

Fair Observer

Monthly

EQUAL JUSTICE UNDER LAW

September 2018

FAIR OBSERVER[®]
make sense of the world

Fair Observer Monthly



September 2018

Atul Singh (Founder, CEO & Editor-in-Chief)

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

Anna Pivovarchuk (Co-Founder & Deputy Managing Editor)

Fair Observer | 237 Hamilton Ave | Mountain View | CA 94043 | USA

www.fairobservers.com | info@fairobservers.com

The views expressed in this publication are the authors' own and do not necessarily reflect Fair Observer's editorial policy.

Copyright © 2018 Fair Observer

Photo Credit: W. Scott McGill / Shutterstock

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

International Standard Serial Number (ISSN): 2372-9112

CONTENTS

About Fair Observer	5
Share Your Perspective	6
What You Missed in the UN Rohingya Report Daniel Sullivan	7
India Owes an Apology to its LGBTQ Community Ankita Mukhopadhyay	9
Money Can't Buy Love: The Failure of US-Pakistan Relations Kevin Ivey	11
Novichok Suspects: Russia's Culture-Loving Assassins Ian McCredie	14
The Conflict that Could Destroy #MeToo Ellis Cashmore	16
Why Idlib Matters to Turkey Nathaniel Handy	19
The Falling Indian Rupee: Crisis or Contagion? Atul Singh & Manu Sharma	22
Despite New Allegations, Will the GOP Confirm Kavanaugh? S. Suresh	26
Brexit: The Countdown Has Begun Orsolya Raczova	29
Virtual Exchange Brings Students and Refugees Closer Francesca Helm and Giuseppe Acconcia	31

ABOUT FAIR OBSERVER

Fair Observer is a US-based nonprofit media organization that aims to inform and educate global citizens of today and tomorrow. We publish a crowdsourced multimedia journal that provides a 360° view to help you make sense of the world. We also conduct educational and training programs for students, young professionals and business executives on subjects like journalism, geopolitics, the global economy, diversity and more.

We provide context, analysis and multiple perspectives on world news, politics, economics, business and culture. Our multimedia journal is recognized by the US Library of Congress with International Standard Serial Number (ISSN) 2372-9112.

We have a crowdsourced journalism model that combines a wide funnel with a strong filter. This means that while anyone can write for us, every article we publish has to meet our editorial guidelines. Already, we have more than 1,800 contributors from over 70 countries, including former prime ministers and Nobel laureates, leading academics and eminent professionals, journalists and students.

Fair Observer is a partner of the World Bank and the United Nations Foundation.

SHARE YOUR PERSPECTIVE

Join our community of more than 2,000 contributors to publish your perspective, share your narrative and shape the global discourse. Become a Fair Observer and help us make sense of the world.

Remember, we produce a crowdsourced multimedia journal and welcome content in all forms: reports, articles, videos, photo features and infographics. Think of us as a global community like Medium, Al Jazeera English or *The Guardian's* Comment is Free on world affairs. You could also compare us to *The Huffington Post*, except that we work closely with our contributors, provide feedback and enable them to achieve their potential.

We have a reputation for being thoughtful and insightful. The US Library of Congress recognizes us as a journal with ISSN 2372-9112 and publishing with us puts you in a select circle.

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

What You Missed in the UN Rohingya Report

Daniel Sullivan

September 5, 2018

The report is damning in its conclusions that the UN “demonstrably failed” in its approach in Myanmar, prioritizing democratic and development efforts at the expense of human rights.

On August 27, the UN-mandated Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar released a devastating report concluding that the country’s military leaders should be prosecuted for the “gravest crimes under international law,” including genocide against the Rohingya minority. Understandably, this is the aspect of the report that has garnered the greatest attention, but other important findings have gone relatively unnoticed.

Chief among these are that the crimes of the Myanmar military go far beyond those committed against the Rohingya, and that the burden of responsibility for those crimes extends beyond the military to the country’s civilian leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, as well as the United Nations.

The fact-finding mission was mandated by the UN Human Rights Council to investigate not only abuses against the Rohingya, but those against ethnic minorities in Kachin and Shan States in northern Myanmar. In addition to the atrocities documented against the Rohingya, the mission “confirmed consistent patterns of violations of

international law” in northern Myanmar including rape, torture, “systematic attacks targeted at civilians” and other abuses amounting to crimes against humanity. The report further documented worsening denial of humanitarian assistance to a population facing high levels of chronic malnutrition, an issue highlighted by Refugees International among others.

While clarifying the distinct dynamics behind the violence in Rakhine State and northern Myanmar, the mission drew attention to the common characteristics of Myanmar military operations in Kachin, Rakhine and Shan States, including targeting of civilians, sexual violence, exclusionary rhetoric and impunity. These findings are significant not only in acknowledging the suffering and persecution of other ethnic minorities outside of the media spotlight, but also in demonstrating that the root causes and tactics behind the violence against the Rohingya stretch across the country and go back decades.

The common factor of impunity is particularly important as it shows the flaw in relying on domestic efforts at accountability. Indeed, the mission looked at the history of impunity and found that no less than eight domestic attempts at accountability for violence in Rakhine have failed to be credible. On this the fact-finding mission is unequivocal, stating that “accountability at the domestic level is currently unattainable ... The impetus for accountability must come from the international community.”

Another overlooked finding of the report related to the issue of impunity is that responsibility reaches beyond the Myanmar military. The report essentially lays out three levels of responsibility for the crimes committed against the Rohingya. First and most obvious is that of the military. The report singles out Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and five other officials for investigation and prosecution and refers to a longer confidential list of individuals that could be made available for future accountability efforts. It recommends referral to the International Criminal Court and use of targeted sanctions.

The second level of responsibility is with the civilian government with the report notably singling out Aung San Suu Kyi for failing to use her moral authority and position of leadership to stem violence and protect civilians. As the report states, “through their acts and omissions, the civilian authorities have contributed to the commission of atrocity crimes.”

This finding reinforces the indispensability of international pressure, not only on Myanmar’s military, but also on the civilian leadership, and flies in the face of arguments by those like US Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell that Suu Kyi is the best hope for addressing the crisis and should not be criticized.

Third, and perhaps least noticed in the report, is the responsibility of the international community, and specifically the UN system within the country. The

report is damning in its conclusions that the UN “demonstrably failed” in its approach in Myanmar, prioritizing democratic and development efforts at the expense of human rights. The mission points to the lack of mention of human rights in recent UN-Myanmar agreements as showing that even now the UN displays “few signs of lessons learned.” This has led to a call for an independent inquiry into the involvement of the UN in Myanmar in recent years.

While the call for prosecution on the basis of genocide may be the most talked about outcome of the report, it is far from being the only consequential finding. The mission’s demonstration of the breadth of crimes and the degrees of responsibility is significant, both in exposing the broader impunity at the core of recurring abuses in Myanmar and in reinforcing the need for outside pressure and efforts at accountability. Finally, by pointing to the failures of the UN to prioritize human rights, the mission’s findings place an extra onus on the international community to act.



Daniel Sullivan is the senior advocate for human rights at Refugees International (RI). Dan joined RI in April 2016 as senior advocate focusing on Myanmar, Central America, and other areas affected by mass displacement. He spent the previous five years with United to End Genocide (formerly Save Darfur), first as a senior policy analyst and then as

director of policy and government relations, leading strategic planning, report writing, and development of policy recommendations on Myanmar, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, and prevention of genocide and mass atrocities. He has over a decade of human rights and foreign policy experience having worked for the Brookings Institution, Human Rights First, and the Albright Stonebridge Group.

India Owes an Apology to Its LGBTQ Community

Ankita Mukhopadhyay
September 11, 2018

India's responsibility to the LGBTQ community doesn't just end at decriminalizing homosexuality.

On the night of February 8, 2010, Shrinivas Ramachandra Siras was caught red-handed with his alleged lover, a rickshaw puller.

A professor at one of India's premier schools, the Aligarh Muslim University, Siras became a sensation overnight, for all the wrong reasons. He was suspended, forced to leave his staff quarters and boycotted socially for his sexual choices. Two months later, he committed suicide. At the time, no one questioned the violation of Professor Siras's privacy and his right to sexual freedom, despite the decriminalization of homosexuality a year before in a historic judgement by the Delhi High Court.

In 2013, the situation became worse for people of the LGBTQ community, who now became legal offenders when the Supreme Court of India overturned the judgement, upholding the archaic Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. Section 377, a remnant of India's colonial past, criminalizes sexual activities between humans of the same sex, including anal and oral sex, as "against the order of nature."

The law, which became a part of Indian Penal Code during the British Raj in the 1860s, was surprisingly upheld for many years despite the former colonial power getting rid of the same legislation in 1967.

The last five years have seen many protests, anger and resentment following the criminalization of homosexual activities. Like Ramachandra Siras, the private lives of many homosexual people came under scrutiny. It was not uncommon to hear stories about gay people being rounded up in public or blackmailed with a jail term. Transgenders, who have access to education and health care, suddenly saw themselves facing a jail term if they chose to maintain sexual relations in private.

In some instances, those who faced charges under Section 377 were denied promotions or directorships in firms. All this in a country that has a history of homosexual relationships and once lauded transgenders for their service to the society.

On September 6, 2018, India finally took a step toward full decolonization of its penal code by striking down Section 377 and ushering in a new era for liberalism in a country which has recently seen a wave of right-wing Hindu nationalism. A five-judge bench, which included the chief justice of India, Dipak Misra, called the act “archaic” and upheld personal freedom in a 493-page judgment.

Addressing concerns related to gender identity and conformity, the bench showed sensitivity to gender issues, gender fluidity and the right to choice and autonomy exercised by an individual. It upheld consensual intercourse between individuals and struck down arguments claiming that carnal sex between two people of the same gender was against nature. A particular observation of the bench that “majoritarian views and popular morality cannot dictate constitutional rights. We have to vanquish prejudice, embrace inclusion and ensure equal rights” is particularly noteworthy.

According to advocate Arundhati Katju, who represented the petitioners in the case against Section 377, the verdict now pronounces people of the LGBTQ community as citizens with equal rights under the eye of the law. But while India’s high court seems ready to overlook popular morality, is the majority willing to embrace inclusivity?

Just striking down an archaic law doesn’t mean that India has progressed. There’s still a long way to go. The LGBTQ community is yet to receive the

right to marriage and adoption, and yet to be integrated into the larger framework of society. While privileged LGBTQ members have come out with pictures of their partners, those belonging to the lower strata of society still fear social ostracization.

Indian workplaces, schools and colleges are yet to encourage discussions on sexuality and sensitize workers against any form of discrimination against people of this community.

Depression, anxiety and AIDS are still rampant health issues in the LGBTQ community, and there is lack of clarity on health-care availability without discrimination. The police, too, needs to be sensitized and protect the rights of the minority instead of subjecting them to ridicule and, in certain cases, violence when they report crimes such as rape.

Political parties need to educate their workers — certain representatives of a right-wing party still believe that same-sex relations are not “compatible with the laws of nature.” Above everything, there can’t be another repeat of what happened to Professor Siras. There needs to be a strict implementation of the law, and eagerness from the bureaucracy to uphold the rights of every citizen of India.

In a world that is largely democratic in nature, people are free to choose the gender they identify with and the gender they may or may not be attracted to.

Unfortunately, Indian culture is still largely heteronormative in nature, with movies portraying the ideal romance between only a man and a woman. Homosexuals are ridiculed on screen, and this proliferates into society, where a man who is less masculine in nature is mocked as gay or chakka (transgender), or a woman who is tomboyish in nature is seen as an aberration from the traditional Indian naari (woman).

India's stand on LGBTQ rights is important, given its strategic position in a subcontinent where homosexuality or same-sex relations is a criminal offence in most countries and even punishable by death in some.

The world's largest democracy owes an apology to the LGBTQ community for its historical marginalization, but also needs to understand its responsibility in a world where free speech and privacy are under threat every single day.



Ankita Mukhopadhyay

is a journalist based in New Delhi, India. She has worked at various Indian publications for the past two 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.

Money Can't Buy Love: The Failure of US-Pakistan Relations

Kevin Ivey

September 13, 2018

Washington and Islamabad see the threat of terrorism, the role of Afghanistan and the larger world in fundamentally different ways.

For an administration accustomed to public backlash, the Pentagon's recent decision to withhold \$300 million set aside for Pakistan has received relatively little pushback in Washington. While the move led to expectedly heated opposition in Islamabad, the response in the United States was decidedly, but unsurprisingly, muted.

The United States has long complained about what it sees as Pakistan's double-dealing on counterterrorism issues, namely fighting some Pakistani terrorists while ignoring similarly aligned groups that attack US and Afghan troops across the border. Pakistan has maintained that it has been a reliable partner in the fight against radical groups in South Asia, providing crucial supply lines that feed, clothe and equip American soldiers in Afghanistan. While the transactional relationship has succeeded at times thanks to mutual benefits, Pakistan has not engendered the deep, positive feelings in Washington that it would have liked to.

Allegations of Pakistani funding of militant groups have been sustained and

withering. Both Western and Afghan officials have criticized the role of militants groups directed and funded by, and aligned with, Pakistan. In May 2006, a senior UK military official complained of Pakistani inaction in stopping Taliban fighters planning attacks in Quetta, near the Afghan border. In July 2008, US intelligence agencies reported that the ISI (Pakistan's primary intelligence service) helped plan a deadly bombing targeting the Indian embassy in Kabul.

Afghan officials accused the ISI of planning the assassination of Afghanistan's chief peace negotiator in September 2011. Statements from the Taliban detailing training and weaponry supplied by the Islamic State have bolstered these claims. This says nothing of the May 2011 raid that killed Osama bin Laden, which happened near a Pakistani military academy. Despite denials, it is clear that Pakistan has a checkered record of fighting terrorists who target Afghan, US and allied targets, to say the least.

PERCEIVED INDIFFERENCE

While long-time critics of Pakistan's apparent insincerity might feel mollified by the decision, it is unlikely to change Pakistan's behavior. Despite public proclamations of their shared interest in prosecuting a war on armed radicals, Islamabad and Washington have been drifting away from each other's orbits for some time, and there is little evidence that important, but finite, financial incentives will be enough to reunite them.

The announcement was the latest in a series of actions and statements by the Trump administration indicating displeasure at Pakistan. Beginning with his August 2017 speech outlining his policy on Afghanistan, Donald Trump took an increasingly hostile tone toward Pakistan and its perceived irresoluteness in fighting militants and terrorists, including his infamous January 2018 tweet criticizing Islamabad's "lies and deceit," followed by plans to suspend most aid to the country. Other moves have occurred more quietly. In August, Reuters reported that the US military had quietly removed Pakistani officers from the International Military Education and Training program.

While Trump's displeasure with Pakistan has taken a more acerbic tone, he is not the first to verbalize the sentiment. President Barack Obama publicly criticized Pakistan's dealings with both the Afghan Taliban and anti-India militants operating in Kashmir. The Obama administration famously froze about \$800 million in aid to the Pakistani military in July 2011, including about \$300 million in Coalition Support Funds, the same source in the spotlight currently. President George W. Bush also criticized Pakistani inaction against al-Qaeda operatives active in the country.

These criticisms from US leaders have taken on various aspects of Pakistani policy, but have generally coalesced around a single point: Pakistan's perceived indifference to certain militant

groups operating on its soil. The beneficiaries of this Pakistani policy vary, but have historically included elements of al-Qaeda and the Afghan Taliban, along with militants targeting Indian troops in Kashmir, a region claimed by both New Delhi and Islamabad. Pakistan has protested these accusations, highlighting what it sees as important contributions in the fight against terrorism in South Asia.

The disconnect between Washington and Islamabad reflects a number of divergent points in their foreign policies. The first among these are two differing definitions of what constitutes terrorism. The US government considers the Taliban — and most sub-state militants operating in South Asia — as malignant actors to be stamped out. Through numerous promises of aid and other soft power outreaches, including the aforementioned educational programs and praise from US leaders, Washington has tried to instill this definition of terrorism in Islamabad.

But Pakistan does not see the fights in Afghanistan and Pakistan as equal. Beyond its public rhetoric decrying all forms of terrorism, Pakistan has historically differentiated between terrorists who operate within Pakistan and target Pakistanis, and other groups that take up arms but attack outside of Pakistan or target Pakistan's enemies. Islamabad has demonstrated its commitment to fighting terrorists targeting Pakistanis following the December 2013 attack on a school in Peshawar that killed 132 children.

Recent statements by newly elected prime minister, Imran Khan, support this reading of two varying definitions.

FUNDAMENTAL DIFFERENCES

The United States and Pakistan also see the role of Afghanistan in fundamentally different ways. While 17 years have passed since the 9/11 attacks, Washington stills sees its mission in Afghanistan as one designed to prevent the establishment of terrorist safe havens. Pakistan sees something far different and existentially threatening: the envelopment of the nation by a hostile foreign power, India. Regardless of the financial incentives offered by Washington, they pale in comparison to the threat that Islamabad sees should India succeed in establishing itself as the preeminent political player in Kabul.

And while Washington earnestly believes that it is fighting to empower an Afghan government that would be sympathetic to Pakistani security interests, a US presence is almost certainly temporary. The US military will likely withdraw most troops from Afghanistan at some point, while the government it leaves behind in Kabul will remain.

Finally, both the United States and Pakistan have suffered from a geostrategic drift that places them in rival camps. As Chinese influence has grown, Washington has turned to New Delhi to bolster its influence in the region. Both Trump and Obama publicly

expressed a desire to increase the focus of US policy on Asia, with a clear eye toward China as a potential adversary. India, as the world's largest democracy, a major Asian power and a growing economy, appears to many as a natural ally to the United States in the region.

Pakistan, in contrast, has forged closer relations with China, including major infrastructure projects that could strengthen its geostrategic position. This relationship, antagonistic to views expressed by Trump that emphasize competition with China, has also served Pakistani interests in direct ways, including military development cooperation that bolsters its position against India. Chinese aid does not come with the same strings as US aid, and China, which also competes with India, has shown care to strengthen Pakistan's hand vis-à-vis India.

Far from surprising, the recent suspension of aid to Pakistan is the result of a process that has developed for more than a decade. Washington and Islamabad see the threat of terrorism, the role of Afghanistan and the larger world in fundamentally different ways.

Regardless of the amount, funds are unlikely to bridge the geostrategic gap between the two nations. While some might rejoice as what they see as a victory in finally bringing Pakistan to task, this and other decisions are unlikely to change what Washington sees as Pakistan's reticence to tackle terrorism head on.

With little holding the two countries together, the drift in their respective foreign policies played out in Afghanistan and elsewhere is likely to continue. If \$300 million can't buy you a friend, what could?



Kevin Ivey is the 2018 counterterrorism fellow at Young Professionals in Foreign Policy (YFPF). He writes on international defense and terrorism issues at Military Periscope, an open-source intelligence platform. His writings have appeared on Fair Observer, International Affairs Review and Tunisia Live. He holds a master's degree from George Washington University.

Novichok Suspects: Russia's Culture-Loving Assassins

Ian McCredie

September 17, 2018

The new Russian terror is a lesson in the value of freedom. It is also a lesson in the current weakness of the West.

No one believes that Ruslan Boshirov and Alexander Petrov, who have been identified by the British police as suspects in the poisoning of a former Russia spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter earlier this year, chose to visit Salisbury for a short cultural holiday in March. The two young Russian men working in the "fitness industry" decided

not to spend their cash on a boys' weekend exploring the delights of Amsterdam or the attractions of Ibiza or Mykonos. Instead, they went for a couple of nights in a cheap hotel in the East London and a couple of trips to Salisbury to see, as they claimed in an exclusive interview with Russia's RT, the world-famous cathedral and its unique clock.

Petrov and Bashirov claim it was a wild coincidence that the Skripals were poisoned and almost died that same weekend as the result of contact with an exotic Russian nerve agent known as Novichok, and that Dawn Sturgess did die in July in nearby Amesbury, victim of the same nerve agent that her partner found discarded in a perfume bottle.

Vladimir Putin and the two Russians smiled as they trotted out their version of events, giving the metaphorical finger to the rest of the world. They do not care, and indeed revel in the transparent fiction of the story. The message is clear: If you are an enemy of the state, the Russian special services will kill you — wherever you are. Moreover, they want you and everyone else to know, and they do not fear any consequences. Your only hope is the sloppy execution of their plans.

This is thuggery and gangsterism in their purest form. If you are a Russian, this is not news: Dozens, if not hundreds, of Russians who have crossed the interests of Vladimir Putin or his oligarchs have been shot, thrown out of windows or poisoned. The victims are

not terrorists or people intent on slaughtering innocent people; if they were, there may be a case for action. They are Russians who disagree with Putin and his mafia regime, and had the courage to say so. Their options are either to shut up or die.

This is the return to the terror of Josef Stalin. We must pity the Russians that have to endure this regime, although a surprising number of them seem to like it and willingly vote for Putin. It is reminiscent of the millions that turned out to mourn Uncle Joe when he died. Russians may choose to live under this tyranny, but ultimately they have the opportunity to overthrow the government — they have done it before. But the rest of us should resist with all our strength any Russian domination of other countries and the export of its brand of authoritarian rule.

The new Russian terror is a lesson in the value of freedom. It is also a lesson in the current weakness of the West. The UK is a shadow of itself as it struggles with impending Brexit, and Putin is only too happy to exploit that by assassinating his own citizens on British soil while at the same time using the UK financial system to launder his friends' dirty money.

The UK's reaction so far can best be described as ineffective. The US has imposed more sweeping sanctions against Russia because of the honorable actions of Congress and the adults in the administration who have forced Donald Trump's hand. Trump

himself has yet to stop praising Putin and level some criticism in Russia's direction. After Helsinki, The Washington Post reported that Trump described Putin as "strong, smart, and cunning," and said he "relished" his interactions with him.

With a fan in the White House and a supine Britain, Putin has little to fear. The rest of the European Union is dependent on Russian gas and will not defy him either. The leaders of the West and the champions of freedom have failed us. These are dark times.



Ian McCredie is a former senior British foreign service official. Most recently, he was Head of Corporate Security for Shell International. He now focuses on helping companies navigate the complexities and manage the risk of frontier markets.

The Conflict that Could Destroy #MeToo

Ellis Cashmore
September 17, 2018

Rose McGowan is likely mindful that sexual assault accusations against Asia Argento could destroy #MeToo and the whole social movement that underlies it.

The clock of history chimed loudly on October 5, 2017, when The New York

Times ran a story detailing almost three decades of testimony from women, all accusing the film producer Harvey Weinstein of sexual harassment. It revealed that Weinstein had paid out at least eight settlements. Three days later, he was dismissed from the Weinstein Company, which he had founded in 2005. #MeToo was born.

Now the clock threatens to turn back time. A public dispute between two women both prominent in the #MeToo movement is developing into the kind of attritional conflict that has already destabilized, and might even ruin, the campaign started after the Weinstein revelations.

Asia Argento, who was among the first and most outspoken accusers of Weinstein, is locked in fierce exchange with Rose McGowan, who has, over the past several months, been the de facto spokeswoman for the movement. McGowan has cast doubts on the credibility of her former sister-at-arms and aligned herself with the man who accuses her of sexual abuse. Meanwhile the universally demonized Weinstein and his legal team are watching in silent rapture as his two adversaries tear themselves to shreds.

Let me refresh readers' memories. In the days after The Times expose, The New Yorker magazine chronicled 13 more incidents, including three accusations of rape. Among them was one made by Argento, an Italian actor and director, who claimed the sexual assault occurred when she worked with

Weinstein in 1997. At the time, Weinstein was still at Miramax, which was distributing her film, *B. Monkey*. “I know he has crushed a lot of people before,” Argento explained her prolonged silence. “That’s why this story — in my case, it’s twenty years old, some of them are older — has never come out.”

POISONED CHALICE

Her account to journalist Ronan Farrow was arguably the most graphic and detailed of any of those provided by Feinstein’s victims. Weinstein “terrified me, and he was so big,” she said. “It wouldn’t stop. It was a nightmare.” After the ordeal, she told him: “I am not a whore,” to which he replied she should have the phrase printed on a T-shirt.

Weinstein sent her expensive gifts for months, presumably in an attempt to render the relationship a more conventional courtship. Surprisingly, Argento responded and engaged in consensual sex “multiple times” over the following five years. She described the encounters as “one-sided and onanistic,” presumably meaning that they involved masturbation.

This was unusual, perhaps extraordinary. Rape victims have often had consensual sex with a partner, before — for any number of reasons — deciding they no longer wish to engage in sexual relations. But the reverse is uncommon and it might have alerted #MeToo campaigners that her support may have been a poisoned chalice —

likely to prove a source of problems. It has become exactly that.

Last month, it became known that Argento, now 42, quietly settled a sex abuse claim of her own. Actor Jimmy Bennett accused Argento of a sexual assault by having sex with him in 2013 (he was 17 at the time) at an hotel in California, a state in which the legal age of consent is 18. Bennett’s version of events is that Argento plied him with alcoholic drinks — the minimum legal age for consuming alcohol is 21. She pushed him onto the bed, pulled down his pants and had sex with him, and not just onanistic sex either, it seems.

At this point, when reading Bennett’s account, my mind went back to the 1994 movie *Disclosure*, in which Michael Douglas files a sexual harassment complaint against Demi Moore. In court, the judge asks Douglas “Did you have an erection?” to which Douglas replies something like, “Yes, but it was involuntary.”

Later, Bennett threatened to sue Argento, claiming the incident had affected his mental health. He accepted a \$380,000 pay-off, funded, apparently, by Argento’s then-partner, the late celebrity chef Anthony Bourdain. Some readers might assume a young man who is importuned by a 37-year-old Argento, then paid a six figure sum to keep quiet about it, would be inclined to do just that. But Bennett couldn’t contain himself when he heard about Argento’s fusillade on Weinstein. It caused his

post-coital trauma to “resurface,” as he put it, and launched bid for damages.

Enter Rain Dove, a nonbinary model who has been romantically involved with McGowan, who revealed that Argento sent them (Dove doesn’t answer to the pronouns him or her) text messages that appeared to confirm that she did have a sexual encounter with Bennett. Argento’s lawyer responded with a statement claiming she was the victim of a “sexual attack” by Bennett, and that she did not initiate the encounter, but instead became “frozen” when Bennett allegedly got on top of her, and that she “chose at the time not to prosecute.”

The case is a gift-wrapped delivery from heaven as far as Weinstein is concerned. He has stuck to his original story in the face of every accusation, and the numbers have now climbed to 80: consensual sex. His legal team knows that hypocrisy is not a crime. It also knows that Argento’s credibility has been undermined, perhaps fatally. Within days, she was dropped from the panel of the Italian version of the TV show *The X Factor*. Then CNN pulled episodes of its show *Anthony Bourdain: Parts Unknown*, in which she appeared.

REAPPRAISALS

Weinstein’s lawyers will be watching how other prominent members of #MeToo react to Argento. Will they stand by her and insist her own past indiscretions have no relevance to or bearing on the allegations against Weinstein? Or will they distance

themselves from her and argue her behavior was as repugnant as that of the accused?

McGowan says she has reappraised her relationship with someone she regarded as her friend and whom she loved. She believes Argento lied to her about the Bennett case and has encouraged her to “Do the right thing. Be honest. Be fair. Let justice stay its course ... be the person you wish Harvey could have been.”

This might sound like a volte-face, but, in fact, McGowan is being entirely consistent. She’s also probably mindful that the Argento case could destroy #MeToo and the whole social movement that underlies it. Its place in the global consciousness is now secure, and it enjoys recognition, admiration and widespread approval. Argento’s transgression could singlehandedly change everything. Hence McGowan’s gutsy response can either be seen as damage limitation or a perfectly calculated forward step for the movement. #MeToo is not just about women, McGowan is saying. It will never stop asking awkward questions or bringing suspected wrongdoers to account, no matter what their gender.

There is another possibility: The public could laugh off Bennett’s claim as opportunistic. A 17-year-old youth has sex with his former co-star, then realizes she has technically committed an offense and so seeks to exploit it for his own purposes. Once the goose has laid

the golden egg, he returns to see if she has to potential to oviposit more.

But the mood of the times seems to be against this. More likely Argento's apparent duplicity will be in focus. Weinstein and his defenders will no doubt be scrutinizing the track records of his detractors for any trace of piousness. At the Venice Film Festival, director Luciano Silighini Garagnani wore a T-shirt proclaiming, "Weinstein is innocent," registering a reaction that's likely to build in the coming months. This is one of those situations in which one of the heroes may turn into a villain, and the villain-in-chief will attempt to transmogrify into an improbable hero.



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.

Why Idlib Matters to Turkey

Nathaniel Handy

September 18, 2018

The final rebel-held province brings into focus all the pressures on Turkey in the Syrian Civil War.

"Protection comes firstly from God, and after that it's up to the Turks," Mohammad al-Youssef, a 33-year-old

resident of the village of al-Surman, southeast of Idlib city, Syria, was quoted as saying by Reuters in August.

Turkish troops are in his village as part of an observation post set up through the Astana process by Turkey, Russia and Iran. The deal established de-escalation zones — particularly around Idlib province, where there are 12 Turkish observation posts — in which the parties would act essentially as peacekeepers.

Given the dynamics of a civil war in which Russia, Iran and the Syrian regime are very much on the offensive, this means that in practice, the only side really offering peacekeeping protection is Turkey. That is because Turkey is keen to protect what is left of a rebellion that Ankara has long supported.

More than the US, more than any other outside power, Turkey finds itself in the unusual position of being viewed as the protector by a foreign people: Syrian Arabs. The Turkish flag is flying in these villages, in the hope that it might deter the Syrian regime.

RUSSIAN REALPOLITIK

When Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan met Russian President Vladimir Putin in Sochi on September 17, it was their second summit this month — yet tellingly, the Iranians were absent for this second meeting. The result — an agreement on a buffer zone in Idlib, a postponement of a planned offensive in the province, and a

commitment from Turkey to deal with jihadist elements in the region — reveals Russia's deeper regional calculations.

Step back from the heat of battle, and what is revealed? If the Syrian regime led by Bashar al-Assad regains control of Idlib, it essentially regains control over most of the state. That leaves Assad less beholden to Russia for military support, and potentially less malleable. With a large chunk of territory out of his hands, it's different.

By getting an agreement from President Erdogan to eliminate jihadist factions in the province, President Putin achieves a war aim without the dirty work, keeps the Assad regime guessing, and cements the Russian working relationship with Turkey, thus disrupting the NATO alliance. For all these reasons, Putin will have felt inclined to offer this agreement to Turkey, despite having rejected a ceasefire in a Tehran summit with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani just over a week ago.

An Idlib offensive would be the most sensitive and serious in Turkish policy terms since the fall of eastern Aleppo. The Syrian regime has since concentrated its energies elsewhere, and in that time Turkey's presence has grown. Turkish troops and allied Syrian rebel forces now actively control a swathe of territory north and east of Idlib province, as well as moving into Idlib under the de-escalation agreement.

Beyond the usefulness of holding Syrian territory as a “facts-on-the-ground” bargaining chip in the civil war and as a buffer against incursions into Turkish territory, what are some of the other motivators behind Turkish interests in Idlib?

PROTECTING FELLOW TURKS

In a familiar echo of a favorite foreign policy tactic of Putin, Turkey's interest in the Idlib region is not simply about containing Syria and holding it at arms-length. There is also an ethnic dimension. Just as Putin has invoked the protection of ethnic Russians as a reason to involve Russian forces in Ukraine and Georgia, so too has Erdogan invoked the protection of ethnic Turkmen in northern Syria as a need to militarily involve Turkey in the province.

This war is far closer to home for Turkey than it is for either Russia or Iran. Syria borders Turkey, and in the case of the Syrian Turkmen, Turks have ethnic kin within Syria who have a long history of persecution at the hands of the Syrian regime. With the onset of the Syrian uprising in 2011, Turkmen took up arms in support of the opposition. They formed the Syrian Turkmen Brigades to defend the ethnic Turkmen villages of north Syria, which have come under sustained attack from Assad's ground forces and the Russian air force.

When a Russian jet was shot down in 2015 — prompting a diplomatic row between Turkey and Russia — it was attacking Turkmen positions, and it was

ethnic Turkmen who shot and killed the pilot as he parachuted down.

Up to 300,000 Turkmen have already been displaced from their villages in northern Latakia province by the Syrian regime, and Turkey can reasonably argue that without Turkish support, they are at the mercy of a central government intent on exacting revenge against the population at large.

CHINA AND THE UIGHURS

Another complication is ethnic Uighurs from China's Xinjiang province. The Uighur are a Turkic people who are the majority in the vast western province of China, where they are currently experiencing mass repression by the Chinese.

Istanbul is the headquarters of the East Turkistan Education and Solidarity Association (ETESA), a Uighur organization with links to Uighur fighters in the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP) and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). Many of these fighters are based in Idlib province now, since it is the last major territory remaining to Islamist militants in Syria.

Turkey has — for geopolitical reasons — been as cautious as other Muslim states about criticizing Chinese policy in Xinjiang. And yet, ETESA has been very supportive of Turkish war aims in Syria, and an attack on Uighur fighters will only bring the issue further to the surface. Will the Uighur fighters retreat into Turkey, and if so, what will Turkey do

with them, and how might China respond?

THE THREAT OF MORE REFUGEES

The Uighur are not the biggest headache for Ankara in terms of migration into Turkey. These less headline-grabbing issues simply add extra pressure to the widely predicted danger of mass refugee flows. An Idlib offensive by the regime in Syria could lead to a wave of as many as 2.5 million displaced people entering Turkey. After all, with this as the last major rebel enclave, there is nowhere else to run.

Turkey already hosts 3.5 million Syrian refugees — the largest number of any country in the world. While Ankara has used the influx as an opportunity, doing both vital humanitarian work and more strategically useful re-education and assimilation work, there is a limit to how many people Turkey can support, especially with a deteriorating economic outlook.

Until now, the Astana trio of Turkey, Russia and Iran have managed to carve out an unlikely alliance to bring a certain stability to the situation in Syria. An offensive in Idlib would threaten that alliance. Turkey is already reinforcing its observation posts in the province.

The danger now is that, as the other side pushes toward their logical and stated goal of total victory in the civil war, Turkey's position within the Astana process becomes untenable.



Nathaniel Handy is a writer and academic with over ten years of experience in international print and broadcast media. He is the author of the chapter “Turkey’s Evolving Relations with the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) of Iraq since the Arab Spring” in *Turkey’s Relations with the Middle East: Political Encounters after the Arab Spring* (Isiksal & Goksel, Springer, 2018).

Elections are due in 2019 and the depreciation of the rupee has led to a polarized debate that is heavy on rhetoric but low on facts. The interpretation of the depreciation varies dramatically depending on the political leanings of the commentator. Supporters of Prime Minister Narendra Modi blame depreciation on the rise in the price of oil, while the opposition blames it on the government’s mismanagement. Rising petrol and diesel prices have become a political hot potato and social media is awash with instant reaction, little of which is informed.

The Falling Indian Rupee: Crisis or Contagion?

Atul Singh & Manu Sharma
September 19, 2018

American economic policies are causing the rupee to fall, but India’s fast-approaching elections might make its economic situation worse.

On August 26, the Indian rupee started falling. On September 11, it fell to a record low with \$1 worth Rs72.7. This led to a plunge in stock markets, caused economic discomfort and sparked an emotive political reaction.

The reason for jitters in the country are understandable. In 1991, India faced a balance of payments crisis. It had to go with a begging bowl to the International Monetary Fund for a bailout, for which it had to pledge its gold reserves. India has never forgotten that humiliation, and it cast Chandra Shekhar, the socialist prime minister at the time, into oblivion.

The operative fact is simple. Since August 26, the Indian rupee has declined by 11% against the US dollar. This fall in the rupee has led to headlines such as “Asia’s worst performing currency” or the “Indian rupee crisis: Worst is not yet over.” This in turn has fueled panic in the country. Yet most journalists fail to take a deep breath and examine fundamental questions.

What happens when the rupee depreciates? For a country that imports its oil, does depreciation lead to widening current account deficit, inflation and lower growth? Is this a result of worsening global conditions or has economic mismanagement played a part? Most importantly, could the depreciation of the rupee lead a full-blown economic meltdown?

FALLING INDIAN RUPEE

US President Donald Trump has unleashed a trade war that is likely to upend the post-Soviet underpinnings of the global economy. Since World War II, the US financed the export-led growth model of its allies. Since 1991, it allowed many emerging economies to grow dramatically by running huge trade deficits. The ensuing trade surplus in places like China, Vietnam and other countries in Southeast Asia boosted their prosperity. Now that model is under threat.

Trump's trade war threatens the export-led growth model, weakens competitiveness of emerging economies and dampens their growth prospects. Naturally, most Asian currencies are weakening. Analysts are placing India in the same club, forgetting that the structure of its economy is dramatically different.

India's biggest worry is not Trump's trade war — it's the rising oil prices. India is an energy hungry economy that imports 80% of its total crude oil consumption. It is currently the second largest consumer of Iranian crude after China. Thanks to Trump's jettisoning of the nuclear deal with the Iranians, India will slash oil imports from Iran by nearly 50%. This means that India's oil import bill will surge by nearly 25%.

The rising oil bill will make the Indian economy less competitive by boosting the cost of everything from agricultural production to transportation of all goods. In an election year, the government will be under pressure to cut fuel duties and

bring down prices. It is little surprise that people are selling off the rupee and discounting it today for short and medium-term risks.

In the long term, India does not face the same risks as the rest of Asia. For the last five years, it has experienced tepid growth in exports. India's exports of goods and services as a percentage of GDP touched an all-time high of 25% in 2013. Since then, it has been declining. In 2017, this ratio stood at a mediocre 18.8%. India has been unable to increase exports because its banking system is broken, policies like demonetization caused much upheaval, and the Asian tigers have outpaced the lumbering Indian elephant by leaps and bounds.

In simple terms, the downward pressure on the Indian rupee is not caused by long-term structural changes like other Asian economies. It is a simple result of demand and supply. More people are selling the rupee than buying it. The price of imports has shot up, but it has not been matched by a similar rise in value of exports. Therefore, there is greater demand for dollars as compared to rupees.

In any case, India has historically operated a negative current account due to its inward looking growth model. Even the economic liberalization of 1991 did not change this model. India has sustained this deficit because of foreign direct and portfolio investments that have long sought to benefit from the country's long-term growth potential.

Now these capital flows have reversed. The US Federal Reserve has raised interest rates and Trump has instituted protectionist policies. Capital is flowing back into US markets to take advantage of the growth potential in many domestic industries. Besides, the currency crises in Argentina and Turkey have also turned market sentiment against emerging economies. Therefore, currencies of most emerging economies are suffering.

Hence, the primary cause of the decline in the value of the rupee is the fear triggered by the economic policies of the US. The trade policy reset, an increase in interest rates, and the cancellation of the nuclear deal with Iran have caused a monetary contagion that is wreaking havoc in emerging economies. Even though India is not an export-oriented economy, its dependence on foreign oil and populist pressure to lower fuel prices before elections put downward pressure on the rupee.

ECONOMIC DOWNTURN?

The depreciation of the rupee will make imports, including those of oil, more expensive. It may lead to an increase in prices. Yet it is unlikely to cause an economic downturn. Currently, India is on a low inflation and high-growth trajectory. The country grew at a remarkable 8.2% last quarter despite adverse global conditions. At the same time, inflation has stayed at 4.8%, a low figure both by India's historic and emerging economy standards.

In any case, the relationship between the strength of a country's currency and its economic health is highly ambiguous. In 1992, the British economy rebounded after it crashed out of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism and devalued the pound sterling. Lower exchange rates make exports cheaper and imports more expensive. If Indians curtail foreign travel or send less students to study in the US as a result of this depreciation while exporting more automobile parts and diamond rings, the depreciation of the rupee might just be what the doctor ordered.

Besides, most commentators forget that they are making a fundamental mistake when they compare India to other Asian economies. Most Asian economies maintain fixed exchange rates or allow their currencies to float within a tight band. Their currency management regimes are fundamentally different to India. Their economic structures are different too, as is their ability to make open market interventions.

The lesson that Asian tigers took away from the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis was to keep huge war chests of dollar reserves. These might help them prop up their currencies, but they also help prop up the dollar. Asian currencies might seem healthier than the rupee, but propping them up means subsidizing American consumers to buy Asian goods on the cheap. In a curious role reversal, the poor are subsidizing the rich.

Similarly, comparing the current fall in the value of the rupee with the 1991 balance of payments crisis is misguided. Then, the fall of the Soviet Union left India perilously exposed. Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait and the Gulf War pushed up the price of oil. Furthermore, a ragtag coalition immersed in infighting and illiterate in basic economics held the levers of power. India may not be run by economic geniuses, but its fiscal deficit is nowhere close to 1991 levels.

Rajiv Gandhi's Indian National Congress government and the subsequent coalition governments consistently ran fiscal deficits more than 8% of GDP since 1985-86. In contrast, earlier governments had run deficits of 6% in the early 1980s and only 4% in the mid 1970s. When the twin shocks of the fall of the Soviet Union and the Gulf War hit India, the currency went into free fall and the economy teetered on the brink of collapse.

Today, India is a much more robust economy. Its very failure to become an exporting powerhouse gives it immunity against external shocks. Besides, the fiscal deficit currently stands at 3.5% and has remained less than 4% for past three years. Furthermore, two major regulatory and institutional reforms give India some leeway. The goods and services tax (GST) has finally achieved what the Europeans achieved many decades ago. It has belatedly turned India into not only a political but an economic union, boosting inter-state trade. The Insolvency and Bankruptcy

Code of 2016 has allowed the government to crack down on those defaulting on big loans. Both these measures have enabled over 8% growth, which was achieved even as the rupee was constantly falling albeit not so dramatically.

MORE POLITICAL THAN ECONOMIC?

Even though the depreciation does not bode long-term dangers to the Indian economy, its political fallout could be immense. Election fever is about to hit India. The opposition is likely to throw the kitchen sink at the Modi government, blaming it for the falling rupee and rising fuel prices. At that point, populist politics might trump sound economics. The government might decide to lower fuel duties, causing an increase in its fiscal deficit.

India's current account deficit — the difference between its exports and imports — is likely to increase in the short run. Understandably, the government is concerned about this deficit and announced measures to rein it in. If internal growth and consumption remain robust, India can ride out the increase in its current account deficit. The growth potential in India can finance this deficit, especially if it remains fiscally responsible and reforms its infamously dysfunctional institutions.

However, political economy always trumps pure economics in real life. Rising oil prices will lead to inflation. Elections in India are proverbially determined by the price of onions. If this

goes up and political unrest begins, the Modi government might start behaving like a cat on a hot tin roof. It is likely to lower fuel duties, increase fiscal deficits, worsen current account deficits, erode the macroeconomic gains India has made over the past four years, and worsen growth prospects for the future. This is precisely what the government must not do.



Atul Singh is the founder, CEO and editor-in-chief of Fair Observer. He has taught political economy at the University of California,

Berkeley and been a visiting professor of humanities and social sciences at the Indian Institute of Technology, Gandhinagar. He studied philosophy, politics and economics at the University of Oxford on the Radhakrishnan Scholarship and did an MBA with a triple major in finance, strategy and entrepreneurship at the Wharton School. Singh worked as a corporate lawyer in London and led special operations as an elite officer in India's volatile border areas where he had many near-death experiences.



Manu Sharma is a political analyst with an international footprint. A dynamic, young thought leader in the field of global political research,

communications strategy, public policy and political economy, Sharma has served in financial institutions,

international organizations and media bodies across four continents. He brings a formidable mix of technical skills, multicultural experience and the ability to deliver across timelines. Sharma's areas of professional expertise include political risk research, psephology surveys and quantitative research papers on economic issues.

Despite New Allegations, Will the GOP Confirm Kavanaugh?

S. Suresh

September 25, 2018

If Brett Kavanaugh's nomination is confirmed without categorically proving the allegations against him are not true, the Supreme Court would have a second judge who is accused of alleged sexual misconduct.

The controversy surrounding Brett Kavanaugh's Supreme Court nomination is heating up with a second claim of sexual misconduct against him. Allegations that Kavanaugh exposed himself and behaved in an extraordinarily deplorable manner with Deborah Ramirez while they were both at Yale University surfaced over the weekend in a New Yorker article. This comes on the heels of the previous allegation by Dr. Christine Blasey Ford, who will testify before the Senate Judiciary Committee on September 28 that Kavanaugh physically and sexually assaulted her during their high school days in the 1980s.

In a confidential letter to Senator Diane Feinstein, Ford shared the details of her harrowing experience at the hands of the man poised to become a judge in the country's highest court. Senate Judiciary Committee chairman, Charles Grassley, released the letter to the public following Deborah Ramirez's allegations.

Kavanaugh has defended himself against both women's claims. In his letter to the Senate Judiciary Committee, Kavanaugh characterized these allegations as "smears, pure and simple." Refusing to step aside, Kavanaugh stated that "the vile threats of violence against my family will not drive me out." Not surprisingly, President Donald Trump, a man who unabashedly bragged about kissing and groping women, defended his nominee to the Supreme Court, saying: "Judge Kavanaugh is an outstanding person. I am with him all the way," calling the allegations politically motivated. Standing by Kavanaugh are most Republicans, including Senate majority leader, Mitch McConnell.

How the Senate Judiciary Committee and the GOP conduct themselves in the next days and weeks will be a telling point in how far has America come in respecting women's rights and appreciating their unique predicament when it comes to discussing sexual assault and harassment. In 1991, Anita Hill accused another Supreme Court nominee, Judge Clarence Thomas, of sexual harassment. A group of men comprising of both Republicans and

Democrats grilled Hill during a 1991 Senate Judiciary Committee hearing, displaying no sensitivity to the woman who had faced sexual harassment at the hands of a powerful man.

Particularly insensitive was Senator Arlen Specter, who accused Hill of perjury and called her testimony a "product of fantasy." Hill could not sway the committee despite her valiant effort, and the alleged sexual harasser continues to date as a judge on the Supreme Court.

DISREGARD FOR THE TRUTH

Now, 27 years later, the Senate Judiciary Committee is set to hear Ford's testimony. Sitting on the committee is Senator Orrin Hatch (R-UT), who told Hill in 1991 that she got the idea for some of her charges from a horror film *The Exorcist*. The hearing is bound to proceed in the same fashion as Hill's, where the Republicans will do their best to discredit Ford and make her feel uncomfortable with their insensitive questions. With the prospect of losing the House and the Senate in the upcoming midterm elections looming large, the Republicans are rushing through the process of confirming Kavanaugh's nomination instead of devoting the time to perform a thorough investigation a matter of this import deserves.

In a display of total arrogance and complete disregard for the truth, McConnell has vowed to proceed with the full Senate vote no matter what

happens in the upcoming testimony by Ford and Judge Kavanaugh before the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Kavanaugh's behavior described by Ford does not seem to be an isolated incident. She mentions that his friend Mark Judge was present in the room when Kavanaugh tried to force himself on her. Judge, a classmate of Kavanaugh at Georgetown Prep, has graphically outlined the drunken debauchery he and his friends routinely indulged in their high school years. In his book, *God and Man at Georgetown Prep*, Judge boasts that "Prep was a school positively swimming in alcohol, and my class partied with gusto."

Notwithstanding Judge's claim that he has no memory of the incident involving Ford, it is undoubtedly clear that such encounters routinely took place at Georgetown Prep in the 1980s. Kavanaugh's page in his 1983 high school yearbook makes references to his drinking excesses as well as a reference to "Renate Alumnus," possibly boasting of his conquests with Renate Schroeder, a student at a neighboring Catholic high school.

MORAL FIBER

The mounting evidence against Kavanaugh's character demands an investigation into the allegations that he had sexually assaulted Ford in high school and continued the pattern in college with Ramirez. An FBI investigation into the matter will shed more light on the events, which right

now remain a "he said, she said" story. In a desperate attempt to cover up the truth and place the fifth conservative judge on the Supreme Court, the Republicans are racing to confirm Kavanaugh, going through the motions in the Senate Judiciary Committee before McConnell puts the nomination up for a full floor vote. Their efforts are aided by the only person who can order an FBI investigation, President Trump, who has indicated that he would not do so.

America is at a pivotal moment in its history today. The #MeToo movement has empowered women, allowing them to make big strides in seeking, and sometimes getting, the justice denied to them in the past. Republicans are desperately trying to change the composition of the Supreme Court, first by denying Merrick Garland his rightful place and now rushing through Kavanaugh's confirmation process. Pushing the nomination of someone accused of sexual misconduct would be a discouraging acknowledgement of the fact that not much has changed since 1991, even with the momentum from #MeToo movement.

Notwithstanding their liberal or conservative beliefs, every judge in the Supreme Court ought to possess the highest integrity and moral fiber. The onus is upon Kavanaugh and the Republicans to prove why allegations against him are false. In Clarence Thomas, we already have an alleged sexual harasser on the Supreme Court. If Brett Kavanaugh's nomination is

confirmed without categorically proving the allegations against him are not true, the Supreme Court would have a second judge who is accused of alleged sexual misconduct. And that would indeed be a travesty of justice.



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 towards building health equity in Silicon Valley. Suresh holds graduate degrees in Computer Science and Chemistry from Birla Institute of Technology and Science, Pilani, India.

Brexit: The Countdown Has Begun

Orsolya Raczova
September 26, 2018

The window to agree on an exit deal between Britain and the EU is closing.

The United Kingdom is due to leave the European Union on March 29, 2019, but because of the necessary ratification procedures of an agreement, the plan was to reach a deal by the EU summit starting October 18. Although this deadline has been extended to mid-

November, there is still worry that no deal would be reached as the negotiating partners still have complex issues to agree on.

There are significant differences between potential Brexit scenarios: A “soft” Brexit would have a far less extensive economic impact than a “hard” Brexit. In the beginning of negotiations, the main question was whether the UK remains a member of the EU’s single market or not. In this soft Brexit scenario, the economic side effects on both the UK and European Union would be minimized. By maintaining access to the single market, the UK would continue to be obliged by the “four freedoms” (free movement of goods, services, capital and persons within the EU), EU standards and the European Court of Justice. In exchange, Britain would be able to enjoy economic benefits of trade and close economic cooperation with the EU.

However, as a non-EU member, the political implications of the withdrawal would mean that the UK no longer has a say in the political machinery of the block, including formal representation with decision-making power in EU institutions. In practice, this means no voting rights or influence over EU laws the UK would still have to abide by. Therefore, such high political costs, together with the maintenance of the free flow of people, makes the soft option less attractive despite the potential economic benefits. Some optimists keep the option for a soft Brexit open, but is it still a realistic

scenario given the past two years of negotiations?

The supporters of a hard Brexit consider such costs from a soft Brexit too high, and they demand a clean break, including the withdrawal from the single market and the customs union. Therefore, a hard Brexit has not only been on the table as a viable option since the beginning of the referendum, but it was confirmed by leaders, including Prime Minister Theresa May herself, that the UK intends to leave the single market. If Britain withdraws from the single market, the economic costs are expected to be high, but could be somewhat softened by a potential transition period. Such a period would give additional time for the negotiating partners to not only reach agreement on key issues, but to work out deals on trade between the UK and members of the EU. There is disagreement on whether the transition period would help or not, given the rather slow pace of negotiations in the past years.

The European Union is the UK's largest and most important trading partner. In 2017, the EU accounted for 43% of UK exports, or £274 billion (\$360 billion) out of £616 billion (\$811 billion) total. Therefore, if no deal is reached on post-Brexit trade relations, the EU's economic losses would account for 0.7 % of its overall GDP, while costs for the UK would be significantly higher; over a 10-year period, 5% of the UK's GDP would be reduced. Therefore, without the single market membership and under WTO rules, the export-import

costs will significantly increase with additional layers of red tape, affecting not only manufacturers and traders, but the economy as a whole. Thus, there is a shock to prepare for if such a scenario becomes reality.

The economic impacts do not only affect the trading of physical products, but also services — a sector on which the UK relies highly. As the single market's largest provider of financial services, in 2014 alone the UK exported £20 billion worth of services to customers in the EU. Therefore, London, as the leading financial center of Europe, is at high risk. Without single market membership, financial services firms would lose their passporting rights. The passporting system enables such firms authorized in an EU or European Economic Area state to trade freely with each other. According to the Financial Conduct Authority, 5,500 UK companies rely on such rights, with a combined revenue of £9 billion. Thus, the loss would be significant.

What are financial services firms likely to do and how can they navigate such a high-risk situation? They can relocate or partially move branches, departments, services and even entire operations to the EU. The Financial Times estimates that about 4,600 banks would be relocated from London, while the accounting firm Ernst & Young estimates some 10,500 job relocations from the City of London on the first day of Brexit. Since the referendum, out of the 222 largest financial services firms with significant operations in the UK,

24% have confirmed at least one relocation destination, and 34% are considering or have already confirmed relocations to Europe, according to the EY Brexit Tracker. Firms including JP Morgan and Bank of America are among the major financial services providers that have already confirmed relocations of hundreds, and in many cases thousands, of jobs to an EU country. Relocation plans target for example, Dublin, Amsterdam, Paris, Berlin or Frankfurt.

While some are already preparing, others are still waiting to see what kind of deal will be reached. However, at this stage, the deadline is dangerously close. The fact is that the EU reacted negatively to British proposals at the recent EU meeting in Salzburg, labeling many as cherry-picking, while the UK has not provided a viable alternative acceptable to the EU yet. A no-deal scenario is becoming a real possibility with serious potential consequences.



Orsolya Raczova is a research fellow at GLOBSEC Policy Institute. She is currently focusing on EU-level political and

policy developments, particularly in the area of security, migration and Brexit. She previously worked as a political risk analyst at Global Risk Insights, as a research fellow at a Hungarian NGO, as a program coordinator at the Berlin-based Institute for Cultural Diplomacy, and as a public relations assistant at

Publicis Consultants Budapest. Moreover, she was a trainee at the European Central Bank and the European Parliament. Raczova holds an MA in Non-Proliferation and International Security from King's College London and an MSc in Politics and Communication from the London School of Economics.

Virtual Exchange Brings Students and Refugees Closer

Francesca Helm and Giuseppe Acconcia

September 27, 2018

Can a virtual exchange program bridge the gap developing between the two sides of the Mediterranean?

Since 1987, when the Erasmus project started, 9 million people have taken part in it, according to data collected by the European Commission. It might be considered as the most successful European project in terms of participation in the last 30 years. The real turning point came in 2007, when the program was extended beyond Europe's borders.

Thus, since 2014, Erasmus+ has included all the initiatives of exchange for studying, teaching, professional education, volunteering and cooperation between young people in Europe and neighboring countries to equip them to collaboratively respond to global challenges.

In 2018, a virtual version of the program was launched on the European Youth Portal with the aim to use technology to facilitate new occasions of exchange and to open cross-cultural dialogue opportunities to the Mediterranean, with Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria and Tunisia as pioneers.

So far, 3,265 young people have participated in virtual exchange activities this year, and the target of the pilot project is to reach 8,000 by the end of 2018. “It is a great possibility, something really new. It cancels barriers of movement or of budget. It is a safe and comfortable space that can include people usually excluded, especially in developing countries,” one of the participants told us.

“It is revolutionary: an innovative possibility to share different views, learn from each other, and better understand different perspectives,” another young participant said.

In 2011, during the Arab Spring that swept across North Africa and the Middle East, the European Commission highlighted the need to raise the funding for Erasmus+.

Thus, the Mediterranean Universities Union association, which includes 108 institutions in 23 countries, launched a petition in December 2017 to ask the European Union to increase the number of scholarships for EU-Mediterranean exchanges to 30,000 between 2021 and 2027. This is particularly important in the

current context of stigmatization of migrant flows by xenophobic right-wing parties all over Europe that try to impose limits on the mobility of young people between North Africa and Europe.

Things seem to be going in the right direction with the European Commission proposing to double funding for Erasmus. For the 2014-2020 program, the budget was set at €14,7 billion, and the proposal for 2021-2027 is €30 billion. Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange has the potential to increase the numbers involved by reducing barriers to participation and involving more young people on both sides of the Mediterranean, including those with fewer opportunities, such as young refugees.

This is done by partnering with NGOs such as Kiron, that work specifically to enable access to higher education for refugees, and by designing virtual exchanges that engage refugee and non-refugee youth in dialogue, such as the Refugees in Europe course, or the upcoming Newcomers and Nationalism.

However political and cultural barriers remain, as is clear from the decision of the Northern League, political party of the Italian interior minister, Matteo Salvini, to stand against the extension to the Erasmus program, both virtually and in person, to North African countries.

YOUNG PIONEERS

We listened to the first experiences of some young participants in Erasmus+

Virtual Exchange as part of a project of evaluation of the experiences of virtual exchange that the University of Padova is developing together with other European research institutes. All the interviewees confirmed that they had a good experience in terms of building cross-cultural relationships. “It has really been a good experience, we are still in contact with other participants. I was the only refugee of my group and I was very interested to know the experience of the others: It was very emotional,” one of the interviewees said.

The interviewees are the pioneering young participants of the project, coming from 44 target countries from both sides of the Mediterranean, including refugees living in Europe or wishing to come to Europe. Accessing an online platform, through youth associations and universities working both in Europe and North Africa, they meet each other during sessions dedicated to different topics of concern.

Some of our interviewees added that this experience challenged stereotypes. “It improved my communication skills a lot — we learned not to judge the others and to walk in their shoes. We acquired capacities that will be useful in our daily life,” one interviewee stated. Moreover, participants met people from various backgrounds, discussed diverse topics and built significant relationships. The majority of the interviewees had contacts and built friendships after the end of the program, planning to meet in person in the near future.

All the interviewees would be happy to take part in future experiences of virtual exchange. “Virtual exchanges are the future; it was easier and more interesting than I expected. I will take part in the program again,” an interviewee explained. Young people who took part in our research confirmed that this experience expanded their communication, teamwork and problem-solving skills.

FEEL CLOSER

Some of the interviewees highlighted problems related to the internet connection or completing their video projects. Others outlined that topics related to the migration crisis in Europe, for instance, could have been tackled in greater depth during the sessions. “Only one of the participants in my group was previously involved in policies concerning refugees.

No one among the Europeans who took part in the program had clear ideas on asylum seekers and refugees. It would have been useful to discuss with experts in their countries on this topic,” one of the interviewees said. Furthermore, a specific interest was highlighted for a possible discussion on migration policies and on the media representation of international events by local media outlets.

The youth of the Mediterranean will feel closer through such virtual exchange projects, overcoming the traditional formula of the Erasmus program. This initiative opens the doors to a still-

unexplored possibility — how to study topics of common interest and current events, including the migration crisis, that involve the two sides of the Mediterranean divide.

Virtual Exchange is now a reality, and it aims to overcome economic and political barriers to the mobility for young Europeans and North Africans. This pilot project aims to reach 16,000 young people by the end of 2019 and to develop a comprehensive strategy for successful integration of virtual exchanges in both formal and non-formal education in the 2021-2027 Erasmus program.

A community of facilitators is growing, with 265 having already participated in facilitation training. Youth organizations and universities are training to develop their own grassroots virtual exchange projects which, with the support of Erasmus+ facilitators, will both complement and enhance their international mobility and educational programs, by equipping young people with the curiosity and skills to constructively engage with difference and build meaningful relationships across societies.

books on the internationalization of higher education, intercultural dialogue, identity and virtual exchange.



Giuseppe Acconcia is a journalist and a researcher who focuses on the Middle East. He lives between Cairo and London, and studied at the Bocconi University writing a thesis on the Iranian reformists. He currently works for Italian, Egyptian and British newspapers. Acconcia has previously written about the Iranian Green Movement, the Muslim Brotherhood, the Egyptian and Syrian revolts, and Italian current affairs.



Francesca Helm is an assistant professor of English at the University of Padova in Italy. Educated at the University of London and Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, she has published articles and edited