

# Fair Observer

Monthly

December 2018

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# Fair Observer Monthly



December 2018

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# 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.

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# What Modern-Day Demagogues Stole from Ancient Greece

Jack Riddick  
December 2, 2018

*Is to be believed better than to reason well?*

It is an age-old tradition to thank the Greeks for bequeathing to us the norms of science, philosophy and democracy. And yet these unfathomably broad concepts, surely too fundamental to be assigned to any one civilization, fail to capture the dichotomy of their present-day influence.

This is unsurprising. After all, history is written by writers. It is the work of Plato and Aristotle that was best preserved, and this in part explains why it is their enlightened principles that have come to characterize an era. Yet behind these men of letters lies the unmistakable influence of an orator — their tutor, Socrates. His relentless questioning of the knowledge of others eventually labeled him a heretic and a “corrupter of the youth,” a crime he would pay for by voluntarily drinking hemlock. It is his speeches, recorded by Plato, that would define the dialectic method employed by philosophers for centuries to come.

Today, however, its most visible representatives are journalists — particularly those who work in states inhospitable to probing minds. An individual who epitomizes the modern Socratic is the late Washington Post

columnist Jamal Khashoggi. In speaking out about the repressive conditions in Saudi Arabia, he refused to compromise in the name of truth, and his murder at the hands of Saudi agents reminds us that state-sponsored execution is more than a relic of antiquity.

So the example of Socrates has not been forgotten. But perhaps a subtler, more pernicious influence has also remained: the sophists.

These Athenian intellectuals made money from teaching rhetoric, and their movement has become synonymous with cleverly contrived but ultimately fallacious arguments. Ever since Plato, their theories have been dismissed as the work of rapacious charlatans, whose verbose speeches consisted of little more than philosophical sweet talk. And yet their methods likely sound familiar. Now, to call everyone who uses rhetoric to bolster weak arguments a disciple of sophistry would be to exaggerate. The sophist must first be distinguished from the common quack.

## THE COMMON QUACK

Money-making and colorful language are elements conspiracy theorist Alex Jones shares with the sophist. Posing as a champion of free speech and truth, his “theories” range from the disturbing (the Sandy Hook shooting was “fake”) to the patently absurd (feminists “are the zombie hordes of the apocalypse programmed by cat piss worms”). His official website, Infowars, also touts costly dietary supplements with names

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as inspired as the Real Red Pill and Super Male Vitality.

Unlike the sophists, however, Jones' arguments make no real pretense of intellectual skill. He also portrays himself as a target of the establishment, giving his listeners the news "they don't want you to know." Conversely, the sophists were the intellectual mainstream; their tutoring coveted by the great patricians of their time. Where Jones plays up to the mistrust amongst the marginalized, the sophists do the opposite: They disguise their mysticism by appealing to our natural trust of intellectuals.

A similar case is the right-wing provocateur and self-described "cultural libertarian" Milo Yiannopoulos. Once writing a cryptic book of poetry under the pen name Milo Andreas Wagner, he at least has the ego of a sophist. He also prefers rhetoric over debate, claiming that his most controversial work (see "birth control makes women unattractive and crazy") is in fact satire designed to "challenge the biases of those who don't want to be challenged." However, a sophist uses rhetoric to persuade rather than to merely provoke. At any rate, it is hard to imagine the ancient Protagoras referring to himself as a "dangerous faggot."

Through this brief analysis of what does not constitute a modern sophist, we should now have a better idea of what does. First of all, he uses lofty but unintelligible jargon as a means of persuasion. He eschews rationally convincing argument. He portrays

himself as a member of the intellectual elite. He seeks public respect as well as financial reward.

## THE PUBLIC INTELLECTUAL

Public intellectual and internet sensation Jordan Peterson is a perfect fit. A psychology professor at the university of Toronto, he is certainly part of the academic establishment. Moreover, much like the sophists, Peterson does not limit himself to lecture rooms. The internet provides his largest audience by far — his YouTube videos alone drawing over 70 million views. He also receives around \$80,000 a month from the crowdfunding website Patreon. Unlike Socrates, his youth pay dearly for their corruption.

The favored weapon of a sophist is, of course, his tongue, and this is where Peterson excels. Across the internet, his fans post montages of Peterson's "best comebacks" and clips of him "destroying" his oratorical opponents. His academic work, while less marketable, is equally revealing.

Take the following extract from Peterson's Maps of Meaning: "The automatic attribution of 'meaning' to 'things' — or the failure to distinguish between them initially — is a characteristic of narrative, of myth, not of scientific thought. Narrative accurately captures the nature of raw experience. Things are scary, people are irritating, events are promising, food is satisfying — at least in terms of our basic experience. The modern mind,



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which regards itself as having transcending the domain of the magical, is nonetheless still endlessly capable of 'irrational' (read motivated) reactions."

Peterson has, of course, his own particular sense of the word "meaning." His version refers only to things that are intangible, and thus do not exist in the real world of hard facts. Yet he fails to explain why propositions about things that do not physically exist are in some way irrational. Which is strange, because this is the basis of Peterson's entire psychological standpoint: If these so-called action-guiding propositions were rational, there would no longer be a need for any unconscious translation process, and the analysis of myths would no longer contain the essence of morality.

Instead of an explanation, Peterson assures us that this is "virtually self-evident." But how so? While it is true that descriptions like "things are scary" are different to those we find in the sciences, this does not make them irrational. To say something is scary may refer to an internal state, but this would only be possible if we first had an external image to compare this with, for example, a scared face, a scream, a flinch. If we did not have this, then we would need to see something scary just to understand what the word meant. Which is a problem, because then the word would not really communicate anything at all.

The point is that meaning in Peterson's sense of the word is not so different

from meaning in the conventional sense — it needs to communicate something. To communicate something, we must have grammar. For this we must have rules, which in turn must have a verifiable correct use. As a result, no amount of mythical analysis would allow us to "mean" things that exist beyond the logic of the observable world. Peterson is free to deny this. But at the very least he needs to explain why. His failure to do so reveals his theory to be no more than a rhetorical device, and yet it is the surface persuasiveness of this device that distinguishes Peterson as a talented sophist.

## **THE HIGH-BROW FALLACY**

Talented, but not alone. A fellow purveyor of high-brow fallacy is neuroscientist and prominent atheist Sam Harris. An occasional adversary of Peterson, Harris is another instance of a public intellectual. His brand of sophistry combines baseless slogans ("certainty about the next life is incompatible with tolerance in this one") with cryptic pseudoscience.

Unlike Peterson, Harris tends to favor vagueness over complexity. Where the former builds arguments from disguised non-sequiturs, the latter uses the language of reason to disguise meaningless tautology, such as "the spirituality which is compatible with scientific rationality is to take spiritual experience as data confirming that such experiences are possible." Selling T-shirts as well as ideas, Harris'

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commercial aspect is also far less subtle.

Over millennia, the school of the sophists has diversified. Peterson and Harris represent only two varieties. It is inevitable that many more exist. While Peterson and Harris are commonly (although perhaps unfairly) identified with the alt-right, sophistry is not a political movement. Its members are to be found throughout the spectrum. From the Marxist guru to the die-hard libertarian, their chameleon quality is part of what that makes them so effective.

Exposing them all is a task worthy of Sisyphus. In an age where the speed of our speech counts just as much as its content, fast-talking rhetoric has an obvious advantage. Much like the Hydra of Euripides, new voices will more than replace those that have been discredited. Conversely, ignoring them is not to be advised either. Just as execution failed to shut up Socrates, excluding sophists from the public discourse would make them even more dangerous.

It seems that the only ground for a fair fight is to be found in ourselves. While we might not be able to stamp out sophistry in the world around us, we can at least abstain from it in our own arguments. This itself is no small endeavor. It is only too easy to convince ourselves of our own rhetoric, especially when we see how persuasive it can be to others. Moreover, as we see from the demise of Socrates, the fruit of reason is

not often sweet. Thus, fittingly, the legacy of the ancient Greeks takes the form of an open-ended question, one that underlines the choice between sophistry and reason: Is to be believed better than to reason well?

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**Jack Riddick** is a student of philosophy. Having recently completed school exams, he will begin studying philosophy in 2019. He is currently working as a writing volunteer at the Indian Institute of Technology Gandhinagar, Gujarat.

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## Refining the UN's Approach to the Water-Security Nexus

Danilo Turk

December 3, 2018

*In many ongoing armed conflicts, water has been used as a weapon of war, but it can also be a strong instrument of peace.*

Today, the world is increasingly aware of the dramatic meaning of water. Water stress and water-related disasters are among the main consequences of global warming and have severe humanitarian consequences. They often cause population movements and tensions resulting in violent conflict and threats to international peace and security. The sad history of the armed conflict in Darfur offers a recent example.

Water can be a powerful driver of violent conflict, albeit generally not as a single

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or the main cause of war. In addition, in many ongoing armed conflicts water has been used as a weapon of war. Water infrastructures have often become targets of armed attack. All this has had an extremely negative effect on civilian populations and produced grave violations of international humanitarian law.

In 2015, an ICRC study underlined that 50 million people are affected by armed conflicts in urban areas and suffer from limitations in water supplies. Armed conflicts around the Fallujah and Mosul Dams in Iraq, and the Tishrin and Tabqa Dams in Syria, are the most recent examples. Hence there is a pressing need for the UN Security Council (UNSC) to address the problem and try to develop an effective response. The so-called Arria Formula meeting of UNSC, convened on October 26, is but the latest example of a step in the right direction.

On the other hand, water is a shared resource and can be a strong instrument of peace. For example, transboundary water cooperation is a historically tested tool of confidence-building and peace. Water cooperation can be a significant instrument of prevention of violent conflicts. The water cooperation system on the River Senegal that binds together Guinea, Senegal, Mali and Mauritania offers an example of sophisticated water cooperation that has helped to overcome occasional tensions among the riparian countries. The relations between two of the riparian states of this river, Senegal and Mauritania, have,

from time to time, been heated by issues relating to the boundary delimitation of this river. However, the common management of the river between riparian states has prevailed over the years, including in times of tension. This aspect has to be strengthened.

## **POLICY DIRECTION**

Recent armed conflicts and other situations on the agenda of the UN Security Council have been characterized by water-related issues, and the council addressed them in its resolutions and presidential statements. They reveal two types of reactions which, taken together, indicate a policy direction of the UNSC.

First, are the expressions of concern and, at the same time, calling for respect and protection of the essential civilian infrastructure, including water infrastructure in the ongoing armed conflicts. These resolutions relate mainly to situations in the wider Middle East.

Then there are expressions of concerns over water scarcity, the resulting food insecurity and related causes of instability, and, at the same time, calling for adequate risk assessments and risk management strategies. These resolutions relate mainly to situations in Africa, for example in the Sahel region, Somalia and Sudan.

As most of the activity of the Security Council is focused on the ongoing

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armed conflicts, special attention is given to the fundamental humanitarian concerns in wartime: access of civilians to the essentials of survival, which includes water; access of humanitarian organizations to civilians in need; and, most fundamentally, respect for international humanitarian law. Action by the Security Council in this regard is essential. However, so far action has been sporadic and insufficiently supported by UN member states.

Recently, preventive aspects have been crystallizing. This progress is welcome, but will require much more work — and not by the Security Council alone. It is useful to recall the recommendations addressed to the Security Council by the Global High Level Panel on Water and Peace.

In its report, *A Matter of Survival*, the panel suggested, inter alia, the need for the council to call, where appropriate, for water supply ceasefires and the deployment of water specialists in peacekeeping and in post-conflict operations. Water ceasefires could take a variety of forms, including as de-confliction agreements, specifically relating to these infrastructures. The UNSC should support this approach, which helps humanitarian organizations, including UNICEF, in their vitally important activities.

A parallel line of action is represented by establishment of the Geneva List of Principles on the Protection of Water Infrastructures During and After Armed Conflicts, geared toward the

implementation of international humanitarian law. This list — developed by the Geneva Water Hub's Platform for International Water Law at the University of Geneva, with experts from partners' organizations, including universities, international and non-governmental organizations — is aimed at systematizing in a comprehensive manner the law applicable to the protection of water infrastructures during armed conflicts and to setting forth practices relating to their protection in post-conflict situations.

The work of the Security Council should continue in ways that will strengthen the awareness of importance of water issues for the maintenance of peace and security. It should remind other elements of the UN system to strengthen activities for protection of water and to the use of water cooperation as an instrument of confidence-building and peace.

Naturally, the Security Council should not be overloaded with activities that have to be followed by other UN bodies, in particular the General Assembly. But the council can and should inspire others — within the UN system and beyond — to address water crises in an effective, preventive manner.

## **THE NATURE OF PREVENTION**

An old wisdom suggests that an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure. It is tempting to believe that prevention of armed conflicts and the consequent adverse effects on water

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are a clear and simple task. It is true that the methodology of measuring and forecasting water stress and the consequent social and political effects has improved greatly. However, this does not mean that better knowledge and understanding can automatically ensure preventive action. There is no one-size-fits-all solution.

Prevention requires strengthening of all forms of water diplomacy — both in response to specific water crises and in developing water cooperation more generally. These efforts should include involvement of a variety of actors, including regional organizations and arrangements. Water diplomacy will have to address, inter alia, the issue of the “fragmented landscape” of water-related international institutions.

The UN should refine and develop its approach to the nexus between water and security. This should be done in two ways.

Firstly, strengthening the analytical capacity and the role of the secretary general for early warning and early initiative, in order to prevent tensions from degenerating into armed conflicts, is imperative. Article 99 of the UN Charter gives the secretary general the authority and the responsibility to bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter that in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security. This is an important responsibility the secretary general exercises, most of the time informally, in his political activity and in

his daily communication with the Security Council.

The analytical capacity is the key. Analysis is provided by the Secretariat’s Department of Political Affairs and a variety of UN field operations, programs, funds and agencies, as well as with the assistance of research institutes and analysts worldwide. This work has to be strengthened. But in order to succeed, it will require that sound political judgment and courageous initiatives come from the secretary general and a Security Council that is prepared to listen.

Secondly, supporting transboundary water cooperation in a variety of its forms is key. This includes specific river and lake basin treaties, as well as the two universal UN water treaties, namely the UN Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses and the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes. The latter are designed to help carrying out two basic principles — that of fair and equitable sharing of transboundary water resources and that of not doing significant harm. Positive examples, such as the cooperation of the riparian states of the River Senegal, do exist and should inspire states worldwide.

What is needed for the future is not a new or additional institution. The answer is in greater coherence of action and, above all, enhanced collaboration. The report of the Global High Level Panel on Water and Peace, which the author has the honor to chair, proposed such an

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approach. This global platform should develop a Global Observatory for Water and Peace, hosted at the Geneva Water Hub, to collaborate with existing organizations and initiatives for water cooperation that would be focusing specifically on the nexus between water, peace and security.

The priority tasks of such a platform, which is already taking place in practice, seem to be relatively clear. They include provision of scientific and legal analysis as well as policy advice. This platform will also help to have consultations needed to reduce economic and financial risks for transboundary water cooperation projects and to pave the way toward financing of such projects.

Wherever this approach succeeds, it means a significant contribution to stability and peace for millions of people around the world.

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**Danilo Turk** is emeritus professor of international law of the University of Ljubljana, a diplomat and politician. He was the third president of the Republic of Slovenia (2007-12). Prior to that, he served as ambassador, permanent representative of Slovenia to the UN in New York (1992-2000), and represented Slovenia on the UN Security Council (1998-2000). From 2000 to 2005, he was assistant secretary general of the UN for political affairs. In the years 2015 to 2017, he chaired the Global High Level Panel on Water and Peace.

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## Legislating Equality: Anti-Discrimination Policy in Europe

Terri Givens

December 6, 2018

*Ethnic and racial discrimination has been an issue for Europe throughout history.*

What does the rise of a radical-right party like the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) have to do with anti-discrimination policy in Europe? In the year 2000, after the FPÖ became part of the government in Austria, the EU passed the Racial Equality Directive (RED) as a response to the party's anti-immigrant position. In 2015, I discussed my recently published book, *Legislating Equality*, with staff and colleagues at the European Network Against Racism (ENAR) in Brussels. The discussion was mainly focused on the retrenchment that had occurred in the 15 years since the passage of the RED.

Many in the room felt despair at the rise of anti-immigrant and racist politicians in many countries and a general sense that discrimination was increasing, despite the efforts of organizations like ENAR and the Fundamental Rights Agency (FAR) that were dedicated to fighting all forms of discrimination. One frustrated staff member asked if I, as an American, had any suggestions for them to pursue that might help in their work.

That plaintive request was made at a time when we still had an African-



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American president, and no idea what was to come in the fall of 2016. Britain's Brexit vote and the election of Donald Trump in the US were shocks to many, yet they are part of a broader trend in America (including South America, most recently Brazil) and Europe, a backlash that began many years earlier. It is difficult to trace when issues of immigration, race and discrimination became most salient. There are many studies that have examined public opinion on these topics, but none that prepared for the electoral earthquake that was 2016.

Anti-discrimination policy in the European Union is only one component in this story. Anti-Muslim sentiment, refugee flows, and terrorism played a very important role in public attitudes and support for some parties, like the UK Independence Party (UKIP), Geert Wilder's Freedom Party in the Netherlands, the French National Front and Alternative for Germany (AfD). Another factor for many has been a loss of support for the EU in the wake of the fiscal crisis that began in Greece in October of 2009, and the broader global recession which clearly had a negative impact in countries like Spain, Portugal, Italy, Ireland and even the UK's financial industry.

## **HISTORY OF DISCRIMINATION**

Ethnic and racial discrimination has been an issue for Europe throughout history, but given the growing minority communities and anti-immigrant violence in Europe today, anti-

discrimination policy would seem a natural area for concern. It is important to note that anti-discrimination policy did not develop directly from demands by minorities in these countries, as it did in the US. The development of legislation in America came during a time of great social upheaval in the 1960s. The situation in Europe was quite different: As a response to the rise of anti-immigrant radical-right parties, politicians across the continent drew upon policies that had been diffused from the North America to Britain in the late 1960s.

The development of the RED closely mirrored European deepening in the 1990s, but its roots lie in developments during the 1980s. Although European integration stalled during the 1980s, actors in the European Parliament saw a political opening for action with the rise of the radical right in places like France and Germany. In the 1980s and early 1990s, racist acts of violence and the stunning success of radical-right political parties across Europe catapulted the issues of immigration, xenophobia, fascism and racism to the forefront. The European Parliament was only beginning to take on a more important role in the supranational structures that were under construction during the 1980s, but it would play a key role in the development of anti-racist — and what would ultimately become racial anti-discrimination — policy for the European Union.

However, it is also important to note that the focus on anti-racism goes back to

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the civil rights era of the 1960s in the US and the impact it had on policy in Europe, particularly in the United Kingdom. Beginning in 1965, Britain expressly recognized the role of race in British society because of immigration from former colonies with diverse populations that increased the numbers of ethnic minorities in the country. Drawing upon the American example, UK Parliament enacted a series of laws that prohibited racial discrimination. It also established institutions specifically charged with their enforcement, including the creation of the Commission for Racial Equality. In many respects, the policies prescribed in the RED resemble these laws and institutions.

In the 1980s, along with the increases in racist violence, the entry of radical-right parties into the European Parliament led to concern at the EU level. In 1984, the European Parliament took the lead in dealing with racial discrimination, spearheaded by a British Labour Party MEP, Glyn Ford. The European Parliament was seen as a secondary institution at the time, with little influence. However, given the outcome of the RED less than 20 years later, it is clear that the actions taken in the mid-1980s set in motion a series of reports and actions that would ultimately lead to the passage of the RED.

As the EU passed the Maastricht and Amsterdam treaties, advocates saw an opportunity to also expand the rights of ethnic minority groups, and the European Commission became a

partner in these efforts. The European Union declared 1997 a “Year against Racism.” This declaration was clearly in response to the success of radical-right parties, but it also signaled a shift in the approach that the EU would take to issues of racism and discrimination. First, it acknowledged that racism existed, and, second, it helped to lay the groundwork for member states to take on this issue through policy change at the EU level.

## **AGAINST RACISM**

As I conducted my dissertation research through the mid to late 1990s, I was often surprised at the lack of institutions that could deal with discrimination issues. France’s “color-blind” approach to discrimination made it difficult for ethnic minorities to prove disparate treatment. Germany’s continued insistence that it was “not a country of immigration” made it difficult for Turks and other minorities to gain citizenship and be considered members of the community. Around this time, anti-racism organizations from around Europe formed the transnational European Network Against Racism to track and report on racist acts. The passage of the Racial Equality Directive was the culmination of many years of effort on the part of actors throughout Europe, and the catalyst of the election in Austria in 1999 made the directive an imperative for European leaders.

All EU member states have transposed the EU into national law and created the equality bodies that were required by

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the legislation. However, the implementation of the RED has been negatively impacted by the lack of support from more conservative governments that came into power in the early 2000s. In 2008, a survey by FAR found that 57% of immigrants and ethnic minorities were unaware of the existence of anti-discrimination legislation, and 82% of those who were discriminated against did not report it. The 2009 fiscal crisis also caused many countries to cut the budgets of their equality bodies. The ongoing support for populist radical-right parties, along with a spate of deadly terror attacks has shifted the focus away from discrimination to immigration restrictions.

The response to the rise of radical-right parties in Europe in the last 10 years has been disheartening. Many mainstream parties, on both the right and the left, have taken on the rhetoric of the radical right, focusing on restrictive immigration and immigrant integration policies. The concerns of the working class are valid, but the working class includes ethnic and religious minorities who also feel the brunt of discriminatory housing and employment policies.

Despite the passage of the Racial Equality Directive, Europe still needs to develop an environment where ethnic minorities are aware of the resources available to them to deal with discrimination. It is incumbent upon those who support equal rights to shift

the rhetoric and focus on policies that can be beneficial to all.

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**Terri Givens** is a political scientist and a consultant to educational technology companies and educational institutions. She was the provost of Menlo College from 2015 to 2018. From the fall of 2003 until the spring of 2015, she was a professor in the Government Department at the University of Texas at Austin where she also served as vice provost for international activities and undergraduate curriculum from 2006 to 2009, director of the Robert S. Strauss Center's European Union Center of Excellence, and co-director of the Longhorn Scholars Program. She founded and directed the Center for European Studies from 2004 to 2006.

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## **Why We Should Call It the "War for Terror"**

Peter Isackson

December 7, 2018

*Throughout history, the US has defined itself by its capacity to make war and its ability to convince itself that it was doing so in the name of democracy and progress. This is the first of a two-part series.*

The numbers are in, though they are provisional and incomplete. Brown University's research center, the Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, has issued a study that analyzes the human cost of the US wars in the

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Middle East conducted under the aegis of the war on terror since 2001. They calculate the death toll at between 480,000 and 507,000, and counting.

According to the political logic inaugurated by US president George W. Bush when he vowed to avenge the first attack on US soil since Pearl Harbor, the tally of deaths cited by the study is the payback for 3,000 Americans who died on 9/11. If we analyze those numbers to calculate the price of vengeance, each death in September 2001 has now been repaid at a rate of more than 160 to 1. On the basis of those figures alone, trading deaths for deaths, some number-crunchers — those who believed that it was all about “teaching them a lesson they’ll never forget” — would call that pretty good return on investment.

After a little reflection, however, they may balk at the idea that the initial death toll on that fateful day 17 years ago should be called an “investment” or that the hundreds of thousands who have died since should be called a “return.”

Or do they? It may sound extreme, but that is the question no one dares to ask. It violates our traditional ideas of morality as well as elementary notions of accounting, even though it would be perfectly consistent with some of our more modern business practices. Strategic positioning, for example. It doesn’t matter what damage you do, even to yourself, if your action allows your business to establish a solid competitive advantage. If the point of

the Middle East wars was to demonstrate the extent of US military power and its ability to endure long wars, Bush might say today, more justifiably than in 2003, “mission accomplished.”

Can this be the way the military strategists have been thinking all along? The Watson Institute’s study tells us, for example, that there has been “a more than 110,000 increase over the last count, issued just two years ago in August 2016.” Why would a rational manager of military operations continue such a monumental effort on such a scale for so long if there wasn’t some business sense to it? Isn’t it all about cost and payback? It may simply be that death alone is not the best metric to measure success, though it remains an essential metric to measure the impact on people, institutions, the economy and geopolitical power relationships.

## **WAR AND THE AMERICAN PUBLIC**

Some will say that it has nothing to do with the quantity of human suffering. It is about honor and respect, which must be defended whatever the price. But there are few human activities left to which such “intangible” criteria apply and in this era of rational management those relics of an outdated aristocratic code of behavior receive short shrift in strategic planning sessions. A code of honor isn’t the same thing as a moral code, but in today’s civilization both have given way to the notion of business acumen. Even the perception of honor by the outside world has lost its value in a diplomatic

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and business culture that regards a show of strength as the factor that differentiates the successful competitors from the losers.

Quoting the Watson Institute's study, Al Jazeera makes the observation that, "Though the war on terror is often overlooked by the American public, press and lawmakers, the increased body count signals that, far from diminishing, this war remains intense." From a politician's point of view, that amounts to a monumental achievement, highlighting a long historical trend. Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon dreamt of being able to intensify a war that they wished might be "overlooked" by the American public. Nixon took the first bold and effective step when he abolished the draft, replacing a citizen army with a professional army of volunteers. Instantaneously, he eliminated the deepening anguish shared by young men and their mothers, who feared their being plucked away by the government to die in foreign lands for a cause that made no sense.

Removing the threat of the draft made overlooking easier for most citizens. America was preparing for the Reagan years, when unconcerned patriots could sit back and watch a trained actor describe America's noble conflict with "the evil empire" that would take place in the stratosphere with the latest technology. With a sense of relief, war could for once appear as a fundamentally rhetorical and psychological conflict that would require no boots on the ground, sacrifice no

unwilling youngster's life and presumably be good for the economy.

In terms of business acumen, it was also the most efficient way of consolidating America's unassailable leadership in high-powered technology. With the end of the draft, the drama of the Vietnam years was over, but not the drama of overseas military and aggressive intelligence operations, which continued discreetly, without the fireworks of *Apocalypse Now* or any direct impact on the lives of American families. The protests of the 1960s, the subversive hippie movement and the organized opposition to an aggressive foreign policy all vanished. Average Americans no longer felt their life and future were at risk. Young adults could, for the first time in decades, plan their professional lives without the inconvenience of two years of military service. Communism was still the enemy, but in some ways, the Vietnam fiasco had the merit of proving that war wasn't needed to stop its expansion. There were no post-Vietnam dominos.

After the heat of a conflict in the tropics of Indochina, the Cold War could go back to being cold. It impelled Nixon and Kissinger to move in a different direction, dramatically opening a dialogue with China. This produced the unintended but beneficial effect of calming the post-colonial troubles in Southeast Asia. Killing and destruction would no longer require the services of the US military. It could be assured by local puppets, such as General Suharto in Indonesia. The US could concentrate

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on undermining governments in Latin America, most spectacularly in Bolivia and Chile, without deploying troops and in a part of the world suitably far removed from the influence of Soviet Russia and China.

## **JIMMY CARTER PLAYS HAMLET**

Then came a new drama. In 1979, Jimmy Carter's administration had to suffer the slings and arrows of an outrageous Iranian revolution, the delayed reaction to the 1953 coup fomented by the concerted intelligence operations of the UK and US to oust a democratic government that had nationalized the Iranian oil industry. The democratic powers of the West had imposed a quarter century of rule by the despotic Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and were baffled when a fundamentalist cleric, Ruhollah Khomeini broke the spell, galvanized the population, overturned the corrupt government and declared the United States the enemy.

After ignominiously losing a helicopter in the desert sent to rescue 53 American hostages, Carter refrained from taking arms against what he correctly saw as a sea of Islamic troubles. Initially praised at home for his "measured response" to the hostage crisis, "in the following months, [his] restraint had begun to smell like weakness and indecision." War was avoided; there would be no repeat of Vietnam. But Carter's apparent pusillanimity would eventually undermine his bid for reelection, paving the way for the first Hollywood

president, Ronald Reagan. Traumatized by defeat in Vietnam and humiliation in Iran, America sought the reassurance of a scripted version of foreign policy that might contain the kind of satisfying Hollywood ending that Carter was incapable of providing.

Paradoxically, at the end of the 1970s the US was undergoing serious withdrawal symptoms from its lack of occasions to reaffirm its military prowess and growing doubts about even its capacity to solve the world's problems through its forceful and uncontested leadership of what had become known as the "free world." Those doubts had been magnified by the crisis of authority brought about by the Watergate affair. When Reagan won the election in 1980, no one knew what to expect. Carter's hesitations and the nation's doubts set the scene for a period of experimentation and the eventual elaboration of a new type of global conflict management.

Reagan stepped into the role accompanied by a team that included — alongside former CIA director and now vice president George H.W. Bush — Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld, two men who would later play important roles in the next phase of innovative war policy that would take place two decades later under George W. Bush.

An actor's capacity to bluff on a stratospheric level, with a missile defense program appropriately called Star Wars, set the tone for the next eight years. The Reagan administration



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avoided major military campaigns while expanding and strengthening clandestine intelligence operations hiding under diplomatic cover. This meant that the messy boots-on-the-ground engagements of the 1950s (Korea) and 1960s (Vietnam) were off the agenda during the Reagan years. Following Henry Kissinger's lead during the Nixon years, the state department focused on supporting strong-arm leaders across the globe who put down rebel movements with US support on the pretext that they were led by communists, even when they weren't.

With its new non-communist enemy, Iran, the US could apply a similar strategy. The Reagan administration egged on their puppet in Iraq, Saddam Hussein, to invest in a brutal war against Iran — a war that ended up killing half a million people. Although the Iranians sacrificed more lives than the Iraqis, who benefited from American logistical and intelligence support, the war ended in 1990 as an expensive stalemate for both countries. In what may have appeared at least locally as a bizarre twist of traditional diplomatic logic, the end of the Iraq-Iran conflict set the stage for the first operation resembling a full scale war initiated by the US since Vietnam.

Believing the Americans would continue to support him in his effort to expand strategically to secure an Iraqi access to the Persian Gulf, Saddam Hussein invaded and occupied Kuwait. The US, under its new president, the recently departed George H.W. Bush, saw this

as an opportunity to shift the game of alliances in the Middle East. From Washington's point of view, Saddam Hussein had failed in his mission. That made him dispensable. Emboldened by the collapse of the Soviet Union, the US reassessed its position and began feeling it could dictate its will with little resistance.

With communism neutralized, it saw its new mission as that of controlling and reshaping the global economy. The conditions for military failure that marked both Korea and Vietnam had disappeared, in particular the influence of the Soviet Union on other nations, coupled with ability to provide supplies and logistical support to "freedom fighters" opposed to local dictators and motivated by the idea of resisting American imperialism. From this comfortable position, president George H.W. Bush declared the first Gulf War in January 1991 and, after mobilizing an international coalition under the authority of the United Nations, humiliated Saddam Hussein, who capitulated within weeks.

Bush Sr. had restored the honor of the US. The glory of military victory, whose every strategic move was loyally documented, amplified and transmitted to an eager public by CNN, made it possible for Americans to believe again that the US could dominate entire regions of the world through direct military action whenever the need should arise.

## **MAKING WAR GREAT AGAIN**

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The Cold War ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the definitive collapse of the Soviet Union in the ensuing years and the extraordinary friendship between Boris Yeltsin and Bill Clinton that confusingly turned Russia, at least temporarily, into a US ally before allowing it to drift into the enemy people appear to want it to be again. Francis Fukuyama had already declared the end of history, positing the end of a need for wars to settle international differences. He failed to appreciate the fact that the rehabilitation process some believed to have begun after Vietnam, with the effect of weaning the US from its psychological dependence on the regular exercise of military might, could never be complete.

At least since Andrew Jackson's presidency in the early 19th century the US has defined itself by its capacity to make war and its ability to convince itself that it was doing so in the name of democracy and progress. The recently declassified transcripts of conversations between Bill Clinton and his friend, Boris Yeltsin, revealed just how close their relationship was and how strongly they both claimed to believe that everlasting peace between the two nations was at hand. They were surprisingly familiar and frank with each other and committed to helping the other achieve his goals.

Nevertheless, in 1998 Clinton, ignoring the very personal pleas of his bosom buddy Yeltsin, and without the authority of the United Nations, launched the war against Serbia that turned Russia into

an adversary, paving the way for its more recently perceived status (at least in the media) as the perennial enemy.

During the Cold War, the US defined itself and shaped its identity as the nation leading humanity's opposition to an evil, expansionist ideology: communism. Committed to this goal in the context of the nuclear threat, the nation began mobilizing its entire economy to that end, as president Dwight D. Eisenhower acknowledged just before leaving office, when he warned of the ever-encroaching influence of the military-industrial complex. The war in Vietnam accelerated the trend, which became unstoppable.

In the early 1990s, the shift to a post-Soviet world where everyone could, as Fukuyama envisaged, share the same values, turned out to be psychologically uncomfortable for a nation so dependent on its belief in its own military might. Conversion to a peace economy, with a scaled-down defense budget, proved impossible to manage as no one dared to challenge the goose that had laid so many golden eggs. The economy had become structured around the military-industrial complex, essentially a socialistic system funded by taxpayers, in which added value increasingly resided in the development of new generations of military technology, exploited by private industry in multiple ways and, through home computing and the internet, increasingly consumed by the public.

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At the dawn of what was believed to be an era of universal peace, reasonable people (such as Fukuyama) expected that with the play of free markets the centralized, socialistic side of the economy that revolved around the military would be gradually reduced to a function of basic security. Like Yeltsin, they also assumed that NATO, initially designed to confront the Soviet threat, if it didn't disappear, would at least reduce its scope and redefine its purpose to become what Fukuyama called a kind of "a league of nations according to Kant's own precepts." Instead, Clinton betrayed his own promises to Yeltsin and promoted a policy of NATO expansion into Eastern Europe that the Russians to this day see as a stab in the back after dutifully converting to capitalism.

No one better (or more inimitably) expressed the culture shock that the sudden lack of an ideological enemy represented for the US than aspiring presidential candidate George W. Bush in January 2000: "When I was coming up, it was a dangerous world, and you knew exactly who they were. It was us vs. them, and it was clear who they were. Today, we are not so sure who they are, but we know they're there." A year later, Bush would be inaugurated on the steps of the Capitol. Eight months later, the events that enabled him to identify "who they were" began a new period in which the US not only went to war, but vowed to stay at war.

The ambiguity about why the nation hadn't managed to reduce its dependence on a military economy was

definitively removed from any "serious" discussion.

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## **Guatemala's Uphill Battle Against Corruption**

Glenn Ojeda Vega & German Peinado Delgado  
December 10, 2018

*The International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala has gained important enemies and faces an unprecedented level of opposition within the country's highest levels of government.*

Guatemala's history over the last century has been one of the most troubled, as well as most heavily influenced by foreign interventions, in all of Central America. During the first half of the 20th century, two revolutions over

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the span of a decade ended the military dictatorship of Jorge Ubico and Federico Ponce in 1944, and, in 1954, the presidency of Jacobo Arbenz. Later on, between 1960 and 1996, the country underwent a violent internal conflict, marked by a succession of military coups. The most notable dictator during this period was General Efraín Ríos Montt, whose year in power was particularly violent for the country's indigenous communities.

Over these troubled decades, multinational companies, particularly the United Fruit Company, played a determinant role in Guatemala's national economic and political sectors. Today, Guatemala is the most populous country in Central America, Mexico's southern doorstep and one of the region's most important export economies, yet it still struggles with a government that is plagued by graft, corruption and impunity.

In December 2006, under the presidency of Oscar Berger, Guatemala signed a treaty with the UN with the purpose of creating an international entity in charge of investigating corruption and crimes against humanity committed during the country's violent civil conflict, which ended in 1996. A year later, in August 2007, the Guatemalan congress ratified the agreement with the UN and ushered the creation of the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) under the leadership of the renowned Spanish lawyer, Carlos Castresana.

This UN-backed and internationally funded commission independently supports Guatemala's constitutional, judicial and law enforcement systems. More specifically, the CICIG conducts investigations to uncover criminal activities on all levels of national government, with the central mission of dismantling all the criminal structures that have permeated both the Guatemalan state and society. Another important mission of the CICIG involves shaping public policies aimed at eradicating and preventing the reappearance of clandestine armed forces and criminal organizations run by either former guerrillas or soldiers, such as those that emerged during the 1990s and 2000s to pursue all kinds of questionable interests.

In principle, the CICIG is not meant to overshadow or replace any part of Guatemala's constitutional judiciary, but rather aid in its work and reinforce its independence. However, this UN agency is empowered to denounce anyone in the government who is not complying with the law. The CICIG also gives technical advice to local institutions and officials in the judicial system. Nevertheless, after more than a decade of existence, the CICIG has gained important enemies in Guatemala and currently faces an unprecedented level of opposition within the country's highest levels of government.

## **MOUNTING OPPOSITION**

Guatemala's president, Jimmy Morales, sworn into office in January 2016, is

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largely considered to be a political outsider given his previous career as a comedian, actor and entertainment entrepreneur. He is a member of the National Convergence Front (FCN), a party created by former military officers in 2008 that currently holds just 11 out of 158 seats in congress. Morales ran his campaign railing against the corrupt political establishment and, before his election, even praised the CICIG's work. Now, following a series of investigations and trials involving leaders within the FCN and even some of his own family, the president has become one of the commission's leading critics. Moreover, as an investigation involving corruption in the campaign financing of the 2015 election advances, Morales announced in August that he will not renew the CICIG's mandate.

Since taking office, President Morales has clashed with the CICIG on several occasions, most notably after a judicial raid took place in the presidential residence in November 2016. This joint operation between the CICIG and Guatemala's Ministry of Justice was meant to obtain crucial evidence on corruption charges against high-ranking members of government.

Once hailed as a leading mechanism for stabilizing Central America's Northern Triangle, the CICIG has gained powerful and vocal enemies in recent years. In 2015, then-US vice president Joe Biden lauded the CICIG's judicial work and lobbied the Guatemalan government to extend the commission's mandate for another two years. As recently as

February of this year, former President Alvaro Colom, who held office between 2008-12, was arrested along with nine members of his cabinet due to an ongoing corruption investigation conducted by the commission.

Likewise, Alfonso Portillo, in office between 2000-04, has been condemned in the United States for money laundering, and Otto Perez had to resign his mandate in 2015 during his third year in office due to a high-level judicial process advanced against him. Alejandro Maldonado, who filled in after Vice President Roxana Baldetti also resigned due to ongoing investigations, had to step up and serve as acting president for nearly six months in 2015. Moreover, the CICIG has gained important allies in Guatemala, including the country's supreme court and large sectors of civil society that support its work. Nonetheless, nowadays the CICIG has powerful adversaries, including US Senator Marco Rubio who seems to take issue with the commission for supposed Russian interference.

On September 3, President Morales stated in a televised address that he will not be renewing the CICIG's mandate for another two-year term, thus limiting the commission's existence to the end of the current session that ends in September 2019. Opportunely, in recent months, Morales has been grandstanding on the issue of a territorial dispute with neighboring Belize in an attempt to rally popular support and distract from his assault on the rule

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of law. It has been evident from almost the very beginning of his tenure as president that Morales is uncomfortable with the CICIG's operations in Guatemala, which led him to publicly express his worries about the UN-mandated commission during the most recent General Assembly meeting in New York.

The CICIG has also encountered recent difficulties relating to its commissioner, Ivan Velasquez. Velasquez is a Colombian lawyer and former member of the Colombian supreme court, who has served as the CICIG's third commissioner since taking the relay from Costa Rican attorney Francisco Dall'Anese in October 2013. As part of his strong stand against the CICIG, President Morales declared Velasquez persona non grata back in September and refuses to allow him back into the country. Meanwhile, Guatemala's constitutional court issued a ruling in favor of allowing Velasquez back into the country, but the president has not relented on his stance.

## **CHRONIC WEAKNESS**

Like many countries across Latin America, Guatemala suffers from chronically weak judicial institutions. However, over the last 12 years and with the help of the CICIG, there has been an unprecedented volume of investigations and convictions against both public and private sector stakeholders on charges of corruption, graft and criminal offenses. In spite of the fact that major stakeholders in

Guatemala, including civil society organizations, still support the CICIG's work, the commission has, as of right now, less than a year to complete a successful departure from the country where it has operated for over a decade.

While it might be true that the CICIG must further strengthen its close working partnership with Guatemala's Ministry of Justice in order to secure lasting structural changes in the country, President Morales' antagonism toward the body raises serious concerns about the rule of law. Moreover, his seemingly opportunistic and news cycle-driven decision regarding the CICIG's future might be the most compelling testament to the commission's effectiveness.

The CICIG cannot and should not become a fixture in Guatemala's political and judicial landscape, primarily because it is not a part of the national constitutional framework. Nevertheless, it is unfortunate that the CICIG is being forced to dismantle while there is a government that is openly hostile to the commission's valuable work. At the very least, the CICIG should be allowed to complete the processing of ongoing investigations as well as the transferring all of its valuable databases and technical capabilities to the Guatemalan judicial system.

If President Morales does not reconsider his decision and refuses to reauthorize the CICIG's mandate for another two-year term, the country's political system will come to an important crossroads in 2019. Whether Guatemala's judicial



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system and the rule of law emerge strengthened or weakened after the CICIG's departure will be President Morales' most important legacy.

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## **Is the US Withdrawal from the INF Treaty an Attempt to Contain China?**

Dmitry Belyaev  
December 11, 2018

*Despite breaking the agreement with Moscow, Washington's withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty is most likely a measure specifically aimed at Beijing.*

US President Donald Trump's recent intention to withdraw from the 1987

Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty) with Russia brought the issue of nuclear security to the top of the agenda once again. In October, Washington cited a violation of the conditions of the treaty by Moscow as a formal reason for breaking the agreement. According to Trump, Russia has been creating new offensive weapons — and not for the first time — which is prohibited by agreement. In particular, Washington is worried about Russia's SSC-8 missile system, which, according to US Undersecretary of State Andrea Thompson, has a range of 500-5,500 kilometers.

In turn, Moscow states that it informed the Americans of the technical characteristics of the missile and provided the results of its tests. The Russian military claims that the launch of the SSC-8 was conducted at a distance significantly lower than 500 kilometers. However, the Pentagon believes that the characteristics, as well as the range of the missile, can change and hit the target at 5,500 kilometers from the launch site.

The first accusations of a breach of agreement were made in 2014, when Washington presented a report that claimed Moscow tested the latest ballistic missile back in 2008. At the time, there was no question of exiting the treaty. Then-President Barack Obama only expressed concern and threatened to file a complaint of violations with NATO. However, this was the end of it. President Trump has gone on to criticize the previous

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administration for maintaining this treaty despite all the evidence of violations.

Moscow has also made accusations of American non-compliance with the conditions of the INF Treaty. The Russian side believes that the US Aegis Ashore missile defense systems in Romania and Poland are “dual use” weapons. According to Russian specialists, these complexes have not only defensive, but also offensive functions. For Moscow, the appearance of American ballistic missiles in Europe means that NATO would have the capacity to sweep Russian territory almost as far as the Ural Mountains. In connection with the protracted crisis in relations between Russia and the West, Moscow seriously contemplates potential outcomes of the situation.

“If the United States does withdraw from the INF treaty, the main question is what they will do with these newly available missiles. If they will deliver them to Europe, naturally our response will have to mirror this,” Russian President Vladimir Putin told reporters.

## **YOU'RE THE REASON I'M LEAVING**

The prospect of the United States leaving the agreement is unpopular with European leaders. In the event of a conflict between Moscow and Washington, the main military theater will be in Europe. “The announcement by the United States that it intends to withdraw from the INF Treaty is regrettable,” noted Germany’s foreign minister, Heiko Maas. “It poses difficult

questions for us and for Europe. We also ask the United States to consider the possible impact of its decision.”

However, the United States has accumulated quite a few reasons for leaving the treaty, regardless of whether Russia is really violating its terms. More than 30 years have passed since the signing of the INF Treaty. During this time, the world has changed in meaningful ways. New technologies and economic development in what used to be considered to be Third World countries has forced the US to think about military threats beyond Russia. Today, Iran has the ability to launch long-distance nuclear charges, with Pakistan is nearing this capacity as well. In 2017, North Korea’s ballistic missile tests created a serious crisis on the Korean Peninsula. President Trump directly threatened Kim Jong-un that North Korea would “be met with fire and the fury like the world has never seen.”

Despite the cessation of missile tests after a summit in Singapore between Trump and Kim, North Korea’s leader still has the opportunity to return to these interrupted drills at any moment. However, it’s possible that these launches from the DPRK could have never happened if it weren’t for China’s influence. Beijing is Pyongyang’s most important ally in the region, both ideologically and economically. China helps North Korea to survive under international sanctions by supplying the republic with food and energy. Beijing uses Pyongyang to contain American presence in South Korea. The launch of

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North Korean's ballistic missiles could have been China's way to start bargaining with the US about reducing the number of US military and weapons (the same Aegis Ashore) in the region. That's exactly what Beijing and Moscow criticized the Americans for during the crisis on the Korean Peninsula.

Experts have long predicted that China will be playing the role of the new world hegemon. The rapidly developing economy and the country's military capabilities are forcing the West to seriously think about containing this growing influence. Three or four highly mobile medium-range missile systems allow China to deliver a sudden strike from anywhere in their country. This alignment of forces affects not only US allies in the region, but also directly threatens the US military based in South Korea and Japan.

Thus, despite breaking the agreement with Moscow, Washington's withdrawal from the INF Treaty is most likely a measure specifically aimed at Beijing. This is partly confirmed by President Trump's national security adviser, John Bolton, who tried to prove to Moscow that Chinese missiles threaten the "heart of Russia." "We see China, Iran, North Korea all developing capabilities which would violate the treaty if they were parties to it. So the possibility that could have existed fifteen years ago to enlarge the treaty and make it universal today just simply was not practical. The threat from China is very real, you can ask countries like Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Australia how they feel

about the Chinese capabilities and they're very nervous about it," said Bolton, adding that between a third and a half of the total number of Chinese ballistic missiles do not comply with the INF Treaty.

Washington openly makes it clear that the United States is generally not against the treaty itself, but instead wants the agreement to include other participants. Since the multilateral format of such an agreement is practically unobtainable, Washington does not want to limit the possibility of deploying strategic weapons. Another question concerns where these weapons might reappear after the US withdraws from the deal — in Europe or in Asia Pacific? The confrontation between Washington and Beijing has already begun, even if it is proceeding at a rather passive pace. And if Chinese trade duties were a measure of economic impact, then quitting the INF Treaty would be the first open step by the United States to contain China in a military direction.

## **UNFRIENDLY STEPS**

In Beijing, this decision is addressed with restraint, and politicians urge Washington to abandon the unilateral termination of the agreement. "We oppose this unilateral step, and also oppose imparting a multilateral character to the INF Treaty," a Chinese diplomat said.

Despite a series of unfriendly steps by the US toward China, today it is hard to

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imagine a real military conflict between the two countries. The economic ties between Beijing and Washington are too strong and too interdependent to break over a geopolitical confrontation. News of a possible agreement between Washington and Beijing gives rise to hopes that the trade war will be over soon. President Trump postponed the introduction of new tariffs on \$200 billion worth of Chinese goods and set a 90-day framework for the search for a compromise on the trade deal.

President Trump also tweeted about the need to begin a dialogue with Russia and China on non-proliferation of weapons. Most likely, the president is trying to bargain for Beijing's participation in the INF Treaty in exchange for the abolition of duties and economic opportunities. Progress in negotiations between China and the United States was achieved at the G20 summit in Argentina.

Shortly before the summit, the American president canceled his scheduled meeting with President Putin, citing Russia's aggressive actions against Ukraine in the Sea of Azov. Thus, Washington continues to put pressure on Moscow preferring, unlike Beijing, to issue ultimatums. US secretary of state, Mike Pompeo, gave Moscow 60 days to return to the compliance with the INF committee, promising that Washington will withdraw from the deal if the demands are not met. "The burden falls on Russia to make the necessary changes," Pompeo stated on December 4. "Only they can save this treaty."

However, in order to find a compromise with Moscow, it is not enough for Washington to simply give out ultimatums. Unlike China, Russia will not gain anything by announcing the destruction of SSC-8. In addition, this will de facto mean that the Russian side has recognized a violation of the terms of the contract. Peace treaties are much easier to create than to maintain. The Russian leadership does not respond to ultimatums. Pleas from Secretary Pompeo are unlikely to be the exception to this rule, especially after the Pentagon's suggestion that Washington may also withdraw from another security treaty, the New Start. "I will not obviously not make this decision. I'll make recommendations," said Marine General Joseph Dunford, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. "But it's very difficult for me to envision progress in extending (New START) ... if the foundation of that is non-compliance with the INF Treaty."

In Moscow, such statements are treated as blackmail, which does not help mutual trust. A possible solution could be a personal meeting between Putin and Trump. If the American leadership is really interested in the multilateralism of the INF Treaty, then it will have to turn a blind eye to both Ukraine and other disagreements with Russia for the sake of global nuclear security.

This is also what Moscow wants. Russia's current economic climate would spell a poor start for a new arms race. Once before, such a race has

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already cost Moscow the collapse of the Soviet Union. At the same time, Russia is ready for the United States to exit from the INF Treaty and is already imagining the future outside the framework of this agreement. In recent years, Russia has faced serious international pressure, and yet another unfriendly step is hardly a surprise for Moscow — just another problem in addition to a plethora of existing crises. Thus, the United States has 90 days to exchange Beijing's participation in the INF Treaty on a trade deal and 60 days to make an offer to Vladimir Putin he cannot refuse.

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## **Will India Listen to Its Protesting Farmers?**

Bestin Samuel  
December 13, 2018

*It is not just the vagaries of nature that push the farmers toward desperate measures — apathy from the government toward the agriculture sector had undermined its fragile economy.*

In June 2017, holding the skulls and bones of who he claims are farmers who

had committed suicide, P. Ayyakannu, the 68-year-old president of the National South-Indian Rivers Inter-Linking Farmers Association, led the protest along dozens of other farmers in India's capital, New Delhi. Farmers like him were devastated when in 2016 the state of Tamil Nadu faced its worst drought in 140 years, plunging many into crippling debt.

Droughts have been recurring with increasing severity across the country, where 60% of the crops depend on rainwater. The 2015-16 drought alone affected over 330 million Indians. Low rainfall marked 13 of the last 18 years, and seven of them were declared drought years by the Indian Meteorological Department. Each was a telling blow to farmers and those directly dependent on agricultural production, who make up more than three-fourths of India's 1.2 billion people.

However, following the media attention garnered by the 2017 protests, Ayyakannu and 3,000 other farmers took the bones on a 2,500-kilometer-long journey back to Delhi this November to protest for the same demands again — a waiver of farm loans, better minimum support prices (MSP) and relief assistance.

This time, farmers from across the country rallied together to force the government to listen to their one overarching demand, namely to convene a special session of the Parliament to discuss the issues they face.

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More than 100,000 farmers joined the two-day Kisan Mukti March, organized by the All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee, which includes over 200 farmer organizations from across the country. The massive protest comes close on the heels of another rally held earlier this year in Mumbai, which saw over 35,000 farmers laying siege to the city to make their voices heard.

Clearly the farmers are desperate, and it is not difficult to see why. It was not merely the vagaries of nature that push them toward desperate measures; apathy from the government toward the agriculture sector had undermined its fragile economy. An estimated 250,000 farmers have committed suicide in the last 15 years, and the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development observed that, between 1997 and 2005, a farmer committed suicide every 32 minutes in India. A study published by the Institute for Social and Economic Change and commissioned by the government of India noted that farm indebtedness “which originates due to inadequacy and continuous shrinking of the income flow” as the biggest cause for farmer suicides.

Though the number of farmer suicides has been running into thousands every year, no political promises have been made to address the issue before the now-ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) did so in the run-up to the 2014 election. Narendra Modi himself delivered speeches promising farmers a 50% profit over the cost of production, stating

that “If the NDA [National Democratic Alliance] comes to power it will ensure remunerative prices to the farmers by adding 50 per cent profit into the peasants’ input cost.”

However, in February 2015, as the fateful drought spread, the government, feeling the pressure, filed an affidavit with the Supreme Court stating the minimum support price cannot be increased by 50% because “it would distort the markets.” As the country was reeling from the 2016 drought, the government demonetized the two biggest denomination currency notes, which accounted for 86% of the country’s cash supply.

It broke the back of the farming sector — primarily a cash economy. Farmers were unable to buy seeds, conduct daily transactions and were left helpless to prevent the loss of perishable products like fruits and vegetables, according to a recent study. To add to these woes, the budget share of the agriculture ministry has fallen from a meager 2.38% of the total budget in 2017 to 2.36% in 2018, despite the government’s claim of the budget being pro-farmer. However, the government introduced a steep hike in MSP in July. The farmers have rejected it, citing wrong calculations that do not account for rents, interest on capital and skilled labor rates.

The question waiting to be asked here is whether these measures would suffice to revive an ailing sector on the whole. With the issue having significantly dented the BJP’s grip over Indian states

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in the recently concluded elections, the incoming governments are keen to announce loan waivers and MSP boosts. However, as Ashok Gulati points out, investment assistance on a per acre basis could bear more fruit in the long run than these stopgap measures. Nevertheless, a flurry of pro-farmer announcements would hardly be surprising as the country braces for parliamentary elections in just four months' time.

The key demand of the historic farmers' protest was to convene a special joint session of Parliament to discuss the agrarian crisis and related issues. In an open letter, the farmers urged India's president to ensure the adoption of the Farmers' Freedom from Indebtedness Bill 2018 and the Farmers' Right to Guaranteed Remunerative Minimum Support Prices for Agricultural Commodities Bill 2018.

With a well-designed website, active social media presence and a groundswell of support from other sections of Indian society, the farmer groups have made this protest count after years of struggling in vain. A wave of solidarity for the movement arose from India's usually apolitical middle class, including students, bankers, artists, businessmen, journalists, lawyers and teachers. Leading agrarian expert and journalist P. Sainath believes this augurs well: "The middle class is now taking the issues of farmers, after almost 20 years of indifference." When a campaign states that "We are making a determined attempt to reach out to all

sections of people across India because the agrarian crisis ultimately affects everyone," India would do well to listen for its own sake, beyond political power play in an election-induced hysteria.

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## **Back to El Salvador: The Fallout of "Shithole Countries" Diplomacy**

Sophia Boddenberg  
December 14, 2018

*El Salvador is among the nations that Donald Trump dubbed "shithole countries" and whose immigrants he seeks to deport as quickly as possible.*

Even during his election campaign, US President Donald Trump described immigration from El Salvador and other Central American countries as an "invasion" of criminals, murderers, rapists and drug dealers.

The number of migrants arriving in the United States from El Salvador almost trebled between 1990 and 2016 and, with an estimated total of 1.4 million people, makes up the second biggest Latin American immigrant population.

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From some 6.4 million Salvadorans, around a fifth live in the US. And despite the antagonistic comments emanating from the White House, new groups embark on the life-threatening journey to their northern neighbor every day.

They flee in search of security, improved quality of life and work. Around a third of El Salvador's population lives in poverty and rural poverty is particularly high. In addition, the population there is at risk from organized crime and gang violence.

Although the murder rate has dropped slightly in recent years, El Salvador still numbers among the nations with the most murders worldwide.

The drug trade is largely to blame for this, tempting people with the chance to earn quick cash despite the precarious economy. El Salvador serves as a transit route for cocaine from Colombia and other South American countries, which is then smuggled via Mexico and onto the United States.

## **LEGACY OF A VIOLENT PAST**

But it wasn't the drug trade that introduced violence into El Salvador. In fact, the country's history was extremely bloodstained over the last hundred years with the repression of uprisings, mass murders of indigenous people and a cruel civil war between a military dictatorship and left-wing forces that united in the Marxist revolutionary

movement, Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN).

More than 75,000 people were killed between 1980 and 1992, thousands more were tortured and abducted, and displaced more than a million Salvadorans. The US played an important role in this civil war. The government under Ronald Reagan supported the military dictatorship of José Napoleón Duarte with weapons, military training and advisers.

After the 1992 Chapultepec peace agreement, the FMLN was demobilized and transformed into a political party that has been in power for 10 years. But El Salvador is deeply divided both politically and socially. Not only the left-wing FMLN, but also the second leading party, the Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA), is a former military party in the tradition of the former civil war opponents. In the last parliamentary and local elections in March 2018, the FMLN suffered one of its biggest defeats so far.

The next presidential elections are slated for February 2019.

Many voters are disappointed because the government has failed to live up to its social promises, such as boosting education budgets, improving its democratic credentials or investigating civil war crimes. Economic growth has stagnated in recent years and many sectors are dominated by a few companies.



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El Salvador has no significant resources and little industry. The most important agricultural export product is still coffee, which is blighted by fluctuations in global market prices.

Due to weak economic growth rates, the FMLN has financed government spending with credit. In the last eight years, El Salvador's public debt has risen by almost 60%. Since the introduction of the US dollar as its official currency in 2001, the country no longer has the option to operate its own monetary policy and depends heavily on external inflows of funds.

Economic growth in recent years was mainly driven by private consumption. The role of remittances from Salvadorans living abroad is described in the Bertelsmann Stiftung's BTI 2018 Country Report on El Salvador: "For those who remain, remittances have been a godsend and have propped up the entire economy." The transfer payments from US-based migrants back to their relatives in El Salvador make up one-fifth of the gross domestic product. Salvadorans without family in the US, however, remain poor.

Most of the Salvadorans who escaped during the civil war live as illegal immigrants in the United States. However, part of this population also benefits from the Temporary Protected Status (TPS), introduced in 1990 amid pressure on George H.W. Bush's government from immigrant organizations and religious groups seeking to protect new arrivals who

could be at risk due to natural disasters or armed conflicts if they were to return to their home countries. Under TPS, they were granted temporary residence and were covered by employment law. Following two fatal earthquakes in 2001, Salvadorans were able to apply for this status.

Around 200,000 Salvadorans in the US are protected by this special agreement. But President Trump's government halted the TPS program for Salvadorans in March this year, announcing the refugees would be deported.

But at the end of October, a court in California forced the US government to defer this plan until September 2019 amid an ongoing lawsuit, challenging the removal of their protected status. The case is based on the racist and thus unconstitutional attitudes that led to the program being shelved. In particular, it cites the president's "shithole countries" statement made earlier this year.

## **RETURNEES HEIGHTEN TENSIONS IN EL SALVADOR**

The mass deportation of migrants from the US will exacerbate El Salvador's already tense social fabric. People, who have often lived away from home for many years, return and end up feeling like immigrants in their own country. Meanwhile, gangs, which were created in the US, move to El Salvador and fuel the local violence.

Above all, however, the country's economic outlook will continue to

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deteriorate without remittances from migrants living in the US. “[T]he recent upsurge in anti-immigrant sentiment in the United States that will be translated into stronger border protection measures means that emigration will become more difficult and less frequent,” predicted the BTI in 2018. “Reduced emigration will have a negative impact on remittance flows as second and third generations Salvadoran living abroad tend to send less money back to their ancestral country.”

But as long as there are no structural changes in El Salvador to fight social inequality and violence or to improve education and employment opportunities, emigration remains the only hope for a better life.

That applies to those who are setting off into the unknown as well as to those who are left behind.

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## Are Saudi Arabia and MBS Becoming a Liability for the White House?

Gary Grappo

December 18, 2018

*It would be hard to find the leader of any close American ally in recent history with a cloud over his head as the one over Mohammed bin Salman today.*

The December 14 Senate votes to end US military aid for Saudi Arabia’s war in Yemen and to condemn Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman for his responsibility in the death of journalist Jamal Khashoggi mark a watershed moment in US-Saudi Arabia relations. The actions by the American congressional body are a significant departure not only from the policy of the Trump administration but also from the norm of US-Saudi relations dating back to 1945. Today, the three pillars on which US-Saudi relations sit — the administration, the Congress and American business — are becoming anxiously unstable for the House of Saud and the US administration.

The historic decisions by the Senate were a predictable result of a briefing provided by CIA Director Gina Haspel, during which she effectively fingered the de facto ruler of the kingdom for the horrific murder of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in October. Though not provided to all members, the briefing was reportedly so convincing, that of those who did attend, many left the

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session “outraged” at the crown prince’s behavior.

“There is not a smoking gun, there’s a smoking saw,” declared Senator Lindsey Graham, a Republican from South Carolina and otherwise stalwart supporter of President Donald Trump. The senator’s assertion stood in stark contrast to Trump’s unconvincing and capricious excusal, “Maybe he did, maybe he didn’t.”

## **A RELATIONSHIP IN TURMOIL**

The vote to cut off aid means that while the crown prince’s prosecution of the Yemen War may be safe for now — the House of Representatives did not vote on the measure — it will be in jeopardy when the new Democratic-controlled House convenes next month. That war has been a disaster on many counts, not least of which the high rate of Yemeni casualties — over 10,000 deaths (though likely as much as five times higher) and 14 million facing starvation.

For Saudi Arabia, the war has been an embarrassment. The nation with the world’s third highest defense budget has been unable to defeat a ragtag Houthi rebel army. It begs the question of how much worse their performance would have been without American (and other Western) assistance. Imagine if Riyadh had to deliver on some of the crown prince’s bluster against Iran, whose military and paramilitary forces are far more numerous and infinitely more capable than the hapless Houthis. So,

the Senate’s action, though toothless for now, taken in conjunction with the ceasefire negotiated in Stockholm, spells good news for a Yemeni population in desperate need after nearly four years of war and deprivation.

The Senate’s unanimous condemnation of Mohammed bin Salman, or MBS, will be more significant for the US-Saudi relationship. Though MBS’ position appears secure for the moment — and all evidence points to his likely ascension to the Saudi throne after his father, King Salman — he will be forever marked by the US Congress for his role in the Khashoggi execution. It is difficult to see how he overcomes such an unprecedented handicap as the leader of a nation previously viewed as one of America’s most important allies. In fact, it would be hard to find the leader of any close American ally in recent history with such a cloud over his head.

This ought to register on the minds of every member of the House of Saud. As important as the relationship is for the US, it is indispensable and fundamental to Riyadh. The folly in Yemen is a perfect example of why the kingdom must maintain its close relations with Washington and, most importantly, the American defensive backstop that comes with it.

Critical to maintaining that relationship has been the congressional support nearly always given to every administration’s Saudi policy starting in 1945 under President Franklin Roosevelt. The Senate’s votes, and

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those likely to follow when the new Congress takes office next month, will mean that fulsome support can no longer be assumed. To be sure, the relationship unquestionably remains in American and Saudi national interests. But the kind of support that the Saudis could previously count on and the usually friendly reception it got on The Hill are no longer certain and, in fact, highly doubtful.

### **BACKED INTO ROYAL CORNER**

For the Trump administration, which has placed so much stock on both the president's and his son-in-law's personal relationships with the crown prince, the Senate actions are especially painful. The president can no longer look to the Republican-controlled Congress to back him up on the kingdom. Donald Trump and Jared Kushner must now dance to a much different tune.

Those personal relations have attracted added scrutiny of late. First, there is the recent New York Times report of the inordinately close relationship between Kushner and Mohammed bin Salman. The relationship is particularly unsettling given Kushner's lack of diplomatic or military experience and ignorance about the Middle East region generally, and Saudi Arabia specifically. It calls into question who may be using whom.

Then, there is the more recent revelation that Kushner may have dispensed advice to MBS after the latter's dispatching of Khashoggi. In

addition to the potential criminal element in that action, there is also the violation of standard White House and State Department protocol, namely the absence of other officials on the call, not to mention simple common sense. Finally, there comes word that Special Counsel Robert Mueller may be extending his investigation into the Trump campaign to possible illicit involvement of Middle Eastern governments, including Saudi Arabia's. Are the kingdom and its crown prince becoming a liability for this White House?

### **BUSINESS BECOMES NERVOUS**

The third leg of the US-Saudi relationship has been the attendant support the kingdom typically received from US businesses and banks. But there is apparent and growing disenchantment of international investors with the kingdom, who view it as less than a good bet these days.

In fact, businesses saw the writing on the wall considerably sooner than the Senate votes and the Khashoggi affair. After MBS detained hundreds of Saudi Arabia's exalted business elite in the Ritz Carlton for an extended period and imposed a blockade on fellow Gulf Cooperation Council member Qatar in June 2017, international business questioned the judgment, business acumen and ultimate political intentions of the brash crown prince who had committed to vault Saudi Arabia's non-oil sector to unprecedented levels.

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Today, the platform of the US-Saudi relationship is seriously out of kilter. Two of the three pillars on which it rests — Congressional backing and business support — have been weakened. The third cannot now be considered a certainty in a post-Trump White House. And with the mercurial, impulsive and politically toxic Mohammed bin Salman at the helm, it is difficult to see how the sides can come together to rebalance this vital relationship to serve their mutual interests.

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## The US Wants an “Honorable Withdrawal” from Afghanistan

Abbas Farasoo

December 20, 2018

*As the US seeks an urgent withdrawal, there will not be durable peace in Afghanistan, nor a dignified exit for America.*

John Bolton, the current US national security adviser, once wrote: “[Barack] Obama is pursuing ideological, not geopolitical, objectives.” If it was true about President Obama’s foreign policy in the Middle East and South Asia back in 2011, it is also true about President Donald Trump’s foreign policy today.

Perhaps the confusion between geopolitics and ideology led to policy inconsistency in these regions. For example, look at the US narrative. In 1998, Pakistan was “the most dangerous country in the world.” In 2002, Iran and Iraq became members of George W. Bush’s axis of evil. In 2018, Mexico became the “number one most dangerous country in the world,” according to Trump. Which one should be taken seriously? When it comes to the war on terror, policy inconsistency is the core problem.

The 2001 strategic narrative of the war on terror was affected by a policy of regime change or “democratization” in Iraq in 2003. However, later down the line, counterinsurgency in Iraq undermined both narratives of the war

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on terror in Afghanistan and democratization in Iraq. The invasion of Iraq not only damaged the war on terror as a strategic narrative, but also provided the Taliban with an unprecedented opportunity to fully return to the battlefield. Moreover, Iraq War opened the opportunity for Pakistan to protect the Taliban's bases and leadership on its soil and choreograph a new proxy war in Afghanistan.

The grave mistake was that US generals in Afghanistan, who had been dispatched from the Iraqi battlefield, saw the problem through a counterinsurgency lens, and all their policy assessments were focused on a counterinsurgency solution (also known as COIN strategy). As such, the strategic narrative changed from the war on terror to counterinsurgency, and the conflict began to be understood as an internal problem. Regional countries such as Pakistan no longer needed to be worried about the consequences of their support for terrorism. This fundamental shift in the strategic narrative of the intervention made it difficult for the US to win the war in Afghanistan.

Consequently, the US held secret talks with Taliban representatives in Qatar in 2011, where the Taliban pressed the Americans to accept their precondition for further talks. This outreach was a clear signal that the US believed it could not win the war militarily and was desperately looking for an "honorable exit" from Afghanistan, similar to the Soviets in 1989. More importantly, as

this author has argued elsewhere, this encouraged regional countries such as Iran and Russia to strengthen their ties with the Taliban.

## **REGIONAL DISAGREEMENTS**

In the 1980s, the Soviet Union did not lose the war in Afghanistan because of the strength of the mujahedeen, nor because the Soviets were militarily weak, but because of proxy support and a regional alliance against it. As result, Pakistan, the US, China and Arab states supported the mujahedeen as their proxies against the Soviets. However, in 2001, the US intervention was welcomed by the Afghan people and the international community. Both Russia and Iran supported the US at the Bonn conference in 2001.

But soon, President Bush added Iran to the axis of evil and followed up by attacking Iraq in 2003. The Trump administration has exacerbated regional uncertainty by withdrawing from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) — or the Iran nuclear deal — and authorized even heavier sanctions against Tehran.

Moreover, tension between the US and Russia has since impacted Afghanistan's security, and Russia has established its connection with the Taliban. The Kremlin even provided them with an international stage at the Moscow conference for Afghan peace on November 9, 2018.

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As a result, US tension with Iran and Russian opened a new front of destabilization against Afghanistan without yet solving the problem with Pakistan. This is paving the way for Russia to make a comeback in the region. Yet many believe that Washington is still looking for an honorable exit from Afghanistan. In this situation, it would be hard to think about a dignified withdrawal. The reason is simple: There is no such thing as an honorable withdrawal without winning a war. To win the war, the military is not the only option, but rather a matter of consistency in policies.

### **THE US HAS NOT LOST THE WAR, JUST THE POLITICS OF IT**

Ideology and geopolitical confusion have led to fragmentation in Washington over its policy toward the region for years. According to American journalist Steve Coll, there was no consensus amongst those who worked on Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and India under the Obama administration. It seems that the main reason was the lack of balance between ideology and geopolitics, coupled with favoritism in different circles of policymakers. Perhaps one could think of a situation where some liked Afghanistan, while others disliked it without any concern for policy consistency. Such a situation existed within the US establishment.

In August 2017, President Trump announced his South Asia strategy to press Pakistan to cooperate in the peace process in Afghanistan. This

proved unsuccessful to change Pakistani policy due to the Americans seeking an urgent peace deal and a hasty withdrawal. For years, the US has been paying Pakistan to buy its cooperation, but Islamabad has refused to cooperate to tackle the Taliban's sanctuaries, except in one case that was handing over the Arab members of al-Qaeda to show it was assisting the US in the war on terror. Those al-Qaeda members were not beneficial for Pakistan's policy toward Afghanistan and Kashmir.

It shows that in the past 17 years, the US policy in South Asia was rudderless, and Washington was confused as to how to deal with the conflicting situation and regional actors. It indicates a fundamental failure of the US to develop a coherent policy in South Asia. So, as Professor Charles Tiefer of the University of Baltimore puts it, "The war is on. The proxy war, that is." In other words, Washington is not losing the war, but the politics of it.

### **PUT AMERICA FIRST AND GET OUT**

Now, the US has pushed different parties in Afghanistan to prepare for peace talks with the Taliban. In doing so, this would perhaps include accepting conditions for Washington's short-term gains, regardless of fundamental values such as human rights, women's rights and social justice. The Americans are using the rhetoric of a US withdrawal as a Sword of Damocles against the anti-Taliban forces inside the country by insisting that the US is in a "hurry."

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However, for countries such as Pakistan, it is a blessing to see the US withdrawal and defeat in the region.

As Bolton wrote in 2011, “The highest moral duty of a U.S. president ... is protecting American lives, and casually sacrificing them to someone else’s interests is hardly justifiable.” He continues, “Terrorist and guerrilla tactics kill humanitarians just as dead as imperialists.” This is clearly a nationalist line of thinking: It doesn’t matter who kills whom — there is no moral base for judgment about politics and violence.

Once upon a time, this line of thinking prevailed in the 1990s after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. As a result, the country turned into a hub for international terrorists and exported atrocities on a global scale, including 9/11. However, once again, if American lives alone are at the heart of the US decision about peace and war in Afghanistan, there will not be a dignified withdrawal.

Today, there are more enemies in the region than at the end of the Cold War. The US has listed 21 terrorist groups in the Af-Pak region alone. Moreover, the increased influence of Russia and China makes Central and South Asia more unpredictable geopolitically. It is unknown who will define the future of the region, the battle against terrorism and the choice between democracy or totalitarianism. One thing is for sure, though: Afghanistan will still be the frontline for the US and Europe.

In the 1990s, the US leadership put America first, forgot about Afghanistan and ignored Islamic radicalism. The result was a civil war and a brutal regime under the Taliban with a safe haven for al-Qaeda. This ended in terror being brought to the US on September 11, 2001. In 2014, the US handed over the frontline of the global war on terror to a young and vulnerable Afghan national army without properly equipping and training its soldiers. As a result, the casualties increased and the security deteriorated dramatically. Therefore, with the urgency of withdrawing based on the US domestic situation, there will not be durable peace in Afghanistan, nor a dignified withdrawal for America.

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