

Fair Observer

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Fair Observer Monthly



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Abul-Hasanat Siddique (Co-Founder, COO & Managing Editor)

Anna Pivovarchuk (Co-Founder & Deputy Managing Editor)

Fair Observer | 461 Harbor Blvd | Belmont | CA 94002 | USA

www.fairobservers.com | info@fairobservers.com

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ABOUT FAIR OBSERVER

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

Carlos Figueroa

October 1, 2017

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

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

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

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

send aid and recovery resources to the US territory.

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

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

Trump had the chance to show real leadership by immediately sending the necessary resources to Puerto Rico, where US citizens are lacking sufficient food, water and electricity. Puerto Rico is now a major humanitarian crisis. At least 16 deaths have been reported, and some estimate that over \$30 billion in physical and economic damages will accrue. The federal government's slow response under Trump's callous attitude — despite his tweets otherwise — reflects something fundamental: the

president's increasingly wrongheaded choices since assuming office in January.

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

Trump lost an opportunity to enhance his credibility, and his divided Republican Party's too, among Puerto Ricans and Latinos more generally (although it would not have made a difference considering at least 60% of Latinos have historically supported Democrats). Trump only reversed his decision on the Jones Act (a waiver that will only be in effect for 10 days) because of mounting pressure from Puerto Rican officials, Democrats in Congress and national media. President Trump's lack of empathy for his fellow US citizens in Puerto Rico is consistent with his failed presidency, which is only several months in and already showing signs of rapid decline with another cabinet member resigning on September 29.

PUERTO RICANS ARE AMERICAN CITIZENS

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

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

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

As a US citizen from Puerto Rico, I take President Trump's slow response to the island's humanitarian crisis seriously, as should others. I was born in Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico, which is located a few miles south of San Juan, and raised in New York City and Trenton, New Jersey. My perspective is not unique, but I share it solely to highlight the fact that, since at least the mid-2000s, Puerto Rico's population has declined from 3.7 million to 3.4 million partly due to having access to mainland economic markets through a limited statutory form of US citizenship on the island.

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

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

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

PRESIDENTIAL LEADERSHIP

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

Puerto Rico has a current population of approximately 3.4 million, which means there are more US citizens living on the island than there are in at least 17 mainland states: Iowa (3.1 million), Utah (3), Arkansas (2.9), Kansas (2.9), Mississippi (2.9), Nevada (2), New Mexico (2), Nebraska (1.9), West Virginia (1.8), Idaho (1.6), Hawaii (1.4), Maine (1.3), Rhode Island (1), Montana (1), Delaware (0.9), South Dakota (0.8), and Alaska (0.7).

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

Trump as president and a businessman should have known the complexity

surrounding Puerto Rico's pre- and post-Hurricane Maria humanitarian crisis beyond saying, "This is an island surrounded by water. Big water. Ocean water." This is about making the right choices for US citizens in Puerto Rico and elsewhere. We need real presidential leadership because it is sometimes a matter of life and death, and not about ratings, popularity or reality television.



Carlos Figueroa is an assistant professor at the Department of Politics at Ithaca College. He holds a dual PhD in Political Science

and Historical Studies from The New School for Social Research, and an MS in General Administration from Central Michigan University. Figueroa has engaged in working-class politics, labor organization, collective bargaining and urban activism since the early 1990s, which inform his research and teaching work.

What's Holding Kenya Back?

Shigoli Shitero

October 3, 2017

Kenya needs stronger legal and informal frameworks to enable the proper functioning of its institutions.

In their book, *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty*, Daron Acemoglu and David

Robinson infer a fundamental minimum for a properly functioning nation — the precision of political and economic institutions.

Institutions, as defined by Nobel Prize laureate Douglas North, are humanly devised constraints that structure political, economic and social interactions. North further states that these include both formal constraints (constitutions, laws, property rights) and informal ones (sanctions, taboos, customs, traditions and code of conduct) and their enforcement structures.

The concept of institutionalism is a mix of both the formal and informal rules in a context. None can exist in separation to guarantee effective and efficient functioning of a society, organization, firm or any other arrangement. The thought of institutionalism has evolved to include norms of behavior in a concept referred to as "new institutionalism."

New institutionalism is cognizant of the fact that institutions do not exist in a vacuum and are occupied by people who have biases. Therefore, it is imperative for the proper working of these institutions that the biases of the individuals correspond to the constraints that inform the system.

In this context, the history of Kenya's institutions is hardly inspiring. Arguably, the challenge on the political scene has been to instill an institutional space that will be an antidote to impunity of the "supreme leaders." On the economic

front, regulatory authorities have been up in arms to make sure that various industries stick to respective operational scripts.

From the clamor for multi-party politics in the early 1990s and through the adoption of the new constitution, the outstanding theme has been that of creating or enhancing Kenya's institutions to foster inclusivity, civic freedoms and accountability. The need for independent and well-functioning institutions was touted as a solution to some of the problems the country faces, such as inequitable allocation of resources, disregard for law and ethnocentric politics.

Economically, strong and stable institutions have been found to have a greater bearing on the fortunes of a country's economy, hence Kenya's obsession with creating credible and operational systems. However, amidst setting up all the formal constraints that formulate the framework of a system or even creating constitutionally founded independent institutions, Kenya still comes up short.

The country's Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission, a supposed watchdog tasked with investigating economic crimes, corruption and abuse of office, found itself in hot water when its former chairman was implicated in one of the biggest scandals in the country.

The National Land Commission, a constitutional body formed to oversee land administration, saw the homes of

its chairman, Muhammad Swazuri, and a number of officials raided as part of an investigation into complaints of irregular compensation for projects, with 17 million Kenyan shillings (\$160,000) in cash seized from one member of the commission's staff.

The precursor of the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission, the Interim Independent Electoral Commission officials and the Kenya National Examination Council officials were mentioned in connection with the bribery scandal code named "Chicken." Representatives of one of the companies involved, Smith and Ouzman Limited, were charged and jailed in the United Kingdom, while the Kenyan accomplices are yet to be brought to book.

In all the above incidences, a lack of a strict system of punishment and a disregard for social norms and values is endemic. One can conclude that the problem in Kenya is not the institutional system itself or its formal constraints, but the lack of adherence to informal constraints and missing restraining incentives. This is the angle that the authors of any reform should focus on.

The guiding principles for stakeholders, as espoused in the Kenya Integrity Plan, should serve to reinforce the legal framework of constraints and counterweight the informal irregularities that create chaos within the system. Mainstreaming integrity and ethical conduct, culture, norms and traditions is the most important aspect of the reform

process. The prevalence and normalization of graft, fueled by an almost dysfunctional system when it comes to the big fish of corruption, creates a negative system of a new normal that impedes any societal progress.

A precise portrait of an institutional functionality was captured by the president of the Supreme Court of Kenya, Chief Justice David Maraga, when issuing the landmark ruling on the 2017 presidential election petition that sent ripples around the world. He unequivocally stated that the supremacy of any nation lies in its loyalty to its constitution, rule of law and, above all, the fear of God.

The Supreme Court ruling was hailed across the world, albeit not short of its share of criticism. In essence, in one statement Chief Justice Maraga implored the tenets that should govern an institution that capture the informal constraint of norms, traditions and values.

It is safe to say that if Kenya is to realize its great potential, there are aspects of its institutional framework that it must get right.

First, there must be strict adherence to the formal constraints that support the system of interactions. Second, the system of incentives must be discouraged at all costs. Finally, the system of punishment has to be astute, independent and efficient in dispensing its justice.



Shigoli Shitero is a Kenyan economist and internal controls professional at a financial institution. He holds a graduate degree in economics from the University of Nairobi. His research focuses on economics, corruption, trade, inequality, economic development and behavioral economics.

What Stops Us Shooting People

Ellis Cashmore
October 5, 2017

The Las Vegas attack was the 273rd mass shooting in the US this year, occurring on day 275 of 2017.

How many times can we explain the kind of mass killing witnessed in Las Vegas earlier this week by invoking the vacuous, depthless term “psychopath”? Stephen Paddock, who mercilessly killed at least 58 innocent people and wounded a further 527 as they blithely watched a concert, had planned his callous attack for several days, setting up surveillance cameras, shoring up his personal cache of weapons — 47 guns were recovered at three locations so far — and, presumably, designing the multiple murders in a way that would give him maximum exposure to the largest number of potential victims before he took his own life.

It was suicide and, as with all suicides, it was deliberate and considered. In this

case it involved a degree of calculation and purposive action.

President Donald Trump's dismissal of Paddock as "a sick man, a demented man" suggests he was suffering from a chronic mental disorder. There is nothing in Paddock's background or previous conduct to indicate this. It also suggests he had a propensity for abnormal, violent behavior. But even a cursory inspection of recent events in the US forces us to recognize that America's normal has been ambushed by the abnormal.

About seven out of every 10 incidents of mass killing occur in the United States. (How we define a mass killing depends on which source and the ethnic identities of the victims.) It could be argued that there is some form of mass shooting every day in the US. The Las Vegas case was the 273rd this year, and it occurred on day 275 of 2017.

Since the infamous Columbine High School shooting in 1999 that left 12 students and a teacher dead, there has been a horrendous string of nine gory, "big" episodes, including the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre, in which 20 children, aged 6 and 7, and seven adults were killed in 2007, and last year's slaughter of 49 people at a gay club in Orlando, Florida — up until a few days ago the deadliest mass shooting in recent US history. In all cases, death came fast and sudden.

THE LIFE OF MAN

The perpetrators either committed suicide or were killed by police, effectively denying any insight into the dynamics of their action. Paddock's death leaves us searching for the right key to the lock. But, perhaps, we are struggling with the wrong lock. What if we tried to explain conformity instead of spectacularly conspicuous divergences from socially accepted standards? If we did, killing and, indeed, crime would instantly become unproblematic. Orderly and lawful conduct would become the object of investigation — not why we break the rules, but why we follow them.

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) famously did exactly this, of course. "The life of man [is] nasty, brutish and short" was his epithet. Hobbes believed humans are motivated entirely by selfish concerns, the fear of death being the primary one.

Thus, the consequent natural condition of humanity is warlike. Society, as we know it, is an artificial contrivance created to accommodate the coexistence of self-seeking individuals alongside each other. We frame, then mostly comply with, rules, laws and norms and, over time, we become conventional, behaving in a way that meets others' expectation. Mostly.

The discomfiting implication of Hobbes' thoughts is that we are all not just capable of but have an inclination or natural tendency to behave in a way that serves our own interests, no matter what the cost to others. Why don't we then?

In the 1930s, the American criminologist Travis Hirschi argued that we learn to conform and tend to remain compliant with rules by forming bonds that secure us to conventional society. In Hirschi's model of society, individuals are stitched into conventional life in four ways: attachment, investment, beliefs and reputation.

The most important one is attachment to parents, peers and other people who matter to us in some way. We know little of Paddock's attachments at the moment. The most significant person, it seems, is Marilou Danley, with whom he lived but who was abroad at the time of the shootings. He had no children and lived at some distance from relatives.

Hirschi also believed that as we mature, we invest in society, specifically the years we spend in formal education and in pursuing our careers and starting a family. In many cases, individuals acquire a reputation that they try to maintain or enhance.

Paddock, it appears, had invested in property and was thought to have assets valued at about \$2 million at the time of his death. He had also worked as an accountant, an occupation that requires years of training and study. Hirschi summarized our various investments as our commitment.

We're also bound to convention by our involvement in work, recreation, sports and an implicit belief in the institutional arrangements already in place. Most of us have a faith, at least to start our lives;

even atheists believe in the absence of a god.

Hirschi believed our sometimes unquestioned respect for law and authority fastens us securely to mainstream society. "[T]here is variation in the extent to which people believe they should obey the rules," he wrote. And, of course, the less someone believes in the legitimacy or moral license of the law, the more likely he or she is to violate it.

ALTRUISM?

We now have no way of knowing what Paddock thought of the law. His disregard for it on the fateful day was hardly a spontaneous shrug: Everything points to a carefully planned and orchestrated maneuver designed to maximize casualties. The "bump-stock" device he used to convert his semi-automatic guns to fully automatic could discharge up to 800 rounds per minute, and those that missed humans would have ricocheted off the hard streets, probably shattering on impact and spraying bystanders with potentially lethal fragments.

Most widely publicized shootings are occasions for renewing demands to change US gun control laws. It makes sense to refrain from this debate simply because, after a respectful period of tut-tutting and earnest reflection, America will resolve not to bend and maintain the Second Amendment of its Constitution intact.

Investigations into several of the mass shooting incidents have pieced together motives and planning and disclosed quite a variance. The perpetrators of the carnage in Orlando or San Bernardino, California, had, it seems, fundamentally different reasons.

But, in a sense, asking why the killers did their deeds isn't going to provide any clue as to how to prevent recurrences. In a country that permits the relatively free carrying of firearms, mass murders are just going to be an evil that stalks Americans' everyday lives.

The culprits behind these atrocities do not seem to be self-willed outcasts. At least the testimonies of those who knew them tell us this. So what is it that stops the rest of us pursuing our own interests selfishly and without any regard for others?

It's the kind of question we dismiss. We are all altruists rather than egoists and prefer cooperation to conflict; that's what makes society possible and functional. That's certainly an answer. But is it the only answer?



Ellis Cashmore is the author of "Elizabeth Taylor," "Beyond Black" and "Celebrity Culture." He is honorary professor of sociology at

Aston University and has previously worked at the universities of Hong Kong and Tampa.

Chad Is Caught in the Crosshairs of Western Politics

Dina Yazdani

October 5, 2017

There seems to be no good reason to justify Chad's inclusion in the Trump administration's new travel ban.

Chad is the latest victim of Western politics that threatens to weaken the already vulnerable African state at the expense of its people. Both the United States and the European Union are using Chad as a tool for their national political gain. With European leaders under public pressure to reduce the flow of refugees and migrants ahead of parliamentary elections, and US Republican leaders hoping to strengthen Donald Trump's loyalist base by appearing tough on terrorism ahead of their own mid-term elections, Chadians are caught in the crosshairs.

On September 25, the Trump administration rolled out a new travel ban, due to come into effect on October 18, which is even more extensive than the last. North Korea and Venezuela were added to the list, as was Chad, while Sudan was removed from it. The decision to include Chad stumped many; the landlocked country hardly seemed to be a threat to US national security. The other two came as no surprise, considering Trump's ongoing tirade against both North Korea and Venezuela and the recent escalation of economic sanctions.

Trump's decision to include Chad in the travel ban was haphazard and will jeopardize US national interests. The Department of Homeland Security claims the decision is based on N'Djamena's failure to provide the US with public safety and terrorism-related intelligence. As one of the poorest countries in the world, with around 47% of its population living below the poverty line, Chad may just lack the infrastructure to collect this data.

Chad was not the only country that failed to comply with Washington's vague standards. Pakistan did too. Yet unlike Chad, Pakistan carries geopolitical significance to the US, which is likely why it did not make it onto the travel ban.

The Orlando Pulse nightclub and San Bernardino shootings in 2016, which collectively left 63 dead, were carried out by Pakistani Americans. Trump openly stated that the San Bernardino shooting inspired his travel ban. Yet despite a significant number of terrorist attacks carried out by people either born in Pakistan or the children of Pakistani immigrants and the country hosting a number of known Islamist extremist organizations, the country is not included in the travel ban.

No terrorist attacks on American soil were committed by Chadians, nor by nationals from any of the other countries included in the ban. There appears to be no grounds to punish a country's civilian population by subjecting it to collective punishment and banning people from

traveling to the US indefinitely. Nevertheless, Trump's justification of his travel ban as a counterterrorism tool renders the inclusion of Chad and not Pakistan nonsensical.

To add insult to injury, Chad plays an important role in the fight against terrorism. It is home to France's counterterrorism mission headquarters and is a member of the US-led Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership. Chadian soldiers have been on the frontline against Boko Haram as well as fighting other Islamist militant groups in West Africa. The ban will weaken bilateral relations between Chad and the US, and will undoubtedly lead to a loss of an important ally in the region.

It is not only the US that has taken advantage of Chad this year. In September, Chad signed an agreement with the EU to serve as a buffer zone to help contain the number of migrants entering Europe. The EU envisions migrants detained in holding centers in Chad, as they await preliminary review for asylum.

In exchange, Chad would receive an increase in aid, which the country badly needs. However, Chad could experience a bottleneck of migrants trying to make their way to Libya to cross the Mediterranean, as Niger has effectively shut its own border with Libya, leaving the route through Chad as the easiest option available.

Chad already hosts over 300,000 Sudanese and Darfurian refugees who

fled Sudan during its civil wars the Darfur genocide. They represent one of the world's most forgotten and neglected refugee populations, who are now stuck in limbo in Chad. International aid for Chad to deal with this humanitarian crisis has largely been eclipsed by more recent conflicts such as the Syrian Civil War. Chad struggles to support these refugees alone. It is difficult to imagine how the impoverished country will be expected to host new migrants and refugees awaiting asylum review for Europe.

Ordinary Chadians will pay the price for Western politics that seeks to deflect legal responsibility of migrants onto transit countries. The US is simply picking on another Muslim-majority country and using Chad as a political tool to throw the Supreme Court into disarray, which has already postponed hearings it was set to undergo earlier this week.

Chad needs international help, not pressure. Its economy is small, and it has little means to provide humanitarian aid to the hundreds of thousands of refugees and internally displaced persons it already has. Hosting even more under the new EU containment plan and being a member of Trump's version of George W. Bush's "axis of evil" is not what the country needs to be burdened with on top of everything else.

It is unbecoming for powerful countries like the US and the EU member states to pick on smaller, weaker ones. Picking on a state like Chad reflects an

undeniable weakness for the West's inability to manage its own problems, despite having the resources to do so. Chad will likely emerge from this resilient. If history is any indicator, the small states almost always do.



Dina Yazdani is a freelance journalist. She currently works at an international NGO and previously served as the news team leader of Aslan Media. Raised by a Sunni Malaysian mother and a Shia Iranian father, her main interest lies in sectarianism and more broadly Middle East politics. She holds a bachelor's degree in international affairs from Lewis and Clark College, and a master's in conflict resolution in divided societies from King's College London. She is a reporter at Fair Observer.

Is America Shot to Hell?

Peter Isackson

October 6, 2017

In American culture, the display and use of massive firepower has become a feature of the true hero.

As this week's and, in fact, any other week's news reveals, the United States is literally shot on a regular basis. This week is exceptional: 59 in one go is the new record for a mass killing. The feat required a battery of very sophisticated weapons and a particularly resourceful assassin.

President Donald Trump has called Stephen Paddock's murderous spree in Las Vegas "an act of pure evil." This from a president who seems to have his own highly developed capacity to dabble in evil, through his highly visible capital sins of greed, pride and lust, to say nothing of envy, wrath and fast-food gluttony. In such circumstances, we can be sure the invocation of hell isn't altogether inappropriate.

Have the gates of hell opened? Many in the media already see Lucifer in the White House. Others, observing the perennial wars and increasingly frequent hurricanes, earthquakes, waves of refugees and miscellaneous atrocities all around us — complemented by regional revolt in Britain, Kurdish Iraq and Catalonia — detect a major shift in geopolitical power that will bring about radical but utterly unpredictable changes in the economy and our daily lives.

THE WOUNDED REPUBLIC

Many lucid voices have begun announcing not just the decline, but the imminent end of the American empire. Historian Alfred McCoy predicts the imminent demise of the dollar as the universal currency — the equivalent of a natural disaster on the scale of a continent, an earthquake that will keep trembling for over a decade and, inevitably, in the words of King Lear, "lay flat the thick rotundity" of America's and Wall Street's world. Does this translate as "mere anarchy ... loosed upon the world"? Or is a new world order — contrasting massively with George Bush

père's short-lived version — emerging to replace it?

Violence is in the air and has been for some time. If it isn't automatic, it's semi-automatic. Live by the AK-47, die by the AR-17. America's military history over nearly two and a half centuries has been one long campaign of controlled and managed violence. It appeared that George H.W. Bush's new world order, following the fall of the Soviet Union, represented the crowning success of that process of growth and strict management. Francis Fukuyama even predicted the end of history, which presumably would have meant the end of war. That was more than a decade before the launch of what now appear to be perennial wars, one of the signs of a declining empire.

In contrast to military organization and focused political wars, uncontrolled violence has always existed in the margins and, of course, at the frontier. Politically managed violence was at one time embodied in the providential idea of Manifest Destiny, permitting the conquest of a continent. It subsequently expanded to the late 20th century's Pax Americana that was designed to seem a lot less political than it actually was. The laws of the marketplace can sometimes disguise the laws the powerful impose on the powerless.

The war on terror, which first of all doesn't appear to be a war and secondly has no identifiable political enemy, may represent the end of the traditional distinction between controlled

and uncontrolled violence. Its central message appears to be that violence is now part of the landscape, meaning that armies and militarized police are required to keep it under control. In terms of propaganda, it seeks to instill the idea that controlled violence is preferable to uncontrolled violence and hopes that citizens will trust the violent state to control all the random violence in the landscape.

ROMANTICIZING VIOLENCE

In the centuries before perennial war, two major domestic conflicts had the effect of defining and orienting America's short history. The first was the "revolutionary war" of independence and the second was the Civil War or the War of Secession.

Americans still refer to the war that gave birth to the nation as a revolutionary war, possibly because it sounds exciting and innovative. It occurred at the same time as *Sturm und Drang* and the Romantic movement were emerging to define the new wave of European literature.

The rest of the world continues to refer to it not as a revolutionary war, but with the more banal description of a war of independence — a breaking away rather than a breaking through, a proto-Brexit, in a certain sense. It was nevertheless a dramatic event, made more so by the slow unfolding of its political outcome, the emergence of the world's first constitutional democracy.

The nation called the United States came into being through the pursuit of a war against the nation that gave it its own culture — a culture to which it continued to adhere, despite this radical act of disobedience.

In some mythological Freudian sense, this resembles the castration of the father. George the son (Washington), after chopping down his biological father's phallic cherry tree in his youth — at least according to an obviously apocryphal legend — replaced George the father (George III) as the nation's symbolic and real political leader. By George, that was an accomplishment!

The Civil War, which began some four score and four years later, turned out to be the most important event in the history of the new republic, possibly more important in its long-term consequences than the war of independence. Not just a spat between neighbors, it has left deep traces that are still with visible across the political spectrum.

Apart from its obvious racial implications, the Civil War raised the question of the literal meaning of the nation's name. How united were the states? And were the states really states, given that the original meaning of state is semantically identical to nation? The question of states' rights haunted the 20th century, largely because of the unresolved racial question that lay behind the Civil War.

The Republicans are still at it, especially now in the age of Trump. The Supreme Court has never taken a definitive position on the question. The preamble of the Constitution begins with the phrase, “We the People of the United States.” It’s worth noticing that all the nouns in the text of the original Constitution were capitalized.

Does this mean that “the People,” as a collective entity spread across the 13 states, had the status of a unified group of members of a single nation, the source of democracy? Or using modern typographical convention, should the phrase be read, “We the people of the united states,” emphasizing the attachment of the people to the diverse political units called states to which they owed their loyalty?

The very fact that the Civil War took place proves that the young nation had no clear idea about how united the states were meant to be. The dramatic outcome of the war — after a body count of some 620,000 sacrificed citizens — was to consolidate the union, legally if not culturally, definitively weakening the status of the states. States become the equivalent of provinces. Postwar culture stressed unity.

Ever since the aftermath of the Civil War, every school child in America has recited, on a daily basis, “one nation, indivisible” (or “under God, indivisible” since 1954), as they pledge their allegiance to the flag and, seemingly secondarily, “to the republic for which it

stands.” It goes without saying that the pupils are expected to be standing, not kneeling.

THE IDEOLOGY OF VIOLENT JUSTICE

Dramatic historical events mold the culture and inform what will ultimately become the prevailing value system. The memory of the violence of those two traumatic wars, one parricidal and the other fratricidal, continues to feed and influence US culture and insidiously model dominant as well as competing ideologies, on the left and on the right, in the North and the South, in the heartland and on the coasts. In a certain sense, US culture, with all its strands, represents a curt answer to Hamlet’s existential dilemma. When confronting complex problems, Americans have learned to waste no time or, like Congress — clearly a special case — simply stall forever. Opposition oblige.

More typically, the instinct of active Americans will be to “take arms against a sea of troubles and by opposing end them.” Hamlet, less concerned with wasting time, dismissed that course of action as soon as he had formulated it as a possible choice in his own mind. The Danish prince had too much respect for the overpowering force of the sea. Like the meek sparrow he later mentions, he ends up trusting “special providence” without trying to second-guess it through his own precipitous decisions. How Scandinavian of him! He must have been a socialist.

US foreign policy, from the halls of Montezuma to the shores of Benghazi, has never deviated from the line of thought that discovers seas of troubles and then links violent action to oppose them to an idea and ideal of justice. American wars are always associated with the notion of punishing those who resist specifically American ideas of a what constitutes a just order. Good guys in Hollywood have to be strong, bold and well-armed to overcome the bad guys. Their violence is ultimately justified by the requirements of justice, even when they decide to retire from a life of violent law enforcement to marry a peace-loving Quaker played by Grace Kelly.

The reasons cited for carrying out violent acts against perceived injustice are many and varied: attacks on American ships, whether real or imaginary (the *Maine* in 1898, the *Maddox* in 1964); the attempt to annex a country (Kuwait) deemed momentarily friendlier or more strategic than the former ally wishing to expand its capacity for commerce (Iraq, 1991); fantasized, but highly publicized, weapons of mass destruction (Iraq, 2003); the very real but deemed insubordinate nationalization of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (Iran, 1953); the inconvenient undermining of United Fruit's economic model built on the exploitation of local labor (Guatemala, 1954); or simply not being politically correct or economically compliant (Chile, 1973). These are just some examples. What they reveal is that violence is always associated with

the sense of a mission "to set things right" (Hamlet again). This is always defined in terms of an idea of justice, or something broader and closer to a sonorous slogan, such as the permanent need to "make the world safe for democracy," even if it means supporting autocratic regimes.

In American democracy, the state theoretically has no privileges that supersede those of the citizens themselves. That is how most people read the Bill of Rights. What the state can do, ordinary citizens can therefore feel justified in doing as well.

That has, in any case, become the standard interpretation of the Second Amendment offered by the gun lobby and libertarians. The purpose of the amendment, we are told, is to protect the citizens' right to take into their own hands, if necessary, the righting of wrongs. That includes eventually rebelling against the federal government with romantic aspirations similar to those of the colonists who revolted against England.

That point of view has become the standard orthodoxy, supported by the Supreme Court's actual decisions, though at least one former chief justice, Warren Burger, a Richard Nixon appointee, begged to differ, and in no uncertain terms. "The real purpose of the Second Amendment was to ensure that state armies — the militia — would be maintained for the defense of the state." He called the gun lobby's

interpretation of the amendment “a fraud.”

Mark Twain, more than Alexis de Tocqueville, helped us to understand that American democracy created a culture in which snake oil would be easy to sell, both for the resourceful seller’s profit of and the buyer’s tranquility of mind and soul. After all, to quote Hamlet again, “there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.”

The gun lobby has proved remarkably resourceful in turning on its head the literal meaning of the Second Amendment. The National Rifle Association (NRA) is still successfully selling its snake oil, at least to the politicians who feel a boost in their health when some of the profits from the sale land in their campaign funds.

But however you read the constitution, it remains merely the law of the land, not the culture of the nation. It’s what people believe and feel that counts. The idea of addressing evil and injustice through violence, so characteristic of both foreign policy and Hollywood drama, has been grafted into the cultural DNA of the nation. Hollywood has written it into the scenario of every action and crime film, to say nothing of war films. It has found its way into the most respectable documentaries. Mogie, the Vietnam war volunteer Ken Burns has just in the past weeks turned into a slightly ambiguous but clearly heroic icon, lived and breathed that cultural meme until, at the age of 17, he managed to run away from home and

then blackmail his parents into allowing him to enlist for battle in Vietnam. Why? Not just because it was a romantic ideal, but also to, in his mother’s words, “prevent communism.” As if communism was a disease that could be prevented with the medicine of violence.

SIN CITY

Which brings us to Las Vegas, Sin City — the one place in the world where whatever happens there, stays there. After three days of investigation, we still have no real clue about Stephen Paddock’s motives for massacring a crowd of concert attendees gathered across the street from his hotel room at the Mandalay Bay.

All we know for the moment is that he wasn’t a “terrorist,” because he was white. Furthermore, he had no known political leanings. That makes him officially a “lone wolf.” Perhaps we should invent a new term for this type of assassin and call him a “human drone,” because that’s what the essentially white government of the US, even under Barack Obama, prefers to use to terrorize populations.

Although he left no clues, Paddock certainly felt he was righting a wrong and using the means written into the Constitution to do so. Will we find a video confession similar to the one Elliot Rogers left us, who took the trouble to explain to us that he was about to right the wrong done to him by women, who had deprived him of “sex, fun and pleasure”? Could he have been driven,

unconsciously, by Thomas Jefferson's words concerning every American's inalienable right to "the pursuit of happiness."

Dylann Roof, who cold-bloodedly murdered at close range nine black members of a church group, was more explicit: "Well someone has to have the bravery to take it to the real world, and I guess that has to be me."

In US culture, the feeling of having a mission, when combined with the belief that it is right for citizens to be armed in order to eliminate some perceived injustice, contributes powerfully to a culture of getting even. Or rather more than even, since the display and use of massive firepower has become a feature of the true hero. Trump went to the United Nations just a few weeks ago to tell the world he was ready to pulverize an entire nation and all its people.

Politically motivated terrorism exists. It is typically a direct consequence of situations characterized, rightly or wrongly, by political and military aggression and domination. Politically motivated terrorism is easier to justify, more rational and — heinously inhuman as it is — makes more political sense than shooting random women because one is still a virgin at 22 or because one believes, as Roof claimed, that "blacks were taking over the world."

We may never know what probably imaginary "cause" was behind Paddock's militaristic rampage aimed at

a crowd of people he had never met. What we can surmise because of what we know about the culture is that he had mentally bought into the military mystique of automatic weapons and efficient killing as an appropriate means of confronting a sea of troubles. The mystique consistently promoted not just by the NRA, but with more emotional impact by popular media.

Banning assault weapons is unlikely to have much of an impact on such occurrences, as author and statistician Leah Libresco has correctly pointed out just this week in an article documenting her conversion to a laissez-faire attitude on gun control. What she fails to consider is that legislation, even if it is likely to fail as an effective material constraint, can actually have an effect on culture.

Statisticians rarely show concern with culture or even awareness of it. That's normal. Culture obdurately refuses to offer up the numbers they like to crunch. But a little creative thought will reveal that the commitment by a majority of hitherto pusillanimous legislators to the principle of gun control would contribute powerfully to attenuating the culture of violence. Law doesn't control human behavior. Statistics can't sum it up. But law does work across generations as a statement of collective purpose and values, particularly in a democracy.

So to extend the NRA's reasoning, we could conclude: "Guns don't kill. People (generally) don't kill. Cultures kill!"

Which also means cultures can stop killing. The problem is that cultures don't change easily or quickly. But with the decline of the American militaristic empire, the confidence that still pushes phony heroes to carry out real acts of false bravado in the name of imaginary justice may, like a devastating hurricane upon reaching land, begin to lose some of its destructive power.

The vast majority of civilized Americans, known for their generosity, humanity and creativity, may yet find a way of saving the republic from the chaos associated with declining empires. They may help to consolidate that very republic at the moment it renounces empire. They can still work to restore some form of sanity through their still viable democracy, as the nation seeks to find its productive place in a better balanced and possibly more equitable world.



Peter Isackson is an author and media producer. Educated at UCLA and Oxford University, he settled in France and has worked in electronic publishing — pioneering new methods, tools and content for learning in a connected world. He has dedicated himself to innovative publishing, coaching training of trainers and developing collaborative methods in the field of learning.

Guns Have No Place in a Civilized Society

S. Suresh

October 9, 2017

America must become civilized before it can become great.

In the wake of yet another senseless shooting that took the lives of 58 people and injured more than 500, America is displaying its true colors.

That this self-proclaimed leader of the free world is a nation of people who value their right to own guns more than the right of people to live; that it is a racist nation with selective memory of its bloody past on which the country was built upon; that it is a self-aggrandizing nation which refuses to take collective responsibility toward society in the name of protecting individual rights.

On October 4, I attended a town hall meeting hosted by Evan Low, a member of the California State Assembly. Low is a Democrat with strong views on having strict firearm regulations. In his prepared address, he mentioned that his views on gun control have consistently earned him an F grade from the National Rifle Association (NRA).

During the individual discussion session, I asked if he would go as far as saying that guns have no place in a civilized society, even if it meant challenging the very core of the Second Amendment. Not surprisingly, his reply was in the realm of political correctness, reiterating his views on gun control and that we

would have to make incremental progress in the fight against the proliferation of firearms.

From the blue state of California, which has some of the most stringent gun control laws, Low typifies the best that one could hope for — when it comes to politicians — in the fight against guns in America.

THE WORST MASS SHOOTING IN AMERICAN HISTORY?

Media headlines are ablaze with the claim that the Las Vegas attack was the worst mass shooting in American history. Is it indeed the case?

Should we ignore the Colfax massacre in 1873, soon after the end of the civil war in which 150 African-Americans were brutally murdered by white supremacists? Should we overlook the Wounded Knee massacre of 300 Lakota Native Americans in 1890 because it was carried out in the name of war? Should we also conveniently forget the 1917 East St. Louis massacre and the 1921 Tulsa race massacre just because the victims were black?

The previous incident that laid claim to the worst mass shooting in America was the 2016 Pulse nightclub attack in Orlando. The media narrative ignored America's bloody history even then. In fact, The New York Times published this article elaborating how historians and police rely on technicalities to justify the claim.

The list of incidents where black and Native Americans have been murdered by white men are many, but they never seem to make the mainstream narrative of today's media. This selective amnesia reflects the deep-rooted racism in American society even today.

A CULTURE OF VIOLENCE FUELED BY INDIVIDUALISM

America thrives in a culture of violence that is fueled by individualism. This is at the crux of why it is impossible to challenge the grip that the NRA has on American politicians and, by extension, the country.

America's favorite pastime and sport, football, is nothing short of a modern-day gladiator spectacle. Studies have conclusively established the effects of concussions on football players. Yet 64% of Americans glue themselves to the TV and throng the stadiums every Sunday in fall and winter to enjoy this gladiator sport.

If it is violence that society craves for even in sport, then the remarkable resistance Americans have when it comes to giving up firearms should come as no surprise. If the death of 20 innocent school children at the hands of a disturbed young man with easy access to firearms does not tug at the nation's conscience to make amends, then nothing will.

Deadly shootings will continue to occur at regular intervals, as with the Orlando killings and the Las Vegas attack.

Politicians, impotent under the NRA's vice-like grip, will express their shallow grief with guarded statements, and they will lay low while the storm blows over. As the dust settles, policymakers will do exactly what they have in the past when it comes to gun legislation: nothing.

REPEAL SECOND AMENDMENT

The Second Amendment gives the majority a convenient anchor to protect their craving for violence. In the late 18th century, the country may have well needed a regulated militia to protect the free state, thus necessitating the right to bear arms and the Second Amendment. But do we need a well-regulated militia that is distinct from the US Army and individuals to bear arms in 21st-century America?

The real dialog the country should be having is not about gun control. Rather, it must be about repealing the Second Amendment, which has no relevance today.

Shackled to its past, real progress has been hard to come by in America. We may have abolished slavery in 1865, but racism is widely prevalent even today. Women's suffrage came to pass in 1920, thanks to the 19th Amendment, and they may have earned the right to vote, but they continue to fight for gender equality even today.

But when it comes to having a rational discussion about the Second Amendment, even small incremental progress becomes a challenge as

people become dogmatic about their beliefs and stubborn in their resistance to change.

An individual's right to own firearms is guarded with such fervor that even the murder of innocent school children couldn't make a dent in it. How can a country consider itself great if its social beliefs are tied to a document written two centuries ago?

There are many Americans, politicians and even Supreme Court judges who proudly state that they are pro-Second Amendment. On the flip side, the voice of the anti-gun lobby is certainly louder today than it was few decades back.

However, what we need are leaders who will spearhead the effort to repeal the archaic Second Amendment. Borrowing a popular phrase from contemporary politics, we need to "repeal and replace" it. Incremental progress in gun control at the state level, with nothing substantial happening in Washington, will leave America exposed to gun violence for decades, if not centuries.

American politicians, including its presidents, never lose the opportunity to display a brash arrogance that borders on crudeness, irrespective of their political affiliation. More than one presidential campaign has been run on the slogan, "Make America Great," most recently by its current leader, Donald Trump.

Guns have no place in a civilized society. The collective effort should be focused on making America civilized, rather than great.



S. Suresh is a product executive with more than 25 years of experience in enterprise software. He is also a writer who devotes much of his time analyzing socioeconomic issues and shares his viewpoints and experiences through his blog, newsletter and Fair Observer. He is a volunteer at HealthTrust, a nonprofit that works toward building health equity in Silicon Valley. Suresh holds graduate degrees in Computer Science and Chemistry from Birla Institute of Technology and Science, Pilani, India.

The Tale of an Incompetent President and His Secretary

Naveed Ahsan

October 9, 2017

If the reports are true, Rex Tillerson was correct to call Donald Trump a moron. But that doesn't get him off the hook.

It is reassuring to hear that President Donald Trump's obdurate behavior has stupefied his own cabinet members and not just the American people. On October 4, NBC News reported that Rex Tillerson, the secretary of state, had considered resigning over the summer and, at one point, had called Trump a

"moron" after a meeting at the Pentagon in late July. Stephanie Ruhle, one of the journalists who broke the news, stood by her story in an MSNBC interview amidst questions over its validity. "My source didn't just say that he called him a moron. He said an f-ing moron," Ruhle said.

At a press conference addressing the report, Tillerson refuted the allegation that he had threatened to leave the White House, but he did not deny that he ever called Trump a moron. "Let me tell you what I've learned about this president, whom I did not know before taking this office," Tillerson told reporters. "He loves his country. He puts Americans and America first. He's smart, he demands results wherever he goes, and he holds those around him accountable for whether they've done the job he's asked them to do."

Whether the NBC reports are true or not, it is more than probable that tensions between the two men have long been in gestation. Ever since Tillerson's tenure began, Trump has contradicted and undermined him. In June, for instance, as Secretary Tillerson attempted to mediate a dispute between Qatar and other Gulf states, President Trump held a press conference lambasting the Qataris and describing them as a "funder of terrorism at a very high level." And, according to The New York Times, Jared Kushner may have a hand to play in the tumult as well. "Some in the White House say that the discord in the Qatar dispute is part of a broader struggle over

who is in charge of Middle East policy — Mr. Tillerson or Jared Kushner, the president's son-in-law and a senior adviser — and that the secretary of state has a tin ear about the political realities of the Trump administration,” the report reads.

Most recently, Trump sent out another series of feckless tweets, but this time targeting the secretary and his diplomatic foibles with North Korea and its leader, Kim Jong-un, whom the president refers to as “rocket man.” “I told Rex Tillerson, our wonderful Secretary of State, that he is wasting his time trying to negotiate with Little Rocket Man ... Being nice to Rocket Man hasn't worked in 25 years, why would it work now? Clinton failed, Bush failed, and Obama failed. I won't fail,” Trump tweeted.

IS TILLERSON ON HIS WAY OUT?

This is certainly not to excuse the indolence of Tillerson, who will presumably go down in history as one of the worst secretaries in American history. As these two Politico reports show, Tillerson has been most adroit at contributing to the mass departures of many future diplomatic leaders. Additionally, hundreds of positions in the State Department still remain empty.

Some have compared Trump's proclivity to be unpredictable when it comes to foreign policy with Richard Nixon's “madman theory.” But the parallels eventually veer off when understanding that the Nixonian strategy — from his

opening with China to the détente with the Soviet Union — was carefully coordinated and meticulously crafted. The Trumpian strategy, however, has been wholly inept and sheer buffoonery, particularly when it comes to the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Paris Climate Accord.

And just as his uncontrollable adversary in Pyongyang, Trump's threats are all vacuous and bluster. David Graham of The Atlantic correctly notes: “An equally likely—or even more likely—outcome is that North Korea will conclude that Trump is capable of nothing, based on past results.” It would certainly be helpful if someone could illuminate the public as to where Trump's continuing humiliation of his White House subordinates or the North Korean leader through social media fits in with his overall policy agenda. Trump's impulse to impair his relationship with Secretary Tillerson, at a time when the world is rife with challenges needing to be dealt with, is just another example of a derelict in office instead of a foreign policy tactician.

As Aaron David Miller and Richard Sokolsky point out, Tillerson's urge to defend himself from the claims made by the NBC report is not unique but awkward nonetheless, as it suggests that even he is willing to endure the same degree of humiliation from the president just like the rest of his sycophants. In fact, his denial of the claims has only made the visible rift even more obvious.

Whether Tillerson is on his way out or not, the same challenge will fester no matter who fills the role of secretary of state — that is to try to temper a perpetually unruly president who routinely undercuts his subordinates. While we watch in mild stupefaction as our credibility on the world stage unravels, the prescient words of the late American writer H.L. Mencken come to mind: “On some great and glorious day the plain folks of the land will reach their heart’s desire at last, and the White House will be adorned by a downright moron.”



Naveed Ahsan is a social media associate at Fair Observer, where he also works in fundraising.

Why the National Anthem Protests Were Doomed to Fail

Charles Hoskinson
October 12, 2017

Protests of the US national anthem by athletes are doomed to failure because they are perceived as attacks on America itself, not just racism.

Now that the National Football League (NFL) has blinked in the showdown over players sitting and kneeling during the playing of the US national anthem, it’s a

good time to look at why the protests were doomed to failure from the start.

The protesting players wanted to raise awareness about abuses of power by police. Concerns over such abuses are widespread and have the potential to unite liberals, conservatives and libertarians in the search for solutions. But the method chosen by the protesters couldn’t have been more divisive, dooming their effort to failure.

The national anthem and the flag are symbols of the American nation, serving the same unifying purpose as those of other nations across the world. Absent their symbolic value, they would just be an old English drinking song and a piece of red-white-and-blue cloth. It’s that symbolic value which prompted protesters to target the anthem, drawing a negative reaction from most of their fellow citizens.

Since the 1980s, the fight against illegal drugs and rising rates of violent crime produced a political climate that allowed police in the US to greatly expand their power and limit their accountability for abuses. Though crime rates began to fall in the 1990s, fear of crime remained high in public perceptions, bolstering support for expanded, more aggressive policing combined with weak oversight.

But recent widespread reports of abuses — many seen as racially motivated — have left many black Americans in particular feeling as if they are powerless to influence how laws are enforced in their communities. Even in

cities where black leaders dominate the political and judicial structure that controls law enforcement, many minority residents believe racial bias permeates the system, and they have reacted with protests and street violence.

Though race has been a factor in some of the well-publicized police abuse cases, there are bigger factors at play, most notably the militarization of police, as detailed in journalist Radley Balko's book, *Rise of the Warrior Cop*, which has led to them being seen in many communities as an occupying army. Impunity also is a factor, even in cases where officers overreacted, like the shooting of Philando Castile in Minnesota.

Calls for reform from both liberal and conservative activists and politicians had come long before quarterback Colin Kaepernick decided to sit for the national anthem at a San Francisco 49ers game on August 26, 2016, triggering a nationwide protest by football players and other athletes that mushroomed after President Donald Trump jumped in during September 2017 and said NFL owners should fire protesting players.

But Kaepernick had already fatally doomed the protest by setting a tone for it that was guaranteed to draw opposition from most Americans. In a statement released by his team after the first protest, Kaepernick said: "I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color."

THE LEFT IN AMERICA

It's not unusual for protests from the left to target national symbols. The practice of flag burning as a form of political protest emerged out of the anti-Vietnam War movement of the 1960s and has been declared a constitutionally-protected form of free expression.

Though legal, it's not without a social cost: By targeting universal symbols of the American community, the left has marginalized itself as a political force relative to its strength in other countries.

The protesting athletes see themselves as heirs to the civil rights movement. In fact, they are kneeling into a headwind of disapproval from most Americans who see disrespect for the national symbols as disrespect for the nation itself. They are inviting their fellow countrymen to disregard their opinion because they are delegitimizing the community itself.

It's one thing to protest racism in policing in America. It's something entirely different to claim America is racist. This was not the moral tone set for the civil rights movement by Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1963 speech at the Lincoln Memorial. King, who was a master of rhetoric, portrayed racism and discrimination as anti-American, and declared that black people were entitled to the promise of the nation's founding documents as much as anyone else.

"When the architects of our Republic wrote the magnificent words of the

Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir,” King said. “It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned.” The protests may drag on as NFL owners consider whether to require them to end amid complaints that the league is stifling the free speech of players. But they have already failed because Americans, including those who agree with the underlying issue of police abuses, stand against them.



Charles Hoskinson is a Washington, DC-based journalist who has written for Politico, the Associated Press, Agence France-Presse and Congressional Quarterly, specializing in politics, international security affairs and terrorism.

Silencing of Dissent in India Spells a Weakness of Democracy

Ankita Mukhopadhyay
October 25, 2017

Across India, dissenters from the mainstream narrative pay the ultimate price for their opinions.

India has a rich history of questioning and philosophizing. In ancient India, women like Gargi were lauded for their

ability to tire people at debates. Atal Behari Vajpayee, India’s former prime minister, was noted for his ability to weave language beautifully during debate.

Democracy was the very foundation of the newborn nation of India in 1947. In the early days of independence, people spoke up for their rights, went on hunger strikes and openly protested against the government. Amidst all this struggle, India became an example for other nations in the way it stuck together as a country and a democracy, despite its extreme diversity and dissent from one corner to another.

The country’s democratic tradition took an ugly turn in 1975, when the Indira Gandhi-led government presided over a period that became known as the Emergency, lasting almost two years. During that time, political dissidents were suppressed, the freedom of the press curtailed and opponents of the regime jailed. Those were scary times for journalists and academics, and the remnants of that era continue to haunt many Indians today.

One would expect the India of 2017 to be a changed, liberal version of itself, having seen so much blood and gore and having sacrificed many who disagreed with the popular opinion. Unfortunately, it appears that there are many people in India who still have a problem with its democracy and the right of dissent. A black cloud has been descending around the country’s free thinkers, ever since the cold-blooded

murder of Narendra Dabholkar, a rationalist author from Maharashtra, a state in western India. Dabholkar was killed in broad daylight in August 2013. At the time of his death, he was trying to get the state government to pass an anti-superstition and black magic bill through his organization, Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti (Maharashtra Blind Faith Eradication Committee).

Dabholkar's death created a domino effect. Less than two years after his demise, Govind Pansare, a Communist Party of India politician and author of a book on Maratha King Shivaji, was shot and killed. Six months later, M.M. Kalburgi, an academic from the state of Karnataka, met the same fate. When India thought it had all ended, Gauri Lankesh, the editor of Gauri Lankesh Patrike, a weekly Kannada-language tabloid, was shot outside her home in September 2017.

Days after her death, the Bombay high court concluded that the "trend of killing all opposition is dangerous" and that there was a lack of respect for liberal values and opinions in the country. All four victims were critics of both the government and society at large, and all espoused liberal values.

LOCAL INFLUENCES

Another thing in common between Dabholkar, Kalburgi, Lankesh and Pansare was that they were prominent writers in the vernacular, or local, languages. India's diverse population

still reads in the vernacular. Among the over 82,000 newspapers in circulation, nearly 40% appear in Hindi, the most commonly spoken language across the country. According to India Ratings and Research, local language print media is expected to grow by 10-12% in 2017. Though unknown amongst the 10% Indians who primarily read and speak English, these four individuals had a powerful effect on their readers in their community.

With a wider audience and, hence, wider influence, they convinced Indians against superstitious beliefs, introduced them to the tenets of communist thought and spoke up frequently against the establishment.

According to Mausami Singh, an editor with Aaj Tak news service, journalists who report in the local language have always been seen as targets for speaking out about micro issues on the ground — the real, rural parts of India. She cites the example of Ram Chander Chhatrapati, a journalist from the state of Haryana, who exposed a famous "godman," Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh, for sex crimes and was subsequently killed by the religious leader's followers.

The Narendra Modi-led government has been accused of inciting right-wing fringe elements to suppress people like Lankesh and Kalburgi. India is dangerously leaning into right-wing rhetoric, with reports of Muslims being killed over alleged consumption of beef and forced conversions to Hinduism. Lankesh was a fervent critic of the

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a right-wing Hindu organization, and the current Karnataka government, led by Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) B.S. Yeddyurappa. An article in her publication accused Prabhakar Bhat Kalladka, an RSS functionary in the state of Karnataka, for instigating communal agitation in parts of the state. The article alleged that he had collected over Rs500 million (\$7.7 million) from his followers in the name of faith to establish religious institutions and educational centers to spread the ideas of communalism and "blind hatred" for people of other religions, such as Christians and Muslims.

Following Gauri Lankesh's death, there were rumors that the murderers belonged to Sanathan Sanstha, a Hindu right-wing organization based in the state of Goa; it denied the allegations. Speculation became rife when forensic reports revealed that the bullets which killed Lankesh were fired from the same gun that killed Kalburgi. Ramachandra Guha, a prominent Indian writer and author of the popular book, *India after Gandhi*, came under scrutiny when he suggested that the BJP government had created an atmosphere of intolerance in India and accused the RSS of killing Lankesh. The Karnataka BJP youth wing, the Yuva Morcha, filed a criminal complaint against Guha.

A RARE LEADER

The issue didn't end there. Hours after Lankesh's death, it was reported that the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi

was a follower of certain Twitter accounts that had supported the journalist's killing. Though BJP's IT cell later issued a clarification stating that the prime minister is a "rare leader who truly believes in freedom of speech and has never blocked or unfollowed anyone on Twitter," he continues to follow those accounts. Some people assumed the "patrike" in Gauri Lankesh Patrike meant "Patrick," a Christian name, and accused Lankesh of being a Christian and, hence, an opponent of Indian society. "Patrike," unfortunately, stands for "publication."

The debate about who killed Gauri Lankesh may finally reach its culmination, after the special investigation team finally released pictures of Lankesh's murderers on October 14 and sought public help in finding them. While the search for her killers is still ongoing, people on Twitter have started speculating about whether the murderers were "commies" (communists) or members of the Sanathan Sanstha. The latter has said that these men are not part of their organization.

However, a prominent political leader from Maharashtra did raise eyebrows when he called her murderers "communist rascals that kill their own people when they turn against them and blame it on Hindus."

One reason Lankesh was attacked could be connected to her political views and her communist leanings. However, another notable thing about her was that

she belonged to the Lingayat community. Lingayats account for 12-14% of Karnataka's population and play an important role in the politics of the state. Lankesh was a proponent of the belief that Lingayat is a religion different from Hinduism as it protests against the Brahminical, or upper caste, traditions of Hinduism.

What is surprising to note is that Kalburgi also held a similar view. He had reportedly received death threats from conservative Lingayats for his interpretation of the vachana verses, the founding literature of the community. If the Lingayats manage to break away from Hinduism, they could become a powerful opposing force, uniting many within Karnataka and prompting the breakaway of many opposing forces within the religion of Hinduism.

MEDIA POWER

Indian media outlets have always been critical of the government, and despite reports of political leanings and funding, the media have managed to bring out many important issues to the attention of Indians.

Protests have erupted, inaugurating local heroes, because of the power of Indian media. What is unsettling, however, is that journalists now have to live in fear for speaking up about issues that matter to them. Their political and ideological leanings can bring real danger, and there is an unsettling air across the country as some views get primacy over others. Such thoughts are

destructive not only for journalists and activists, but all rational thinkers alike. India cannot impose another emergency on itself by sacrificing dissenters.

It's not uncommon for many in India to think that they need to appease the current government in power in order to live peacefully. Journalists who report in local languages do not have access to the facilities and security that those who report for big English publications do. They risk their lives every day to expose corruption in society. Instead of protecting them for their vital contribution, they are being exposed to gunfire.

The flaring up of religious sentiments is also worrisome. India is not a country of Hinduism — it is a secular nation. The reason India stood out from other countries and still does is because of its diversity and ability to accept and integrate all cultures.

However, with the targeting of actors, writers, politicians and dissenters, it is becoming evident that a particular religious discourse has to get primacy over others. While this may or may not be a result of the current government's stance on the issue, it is alarming that little is being done to curb flared religious emotions. The recent riots in the state of Haryana over the jailing "godman" Singh and the complacency with which the state government dealt with it point toward this disturbing trend.

Gauri Lankesh is one of many murder victims. But how many more need to die

before India realizes that, beyond being a crime, it is also a human rights violation?



Ankita Mukhopadhyay is a journalist based in New Delhi, India. She has worked at various Indian publications for the few years as an editor. She is currently a business journalist at an international media outlet. An avid reader and history buff, Mukhopadhyay pursued her postgraduate degree at the London School of Economics (LSE). She is particularly interested in feminism and gender issues and Indian politics. She is a reporter at Fair Observer.

China's Cyberwarfare Finds New Targets

Elizabeth Van Wie Davis
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*Is China a leader in cyberwarfare?
China answers yes.*

With the massive media coverage of Russian cyber interference in recent Western elections, the time is ripe to examine the issue of cyberwarfare in China. China discusses its own emphasis on cyberwar capabilities in several official documents, including the 2015 China's Military Strategy white paper:

“Cyberspace has become a new pillar of economic and social development, and a new domain of national security. ... As cyberspace weighs more in military security, China will expedite the development of a cyber force, and enhance its capabilities of cyberspace situation awareness, cyber defense, support for the country's endeavors in cyberspace and participation in international cyber cooperation, so as to stem major cyber crises, ensure national network and information security, and maintain national security and social stability.”

Moreover, in the wake of the massive worldwide WannaCry ransomware attack, China was hit hard. The malicious backdoor software that hackers relied on to develop the ransomware attack was created by the US National Security Agency (NSA) and later stolen by a secretive group known as the Shadow Brokers; NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden wrote that the “circumstantial evidence and conventional wisdom” suggested Russia was behind the hack.

With the largest online population in the world, surpassing 649 million users, China is more openly declaring its place as a cyber power among the US, Russia, Israel and North Korea — the “cyber five.” The question is whether China will fully assume a leadership role.

The iSight intelligence unit of FireEye — a company that manages large network breaches — conducted a study that

came to the conclusion that Chinese attacks are decreasing in volume and increasing in sophistication. China picks targets more carefully and covers tracks more expertly. Unit 61398 — the notorious military-run cyber center — appears to be largely out of business, with its hackers dispersed to other military, private and intelligence units.

The Chinese cyberattacks have focused on the US, Russia, South Korea and Vietnam and have sometimes aimed at the South China Sea disputes. The report states that the change is part of Chinese President Xi Jinping's broad effort to bring the Chinese military, which is one of the main sponsors of the attacks, further under his control.

A REVOLUTION IN CYBER AFFAIRS

The Chinese approach has clearly shifted in the past three years. For instance, The Science of Military Strategy — a study of the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) strategic thinking, published by China's Academy of Military Sciences — released in 2015, both acknowledges for the first time that China has built up network attack forces and divides them into specialized military network warfare forces, teams of network warfare specialists in government civilian organizations and entities outside of the government that engage in network attack and defense, including its civilian IT industry.

Similarly, the 2015 China's Military Strategy asserts that "China will devote more efforts to science and technology

in national defense mobilization, be more readily prepared for the requisition of information resources, and build specialized support forces. China aims to build a national defense mobilization system that can meet the requirements of winning informationized wars and responding to both emergencies and wars." This new openness about the need for strong cyber forces and the integration of civilian specialties into national defense is a definite shift.

The previous two decades were a steady buildup to this perspective. Beginning as early as 2000, China's Central Military Commission called for a study of people's war under conditions of "informationalization." The Chinese strategy called Integrated Network Electronic Warfare consolidated the offensive mission for both computer network attack and electronic warfare under the PLA's General Staff Department.

The originator of the strategy, now retired Major General Dai Qingmin, a prolific and outspoken supporter of modernizing the PLA's information warfare capabilities, first described the combined use of network and electronic warfare as early as 1999 in articles and a book entitled An Introduction to Information Warfare, written while on faculty at the military's Electronic Engineering Academy. General Dai was promoted in 2000 to lead the General Staff's 4th Department.

China's National Defense in 2004 white paper stated that "informationalization

has become the key factor in enhancing the warfighting capability of the armed forces” and that the military takes informationalization “as its orientation and strategic focus.” Chinese military doctrine advocates a combination of cyber and electronic warfare capabilities in the early stages of conflict.

Both the 2004 white paper and the noted expert on the PLA, You Ji, identify the PLA Air Force as responsible for information operations and information countermeasures.

Other cyber responsibilities lie with the PLA General Staff’s 4th and 3rd Departments that conduct advanced research on information security. The 4th Department oversees electronic counter-measures and research institutes developing information warfare technologies. The 3rd Department is responsible for signals intelligence and focuses on collection, analysis and exploitation of electronic information. The military also maintains ties with research universities and the public sector.

The Chinese military maintains a network of universities and research institutes that support information warfare-related education either in advanced degree granting programs or specialized courses. Military universities supporting this approach include the National University of Defense Technology, the PLA Science and Engineering University and the PLA Information Engineering University.

China, like many countries, initially turned to its civilian computer programmer subculture and information technology workforce, but this strategy too has modified as Chinese cyberwarfare strategy matures. In the early days of 1999 to 2004, China’s civilian computer programmer subculture gained notoriety for its willingness to engage in large-scale politically motivated denial of service attacks, data destruction and defacements of foreign networks. While initially encouraged, this sentiment changed and official party media sources published editorials suggesting that civilian computer attack activities would not be tolerated.

Nonetheless, the traditional computer programmer subculture may still offer unique skill sets and may have a niche role for military or state intelligence collection. Some evidence suggests a relationship exists between Chinese malicious civilian computer programmer subculture and Chinese government operators responsible for network intrusions, and there has been limited recruiting from this community, similar to what occurs in the US and Russia.

INFORMATIONIZATION

How is China integrating the military strategy for cyberwarfare into overall planning efforts and implementing it? The FireEye study concluded that as early as 2014, around the time of the indictment of the PLA’s officers and hackers in the US for economic cyber theft, the Chinese government was

modifying its approach to cyber operations. Central to this new posture is the previous decade's scheme of informationization. The guiding doctrine, *Local War Under Informationized Conditions*, outlines the effort to develop a fully networked architecture capable of coordinating military operations on land, in air, at sea, in space and in cyber realms. The goal is to establish control of a rival's information flow and maintain dominance in the early stages of a conflict.

Chinese military strategists early on viewed information dominance as a key goal at the strategic and campaign level, according to *The Science of Military Strategy* in 2005 and *The Science of Campaigns* in 2006. The strategy relies on applying electronic warfare and computer network operations against an adversary's command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (C4ISR) networks and other essential information systems. The strategy requires that these cyber tools should be widely employed in the earliest phases of a conflict and possibly preemptively against an adversary's information systems and C4ISR systems. Additional to the core military objective, other goals have emerged.

The primary objective of the strategy is to deny an enemy access to information essential for continued combat operations, ideally before other forces engage in combat. A secondary objective is to attack people's perception and belief systems through information

deception and psychological attack. A third objective is strategic deterrence, which some Chinese military strategists see as comparable to nuclear weapons but possessing greater precision, leaving far fewer casualties and possessing longer range as most other weapons.

Another early objective of cyber strategy in China, a strategy that has been greatly modified since the 2014 shift, was cyberespionage. Most countries engage in some sort of espionage of each other's governments. However, in the initial stages from 2006 to 2014, China was very active in cyberespionage of commercial interests as opposed to government secrets; some scholars argue that commercial espionage was seen as necessary to build the Chinese economy.

A massive commercial cyberespionage campaign was conducted by APT1, a single organization of operators. Since 2006, Mandiant — another FireEye company — observed APT1 compromised 141 companies spanning 20 major industries, a long-running and extensive cyberespionage campaign made possible, in large part, through direct government support it received from the military's Unit 61398. As late as 2011, at least 17 new victims operating in 10 different industries. However, by 2017, Unit 61398 is mostly disbanded, as Chinese cyber strategy completes its shift from volume to sophistication and its shift from commercial to government objectives.

One of the major concerns of cyberespionage, besides loss of government and commercial secrets, is that it can be a frontrunner for cyberattacks. According to The New York Times, “What most worries American investigators is that the latest set of attacks believed coming from Unit 61398 focus not just on stealing information, but obtaining the ability to manipulate American critical infrastructure: the power grids and other utilities.”

Then-US President Obama discussed this point in this 2013 State of the Union speech. “We know foreign countries and companies swipe our corporate secrets,” he said. “Now our enemies are also seeking the ability to sabotage our power grid, our financial institutions, our air-traffic control systems. We cannot look back years from now and wonder why we did nothing.” From 2006 to 2014, the theft of intellectual property resulted in the loss of billions of dollars of revenue. But clearly the strategy and objectives have changed.

CONTROLLING CYBERSPACE

Another thing that has changed is the belief in the ability to control cyberspace. China argues that states have the right to control their own cyberspace, much like they do any other domain or territory or cyber-sovereignty, while Western countries argue for an “open, interoperable, secure, and reliable information and communications infrastructure.” Chinese leaders believe that cyberspace is largely controllable.

Around the time of the Google pullout, China’s State Council Information Office delivered an exultant report on its work to regulate online traffic, according to a crucial Chinese contact cited by the State Department in a cable in early 2010 and later quoted in The New York Times. The source claimed that “in the past, a lot of officials worried that the Web could not be controlled. But through the Google incident and other increased controls and surveillance, like real-name registration, they reached a conclusion: the Web is fundamentally controllable.”

In an attempt to control its own cyberspace, China adopted a cybersecurity law to address growing threats of cyberattacks in addition to the Golden Shield Project, a major part of which is the notorious Great Firewall of China. The new cyber legislation took effect in June 2017 and is labeled an “objective need” of China as a major internet power, a parliament official said.

The law might shut foreign technology companies out of various sectors deemed “critical” and include requirements for security reviews and for data to be stored on servers in China. In 2016, Beijing adopted a sweeping national security law that aimed to make all key network infrastructure and information systems secure and controllable. “China’s government has come to recognize that cyberspace immediately and profoundly impacts on many if not all aspects of national security,” said Rogier Creemers, a Sinologist at Leiden

University. “It is a national space, it is a space for military action, for important economic action, for criminal action and for espionage.”

So is China a leader in cyberwarfare? China answers yes. Yang Heqing, an official on the National People’s Congress standing committee, said cyber power is deeply linked to China’s national security and development: “China is an internet power, and as one of the countries that faces the greatest internet security risks, urgently needs to establish and perfect network security legal systems.” The Chinese cyber approach has clearly shifted in the past three years with expanding goals and increased sophistication in strategy and targets. It has also shifted from predominantly economic cyber targets to predominantly governmental and infrastructure targets. China has taken a leadership role among the top five cyber powers, now openly declaring its place with the US, Russia, Israel and North Korea.

regularly to Asia working on issues of preventive diplomacy. Simultaneous to on-the-ground projects, Davis maintained a rigorous academic agenda, including briefing US senators and congressmen, top military officers, and foreign government officials on issues related to China and Asia.



Elizabeth Van Wie Davis is an expert on security and the Asia Pacific. She has lived and worked in Asia for many years. She and

her family lived in China on several occasions, primarily in Nanjing and Beijing, and traveled extensively throughout the country. After 17 years in academia, Davis took a hiatus to work for the US government on issues related to Asia. Based in Hawaii, she traveled