaneous goods and services](#)” definition—an indeterminate number of men and women who rely on sex for the bare bones of survival. As Laura Seebom, director of Women’s Services at the charity [Changing Lives](#), [writes](#): “The link between sex work and poverty [is] palpable—selling sex for a roof over your head, for laundry, tiny amounts of money, a packet of cigarettes, a bottle of cider.”

HOW DO YOU FUND YOUR ADDICTION?

“At the time sex work just wasn’t talked about, so there was a sense that unless you have a red light district, it’s not going on. But that’s not what the women were saying to us,” Laura tells me. Ten years ago, she left her job as probation officer in Newcastle to set up a weekly drop-in for women involved in sex work locally to talk about what their needs and wants actually were.

This engagement with the women themselves became the Girls Are Proud (GAP) project, which employed former sex workers to both conduct research among and provide support for those still working in the area. “As opposed to the traditional systems that we have—the homelessness, the drugs and alcohol, probation, social services—where the way we work actually suits the services rather than the clients, the needs of the clients.”

“You could drop in on a Friday, and you wouldn’t be judged,” says Becca (not her real name), a former client and now a GAP employee.

“When I was a heroin addict I used to do sex work to fund my addiction,” she tells me. “There was no support out there for anyone. We were just basically left to our own devices to do what we want and no one asked, ‘How do you fund your addiction?’”

Becca’s story is painfully similar to that of hundreds of other GAP clients over the years. Sexually abused at the age of 10 by her friend’s grandfather, she started to take her anger and trauma out through violence, which resulted in a conviction for assault at the age of 16. “And then when I came out of prison, I couldn’t deal with the things that was going on, the thoughts that was going through me [sic] head, and I used heroin as a way of coping,” she explains.

“A lot of the women we work with would have either been in care or have been involved in the care system—you see family breakdown, witnessing domestic abuse, and often sexual and physical abuse themselves,” Laura paints an all-too familiar picture. Recent reports brought out by GAP on areas around [Newcastle](#) in 2013 and [Durham](#) in 2015 read like an endless cycle of poverty, abuse, trauma and addiction, which only leads to more abuse, more trauma, more drugs and more poverty.

Half of the women who answered the question in 2013 became involved in sex work before the age of 17, while almost all experienced problematic drug use and domestic violence; for two of the women it was with their current partner. In the majority of cases, drug addiction necessitated sex work, like for Becca, which then induced heavier drug use as a coping mechanism.

A [2004 report by the Home Office](#) put problematic drug use among women involved in street prostitution at 95%, with a similarly high percentage dependent on heroin and/or crack cocaine. Many of the women GAP works with spent up to £300 a day on drugs, which was the sum Becca wasted on heroin daily. “I could have bought a house!” she laughs now.

But the nature of drugs has changed. Alcohol has become much cheaper, and as many women were undergoing drug replacement therapies but still searched for a relief, alcohol became a major problem, according to Laura, as have legal highs.

It is hardly surprising, then, that a large proportion of sex workers GAP supports have been to prison, a vast majority more than once. In an altruistic twist, turning to sex to fund the drug habit was, for many, a way to avoid committing crime. For most victims of sexual abuse, self-worth and self-esteem are non-existent, so the easiest thing is to turn to what they know best: hurting themselves. “I didn’t want to go out and commit crime anymore to fund my addiction, so I did what I felt was normal at the time: abuse myself.” Becca’s statement echoes so many in the reports.

Many of the women that the GAP team works with would have dropped out of school as early as 12 or 14, and few have any qualifications, while some have problems with numeracy and literacy. Coupled with homelessness and addiction, a desperate pricing system takes effect. “I’ve worked with women in the past where it was, ‘I just need a bottle of cider,’” Laura tells me. “The compulsion to drink is such that they will do what

they need to do. In the most recent peer research, the respondents said that it was as little as £10. I can't say this is how much it is all the time, but that's what has come out of the respondents."

While [opportunistic sex workers](#) were able to get £150 for full sex, those involved in survival sex averaged around £40-60, with some being offered as little as £5 when they were coming off drugs. "You had to undercut to stay in the game," Becca explains. A violent, dangerous game.

A VIOLENT, DANGEROUS GAME

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), up to 60% of women across the world [will experience physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime](#). Unlike men, who experience violence from strangers—gang violence, armed robberies, street fights—the most common perpetrator of violence against women is someone close to them. At least a third of all women who have ever been in a relationship have experienced what is known as male-perpetrated intimate partner violence, or IPV.

The numbers increase exponentially when it comes to sex workers. According to a grim [compilation](#) by Alison Phipps at Sussex University, [81% of street workers across three UK cities had experienced violence](#) in 2001; a 2004 study of 125 street workers in five cities found that three-quarters had experienced physical violence. She cites a further study of 71 street workers conducted in Bristol in 2004 which found that [rape and physical violence, including weapons](#) such as guns, machetes and chainsaws, had been experienced by 73%. These numbers are in keeping with the [global trend](#).

A 1999 study of [street workers in West London](#), after assessing the high incidence of violence, drug abuse and sexually transmitted disease, concluded that the death rate among sex workers was 12 times higher than the general population. A more recent study in the United States found that active sex workers were [18 times more likely to be murdered](#) than women in the general population. Changing Lives echoes these findings among survival-sex workers, with two-thirds of women reporting violent encounters with clients.

There is an extra element of danger to this type of sex work is the vulnerability of women working on the street—"a historical, cultural endurance of intolerance and hostility towards street workers fostered by a general culture of distaste and disrespect

towards women who sell sex” outside the [regulated environment](#) with safety measures in place.

Hillary Kinnel, in her book, [Violence and Sex Work in Britain](#), places emphasis on poverty as a risk factor for women. Citing Home Office figures from 2007 for England and Wales, she stresses that sex worker homicides constitute only 2% of all female murders, in stark comparison of the 40% claimed by domestic violence. But murder is strongly correlated with poverty, with those in poor neighborhoods being six times more likely to be killed than those living in prosperous areas.

It is perhaps unsurprising that two-thirds of sex workers in South Africa, the US, Thailand, Zambia and Turkey [met the criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder \(PTSD\)](#).

Compounding this data and adding together the disadvantages of being a woman, poor and a sex worker perpetrates a cycle of violence and trauma that spans generations.

GETTING THROUGH LIFE

Luckily, Becca never got hurt at the hands of a client, like many of her friends have. But still, violence hung in the air like ripe fruit. “You never knew what situation you were going into. You could go to a house and there could be someone sitting there with a knife, you could be kidnapped—a lot of violence,” she says. This constant weariness and fear were a part of the job, “the good with the bad” as she puts it.

When I ask her why she kept up with it despite the danger, her answer is simple and direct: “You had to do what you had to do. To get through life.”

Many of the women have similarly normalized rape and physical assault. “I don’t think we work with any women who haven’t experienced violence through sex work,” Laura tells me. “I’ve had many times when somebody says, ‘Yeah, I was raped last week,’ as if it’s the most normal thing in the world.”

This normalization of violence is something that [Zoe Lodrick](#), a sexualized trauma specialist who consulted GAP on understanding cumulative impacts of abuse, describes as a [systematization of threat](#) in our neural passages. Young people,

particularly those who do not have strong relationships and support networks and have experienced trauma previously, are at a greater risk of falling into a cyclical pattern of abuse. Borrowing an ice-skating metaphor from a colleague, Lodrick explains repeated trauma as grooves in the ice, where every repeated move along the same trajectory creates a deeper cut that slowly becomes the only available way to move forward.

What is of particular relevance to the women that GAP is working to help is the survival mechanism which ensures that during a perceived threat, people do not flee from danger but rather toward the familiar—what they think of as home, someone they know. “When confronted with a significant threat from someone depended upon, most people respond in a way that best ensures continued attachment to that person,” Lodrick [writes](#). This trick of the mind is what helps explain what, to an outsider, often appears as a contradictory “going back for more” but, to a victim of physical or sexual abuse, represents the only known way to survive.

Becca, having grown up without her dad, relied on her mom for support after being abused. “But my mom has always used drugs. So I didn’t really have that support, and that’s why I turned to drugs because that [was] just a normal life to me,” she explains, confirming not only the generational nature of the problem, but also the [failure of social services](#).

TO LEGALIZE OR NOT TO LEGALIZE?

In a twist of morbid irony, this disproportionate violence is what put the dangers of sex work on the map and moved the debate about ways to mitigate it. “There’s been a lot of violent murders against sex workers in different areas and things, and I think people became more aware of the situation and more open,” Becca tells me, reflecting former Prime Minister David Cameron’s promise to review legislation after the [murder of three women in Bradford](#) in 2010.

Paying for sex is legal in Britain, but the [2003 Sexual Offences Act](#) prohibits curb crawling, solicitation, profiting from prostitution and, as of 2009, paying for services of someone subjected to force. The [debate](#) on sex-worker rights and safety focuses around the issue of decriminalization of the sex trade as actors attempt to define the notions of (sex) work, choice, exploitation and the free market.

To call this debate heated would be an understatement.

There are many dogs in this fight. There are sex worker rights organizations, who favor legalization and decriminalization, as were adopted in [New Zealand](#). There are the survivor organizations that tend to be more cautious in their approach. There are the anti-trafficking groups, who think legalization fuels human trafficking. There is the academia, playing around with numbers and model projections, and the governments trying to gage public attitudes while not stepping on too many political landmines at once.

When [Amnesty International](#) officially announced its adoption of decriminalization policy in 2015, the [Coalition Against Trafficking in Women](#) accused it of siding “with the multi-billion dollar international sex trade” and widening “the door for human rights abuses against prostituted individuals on a global scale.”

Neither side has the truth firmly on its side. A recent [study](#) by a government agency in Sweden—where paying for sex is illegal, known widely as the Nordic Model—concluded that prostitution was more than halved since 1995. The idea behind this model is to criminalize the perpetrator and [deter traffickers](#). As Thomas Ahlstrand, Gothenburg’s deputy chief prosecutor, told [The New York Times](#): “The beauty of the Swedish system is that we criminalize the strong, the oppressors.”

A report in [The Lancet](#), however, claims that no “evidence suggests that criminalisation of sex work (such as Sweden’s approach that criminalises the buying of and profiting from sex, and the renting of housing to sex workers) reduces sex work.” It goes further to state that “two evaluations reported that Sweden’s laws were a barrier to the prosecution of trafficking because clients who had previously assisted victims by alerting authorities now feared self-incrimination.”

A [comprehensive study](#) by the London School of Economics (LSE) applied economic models to the sex trade industry, concluding that according to the rules of the market, an increased demand following legalization will invariably increase supply. The study found that countries where prostitution is legal experience higher trafficking inflows—democracies are over 13% more likely to be recipients. But a comparison between Sweden and Denmark, where prostitution is legal, suggested “tentatively” that the proportion of trafficked persons was similar in both countries despite differences in legislation.

What makes the Swedish example even more complicated is that there is no data on trafficked persons in the country prior to 1999, making any comparative study of effects of criminalization on trafficking meaningless. [Data from Germany](#), where prostitution was legalized in 2002, shows that numbers of trafficked sex workers did increase following legalization, but remained proportionately similar to the Swedish statistics.

The authors conclude that there is no “smoking gun” proving that “legalization of prostitution definitely increases inward trafficking flows. The problem here lies in the clandestine nature of both the prostitution and trafficking markets, making it difficult, perhaps impossible, to find hard evidence establishing this relationship.”

THE QUESTION OF CHOICE

What it boils down to is the question of choice. The feminist assertion that each woman is free to decide how she earns her living favors decriminalization of sex work as a consensual exchange between adults, supported by the [safety argument](#) that treating sex work as legal employment increases access to health and police services, decreases crime and augments the civic rights of the sex worker.

Becca agrees: “If the police weren’t so judgmental, the women would speak out more about violent crime that happens to them. Even though it is not illegal to do it, it’s not spoken about, so people think it is illegal.”

Indeed, the peer research found that the majority of women do not report violent crimes to the police out of fear of persecution. A number of [studies](#) cited by Teela Sanders from the University of Leeds and Rosie Campbell from the UK Network of Sex Worker Projects have led them to conclude that with “state controlled or regulated sex markets there is evidence of less violence.”

But then again, what is choice? What is consent? If the vast majority of women enter sex work out of some form of necessity, often following a troubled childhood, sexual, physical and substance abuse, poverty and lack of education, is the transaction between a [willing buyer and a willing seller](#) really fair and equal?

“Over the years I have really struggled with this, because as a service provider it’s not helpful for us to take a strong political stance because every time it just excludes groups of women you work with. It’s not really helpful,” Laura says. But, over the years,

she has found more confidence to express her discomfort with the idea of legalization and leans toward the Nordic Model. “For me, it’s not like other types of employment, which might be exploitative through some other capitalist system—I get that.” For her, the crux of the matter is around the concept of consent, “because most of the women we work with started this path as young people, if not as children.”

Becca, too, is very clear about this idea of “choice.” “It’s not. It’s not a choice,” she says sternly. “When you are like 6 years old at school, everyone has an aspiration and a dream; my dream was to become a police officer. I didn’t dream to be a heroin addict or a sex worker or anything like that ... A 6-year-old girl or a 5-year-old doesn’t dream, ‘I’m gonna be a sex worker when I grow up.’ They don’t. And that’s what people don’t understand—they think that girls choose to be like this. No, they don’t.”

There is no real way to argue about that. But this debate about meaningful consent has one fundamental weak point, a blind spot—and that is the fact that, despite all the calls for or against criminalization, sex trade will continue regardless and will continue to put women at risk.

“I don’t think the stigma is because it’s illegal, because most bits of sex works aren’t illegal. There’s something else around male attitudes to women which makes it a much more dangerous occupation,” says Laura.

And it is this idea of “male attitudes” that is the heart of the matter. Most violence in this world is perpetrated by men against women. Men will continue to pay for sex. Until there is a fundamental shift both in the way men see women and a legal framework that protects all women—especially the most vulnerable—against men who don’t quite see them as equally human, then violence, inequality and stigma will continue unabated.

Like sex work, there are many jobs that women probably would not choose, were it an option—jobs where abuse is rife and the pay is low, and yet it is a job, a meal, a roof over your head. Just remember the blood-curling cruelty that immigrant maids experience in the Persian Gulf, or the plight of so many servant girls in India. These jobs are not illegal, and yet they are dangerous because of the power dynamics involved.

It falls on the shoulders of nongovernmental organizations such as Changing Lives to slowly turn the tide of social stigma and discrimination, and help sex workers—men and women—find a way out of a cycle of despair. This is why Becca continues to try her best every day: “If I could help one person, save one person’s life from a life of sex work and drugs, I have done my job.”

Robin Chaurasia of [Kranti Mumbai](#), who works with children of sex workers in India, told me something in an [interview](#) a few years ago that is hard to shake: “The only way to end issues relating to sex work—if you actually want to end the industry—is for every girl in the world to have access to education, jobs, and money. That’s the only solution: every single girl. And when is that going to happen?”

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Amid Uncertainty, Latin America is Looking Up

Pablo Bejar

November 22, 2016

Despite a recession, the Latin America and Caribbean region is looking ahead.

For the first time since 1982-83, the Latin America and Caribbean region is expected to be in recession for two consecutive years (2015-16). According to [World Economic Outlook forecasts](#), growth is expected to be -0.6% this year following growth of -0.03% last year. The fall in commodity prices, lower global trade and continued weakness in advanced economies, combined with a set of internal factors in some of the larger regional economies, have driven growth lower.

However, there is considerable heterogeneity in the region. The simple average growth rate across the 26 regional economies is expected to be 1.6% this year, and while six countries are expected to have negative growth, 12 are expected to grow at more than

2.5% and five at 4% and higher. In addition, the baseline prospects for 2017 indicate a recovery for the region, with a growth rate of 1.6% and only two economies continuing in recession (Ecuador and Venezuela). Nineteen countries are expected to have growth rates of at least 2.5% and eight with at least 3.5% growth. The simple average growth rate of the region is expected to be 2.5%.

But there are significant risks to these projections. Currently, there is considerable uncertainty regarding the posture of advanced economies toward trade and immigration policies (important for remittances), particularly in the US. This could have significant effects particularly on Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean.

The impending rise in US interest rates may also impact capital flows into the region, bring back inflationary pressures, which would reduce monetary policy space via exchange rate depreciations, and thus influence lower economic activity.

Moreover, while the Chinese economy has slowed somewhat, there remains uncertainty regarding its transition to a more domestic demand- and consumption-driven economy and the potential impacts on commodity prices for importer and exporter regional economies.

RECESSION IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

At the end of the third quarter, the forecast for Latin America and the Caribbean indicates a recession for a second consecutive year. However, looking beyond the numbers, there is some good news amid the current uncertainty.

To begin with, things looked considerably worse earlier in the year due to internal balance sheet and monetary adjustments, a hostile external environment dragged down by low world growth, high financial volatility prompted by foreign exchange instability, and the continuing slump in commodity prices, which fueled capital outflows from the region.

In macroeconomic terms, the region currently looks decidedly brighter as external shocks appear to have become less intense. Commodity prices are no longer in free fall, long-term interest rates in developed countries have remained ultra-low in response to continued proactive monetary policies, and access to global capital markets remains open thanks to the relative risk tolerance of international investors.

Given these trends, Latin American EMBI spreads have declined by approximately 30%, capital inflows into the region have picked up, and exchange rates have stabilized in most regional economies (see Figures 1 and 2).

Although there have been worsening perspectives during 2016 for four out of six regional economies in recession, as well as Mexico due to the weaker than expected investment in the US and other risks associated to the presidential elections, major fiscal and institutional adjustments in Argentina and, most importantly, Brazil brightened the medium-term growth prospects for these two economies as well as for the entire region.

The adjustments prompted markets to both validate improvements in regional country risk and stock market conditions.

RESILIENCE

Clearly, the Latin America and Caribbean region is not a monolith, and the weight of some countries can skew regional trends. The Inter-American Development Bank's (IDB) latest [Macroeconomic Report](#) documents 2014-20 as the region's lowest average growth period of the last 20 years, but not all countries have suffered equally. Although the region will contract for a second consecutive year, the six fastest growing economies will average growth rates of around 4.5%.

Indeed, given the intensity of the external shocks that have affected the region in the last few years, a strong argument can be made that the Latin America and Caribbean region has shown considerable resilience, and there has not been a repetition of the banking and currency crises that have been so problematic for the region especially in the 1980s and 1990s. Indeed, most of the larger economies in Latin America and the Caribbean have floating exchange rates and have allowed considerable depreciations in their currencies, which are now helping in the adjustment processes. These depreciations have been effected without causing a large increase in debt or widespread bankruptcies due to currency mismatches—another significant achievement since the 1990s.

There has been some pass through to domestic inflation in some cases, but given the size of the currency depreciations, this pass through has been relatively limited and inflation expectations in general indicate that inflation is likely to fall in the future back

toward inflation targets. Figure 3 plots the extent of currency depreciation and inflation for a number of selected countries.

The imbalances in current accounts are also being corrected, and evidence exists that most of the large economies in the region will again be able to finance the deficit with foreign direct investment (FDI).

Regarding budgetary imbalances, 15 countries have announced explicit adjustment programs that are expected to cut spending by an average 1.7% of gross domestic product (GDP) and boost revenue by 1.1% of GDP in the next five years. For most countries, these corrections in a context of greater growth guarantee sustainable levels of public debt to GDP.

Before breathing too deep a sigh of relief, some important caveats to this outlook are in order. The results of the US presidential election and other external developments will undoubtedly play an important role in shaping the regional economic environment going forward. Most importantly, however, countries in the region face two fundamental challenges in the coming years. First, they must stay on track with the policies that have been announced to address their imbalances. Second, they must return to a path of sustainable and inclusive growth.

Beyond what happens to “actual” growth rates in the short term, the region desperately needs to boost its “[potential GDP growth rates](#),” which have steadily fallen from 4.25% in 2008 to 3.1% in 2016—equivalent to a 25% reduction (see Figure 4).

IMPROVEMENT IN WELFARE

Moreover, after 20 years of progress in social indicators such as infant mortality, access to drinking water, elementary school enrollment and life expectancy, Latin American society has come to expect a steady improvement in its welfare. More specifically, the slowdown during the 2010-16 period has not dampened the legitimate desire of citizens across the region for more prosperous economies and personal prospects.

Returning to “actual” growth rates in the neighborhood of 3%, which is about twice the rate expected for 2017, is the first step. But this is only one step. In order to satisfy citizens’ expectations for improved well-being, it is essential to both increase the

growth potential of economies—which in turn requires a complete restoration of macroeconomic imbalances—and undertake reforms to improve the underlying productivity of economies.

Of course, political economy, rather than pure economics, may be what ultimately determines whether countries reach their goals and how their economies evolve in the coming quarters. Governments must further strengthen their political institutions to be able to develop better, more targeted, more transparent and more accountable public policies. But they can't do it alone. The private sector, specifically the technology sector, must also chip in to take on the challenge of cementing a sustainable growth model that addresses real regional problems, such as growing unemployment and inequality.

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Fidel Castro: The Last Great Revolutionary

Ishtiaq Ahmed

November 30, 2016

With the death of Fidel Castro, the last great leader in the revolutionary movements of the 20th century has gone.

It is with sadness that I learned about the death of the founder of modern Cuba, Comandante Fidel Castro. For the younger generations his may not be a familiar name, but for us who were looking for alternatives to international capitalism Castro and the Cuban Revolution was an inspiration. The revolutionaries were radical nationalists who rose against the tyranny of Fulgencio Batista—a brutal dictatorship led by a corrupt family that exploited the people ruthlessly and used terror and torture extensively against the opposition, while enjoying the support of the United States.

The US began to treat the Cuban revolutionaries as dangerous communists after they had overthrown Batista regime. It is then that Castro and his comrades turned to communism, and it was the Soviet Union that came to their help. Fidel Castro, Ernesto “Che” Guevara and other revolutionaries carried out extensive reforms and brought into being a welfare state that has been successful in providing a fairly decent standard of living and free education and medical help to citizens.

During the 1970s, Cuban volunteers fought in the liberation wars in Africa, such as against Portuguese colonialism in Angola. Unlike the founders of the Soviet Union and the Peoples’ Republic of China, the Cuban communists always drew a distinction between the legitimate use of force and its illegitimate use. Therefore, force was treated as the last resort when peaceful means failed.

FOOLS’ PARADISE

With the death of Castro, the last great leader in the revolutionary movements that grew in the wake of the Russian Revolution of 1917 is now gone. His legacy will inspire us to keep on struggling for a fairer and more just world. People like me, who were witness to the history of American carpet-bombing of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, US support of blood-thirsty military juntas of Latin America and Islamist regimes of the Middle East, know that during the Cold War the US cared two hoots for human rights. In fact, the US is the post-war greatest criminal when it comes to crimes against humanity. It was not a communist who set up the International War Crimes Tribunal against US excesses in Southeast Asia but a liberal anti-communist Sir Bertrand Russell.

Of course, crimes committed by communist regimes should also be condemned without any apologies if we are to be considered credible public intellectuals. So, I hold no brief for any violation of human rights and human dignity by leftists.

However, I do not live in a fools’ paradise. I am witness to the way the Cold War was conducted by both sides and it was the new nations of the world created out of decolonization, forced to choose sides, which most did one way or the other.

FRIEND OF THE DEVIL

I have moved away from dogmatic leftism and subscribe to a fundamental human right of social democracy. However, that has never made me accept the US as a leader of any such movement.

The US will support the devil if it needs to secure its interests—and that's all. Fidel Castro stepped in to secure freedom of his people from a ruthless dictator supported by the Americans.

Castro was forced toward communism as the result of US myopic foreign policy. After the tyrannical regime was overthrown and its property confiscated, the US treated it as proof of the Cuban nationalists being communist agents. It was reminiscent of the way the British MI6 and CIA conspired to overthrow Mohammad Mossadeq of Iran and other radical nationalists, impelling the young Cuban state to seek help from the Soviet Union.

Socialism does have a tendency toward totalitarianism. Therefore, I prefer social democracy of the Swedish type instead because it combines equality with freedom and rewards hard work while ensuring that nobody falls out of the security net needed for all. This version of social democracy is its best manifestation. But when we talk of a brutalized people trying to rise out of poverty and degradation, socialism has been successful in providing those basic services needed to maintain a level of dignity and of substance.

Fidel Castro and his comrades fought for the freedom of their people crushed by a brutal dictatorship. In building up Cuba, Castro had to resort to authoritarian measures just as all liberal democracies have done in their formative phases. He was, however, able to maintain an egalitarian social-welfare system and that has benefited the downtrodden.

As of 2014, there are around [50,000 Cuban-trained healthcare workers aiding 66 nations](#). Cuban physicians have played a leading role in combating Ebola in West Africa.

According to the UN, in 2013 [life expectancy in Cuba](#) was 79 years. This ranks Cuba 44th in the world and 4th in the Americas, behind only Canada and Chile. Infant mortality in Cuba declined from 32 infant deaths per 1,000 live births in 1957, to 5 per 1,000 live births in 2015. In 2015, [Cuba became the first country to eradicate mother-](#)

[to-child transmission of HIV and syphilis](#), a milestone hailed by WHO as “one of the greatest public health achievements possible.”

One must choose sides and cannot reasonably throw out ahistorical liberal accusations against a struggling regime when the big bully is responsible for creating conditions where progressive change of any sort was considered a concession to communism. This capitalist system has ruined the lives of millions of US pensioners because of the greed of Wall Street when financial insolvency it brought about led to the collapse of banks in which their savings were invested. How is that any less a gross violation of human rights?

Fidel Castro stands out tall among the leaders of the 20th century because he defied US pressure and maintained the sovereignty of his tiny nation. That is in itself a great achievement of our times.

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DECEMBER

Fixing Fashion to Save the Planet

Shivika Sinha

December 2, 2016

Fashion is the second largest industrial polluter on the planet.

The University of Cambridge's [Centre for Study of Existential Risk](#) (CSER) investigates threats to humanity posed by technology and human activity. At the top of their list, [climate change](#) firmly rests as the greatest self-created risk to our civilization. Fossil-fueled industry and overconsumption have danced together to create exponential global environmental changes. The top industrial contributor to climate change is intuitive to many—oil. The second is often a surprise: [fashion](#).

Fashion is the second largest [industrial polluter on the planet](#) and among the [top exploiters of people](#) globally. It's the second greatest [contaminator](#) of the Earth's freshwater supply. A [t-shirt](#) made from conventional cotton requires 2,700 liters of water, or one person's drinking water for 900 days. The apparel industry accounts for [10% of global carbon emissions](#). A quarter of the chemicals produced in the world are used in [textiles](#).

[Microfibers](#) that shed from synthetic clothing account for 85% of the man-made material found along ocean shores, threatening marine wildlife. Annually, [150 billion](#) garments are produced and most end up in landfills. Over 60% of the world's clothing is manufactured in [developing countries](#). [Garment workers](#)—80% of them women aged 18-35—earn as little as \$21 a month. Many support their children and families using their wages. Eleven percent of the global population of children are engaged in [child labor](#), many in the garment industry.

MAN-SOLVING PROBLEMS

The environmental and ethical deterioration caused by fashion is astounding and begs the question: How do we fix it? The good news is that if a problem is manmade, it can

be man-solved. Industry follows market trends and won't become part of the solution unless consumers create demand for sustainability and social impact.

Consumerism must lead fashion out of planetary and ethical degradation. Conscious consumerism is the utilization of personal economics toward brands that entrench environmental and social solutions into their business models. Consumers are the fulcrum in reshaping fashion by creating market demand for businesses to pursue positive impact along with profit.

Conscious consumerism is a burgeoning trend in business and buying. In a [Nielsen survey](#), more than half of online consumers across 60 countries say they are willing to pay more for products and services provided by companies that are committed to positive social and environmental impact. However, conscious consumerism needs to flourish more rapidly to meet the pace required to fix our great planetary and humanitarian crises.

Innovations in fabrication and supply chains have created a thriving global community of social and eco-conscious fashion brands that require consumer demand in order to reshape industry. There is a new generation of emerging designers that redefine design. Brands like [Indigenous](#) use organic textiles and fair-trade supply chains to support local artisan communities. Indigenous is listed on B-Corporation's Best of the World List that honors the most socially and environmentally impactful companies in the world.

Sustainable fashion retailers are capitalizing on the fast-growing trend in sustainability while making it easier for consumers to shop. [Modavanti](#) is a retailer that allows consumers to shop fashion brands by traits like the use of recycled materials, zero waste, fair trade and more.

REDEFINING THE VALUE OF STYLE

For these brands and retailers, beauty isn't merely at face value. It's sewn into every stage of the garment's production and supply chain. Sustainable fashion is redefining the value of style and is betting on the conscious consumer to grow in scale and power. Across the world, sustainable fashion brands and retailers have created more options for consumers to vote for the future of our planet. With a simple Google search, consumers can find a slew of ethical and sustainable alternatives for their wardrobe.

Change doesn't come overnight, but it begins with all of us leveraging our day-to-day clothing purchases to support brands that solve humanity's struggles. Consumers raise their voices with their wallets and can meaningfully impact climate change via fashion. By expressing an interest in brands that couple design with transparency, ethics and a regard for our environment, we can safeguard our inner and outer humanity.

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Americans Need to Read Beyond the Headlines

Ryan Suto

December 5, 2016

Donald Trump is showing the next phase of his strategy: pure theater.

Recently, President Barack Obama [pointed out](#) that Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and the Grand Old Party (GOP) figured out something very important during the Obama presidency: Most Americans either don't know or don't care about the nuance of how government works. "And the problem is, is that the general public is not following the intricacies of the legislature and they're not interested in who's to blame, they just want to see stuff done. And the one guy they know is the President of the United States, so if things don't get done, that can advantage the politics of the other party."

Americans know that the president is in charge of the government, and so if they are told that the government is not working, and they don't see it working, it must be the president's fault.

This is how the Republican Party survived—and actually thrived—through eight years of obstructionism in Congress. By blocking nominations, budgets, and legislation—much of which that would have actually helped their own constituents, and some of

which Trump [has championed as his own](#)—the GOP was able to convince enough Americans that the resulting ineffective governance was Obama’s fault all along. He is the president, after all, and he is responsible for getting things done.

Republicans were able to ignore a Supreme Court nominee for eight months, along with [90 other judicial nominations](#), without any electoral punishment—and they knew they could do it, because not enough Americans concern themselves with esoteric notions like structural democracy.

THE IN-PARTY GAME

Now, Donald Trump is showing the next phase of this strategy: pure theater. First, Trump claimed credit for keeping a Ford plant in the US that [wasn’t actually slated for closure](#) or relocation. Now, he claims to be [saving jobs at a Carrier plant](#), which actually amounts to a state tax break deal from the governor of Indiana—soon-to-be Vice President Mike Pence—and still allows for jobs to be shipped to Mexico.

But most Americans don’t read beyond these headlines. They don’t understand or care about the details, such as an incoming president’s legal inability to unilaterally provide incentives for an individual firm to change their financial decision making. And Trump knows this.

He knows that his tweets and his statements will create headlines that will get tens of millions of views, whereas the resulting fact-checking and counterarguments will merely get thousands of views among his supporters. Further, he and the GOP have already convinced [86% of Republicans](#) that the “mainstream media”—the ones best positioned to uncover the facts behind his claims—are untrustworthy.

Like a lucky hat during a baseball game, Trump supporters will cling to these superficial displays as the cause of all that is good while overlooking the bad—or likely blame it on Obama. No rigorous investigation of cause-and-effect will take place. And without hold of either the House or the Senate, the Democrats have little ability to even use the Republican’s obstructionist playbook. They have little ability to undermine the empty theatrics of the Trump administration that will echo among his supporters.

The Democrats cannot count on Trump’s scandals or failures to shake his support come 2020. If the president-elect keeps up his smoke and mirrors theater and

Americans take them at face value, the next election may actually be more “post-truth” than 2016.

**Ryan J. Suto is a writer on the United States and the Middle East. This article is available online at [Fair Observer](#).*



Millennials Shape Discussion on Gun Violence

Martha Durkee-Neuman
December 9, 2016

Millennials want to see an intersectional understanding of gun violence in America. Each generation carries its own revolution. For years, gun violence has dramatically impacted communities around the United States, and a movement for gun violence prevention has emerged to respond.

Now, as we reel and rebuild from the results of the presidential election, it is the time for a new generation of organizers to metamorph this movement into one that is intersectional, inclusive and diverse. Young organizers and activists have been left behind by a movement that has focused strongly on background checks, but it also needs to strategically focus on responses that address the intersectional oppressions linked to gun violence.

My experience with gun violence reflects this nuance. In 2008, my Peruvian host sister, Tika Paz de Noboa, was shot and killed while she waited on the street outside a nightclub in Portland, Oregon. A courageous, artistic young woman, a person of Latin American origin, an immigrant—she was murdered by a white man who bought the weapon used to kill her from a gun show, evading regulation background checks that would have picked up on the mental health struggle that eventually ended both my host sister’s life and his own.

The layers of intersectionality in Tika's case are clear: she was a woman, Latina, Spanish-speaking and new to the US. Was she killed simply because she was in the wrong place at the wrong time and [the gun show loophole](#) allowed a weapon to be purchased?

Or was she killed because this man fell through the cracks of the mental health care system in the US? Was she killed because rampant xenophobia in the US created cycles of hate against immigrants? Was she killed by misogyny and toxic masculinity that drove this man to shoot this woman?

BACKGROUND CHECKS FOR GUN SALES

Every circumstance of violence is unique, nuanced and complex. Background checks will reduce gun violence, but they will not be effective without understanding the intersectional nature of the oppressions people face.

Nearly [90 Americans are killed by guns every day](#) by a combination of homicides, suicides and accidental shootings. Yet when the statistics are desegregated, intersectional patterns appear: [77% of gun deaths](#) for white Americans are suicides, while 82% of gun deaths for black Americans are homicides. Unarmed black men are [six times more likely](#) to die at the hands of police than unarmed white men. And [53% of women](#) murdered with guns in the US were killed by intimate partners.

Our approaches to gun violence prevention must be critically and continually aware of these differences and discrepancies. When we talk about prevention, we need to address the root causes of gun violence rather than act reactively to illogical fallacies. In November 2015, I was in Paris during the terror attacks. I was downtown when the attacks happened, watching the horror unfold. Police grabbed me, pushing me out of the train station, and I fled, hiding behind cars, shaking and waiting to hear the shots with the people around me. Terrorist attacks occur in the US as well, at an alarming rate. According to the [Federal Bureau of Investigation](#) (FBI), from 1980 to 2005, around 94% of these attacks were committed by non-Muslims, yet the media and our public outrage continue to focus on attacks committed by members of the Muslim community.

Throughout the US and Europe, we are witnessing policymakers use these attacks and fear-mongering techniques to justify Islamophobic and xenophobic proposals. This plays into a cycle of discrimination, scapegoating, alienation and violence with our wars

abroad against predominantly Muslim countries and attacks of retaliation at home. Gun violence committed by members of the Muslim community is often driven and spurred by our Islamophobia.

Much of the gun violence prevention movement has responded by supporting and promoting an Islamophobic campaign, the No Fly No Buy legislation, which would prevent individuals who are on the FBI's terrorist watch list from purchasing weapons. This list unfairly and indiscriminately targets innocent Muslim Americans. This campaign is bigoted and reductive and only fuels the hate that inspires attacks such as in Paris, Beirut, San Bernardino and other cities. If we are serious about preventing gun violence, we need to ensure we are not isolating and discriminating against Muslim communities in America.

LOOKING UNDER THE SURFACE

To respond to the intersectional and devastating nature of gun violence in America, it is necessary to listen to the experiences of all of our communities, including underrepresented groups such as black, brown, Latin, immigrant, undocumented, LGBTQ, veteran and economically disadvantaged communities.

Many of the currently proposed actions to lower gun violence rates do not address the specific issues of these communities. A strong example is the recent case of Alfred Olango, an unarmed African American man with a seizure disorder, who was killed by police in San Diego in September.

This man was not just a victim of the phenomenon of gun violence, but he was killed by racially unjust patterns of policing that do not value black lives: He was killed by the lack of adequate services available to those the US living with mental illness; he was killed by the oppression of low-income families in America; and he was killed by capitalist corporate greed that drove up the price of seizure medication to make it inaccessible to those without health care. The list goes on.

If we are not addressing all of these oppressions and treating individuals as individuals within a flawed system, then we are not addressing gun violence. Millennials understand this.

It is time for an intersectional approach to gun violence prevention, in order to effectively keep all of our communities safe.

**Martha Durkee-Neuman is a gun violence prevention organizer, reproductive justice advocate, and sexual health educator. This article is available online at [Fair Observer](#).*



How Can Turkey Stop the Cycle of Terrorism?

Nathaniel Handy

December 11, 2016

Erdogan's government must seek a political resolution to the deepening conflict in Turkey, which has no end in sight.

With the latest terrorist attack on Turkish soil—[twin blasts close to the Besiktas football stadium in Istanbul](#) that killed at least 38 people and injured many more—the inevitable focus will be on heightened security, an expectation of solidarity from global allies, and questions about how it was able to happen.

The fact remains, however, that another terrorist attack in Turkey is sad, yet almost inevitable. It was clear from the outset that this was likely to be a Kurdish militant attack. Three broad groups have been responsible for multiple attacks over the past year in Turkey: Islamist extremists, left-wing radicals and Kurdish militants.

To strike outside the Besiktas football stadium—a club known for its traditionally left-leaning support base—would be a strange target for left-wing groups. To target the police, who were the majority of the victims, would be unusual for Islamic State-inspired extremists, who tend to focus on soft, civilian targets, often in areas frequented by Western tourists.

Sure enough, the attack was [claimed by the Kurdistan Freedom Hawks](#) (TAK), a splinter group of the more widely known Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The

distinction will matter little to Turkey's government, and perhaps even less to shocked outside observers around the world. Yet in that distinction lies the heart of the problem in Turkey today.

TURKEY: FIGHTING AT THE EXTREMES

The nuance that President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government will avoid drawing out is that the TAK represents the most extreme wing of Kurdish militancy in Turkey. While Kurdish militants of the TAK still proclaim that the imprisoned Abdullah Ocalan is their leader, they exist as an expression of the dissatisfaction among some with the passive direction of the PKK in the mid-2000s, when it began engaging politically with the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government.

How much the TAK and the PKK work together or apart is hard to assess in the opaque world of militancy, yet at the other end of the spectrum, the near-outlawed political party, the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), is widely regarded as the non-violent political affiliate of the PKK in Turkish politics. While there is a continuum of Kurdish political activism from the TAK to the HDP, there is a wide gulf between them in terms of actions.

It is in that gulf that Erdogan's government must seek a political resolution to the deepening conflict in the country. Yet it is a conflict for which no end appears to be in sight. Indeed, two parallel events have conspired to make a reduction in this conflict highly unlikely. Ironically, they are events in which the PKK was not directly involved.

The first is the rise of Islamic State (IS) in neighboring Syria, and the second is the attempted coup of July 2016 in Turkey. In combination, both events have placed Erdogan in a combative role as president—the footing of a classic war president. It has increased the nationalist posturing of his government, which has led it back into old conflict paradigms of the Turkish state.

Whether these events have accelerated a trend that Erdogan's government was likely to follow eventually anyway, or whether they pushed it toward this extreme and away from consensus politics is hard to judge. However, the destination is the same. There is increasingly little daylight between the position of the ruling AKP and that of the hardline nationalist—and avowedly anti-Kurdish—MHP, or Nationalist Movement Party, in the Turkish political landscape.

Had Erdogan and the PKK leadership acted differently, the Turkish engagement in Syria against the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) might not have the character that it does, and the post-coup crackdown on Kurdish political figures within Turkey might not have occurred. After all, the AKP government itself has not claimed the coup to be a Kurdish plot, but rather one perpetrated by Fethullah Gulen's Islamist movement.

THE STRENGTH TO BEND

Supporters of the Turkish government might ask why it should be they that change course. The usual mantra is that one should never bow to terrorists and that any compromise is defeat.

But the facts on the ground are such that Erdogan's government now has the undisputed upper hand in Turkish politics. It has no threat from within the parliamentary system. President Erdogan is increasingly unchallengeable.

Faced with a build-up of Turkish nationalism from the ruling party, the reaction in Kurdish militancy is a similar move to the extremes. Yet in any battle, the weaker side has a tendency to entrench its positions. Its very weakness makes it loath to offer an olive branch. Were Erdogan's government—from a position of strength—to play peacemaker with those Kurdish activists willing to reject violence, it could set the agenda.

Whenever Erdogan feels the time is right, he must rediscover an ability to apply the carrot as well as the stick. If he doesn't, he may be left with an increasingly ungovernable country.

**Nathaniel Handy is a writer and academic with over 10 years of experience in international print and broadcast media. This article is available online at [Fair Observer](#).*



A Farewell to Aleppo

Maria Khwaja

December 14, 2016

As Aleppo falls, the world has forgotten about civilians in Syria.

I woke up this morning to a [video](#) of an old Syrian man gesturing wildly at a camera as bombs tore up the concrete behind him. He looked like many Arab grandfathers I know, bearded and wearing a plaid shirt decorated with dust.

On Twitter: [images](#) of soldiers carrying civilians out of a besieged city; women committing [suicide](#) rather than being raped by government forces; politicians barely holding an emergency meeting; a boy weeping over his dead mother.

We have failed you, Aleppo.

We have watched for years while you burned. While bewildered children covered in dust were found in the rubble; while refugees died on foreign shores in Mediterranean water; while our politicians kept silent or helpfully funded another proxy war.

We have failed you.

We have invented sanitized phrases for what is happening to your people. In a few years, if your “otherness” is allowed in our glossy history books, we will call them “war crimes” by “rebels” or “government forces” or “coalitions.” We will call those who fled but had nowhere to go “refugees,” and we will lock up our women because we fear their “gorilla-like barbarism.”

We will pretend blissful ignorance of our role in watching your skin torn apart and your people ground into the rubble. We will turn away, pretending we did not do the same thing in Kosovo, in Rwanda, in Myanmar as they quietly exterminate the stateless Rohingya.

We will pretend we knew nothing of Vietnam, of Iraq, of [Afghanistan](#). We will pretend we didn't know those monsters existed.

We have failed you.

But you possess something the others did not: your phones, [your videos](#), your ability to speak a language we understand. You force us to bear witness to you in a moment—just a fragile, crippling, traumatic moment—of empathy.

Robert Fisk [writes](#) that, on the eve of the Taliban entering Kandahar, he was startled by a sound outside. He watched from his balcony as, across the city, families raised their voices, chanting “Allahu Akbar”—a cry now most often associated with black-clad menaces, but in every other moment, a cry of recognition.

In Islam, we say that one of the names of God is Shahid, the Witness. In our prayers, we bear witness to the oneness of God. In Kandahar, the people bore witness to their own helplessness, the untranslatable feeling of complete despair. In Aleppo, we are forced to bear witness as the veneer of civilization we have attempted to construct is stripped away.

You shame us, Aleppo.

Your faces, your photos, your cries are not a Hollywood production. No one is coming out alive even as the United Nations hurriedly attempts to broker a deal to evacuate 100,000 civilians. No one is listening, even as British politicians fail to fill a room for an emergency hearing and no one but John Kerry has said anything to Russia.

Even we don’t hold our own politicians accountable. Even we don’t care enough, no matter how many times we shed tears over your deaths.

We watch it unfold on our expensive tablets, expensive phones, in the comfort of our relatively secure homes waiting for the next Muslim bogeyman or imminent threat to our safety while you are exterminated like fish in a barrel. We list the names of our dead, award them memorials when we are feeling generous, but your children will have no gravestones but the rubble or the sea.

You shame us.

It is time we stopped pretending at civility, stopped pretending that because of your strange ways and strange language, because of your skin and your faith, you are the

barbarians. It is you trapped in basements with the severed hands of children; you who struggle to provide hospitals, schools, shelter to your population while we cheerfully continue to ignore politics in favor of discussing Kanye West.

It is you who do not have the privilege of our freedom and you who died for it. It is you who we should remember and name every day because we cannot leave our own world long enough to march against your murders in the street no matter how many times we read *Night* and the *Diary of Anne Frank* or whitewashed history textbooks. We keep saying “never again” but you have outed us because we don’t mean it.

We don’t mean it. Even while we watch our governments vie for hegemony; even while we watch them engage in the fifth or sixth proxy war in our generation; even while we know that part of this is our fault, our taxes, our silence, we say nothing because those books reports we wrote in eighth grade on injustice were only meant for the utopian civilization we supposedly live in.

You do not fit into our world—your unsanitized blood, your broken limbs, the faces of your dead children, we do not want them here in our comfortable bubble of “never again.”

You shame us.

We shame ourselves.

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Japan's Media: A Narrow Window on the World

Virgil Hawkins

December 21, 2016

Media in Japan focuses heavily on domestic affairs, affecting the country's global outlook.

Our world is becoming increasingly interconnected in a multitude of ways, and advances in information and communication technologies have made the gathering and dissemination of information at a global level rapid, simple and highly cost-effective. One might have anticipated that such developments would have boosted our access to world news, as it now has increasing relevance and is easier to obtain.

Sadly, this has not been the case. [Coverage of world news](#) (in the US media at least) has in fact decreased with the end of the Cold War and has not really recovered since. And there is a host of other issues, beyond the overall quantity, that need to be considered when looking at how well the news media is performing in its provision of information about the world. Geographic distribution is one such issue. There are typically large gaps in media coverage of different regions in the world. The factors that decide which regions and/or countries become the haves and which become the have-nots of media coverage include: geographic proximity, national, racial, ethnic, linguistic and historical ties and perceptions of strategic/economic importance. But there seems to be one constant in much of the world's news flow—the global South is heavily marginalized.

A VIEW FROM JAPAN

How does the Japanese media perform in this regard? Japan has a relatively high consumption of news media. The *Yomiuri Shimbun*, for example, is thought to have the [largest circulation for a daily newspaper](#) in the world. The national broadcaster (NHK) is one of the [most profitable television companies](#) in the world. Furthermore, as a country with the third largest economy in the world, the (potential) ability of Japan to influence the world, through corporate or government activity, is exceptionally high. For these reasons, it is worth examining how the Japanese media sees the world.

A newly established research organization (of which the author is a part) based at Osaka University, [Global News View \(GNV\)](#), is conducting research into the world news coverage by Japan's three leading newspapers: *Yomiuri Shimbun*, *Asahi Shimbun*, *Mainichi Shimbun*. Looking at the quantity of coverage by these newspapers for the year 2015 reveals some rather concerning trends. Firstly, the levels of coverage of the world (compared to domestic news) are low, averaging less than 10% of the whole. This amounts to [less than half](#) the amount of coverage devoted to (primarily domestic) sports.

Furthermore, the [geographic distribution](#) of this limited coverage is massively skewed. Looking at the total coverage for the three newspapers, roughly half of the world news (48%) was focused on Asia (including the Middle East), with an additional 24% of coverage of Europe and 14% of North America (primarily the USA). In stark contrast, the African continent (including North Africa) was the object of little more than 3%, and Latin America (including Mexico), 2%.

The ten most-covered countries included the USA (the most-covered country), five European countries (France, Russia, Greece, Germany and the UK) and four Asian countries (China as the second-most-covered country, as well as South Korea, Syria and Myanmar). If we combine all coverage of the entire African continent and of Latin America (87 countries), it amounts to roughly the same (5.5%) as that of just one (the third-most covered) country—France (5.2 %).

This represents a staggering level of disproportion, leaving much of the global South virtually invisible in Japan. Coverage of France did, of course, have much to do with the high-profile terrorist attacks in that country. Terrorist attacks with death tolls greater than those in France that occurred in Kenya and Nigeria, not to mention Syria, were largely ignored by the Japanese press, as they were in much of the rest of the world.

CULTURAL DISTANCE

The various forms of “distance”—geographic, racial, trade, historical and cultural—from Japan might help to explain the marginalization of Africa and Latin America in the press. But they do not help explain the relative marginalization of countries that are large—in terms of population and GDP—geographically and historically close, and linked by relatively large proportions of trade with Japan, perhaps most notably

Indonesia and India. Neither of these countries was able to garner more than one percent of the [international coverage](#).

Gaps are also evident in the content of coverage of issues, such as conflict. The quantity of coverage of conflict in Europe—primarily the Ukraine conflict and the attacks in Paris—amounted to more than five times the quantity of coverage of conflict in Africa. But although the quantity of conflict coverage in Africa was relatively small when compared to other regions of the world, it dominated what little [coverage of Africa](#) there was, making up 42% of the whole. This indicates that other events and phenomena in Africa were marginalized, leaving readers with a conflict-laden image of the continent.

These massive gaps between the haves and have-nots of foreign affairs and the marginalization of the global South help neither Japan nor the world. Japan relies on, impacts upon and is influenced by the outside world in a multitude of sectors, including trade, security, health and the environment. A greater knowledge and awareness of the world outside would help Japan to survive and thrive in it.

Furthermore, its economic power gives it the potential to provide considerable amounts of official development assistance (ODA) to least developed and developing countries. Yet [Japan gives](#) less than one-third of the amount of ODA set in the long-accepted target of 0.7% of gross national income (GNI). It also accepts a negligible—sometimes in the single digits annually—numbers of [refugees](#).

Realizing change in the how the Japanese media covers the world is going to be challenging, to say the least. Not only is there the problem of a financially shrinking news media sector—gathering and presenting international news is rarely financially rewarding—but there also seems to be little awareness (among the public and in the media sector itself) that there exists a problem in the levels and content of international news in Japan. Making improvements in international news will mean working to change perceptions at a very fundamental level.

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UN Resolution on Israel Changes Nothing

Gary Grappo

December 26, 2016

The UN Security Council resolution is just one more fruitless international effort to address a conflict that refuses to end.

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) vote on December 23 is a fitting end to the Obama administration and, of a different sort, to the term of Secretary General Ban Ki-moon. The vote—on a resolution condemning [Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem](#)—will achieve nothing.

The resolution is rendered all the more absurd, if not risible, by the inaction of the US administration and the UNSC to stem the mayhem, death and destruction of Aleppo, one of the world's most historic cities. Subject to unrelenting and indiscriminate bombing by Russia and the paltry-numbered forces of its Syrian puppet, President Bashar al-Assad, for more than 18 months, the city finally fell to Syrian forces and their Iranian overlords and Shia mercenaries only days before the UNSC vote on West Bank settlements. The UNSC, neutralized by Russia's veto, stood idly by and offered little more than pathetic consolation and finger-pointing prattle.

Palestinians, therefore, may take no comfort. The vote they secured will do little more to alleviate their plight than would have a UNSC vote that has eluded the Syrian crisis for five years and counting. Friday's resolution and a few shekels might get them a cup of good Turkish coffee at their nearest coffee stand but little else.

ISRAEL, PALESTINE AND THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION

For an American administration that took office eight years ago amidst so much hope and high-mindedness on the Middle East, the vote—while technically consistent with long-standing US policy opposing settlements—seems an appropriate denouement to its ineffective Middle East policies. Washington's aspirations for the Middle East—from a resolution of this, the Middle East's most enduring conflict, to stability in Iraq and

from an end of violent extremism in the region to a flowering of democracy in the wake of the Arab Spring—have uniformly been dashed.

President Barack Obama may take small comfort from the much criticized deal struck in 2015 to curb Iran's nuclear ambitions. That accord could hardly pass muster in the US Congress and the Democratic Party. And America's incoming president, Donald Trump, campaigned on a pledge to negotiate a better one (as unlikely as that seems at present).

Moreover, the Iranian nuclear agreement did little to attenuate the venomous oratory emanating from Tehran, which is apparently even more determined now to detest its Western nemeses, the US and Israel, all the while looking to capitalize on commercial deals and foreign investment. Again, lofty Obama rhetoric may be America's only compensation. Enter President Trump and the art of the deal.

Obama seems to have learned little from his eight years wrestling with the hydra-headed monster of the Middle East. He came into office believing that Israeli settlements were the issue in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and named a respected politician and experienced negotiator, Senator George Mitchell, to work to resolve it.

In 2010, Obama and Mitchell managed to secure a temporary, limited suspension of settlement activity in the West Bank from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Then, it was Mahmoud Abbas, president of the Palestinian Authority (PA), who refused to acquiesce. A meaningless, 11th hour sop by Abbas to the US president toward the end of the suspension period predictably led to nothing. Some two years later, the good senator quietly resigned, having made no headway. Not surprisingly, the settlements continued.

Three years later, the president's eager new secretary of state, John Kerry, despite 30 years of experience confronting the issue as a US senator and chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, took up the challenge. Fourteen months of furtively furious diplomacy foundered on Kerry blaming Israeli hardheadedness on settlements. And settlement activity continues.

Little has changed on the Palestinian side either. In November, Fatah, the party headed by Abbas, held its oft-postponed General Conference in Ramallah. It unsurprisingly reelected its Procrustean leadership, whose control of the party and the

PA has been marked by insidious corruption, deteriorating quality of life for Palestinians, and declining prospects for a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Neither the United Nations (UN) nor the United States can fix that either.

US FOREIGN POLICY

America's vote on Friday went against more than 35 years of US policy opposing action in the UN that imposed conditions on the Israelis and Palestinians. Administrations of both American political persuasions have long—and rightly, in my view—believed that this tragic conflict can only end when the two sides themselves sit down, negotiate the tough issues and ultimately make the very painful compromises necessary to resolve *their* conflict.

When they each can commit themselves to that and then produce the courageous leadership required to achieve that herculean task, then and only then will these two peoples see a resolution. Until that time, the well-meaning do-gooders like the US, the European Union and the UN will offer what we witnessed in Friday's vote.

If anyone expects this resolution to change anything, then read the sad history of this conflict dating back to 1948 and even before. Moreover, America's incoming administration, also long on rhetoric (though of a much different sort) and very short on history (or even policy for that matter), is likely to take US policy on this issue into uncharted waters.

The UN Security Council resolution will stand as one more fruitless international effort to address a conflict that refuses to end.

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